

into the gloomy little building. It was so dark that, coming from the dazzling sunshine, she could at first distinguish nothing, except that the floor was encumbered with rubbish and a few large stones, on one of which she sat down, thankful to rest at last. After a little time her eyes grew accustomed to the partial light, which was admitted only through the open doorway, and she could ascertain that she was in a small octagon room, the walls of which were, in fact, the actual rock, joined to massive stone masonry, which formed the remaining portions. It was very lofty, extending up the whole height of the tower, so that the roof was lost in impenetrable shadows, and there was no window and no furniture that she could perceive. One striking object only met her eye, because it happened to be exactly opposite the gleam of light admitted by the narrow door; it was a huge roughly-executed cross, hewn out of the living rock, and standing forward in bold relief against the indistinct background. Una gazed at it with great interest, thinking how before that awful symbol the poor lonely penitent of the old legend, night and day, poured out his anguish of remorse, and wondering if ever in this world he found peace. But while she looked on it long and steadily, a sudden terror shook her whole frame from head to foot, and made her very heart seem to cease its beating, for it appeared to her that she saw standing by the side of that cross, a tall dark figure, perfectly motionless, but with gleaming eyes fixed upon her, from amidst the shadows. For a moment she tried to persuade herself that it was a delusion, but as she forced herself to look again the apparition only grew more distinct, and completely overmastered by a superstitious fear, her courage failed her altogether; she gave a stifled shriek, and starting up, rushed to the door, stumbling as she did so over a stone, so that she was thrown violently forward, and would have fallen, had not the figure which had so terrified her darted towards her and caught her in his arms.

"Miss Dysart, I am so grieved to have alarmed you; there is nothing to fear."

Still terrified and bewildered, she struggled in his grasp, exclaiming, "Who—what are you?"

"Humphrey Atherstone; do you not know me?"

She looked for a moment into his face, on which the sunshine from the door at which they now stood was shining, and when she met the dark mournful eyes, gentle and softened now as they gazed into hers, she ceased to struggle and drew a long breath of relief. But the reaction was too sudden, and she still trembled so violently that she was fain to lean against him to avoid sinking to the ground. His powerful arm held her fast, as he looked down tenderly into the young fair face, now blanched to the very lips. But soon, with a heavy sigh, he moved, as if he dared not remain in that position another moment.

"Will you not sit down?" he said; "I can find you a seat inside."

"Oh! don't take me back in there," she said, shuddering. "Let me stay in the sunshine; I am better now," and she raised herself from his arms and stood upright.

"Wait one moment," he said, and going into the tower, he brought out a seat for her, which he placed in such a position that she could lean back against the rock. "You can rest here in tolerable comfort, I think," he said, and she thanked him with a smile as she sat down, while he stood beside her supporting his tall frame against the doorway. "Now, let me beg your pardon a thousand times for the needless terror I caused you," said Atherstone; "I

saw you come in, and was aware also that you did not perceive me, and I was afraid I should startle you if I spoke too suddenly. I was just thinking how best to make my presence known, when you gave that sad little shriek of dismay."

"I was very silly, and I am quite ashamed; but the truth is, I was so completely convinced when I first came in that there was no living being there but myself, that when I saw a dark figure beside the cross, I thought—" She paused and seemed unwilling to finish her sentence.

"What did you think, Miss Dysart?" he said, gravely.

"You will laugh at me if I tell you."

"This is the last place where I am likely to laugh," he answered.

"I thought then," she said, in a low tone, "that it was the spirit of Fulke Atherstone."

Not a word did Humphrey speak for a few minutes; then he said, "It is strange, indeed, that you should have connected him and me in this manner in your mind."

"He was your ancestor, was he not?" asked Una.

"Doubtless; but I often think there is a closer connection between us than that fact need imply."

"I should hope you are not so unhappy as he is said to have been?" said Una, softly.

"I never committed a murder certainly," said Atherstone, in a voice so harsh that Una was quite startled.

"Did he, your ancestor, do so?" she asked.

"Yes—at least so the legend goes—he was a Cain, and slew his brother. He was the younger son, and he wanted the Abbey and the good lands of Atherstone to be his own, so that he might win with them the woman he loved, as well as a place of honour in the country. So he killed the rightful possessor and took them to himself." Having said this much, Atherstone turned away as if unable to proceed.

