

no strong appeal to old Ralph Blount. He longed to see her at the head of some great city chapel,—the wife of an earnest successful minister,—forwarding his manifold schemes alike with her personality and her fortune.

Dalgleish—even in the early days—had not been in all respects the man he would have chosen; but he could not fail to see that Dalgleish had been the first to touch the young girl's heart.

And now the lad had shown himself so utterly unworthy! Even the supreme initiation of a life and death illness had failed to make a man of him.

At last the summons came, and it was too late to draw back. 'Mr. Blount will see you in the library, sir.'

Dalgleish just retained sufficient presence of mind to look the old man full in the face, and to take the first word.

'I have come, sir,' he said, 'to tell you the whole story.'

There was something very disarming about his appearance,—the flexible mouth, the straight forehead, the eager eyes. Sternly Mr. Blount held out his hand. At best Dalgleish had behaved wrongly and foolishly, but a man must be judged honest until he is proved a thief.

A chair had been placed uncomfortably near the old man, but Dalgleish had sense enough not to move it by so much as a hair's breadth. Sitting down, he looked straight into the fire, and plunged into the story. With every sentence the tale grew blacker in the light of that cold judicial personality. Dalgleish tried not to be mawkish nor sentimental,—tried to stick to facts; but, as he came to the end, his voice faltered.

'I suppose you would say I was off my head, sir,' he said. 'I was frightfully lonely and upset, and I just loathed the thought of returning to the old routine. I felt as if I must break away somehow.'

Had Mr. Blount in the whole course of his strenuous life ever felt a similar longing? If so, he gave no indication of the fact. 'Who opened the door to you?' he asked abruptly.

Dalgleish pulled himself up short. 'Nobody. It was open. Somebody seemed to be waiting for an answer.'

'And who let you out?'

'I let myself out,—as usual.'

'You watched your opportunity?'

There was a moment's silence. 'Yes.'