

pate in his good or bad fortune, and who was made wretched by his mysterious conduct.

"Has she spoken to you?" said he, fiercely.

"There needs no other language," replied I, "than her pale cheek and wasted form. You, who see her daily, cannot realize the change that has taken place; but I, who saw her last at N——, blooming and happy, full of health and gaiety, alive to all that was beautiful in creation—can I agree with you that you alone are the sufferer?" I found I had touched the cord to which his heart vibrated; I pursued the subject, and finally obtained the victory. He promised me solemnly to return in the course of a few weeks.

"It was with heartfelt pleasure I set about preparing for them. I had the old shattered mansion put into comfortable repair, and took half a year's salary in pork, grain, and live stock, much to the satisfaction of my parishioners, who had rather pay in produce than money, and it was cheerfully transferred to the desolate building. It was the last day of November when they arrived, and the snow lay three feet on the ground. The old trees that remained with their dry straggling branches, stood on each side of the avenue like a procession of mourners. In winter there is but little for a farmer to do, except foddering his cattle, and preparing for the coming spring. Mr. Forester had no stock or materials, and his life was an idle one. I could not but think Providence had wonderfully marked its bounty to the other sex, when I saw how cheerfully and constantly Mrs. Forester found employment. Her colour and spirits returned, and again I heard her singing songs that seemed only made for summer.

"I have hitherto said but little of myself. I had dwindled into a kind of insignificance in my own mind, and was thought to be a confirmed old bachelor. Even my neighbour, Miss Keziah Spinney, no longer attempted to pour in the oil and wine, but passed on to the other side. I confess, however, that I sometimes looked back with lingering regret on the years I had loitered away. I could count up to fifty-two. After twenty-five, they were all dull, cheerless blanks, except in the way of duty, and every faithful minister knows how many omissions must press upon his recollection. March had arrived, and we had reasonable expectations that the severity of winter was over; but it did not prove so. There came a violent driving snow-storm, and I did not visit the Foresters for several days. At length I received a message from them requesting to see me. Mrs. Forester met me at the door. 'My husband,' said she 'is very ill. Do you remember our visitor on the fifth anniversary of our marriage? Twice since, he had come. God knows what malignant power he has over us: but it is terrible in its effects. Yesterday he came suddenly upon us: his visit was short, but immediately after his departure, my husband complained of great oppression upon the lungs, and this morning he has been seized with a hemorrhage. Oh, my dear friend,' continued she, wringing my hand, 'go to him, tell him there is nothing he can reveal so dreadful as this suspense. I can endure it no longer; my reason will be the sacrifice.'

"I hastened to his apartment. He was in bed; his countenance was pale, but calm. 'I am glad you have come,' said he; 'I have a confession to make.' At that moment his wife entered. He called her to his bedside, and, as she knelt down, he looked earnestly at her, and his courage appeared to fail. But in a few moments he resumed: 'I had hoped that I might die with my secret unrevealed; but now that I believe myself on my death-bed, the judgment of my fellow-creatures loses its importance. And yet,' said he, turning to his wife, 'to voluntarily relinquish your esteem, to be remembered by you only with horror! Oh, if suffering could expiate guilt, these pangs would atone!'

"Never shall I forget the expression of her countenance—the noble, the sublime expression, as she leaned over him. 'My friend—my husband,' said she, 'fear nothing from me.

Whatever may be the circumstances to which you allude, they cannot now influence my affection. The years we have passed together are all that identify you with me. Speak without hesitation.'

"'I will be brief,' said he, 'for my strength is failing. My early life was one of dissipation and profligacy. My father gave me all opportunities of a good education, and a lucrative profession. He died, and left my mother destitute. I persuaded myself it was a duty to run all risks to place her in an independent situation. Frequently I returned from the gaming table, and poured money into her lap. The poor deceived parent blessed and applauded me. I went through all the changes of a gambler, and at length found myself deeply in debt. A horrible chance presented—it was one of fraud and treachery. I purloined a sum intrusted to me—was detected! He seemed unable to proceed. 'I was sentenced to two years' imprisonment,' continued he, in a low voice. 'Though sunk and degraded, I was not lost. I loathed the vice that had undone me. I turned with horror from the profligacy by which I was surrounded. My conduct was such that the term of my imprisonment was shortened. I received a pardon. My poor mother had died broken-hearted. I quitted Havana; for this was the scene of my guilt and disgrace. At Richmond, I by degrees gained access to good society. I was persevering and industrious. You know, my dear Mary, how I became acquainted with you, and you now perceive that when I married you, I added a new crime, that of deception, to my catalogue of sins. I truly loved you, and I could not resist temptation. My business was lucrative, every thing around me prosperous, and if vice had left no sting, I might have been the happiest of mortals. But not all the rivers of Damascus, nor the waters of Jordan, can wash out the stains of the soul. I was haunted by remembrance of the past. There was something so unlike retributive justice in my prosperity, that I felt as if even this success portended some dreadful reverse. Fool that I was, not to perceive that the terror and anxiety that consumed my hours was retributive justice! When I pressed her whom I loved best to my bosom, I thought what would become of her if she knew she was the wife of a felon!

"Such was the state of my mind while every body congratulated me on my happiness. I was nominated for an office of trust. A few days after the election had taken place I received a note, requesting me to come to a particular place, if I would avoid public disgrace. I went to the spot with a beating heart, and found, to my horror, a fellow convict! When I quitted the prison, I had left him there. He had staid out his term, and accident brought him to Richmond. His object was to extort money. I gave him what he asked, as the bribe of a secrecy. Again and again he came. My anxiety grew insupportable. Horrible thoughts crossed my mind. I sometimes felt that either he or I must be sacrificed. I gave up all but my wife and children, and left Richmond in hopes of concealment from my persecutor. The rest you know. As soon as I began to acquire credit and property, my tormentor appeared, and stripped me. For three years I lived on this spot unmolested; and I began to think he was dead. You know how, in the midst of apparent security and happiness, he came upon me. Twice he has visited me since. Yesterday he arrived. But Heaven is merciful. The disorder that for months has been undermining my life, is brought to a crisis. With the near prospect of death, I have gained fortitude. I might say something in extenuation of my guilt; but why should I? There is a Judge, and he is merciful.'

"Such was the unhappy man's story. He was mistaken in believing his end so near. He lingered on for months. His confession had rendered the scourge of his persecutor powerless. His decay was gradual, and he lived till June. His wife and myself were his constant attendants. He saw that her affection was undiminished; that it was the labour of love, and not of compassion, that bound her to his side,