

to her eyes. "Who shall comfort thee? Who shall speak hope or solace to thy breaking heart? Was it not enough that I should have to mourn, but thy bright youth must be darkened too, by sorrow!"

She turned away, and approached the couch, where Claude usually sat. A book, elegantly bound, lay upon it. She looked at the title page. How well she knew the careless, yet graceful characters. "To my beloved mother, from her devoted and affectionate Claude." This then was his parting gift. Mrs. Vernon's calmness fled, and falling on her knees, she passionately exclaimed:

"Oh! this trial is too heavy—'tis more than I can bear."

All the love she had ever felt for that worshipped son, seemed concentrated in that one burst of wild idolatry; death then would not have been more painful than separation. Mrs. Vernon's feelings rarely rebelled against her control; she seldom, if ever, lost the placid calmness, which had been through life her distinguishing quality, but in that moment of agonized sorrow all barriers were broken down, and the passionate, vehement Ida herself could not have yielded more utterly, more hopelessly, to despair. Suddenly the door unclosed, and Claude silently and slowly entered. He started, and his glance fell on the kneeling figure of his mother, and tears dimmed for a moment the large brilliant eyes that had never known since childhood such a guest. But he quickly dashed them away, and with a soft step approached.

"My own dear mother," he whispered, as he gently pressed her hand; "why do you sorrow as one without hope?"

Her only answer was to fling herself into his arms, and sob on his breast. For a long time he held her in that warm embrace, and though his own heart was heavy enough, he spoke of future hope and happiness, and dwelt on the bright prospects of fame and wealth, thus opening before him; but ambition had no place then in the mother's heart, and she replied with a bursting sob:

"Speak not of rank or riches, Claude! Can they compensate to me for your love, for the sunshine of your presence? Oh! my son, there is a dark presentiment hanging over me, that if you leave for India, you will never return."

A cloud, sombre as night, passed over his countenance, as he involuntarily murmured:

"And I, too, have the same presentiment; but it does not sadden me much; for I know that if I ever do revisit the shore of England, it will

be when spirits, health and youth, have fled forever."

These were sad words for the bright and happy spirit of Claude Vernon to utter; but that hour was one of gloom, and it may have given its colouring to his thoughts. At length Mrs. Vernon's vehement sorrow exhausted itself, and, complying with her son's entreaties, she suffered him to place her on the couch, and adjust the cushions around her. Gradually she yielded to the glowing pictures he painted of the high station he would attain, the honours that should be his.

"But, ah! Claude," was her mournful reply, "how many long and weary years will it take to effect all this! How endless a period of exile from your native land."

"But for you, my mother," murmured the young man, as he pressed his lips upon her hand, "I would never care much to return to it. I must now prepare for manhood's toils and trials, and the happiness, the tranquil felicity, that have marked the course of my youth and boyhood, must be to me, for the future, as a bright but evanescent dream. From henceforth India must be my home, my resting place, the theatre of my toils and sorrows, as of my joys."

"And oh! may you be happy, my beloved child!" returned Mrs. Vernon, as she clasped her hands. "May you never have cause to regret the home you have left, and may you find a compensation for a mother's tenderness, a sister's love, in the nearer and dearer ties which you will sooner or later form."

"No! mother," was the quick rejoinder; "such ties I will never form. You will ever be, as you are now, the first, the only idol of my heart."

There was something strange, forced in his accents, and Mrs. Vernon cast a wondering glance upon him. The moonlight shone full on his high, polished brow, which had something stern in its marble beauty, and the same expression lurked in the corners of the faultlessly chiselled lips, but the dark meaning eyes that encountered her own, seemed to pour forth very floods of tenderness upon her, and Mrs. Vernon felt that blessed indeed would be the lot of her who should be the chosen one of her noble, gifted son. She thought of Ida at the moment; the wayward but high-minded Ida; she who beneath her cold, reserved exterior—her apparent icy egotism—concealed so deep a mine of woman's tenderness and devotion; and the words almost rose to her lips, "that she, indeed, notwithstanding her many faults and foibles, was well worthy of him." But her promise sealed her