

even in idea place himself in a questionable situation. For some minutes, Sophia was irresolute which course to pursue. She counted the money again, and argued thus—"He may be rich: this sum may be nothing to him, while it will save me the painful exposure of my folly. It is not theft; for I found it in my path. Besides, it may not belong to him, after all, or, if it does, he may not remember when and where he lost it. She dropped the purse into her pocket, and walked a few paces forward. Her mind misgave her—conscience loudly warned her not to commit so base and dishonest an action; her better feelings for a few moments prevailed, and she determined to walk after the stranger, and restore to him his property. With this intent she drew the purse from her pocket, and with it the fatal bill which had caused her so much uneasiness. The sight of it overturned all her good resolutions; thus does one crime ever lead to the perpetration of another. "That hateful bill must be paid," she muttered to herself. "This money appears sent to me by Providence to free me from this worse than Egyptian bondage—the consciousness of debt, without the means of satisfying a cruel and remorseless creditor. The stranger cannot detect me. He did not see me take it up. Gold and silver cannot be identified like paper. I will keep it!"

She thrust the purse hastily into her bosom, and hurried on—so easily does the tempter beguile the deluded victims that listen to his subtle arguments. She had not walked far, when, at a turning in the lane, she encountered the old gentleman.

"Miss Linhope," he said, hastily addressing her by name, "I have lost my purse in this lane. I suppose I dropped it in pulling out my handkerchief. Have you picked it up?"

"No, sir," returned Sophia, with a calmness that surprised herself—"what colour is it?"

"Green, wrought with gold twist, and it contains twenty sovereigns in gold, and three pounds seven and sixpence in silver—rather too large a sum for me conveniently to lose," said the old gentleman, regarding his companion with a peculiarly searching glance. But, from a child, Sophia had been an adept at disguising her feelings; and never had she felt the necessity of practising that speciousness of look and manner, against which her virtuous father had so earnestly warned her, as on this occasion.

"Twenty sovereigns?" she said, "is a serious loss. Are you sure, Sir, that you dropped the purse in this lane?"

"Quite sure; I had it in my hand a few minutes ago. If you have not seen it," he continued, again fixing upon her the piercing glance of his eagle eye, perhaps you will be so kind as walk a few paces back, and help me to look for it?"

"Willingly," said Sophia, and they commenced their search?"

Again she felt in her mind the fearful struggle of good and evil. One moment, she was strongly warned to restore the purse; the next, to drop it by the side of the hedge, and pretend suddenly to discover it glittering among the fern and grass; and once—when the fierce arrow of remorse more forcibly struck into her heart—she felt inclined to 'dash the fatal treasure' at the stranger's feet, and abandon the path. Well had it been for Sophia had she yielded to the latter suggestion. But the tempter came and whispered, in mocking tones, "will you expose your dishonesty? will you submit to the disgrace of being considered a thief, by this stranger—as a liar, by your mother and sister—when Mrs. Lawrence makes known your delinquency? How will you then appear? What excuse can you frame to conceal your guilt? It is impossible to retrace your steps—you must plunge boldly on!"

Whilst these thoughts were passing rapidly through Sophia's mind, she acted her part so well, that no one could have suspected her of secreting the purse.

"I perceive that our search is fruitless," said Mr. Granger, with the same severity of look and manner. "Those who have detained it, have yet to learn that money so ill gotten will never prosper."

Sophia replied to this insinuation with an indignant glance, as though she were not only innocent but the injured party, and walked proudly away. The conviction that the stranger suspected her honesty, filled her mind with uneasiness and alarm. When she reached the Abbey, to her increasing annoyance, she passed the old gentleman again in the avenue. He never raised his hat, as she glided by, but regarded her with a look of pity and contempt. Mrs. Hazlewood was absent at a neighbouring house. Sophia left the order with the servant, and returned home. As she passed through B—, she stepped into the milliner's, and paid the half of the bill, promising the rest in a few weeks. Mrs. Lawrence was all smiles and politeness, and Sophia, for a few minutes, felt the intoxication of spirit which sometimes follows successful wickedness. Such joy is ever of short duration. She had scarcely informed her mother of the result of her visit to the farm, when the servant slipped a note into her hand. As it was written in a very beautiful hand, she expected that it was a tender communication from Captain Ogilvie. She eagerly tore it open, and, to her utter dismay, read, in a strange hand, the following billet:—

"The money you have so dishonestly appropriated is yours. I give it to you to save you from the perpetration of a greater crime. If your heart is not entirely callous to the voice of conscience, repent and sin no more.

"R. GRANGER."

This note produced an electric effect upon the