

whose power, whoever they might be, exerted over him a mysterious and evil influence.—Had there been any person of a healthy tone of mind, on whom she could have bestowed her confidence, different inferences might have been drawn, founded more on reason, and less on the imagination. But Mrs. Wilton, her sister-in-law, the only person of a strong mind unclouded by superstition, to whom she would have felt free to communicate her thoughts and apprehensions, seldom appeared whereshe would be likely to encounter Lord Seaford, and she herself was far too feeble to walk the mile which intervened between her present abode and the home of her childhood, or to undertake to manage one of the vicious animals that filled her husband's stable.

Lady Seaford's father, who, for several months, had been sinking under a complication of diseases, died, having bequeathed the whole of his rich possessions, consisting of Wilton Place, and several valuable appanages, to his grand-son, Frederic Wilton. In case, however, that his grand-son should die without heirs, or before he attained the age of twenty-one, the estate was to go to his daughter and to her heirs, the whole to be subject to the control of his well-beloved son-in-law, Lord Seaford.

This last clause in his will, would never have existed, had he been made acquainted with the true character and conduct of his daughter's husband; which, out of regard to his declining health, had been concealed from him, without any anticipation of his investing him with so much power, in case of the lineal heir's decease. But this was an event which did not seem likely to occur. The child's health was perfectly good, and being under the control of a strong-minded, judicious mother, whose good sense led her to adopt those modes of treatment, many of which, at the present day, may be gathered from books, there appeared to be little chance, that Lord Seaford, who already began to drink deep of the inebriating cup, would survive him.

A gleam of mental sunshine alone broke in upon the troubled spirit of Lady Seaford, after the birth of a daughter. Having looked, for a long time, upon its smiling and innocent features, she requested to see Mrs. Wilton.

"Promise me," said she, when her sister-in-law appeared at her side, "to be a mother to my child."

"Certainly, my dear Catharine," she replied, "if——"

"I know what you would say—I must see him. Let some one call him."

When Lord Seaford was told that his wife could live only a short time, he hastened to her apartment, and softened by the earnestness and pathos, with which she urged what he felt her dying request, he promised her that the child should be committed to the care of Mrs. Wilton.

"I can now die in peace," were the last words of the young and broken-hearted wife and mother.

Lord Seaford adhered to his promise, and permitted Mrs. Wilton to take the infant, who was named Catharine, for her mother, to her own home, as it would have been equally unpleasant and inconvenient for her to have resided at the castle.

CHAPTER II.

SEVERAL years passed away, and Frederic Wilton, sole heir of the Wilton estates, had grown to be a fine, intelligent boy, and of a daring and adventurous spirit far beyond his years. Already he had learnt to scale many a bold cliff and precipice, whence he delighted to watch the waves breaking into foam against the rocks, and to listen to their hoarse music. Nothing could tempt him from these, his favorite haunts, when released from his studies, except the pleasure of directing the footsteps of the little Catharine, who, made healthful by her out-door sports, was one of the most buoyant and beautiful children that ever revelled on the green sward, or by the blue and sunny sea.

The head of the cove already alluded to, where the sea broke in ripples on the hard, smooth sand, was his usual place of resort, when Catharine was his companion. Within a natural excavation of the rock, extending a few feet, he had made a seat and covered it with moss and concealed the rough sides with beautiful shells, he had collected on the shore. Here, alike sheltered from sun and wind Catharine, the summer she was four years old, established her favourite play-house, and while amusing herself with her dolls, Frederic would sit near, busily employed in endeavouring to construct a tiny schooner after the fashion of one, that had a few months previous, anchored in the cove, and remained nearly a week.

The schooner, whose crew consisted of a set of swarthy, uncouth looking men, who spoke a foreign language, occasioned considerable stir among the inhabitants of the place. Some imagined that she was a pirate, and con-