

When he arrived at Ardmore, he had been utterly unprepared for the solemn scene which awaited him. Although he knew that Fitzgerald was dangerously ill, he had not thought that death was so near. When he looked upon the ghastly features of his dying friend—when he listened to his dying words—in the tumult of his feelings, he had endeavoured to explain to Fitzgerald, that he could never become the wife of Constance; but the words died upon his lips. He knew that he had stood by the side of Constance—that he had repeated those solemn vows which he had lately paid to another; and he had seen Fitzgerald die confiding and happy. A confused dream had followed those actions; and when he had awakened, the same lovely face beamed upon him—the same gentle smile cheered him, as had shed its placid light upon his early days. Well might Charles O'Donnel feel the deepest remorse, when he thought of the wife he had deceived, and of her who was far distant, who would daily look for his return, till disappointed hope would chill her young heart, and she would bitterly mourn the day she had first lent an ear to the words of the faithless stranger.

And now that Charles was once more in the presence of Constance—now that he again looked upon her who had watched over him in sickness, and rejoiced over his returning health, the affection which he had borne her, before his heart had strayed to another, returned in all its strength; and Constance was right, when she thought that her husband did not assume toward her an affection which he did not feel. But, for a time, we must leave this picture of wedded life, and seek again the presence of Ellen Douglas.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.

SHAKESPEARE.

It was a soft and balmy morning in June. The sun shone high and cheerfully over hill and dale, and with royal munificence lavished his golden light upon congregated roofs and tall aspiring chimneys, which clustered together thickly as forest trees, in the town of E—. He peeped inquisitively into dingy garrets, and in mockery revealed the poverty and misery which he there beheld, and whose unglazed windows did not offer the slightest impediment to his pert eye. Des-

pite the rich drapery and thick blinds, which sought to banish his glaring light from the rich man's house, he laughed at their attempts to exclude him, and deridingly shone even in their faces, as they sat at their mid-day breakfast. Upon this morning, even a stray beam appeared to have found its way to the heart of Ellen Douglas, for with a smile, which seemed a stranger to her face, she rose from her seat, and threw open the window at which she sat, so that the gentle breeze might find an entrance and fan her feverish brow.

For a moment she stood looking forth upon the wide-spreading city which stretched beneath her, and listened to the hum of human voices which met her ear, and looked upon the busy crowd, hurrying hither and thither, intent upon business or pleasure. But, with a sigh, she turned from a scene so uncongenial to her feelings, and, resuming her seat, she again took up her embroidery, and mechanically—for her thoughts appeared pre-occupied—she plied her needle.

Days, weeks, and months had slowly sped onwards, and with their accompanying events had been consigned to the past, since that night, so eventful to Ellen Douglas, upon which we last beheld her. Each succeeding morning, since that period, had seen her cheered by hope, for that day she might witness the return of O'Donnel; and each succeeding night had beheld her despair, for he came not. Months had now passed away, and had brought no tidings of him, and Ellen's hopeful nature even abandoned her. What could this long-protracted silence portend? Why did he not return, as he had promised, to claim her as his own? The heart of Ellen died within her, as she sought to reply to these tormenting questions. If O'Donnel had been only a lover, she might have distrusted his fervent protestations of enduring love, for many a maiden had been thus deceived: she might have believed that he had forgotten her, and that in absence his affections might have become estranged. But it was her husband for whom she looked,—for him who had vowed to cherish and protect her through life, and who had placed it beyond human power to separate them. Sickness might have overtaken him—death might have snatched him from the earth,—but nought could have the power to keep him from her presence.

For a time Ellen plied the needle with an eager haste, which partook of agitation rather than of the steady application of industry, and then, suddenly desisting from her task, she leant her arm upon the frame, and supported her head.