

where she now stood a stranger, and in spite of herself, her feelings softened as memory retraced her by-past life. The entrance of the mistress of this old-fashioned mansion, only served to revive with still greater vividness her recollections of the past, for in the mild countenance of Mrs. Wilkinson, she beheld the same kind expression which had won her childish affection. The years that had stolen the bloom from the cheek of the votary of fashion, and had robbed her form of its pliant grace, had left scarcely a trace of their progress on the elder lady. Her tall thin figure still retained its perpendicularity, and time had only deepened the furrows which grief had early traced upon her brow. Her closely-cut black silk dress—the square of thin muslin pinned with so much precision over her bosom—her high-crowned cap, with its neatly-crimped border, and the smooth braids of silver-sprinkled hair, which crossed her high forehead, all were in exact resemblance to the picture traced upon Mrs. Harley's memory some twenty years earlier.

"I have come to ask you to pass the day with me, aunt," said Mrs. Harley, assuming her blandest tone in answer to Mrs. Wilkinson's polite but cold salutation. "Your duties, and my constant engagements, prevent us from meeting as often as we ought, but I am determined, for the future, to arrange some plan by which we can have more of your society."

"Your determination comes too late, madam," said the old lady, while a slight flush crossed her pale cheek; "had my duties and your engagements been the only barriers between us, they might have been easily removed. The true obstacles have been somewhat more insurmountable, and yet methinks even the distinction between poverty and riches might have been overlooked in favour of your few surviving relatives."

"Nay, aunt, you wrong me," said Mrs. Harley. "I am sure I have never failed in respect towards you."

"No: you have managed to treat me with total neglect, and yet, to be perfectly respectful, if, by any chance, we accidentally met.—However, I wish not to reproach you, Caroline; your way through life has not been as my way, and though both of us were nurtured in the same home, we have sought very different roads to our journey's end. When your mother—my only sister—named you by my name, and gave you into my arms as another claimant upon my affections, I received you as a precious gift from her hands; and when, two years later, she was borne to her early grave,

you can testify to the manner in which I fulfilled my duties to the little orphan. But times have altered; I was then prosperous and happy, the wife of a man eminent in his profession, and the mother of a lovely family. I am now a lonely widow, compelled to eke out my diminished means of support by keeping school, and I ought not be surprized to find friends changed as well as fortune."

"My dear madam, can you suppose your altered circumstances have had any influence upon my feelings?" exclaimed Mrs. Harley, in well-dissembled surprise.

"I do not speak from vague supposition only, Caroline; I *know* what I say. When my daughter and myself undertook the charge of a private boarding-school, you gradually dropped all intimacy with us, for you had grown rich, as we had declined in fortunes, and you began to feel that the presence of '*poor relations*' might be rather inconvenient. When your daughter left the nursery, she was transferred to one of those pests of modern society, a *fashionable* boarding-school, not so much on account of my antiquated method of imparting real knowledge, instead of superficial accomplishments, as because the relationship between us would seem degrading in the eyes of the world. Nay, you have even denied that relationship when questioned on the subject, and I therefore can have no confidence in professions of regard."

The self-possession of Mrs. Harley quite failed her as she listened to these bitter truths. Her brow crimsoned, and she bit her lips as she replied, "Well, aunt, you have chosen to misunderstand my motives, and reject my good will."

"No, Caroline, I do not reject your good will, but I cannot consent to accept your civilities; if I can serve you in any way, I am ready, but do not come to me with hollow professions. You have doubtless visited me on business, this morning; let us therefore discuss it as strangers, or, at least, mere acquaintances."

Nothing but Mrs. Harley's strong desire to acquire some information on a subject which nearly interested her, could have induced her to bear her aunt's severe remarks. She, however, repressed the angry feelings which rose within her breast, and with the bland courtesy for which she was remarkable, replied, "I shall be as you wish, madam; I will no longer proffer any claim of kindred, but if it be not contrary to your ideas of propriety, will you be so good as to afford me some informa-