

saw her aunt sitting behind the urn, evidently awaiting her entry to commence pouring tea. Mrs. Barber gave her a kind, encouraging smile, at the same time glancing across the table, to where, seated in a large resting chair, so that he could enjoy the heat of the fire, was a gentleman who appeared to be between fifty and sixty years of age. The door by which Miss Ashleigh had entered was directly opposite this portion of the room, so that she could at first only see her guardian in profile. If the expression of a countenance could be, in all cases, relied on, she certainly was not wrong in thinking that the character of Mr. Burton had been very much misjudged. A pleasant, almost genial face was that which turned to greet her; but alas! no sooner had he spoken the first few words than all her old prejudice returned.

"Umph! Miss Ashleigh, I presume," he said, without rising: "rather slow in letting one know it: been in the house two hours and couldn't catch a glimpse of you. Please be seated, Miss Ashleigh: we have waited for you precisely fifteen minutes. I detest waiting, and never make a practice of it for anybody. In the future you must be more punctual."

Nellie quietly took the chair assigned her, and began to drink her tea in silence, while Mr. Burton and her aunt endeavoured to carry on a broken conversation. Was this the man to whom, for the next two years, she must yield implicit obedience?—this he, at whose command she was to put her own happiness aside, and endure in silence, because of the promise to her dead father, the torture of daily intercourse? The thought was humiliating; and to her proud nature this term of guardianship resembled more a sort of bondage. She was trying to repress the tears of mortification that seemed almost to choke her, when, carefully adjusting his spectacles, he turned to her and abruptly asked—

"Did you communicate the contents of my last letter to that very love-sick young man? On my word, his profession stands him in good stead: he pleads admirably."

"I have told Mr. Knightbridge that I cannot give him my hand until I am of age," she answered quietly, "when, of course, I will be the mistress of my own actions."

Mrs. Barber looked reprovingly at her niece, as she said, addressing Mr. Burton,—

"My dear sir, we must not be too severe with these young people. They are well suited to each other; and in a social point of view, I am sure the young man is everything that can be desired. And besides," she continued, a smile playing over her kind, matronly face, "we must not forget that we, too, have been young, and perhaps felt once exactly as they do now: even you—"

"Never experienced anything of the sort, madam," sharply interrupted the irate old gentleman, turning and poking the fire vigorously. "It's all a pack of nonsense, and the sooner the complaint is got rid of the better. My ward must be cured, and it's for this purpose, madam, I've come to England."

Here he glanced at Nellie, who, while he was speaking, had been gazing at the face that seemed so very much at variance with the disposition. She raised her eyes fearlessly to his as she replied,—

"Mr. Burton, if you are a gentleman you will please allow the discussion of this subject to cease entirely for the future; as I assure you, your interference can in no possible way have the desired effect. So long as you respect my wishes in this matter, I will observe yours in others: if not, I cannot an-