CHAPTER IX.

There was silence for a few minutes, then Atherstone faced Una again with his usual calm. "Do you wish to hear more of my ancestor's life?" he asked.

"Only this," said Una; "tell me if he truly repented."

"Yes, he repented, for his crime brought nothing but evil days upon him; although in those old, lawless times, when deeds of violence were frequent, he escaped the judicial punishment he so well deserved, and was allowed to live. The woman for whom he committed the crime refused to touch his blood-stained hand. She left him, and passed her life in praying for him; and when even in loveless solitude he sought to reign as lord of Atherstone, his equals in the land all combined to disown and shun him; no man would speak to him, no woman would smile on him, and they say that his brother's face, pallid in death, was ever before him. So at last remorse seized him, and it was like a worm gnawing at his heart. Then he built this tower and carved out the cross from the rock, and spent the rest of his life prostrate before it. He was found there dead at last, and is buried where he lay, for the remains of a murderer could not rest in consecrated ground."

"What a dreadful history," said Una; "I almost wonder that you can bear to come here, Mr. Atherstone. I came myself from mere curiosity; but I think if I had known all about the tower, I should not have ventured to visit it."

"I come here continually," said Atherstone, gloomily. "It is the place where best I can wrestle with the inexorable difficulty of my life—where I try to solve the

never-dying problem of the true nature of evil; to adjust the balance of right and wrong, in cases which do not seem to be touched by any known laws, and to prove to myself whether my own position is founded on immaculate righteousness or on a hideous wrong."

Una looked up to him with a glance of wistful compassion. "You speak in riddles, Mr. Atherstone. I suppose you do not wish that I should understand what you say. But I fear there is one fact connected with you which I can comprehend too well; your life is very unhappy, I am sure."

He fixed his eyes keenly on her face. "Miss Dysart, will you tell me what you have heard concerning me? It seems an odd question, but I beg you not to refuse to answer it. What have you been told of my history, past and present?"

"Of the past, I have been made acquainted with all that is known of the circumstances of your uncle's death; and of the present—" she stopped and hesitated.

"Pray go on," he said entreatingly, bending down to her with anxious eyes.

"Of the present," she said in a low voice, "I have heard that you have firmly resolved to lead always the solitary life you are living now; that you will never allow any human tie to break its loneliness."

"Yes, you have rightly heard," he said, "but my will has no share in this harsh decree; it is a doom laid upon me. Miss Dysart, since you know that in this respect I am shut out from the common humanity, it will not, I trust, offend you if I say, that I never understood the extent of the sacrifice I am compelled to make till I saw, the other day, how your sweet presence made sunshine in my gloomy old home, and taught me what life might be for happier men."

She bent down her head and made no answer, and after a few minutes' silence, he said, more calmly, "What do you think of a life in which the chief element is not love, but hatred—hatred felt and returned?"

"Oh! it must be terrible," she said; "but surely it never can be right to hate?"

"Not even to hate evil?"

"Mr. Atherstone," she said, with a winning frankness, "you do not wish me to penetrate the mystery of your life, and therefore it is impossible I can rightly comment upon it; only of this be very sure—I feel deeply for you in the evident suffering which it entails upon you. I wish I could think you would one day be happier than you are now."

"Can I ever be happy when that irrevocable sentence has been passed, which shuts me out from all human love; which condemns me to drag on through my hopeless days, a solitary, childless man, with none on earth to care whether I live or die?"

"But you may have friends," she said, with a tender earnestness; "do let that thought comfort you: even though you are deprived of nearer ties, you may have much sympathy and joy in them."

Her voice was so full of the intense compassion she felt for him, that the strong man was greatly moved. He stooped down and gently took her hand. "Those words sound very consoling, spoken by your lips; may I count you among the friends you promise me?"

"Indeed you may, now and always," she exclaimed. But as she raised her sweet brown eyes to his face, as if to seal the promise with her eloquent look, and he saw the world of feeling that lay behind them, he felt his very heart sink down with despair, and he knew as he never had known before of what he was bereft.

(To be continued.)