

ROSAMOND.

CHAPTER I.

THE OWNER OF RIVERSIDE.

All the day long the September rain had fallen, and when the night closed in it showed no sign of weariness, but with the same monotonous patter dropped upon the roof, or beat against the windows of the pleasantly lighted room where a young man sat gazing at the glowing grate, and listening apparently to the noise of the storm without. But neither the winds, nor yet the rain, had a part of that young man's thoughts, for they were with the past, and the chain which linked them to that past was the open letter which lay on the table beside him. For that letter he had waited long and anxiously, wondering what it would contain, and if his overtures for reconciliation with one who had erred far more than himself, would be accepted. It had come at last, and with a gathering coldness at his heart he had read the decision—'she would not be reconciled,' and she bade him 'go his way alone and leave her to herself.'

'It is well,' he said; 'I shall never trouble her again'—and with a feeling of relief, as if a heavy load, a dread of coming evil, had been taken from his mind, he threw the letter upon the table, and leaning back in his cushioned chair, tried to fancy that the last few years of his life were blotted out.

'Could it be so, Ralph Browning would be a different man,' he said aloud; then, as he glanced round the richly furnished room, he continued—'People call me happy. Why was it suffered to be, and must I make a life-long atonement for that early sin?'

In his excitement he arose, and crushing the letter for a moment in his hand, hurled it into the fire; then, going to his private drawer, he took out and opened a neatly folded package, containing a long tress of jet black hair. Shudderingly he wound it around his fingers, laid it over the back of his hand, held it up to the light, and then with a hard, dark look upon his

face, threw it, too, upon the grate, saying aloud. 'Thus perisheth every memento of the past, and I am free again—free as air!'

He walked to the window, and pressing his burning forehead against the cool, damp pane, looked out upon the night. He could not see through the darkness, but had it been day, his eye would have rested on broad acres all his own; for Ralph Browning was a wealthy man, and the house in which he lived was his by right of inheritance from a bachelor uncle for whom he had been named, and who, two years before our story opens, had died, leaving to his nephew the grand old place, called Riverside, from its nearness to the river. It was a most beautiful spot; and when its new master first took possession of it, the maids and matrons of Granby, who had mourned for the elder Browning as people mourn for a good man, felt themselves somewhat consoled from the fact that his successor was young and handsome, and would doubtless prove an invaluable acquisition to their fireside circles, and furnish a theme for gossip, without which no village can well exist. But in the first of their expectations they were mistaken, for Mr. Browning shunned rather than sought society, and spent the most of his leisure hours in the seclusion of his library, where, as Mrs. Peters, his housekeeper, said, he did nothing but mope over books and walk the floor. 'He was melancholy,' she said; 'there was something workin' on his mind, and what it was she didn't know more'n the dead—though she knew as well as she wanted to that he had been crossed in love for what else would make so many of his hairs grey, and he not yet twenty-five!'

That there was a mystery connected with him was conceded by most of the villagers, and many a curious gaze they bent upon the grave, dignified young man, who seldom joined in their pastimes or intruded himself upon their company. Much sympathy was expressed for him in his loneliness, by the