

with a vague fear of some calamity, more terrible than the loss of fortune or position. I hurried home, promising Heaven during that drive of agony, that if it would protect you from harm, I would be a better wife than I had been. Cranston, who was sitting up for me, opened the door, and my first inquiry was for you. You were in and had gone up stairs. Ah, God was very good to me! You had not left me for ever, as Colford Stone would have done, or—well, still worse! Up stairs I sped, though dreading that in your despair you might repulse me, or receive me with reproaches. Clive, dear, you were merciful to me, and Heaven has been very merciful to us both."

He bowed his head in assent, too much moved to speak, and tenderly laid his hand on his young wife's head, inwardly registering a vow that henceforth no act or word of hers should ever move him to anger or harshness. Then, after a pause of silent emotion, they went back step by step over the estrangement that had subsisted so long between them. The note he had written to her, the non-reception of which had caused so sad a misunderstanding, was spoken of, and its disappearance at once attributed by Virginia to her whilom friend.

"Pray let us talk no more of her, Clive, for I am beginning to feel uncharitable. Let us face instead the realities of our position. All this fine house and its belongings must be given up; then we must get a small cottage, or a couple of rooms in some quiet out-of-the way street; I will have to wear calico dresses, and sweep and dust, for, of course, we will not be able to keep more than one servant, or perhaps none at all. I assure you, Mr. Weston, I will be quite equal to the situation; only, how about the cookery? Oh, I have it! There is a book called "Cooking Made Easy," and—"

"If it is anything as vague as 'Spanish Made Easy,' or 'Italian without a Master,' I think it will be safer for us not to venture on giving dinner parties for some time to come,"

he interrupted, won to smiles despite the seriousness of his mood.

"Be serious now, Clive! For the first few weeks we will live on my diamonds—the remarks of that old cynic Stone, whose name I will bless through life for the lesson he gave me, suggested the idea: in the meantime you will look about for a clerkship, as the diamonds, I suppose, will not last long. Do you think, Clive darling, you will get one?"

"Without difficulty!" and the bankrupt merchant faintly smiled, as he thought how many firms in the city would gladly secure his services, almost on his own terms.

"That is delightful, and I might teach playing and singing—though I do both execrably—to beginners. But now that I remember, poor old Aunt Ponton is expected home from day to day. She has been passing five or six months in Florida for her health, which is much better. Of course she will insist on our living with her and spoil all our plans. I think she will look on our bankruptcy as a blessing in disguise, if it procure her the advantage of having us in her own house so that she may pet and spoil me as of old."

What a relief to body and mind, that had been stretched on the rack for days past, it was to sit there and listen to that gay feminine talk rippling so pleasantly from Virginia's lips!

More than once he asked himself: "Was he not dreaming?" The reality was so different to anything he had pictured. He had thought of her pale, crushed to the earth by humiliation and grief; or else loudly proclaiming her wrongs, but always turning from him in anger and scorn; and here she was sitting at his feet in love and trust more perfect than had ever yet reigned between them.

How different it would all have been if his Heavenly Father had not arrested his hand! When his wife's eyes were closed in peaceful sleep, he knelt in self-abasement, in passionate pleading with his Maker for pardon.