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## CONSCIENCE.

'If happiness have not the seat and centre in the breast,  
We may be wise, be rich, and great, but never can be blessed.'

There is a feeling implanted in the human breast, which makes sympathy a necessary of our existence, and he who carries with him an uncommunicable sorrow, bears a load which becomes more and more painful each hour of his life. Such is my lot.

To relieve the feelings which sometimes seem bursting from my breast, I will attempt to pourtray my sufferings—on this pure unsullied sheet transcribe my crimes. To whom do I write? To myself alone—a second self can only know my temptations, my fall, and the agony I endure. If there was the most remote probability that one human being would ever know my guilt, I could not bear the thought and live. No, no—it shall die with me whatever it may cost to suppress the utterance of my pangs—I must acquire more self-control—I must learn to conceal from all, the dark cloud which comes over my soul.

I have flown from my crowded apartments, where beauty, talent, and fashion are assembled. My wife gives a musical soiree—a band of newly arrived German musicians are there. She never looked more beautiful, nor seemed in better spirits, than when waiting for the assembling party; but I have dashed her enjoyment for the evening. Yes, I—who, were it in my power, would make her life a gorgeous pageant, a fairy dream. As I left the room, she caught a glimpse of my countenance, she perceived my dark hour was upon me—I knew it from her expressive features, and I know that whilst many are listening to the matchless powers of her voice, or her unequal touch of the instrument, whilst others admire her transcendent beauty—her triumphs—her enjoyments are over. She follows in her thought the one who possesses her heart. She would willingly fly to soothe, to sympathize with him; but she knows it is in vain. She knows there are moments when she, even she is excluded from the presence of one who has sacrificed—what she knew, high-souled and proudly virtuous as she is—that her husband is a—a—I cannot write the word which would truly pourtray me. She never shall know it—no, no! the secret is mine, and mine it shall be to the grave. The grave?—beyond the grave—what then?—away, away! such thoughts distract me. I must not, cannot, dwell upon them.

Men call me good—honest. They look up to me as a man of probity, they cite my name among the honourable. Could they look into my soul! what foul corruption they would behold in one they esteem so highly. I feel how unsatisfactory are their commendations, and yet I could not live without them. I crave them as a diseased appetite craves delicious food. Yes, yes, I shall ever walk among them as one without stain or blemish, and transmit to my children an unsullied name. Is there not one, more mighty than man—who sees all—knows all? Let him tell my tale!

Ambition was ever my ruling passion. In my youthful days, what high aspirings, what longings after distinction possessed my soul.—Sometimes I fancied myself a Demosthenes, guiding a charmed multitude by my eloquence; again I imagined I possessed a great political influence, and controlled the destinies of nations; in short, there is no telling the various flights to which my fancy soared in my day-dreams of the future. One by one these imaginings were dispersed by realities, either the want of talent or circumstances controlled my destiny. My way seemed impeded by every obstacle until I found myself obliged to submit, to confine my ambition to the sphere of a merchant. I entered into business with every

advantage, and my restless soul impelled me to endeavor to become the first among merchants—to be cited as the greatest—the wealthiest. My name known in every part of the world where commerce had sent her emissaries. To have my ships traverse every sea—visit every clime—and bring by my power the productions of every nation to my store-houses. After all is not a merchant a sort of prince? How many sue to him for favors, how many depend on him for means of living?—When surrounded by his clerks, the captains of his ships, his porters, in short the numerous persons in his employ, is he not like a king among his subjects? I entered largely into dashing speculations—I was fortunate; and every one looked upon me as a prosperous and successful man. Society—the *vois-distant* first in our city opened its arms to me—fashion sanctioned my admittance, and I became a favorite.

A bright star soon appeared in the circles where I visited. Cornelia Manners was the most admired person I had ever seen—and well she deserved the distinction which accompanied her, for her beauty, her talents, and her accomplishments were of the highest order. She had been educated in Europe, where her father had been many years as minister to a foreign court. She soon attracted a crowd around her, and I resolved to win the prize. When I became more intimately acquainted with her, her many virtues, her noble qualities inspired me with a sincere and lasting attachment. I soon had the happiness of perceiving I was not indifferent to her. Her father too, encouraged my addresses; for he had expended all his property abroad, and wished to see his daughter well established. He knew she had a taste for magnificence, and he had indulged her in the most extravagant habits.—He was therefore pleased to see her bestow her affections on one who seemed prosperously floating on the tide of fortune, and whose love of *style* would probably coincide with her's.

