

## THE PARENT'S CURSE.

"And will you still indulge the fond, vain hope, that the pretended regard of lord Frederick Villiers is sincere! Deluded girl! no longer trust him! for be assured that too late you will learn, that your love was vain. Is he not, even now, at the lordly residence of the duke of N.—!—and what prompted the visit? You who have seen the lovely lady Emily Percy may easily comprehend his motive for going there!"

"You will permit me to remark, that this comes with rather a bad grace from Sir James Wilmot, and I might ask how he obtains such information."

"From my own knowledge of the human heart, incredulous lady!—a knowledge gained by the experience of years: and from closely observing the connexion which existed between you, and by the confidential disclosures of the earl, his father. Do you suppose that that proud nobleman would have permitted the attentions of his son to you, if he had for a moment supposed them real? No; not for a moment would he have tolerated it: but well he knew that the union between his heir and lady Emily, a union which has been contemplated many years, would still take place, and even the lady herself, secure in the promised faith of her future lord, looked calmly on his apparent devotion to another, and accepted the attentions of the bashful Sir Edgar Roscoe. But you are very, very pale, dear Florence! and see, the tide is rising, even now the waves have reached the very spot where we stand; let me assist you from this dangerous place!"

"Leave me," she cried, "leave me to my fate! Rather, far rather would I perish here, even by the violence of those resistless waves, than live to know that lord Frederick is false to his promised faith!"

"I will not, I cannot leave you thus," he cried, as, seizing her arm, he hurried her from the place, notwithstanding her struggles to free herself from his grasp, nor would he leave her side, until they reached the house.

Sir James remained several days, and although Florence avoided him as much as possible, he contrived, by the aid of Mrs. Burton, to see her several times alone; but he seemed now to have resigned all hope of gaining her affection, and the respectful kindness of his manner, his apparent dejection, and the fact that he was unhappy for her sake, overcame in a great measure her dislike of him, and viewing him only as a companion and friend, in a world where her friends were so few, she even regretted, when the time drew near which he had appointed for his return, Sir James took a respectful, nay even a tender leave of poor Florence; and as he pressed her hand in his, said in a low voice:

"When convinced that I have been to you indeed a friend, when all else deceived you, then may you learn to prize my friendship, if you cannot return my love; but I cannot resign the hope, that your young heart may yet be mine."

Florence turned away in silence, for tears choked her utterance, and sought her chamber; throwing herself upon a sofa, she gave way to a violent burst of sorrow; the deep, the hidden mystery, which blighted the sunny prospect of her early days; the scenes of poverty and sorrow through which she had passed; her mother's death; her school-days, happy in themselves, but darkened by the deaths of the brother and sisters, thus torn from her, her meetings with lord Frederick Villiers, and his undaunted heroism, by which she was saved from a horrid death; the friendship of lady Harriet; the happy days she passed in Kent; the love of lord Frederick, and the kindness of lady Julia, together with her singular removal from school; the late visit of Sir James; the apparent neglect of lady Harriet, and the almost certain perfidy of Frederick, formed a chain of events so disconnected that she could with difficulty persuade herself that she was the subject of them.

"Mary, my wiser, better sister," she cried, "would that, like you, I had learned to value as they deserve, the pleasures of the world! Why did I not check its wanderings, ere I learned to feast my soul on imaginary delights? until I thought no cloud would ere again obscure my sunny sky! Would that I too were at rest in Windsor's sacred churchyard, and the anxious beatings of this aching heart forever stilled! But can I, must I, abandon all hope? May not the assertions of Sir James still be false: But could he be guilty of such base deceit? Aye! could lord Frederick be guilty of such heartless perjury? No; I will not, cannot believe him false! yet will I trust him, and when I know him false, then! and then only, will I cease to confide in his love!"

When Florence joined Mrs. Burton, that lady spoke in the highest terms of Sir James Wilmot; he was so honorable, so generous, so noble; it had given her great pleasure, she said, to witness his partiality to her young companion, and nothing would give her greater pleasure, than to see her two most valued friends united, as she knew them so well worthy of each other. Florence begged her to cease, as it was not probable her wish would ever be gratified; Mrs. Burton smiled incredulously, and changed the subject.