

He had ever been a proud man, proud of his integrity, his intellect, and if his prayers had not been exactly in the Pharisee's strain, they had been wanting in the spirit that won forgiveness for the publican. Now his pride was laid low, the idol of self-love shattered, and Clive Weston was in every sense of the word a better man.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER their early breakfast Mr. Weston rose saying; "I must be off at once to the office, Virginia, and face my fate. Oh my darling!" and he drew her tenderly towards him, "what courage your example has imparted to me! Ruined, bankrupt, I yet go forth strong in hope and brave in heart. You will not give way to fretting, promise me, whilst I shall be away? I may not be able to get back till night."

"Fret, no indeed! I used to patronize that luxury when I had nothing else to do; now I have no time to indulge in it. Cranston and I will have a busy time of it overlooking and packing up my wardrobe."

Not daring to trust his voice, he pressed her to his heart and passed hurriedly out. Full of her new plans Virginia returned to her dressing-room, and began her day's work by carefully arranging her diamonds in their velvet lined cases. Whilst doing so she became aware for the first time that the diamond studded pendant of one of her eardrops was missing. More startled and grieved than she would have been by the loss of the whole set a day previous, she hastily examined her dressing bureau and the carpet, but it was not there. Remembering her visit to her husband's room the night before she bent her steps thither. Anxiously she examined floor, chairs, and table, without success. Perhaps she had dropped it in Mrs. Markland's rooms, or on the garden balcony. A messenger must be sent off at

once to ascertain. Here her eye fell on the small drawer of the table, and she recollected with a gleam of hope that Mr. Weston, before leaving the apartment the night previous, had thrust some papers into it. Possibly the object of her search might have fallen among them. Hastily she drew the drawer out. No diamond met her gaze, but instead it fell on that small dark instrument of death, and on a paper containing a few lines addressed to herself in her husband's writing.

Instinctively she closed and locked the door, then, trembling in every limb, sank into the chair in which Clive had kept his terrible vigil, and read over, and re-read that almost illegible scrap of writing, unable for a time to fully comprehend its awful import. As it dawned at length fully upon her, she fell on her knees with a low agonized cry, incapable either of prayer or thought.

It was her turn now for utter self-abasement, for impassioned supplications to Heaven, for broken murmurs of gratitude.

Here in this very room, might Clive, her idolized husband have now been lying, cold, mute for ever, his memory a nameless horror, his ghastly corpse bearing traces of that terrible crime that would have closed for him all hope. And would it have been much better with her? Would she have deserved more mercy than himself? Made clear by that light which the near approach of death sheds on earthly actions, the course of her life stretched out before her: first, her pampered childhood and selfish girlhood, then the still more criminal page of her married life, with its heartless dissipation, its neglect of duties, and of the claims of the husband to whom she had vowed love.

Out of the agony of that first half hour arose, bright as the moon after a midnight storm, the thought that it was not yet too late. Blessed hopes that flooded her soul with gratitude, leaving in that heart which fashion had not yet perverted, seeds of future-virtue and peace.