Fortune, with her proverbial fickleness, seemed as if she only meant to hold the enchanting cup to my lip, to dash it away. Just as I had ascertained the enrapturing certainty of possessing the hand of my matchless Cornelia—when her father had graciously sanctioned our attachment—every thing seemed to turn against me. My speculations proved unfortunate; loss succeeded loss. My affairs grew worse and worse every day, until bankruptcy stared me in the face. Bankruptcy? hideous fiend! Could my proud spirit endure to become a broken down merchant!—never, never! To lose Cornelia too—I was nearly distracted.

Just at this crisis, I received letters from England, informing me of the death of a gentleman with whom I had been intimate whilst he was on a visit to this country. He was a generous-good-hearted fellow, but guided by every impulse. His thoughtlessness often brought trouble to those on whom he wished to confer happiness. He was the second son of a noble family; whilst here he became attached to a young girl of respectable connections, though not rich. Governed by his feelings, he married her without consulting his family. Soon after he received intelligence of the death of the elder brother. His mother urged his immediate return to take possession of his title and estate, as he was now the head of his family; her health being extremely precarious, in consequence of her grief for the loss of her eldest son. He departed, assuring his wife he would soon return to claim her and present her to his mother. When he arrived in England, he found his mother's health in such a state, he dared not reveal his marriage, as he knew the blow to her pride would destroy her. He delayed from time to time the communication, whilst the flattering attentions, the allurements of

pleasure, which rank and wealth receive, became more and more fascinating. The recollection of his wife became proportionably fainter—whilst she—but I will not attempt to pourtray the sufferings of a sensitive woman. Her fragile constitution could not bear up against the sickness of hope deferred. She died after giving birth to a daughter. Her husband was duly informed of these events, but he took no notice of the intelligence. He soon after married a lady of rank, and plunged into a whirl of dissipation. In a few years death deprived him of his mother and his lady-wife. The latter left no children. Shortly after he received an injury from a fall from his horse, which terminated his life. Before he died, however, in the loneliness of his bed of sickness, the recollection of his first love, his neglected wife and orphan daughter, preyed upon him. All the reparation in his power was to leave his personal property, which was large, to his child. The title and estates went to a younger brother. To my charge was confided this property. Her maternal grandmother and myself were appointed sole guardians to the little girl, whilst through me only was the intelligence to be communicated. He had the most implicit confidence in my integrity, and every thing was in my power.

'What a fickle jade is fortune,' thought I, after perusing these papers; 'this large fortune is bestowed on an insignificant little girl, who will be insensible to its advantages, and is quite as well off without it, not expecting it, whilst she frowns on me, when every thing is at stake. One good turn might yet retrieve my affairs. Oh, had I this wealth, Cornelia would yet be mine, and I would have the power to make her life what it ought to be.'

The first step in sin was committed. I had broken a commandment—'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.' Instead of driving temptation from me I allowed fancy to pourtray all I could do if this property were mine. Need I describe how by degrees I became familiarized with the idea of applying it to my use, until I determined to borrow it for the present, and at some future time repay it. The family lived so quietly and obscurely, they would never hear of the death of Lord Grammont, and they had long given up all expectation of any thing from him. In short, ambition, love of worldly distinction, the desire to obtain Cornelia, were too great temptations for me, I possessed myself of that property to which I had no right, and my integrity was gone, gone forever! Oh, you who stand vacillating on the brink of crime, beware how you take one step downwards—for there is an impelling power which leads us on and on until we know not to what depths we shall sink.

I continued my business with the same reputation for prosperity. I married Cornelia, and we commenced an establishment exceeding all others in the city for costliness and elegance. Cornelia was fond of *style*, and I placed no limit to her extravagance. No one was better formed to grace our splendid establishment. We do not content ourselves with a vulgar display of wealth, and suppose we have arrived at the summit, because we expend more money than any one else. She possesses an exquisite taste, and every thing is recherche and in good keeping. The most fastidious critic can find no fault with our establishment or our entertainments. I have obtained all I have struggled for—all I have sacrificed so much to procure. Am I happy, am I contented? Let these groans which burst from me when I fly to solitude to relieve my overloaded spirit, be my answer. Oh! what would I not give to have the integrity of my soul restored—to say to myself there is no human being living whom I have injured—to be free from the feeling of conscious dishonesty! I plunge into business—hurry into company, I am always