

SOLITARY ISLAND

A NOVEL.

By REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

"I s'pose. All the worse for you an' maybe you'll not be astonished and ashamed readin' that paper in days to come. I had an idee of a man gentle and quiet, whose mind was jes' like the water on a still night, deep, clear, sweet and full of heaven an' the bright pints in it, who'd settle down to a steady, pious thinkin' life, writin' fine things for other people to read, comin' nearer to God every year and bringin' others along with him. till he'd be so ripe for heaven as to fall into it from this world, jes' as natural as a ripe apple falls to the ground. I had that idee, but it's gone, and I mentioned it jes' to show ye what a stranger thought o' ye."

CHAPTER X.

Florian returned from his solitude with a feeling of lofty indifference for the world and everything in it. He had, moreover, a profound contempt for solitude in respect to men of his disposition, for, having gone out to ascertain by himself and with the aid of a sage of silence and loneliness his own tendencies and fitness for certain work, he had instead been perplexed and confounded, both by his own meditations and the sage's advice. He now arrived at the conclusion that he should go on in the path already chosen, nor turn aside even at the command of an angel.

wished to say, "sentenced the child to death"; but felt its foolishness and was silent. "I saw she would not last much longer," said the pere in his professional tones. "and so informed her. There was no one else to do it, and if I had told her she was to live she could not have taken it much better. Good day."

"I do not know why he has been so much in my thoughts lately, but his red beard and keen eyes have haunted me pleasantly for two weeks. Probably because you were there with him. And what did he say to you? You know you promised to tell."

and looking into the pallid face. Could this be the lively, cheerful girl of a month past? He could not realize that it was. The changes made by death were very painful. It had robbed them of the dear girl even before the soul had fled, for this was no more the Linda of old times than a stranger. She fell asleep soon, and he saw how completely death had seized on her. The hollow eyes and parted mouth, the wasted hands, the feeble but labored respiration, were all eloquent of death. She slept sweetly, indeed, so sweetly that he could not help saying the angels were around her; but her eyes were only closed in part, and it awoke him to see how she seemed to look on him with her senses locked in slumber.

"There is no pain in dying," she whispered, "but only in leaving you, mother."

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"You will not forget, Linda, that you are to tell me your wishes before—before— You said you would."

So it happened Florian found him a half an hour later in the same position when Mrs. Winifred came to hurry them all to the death-room— for death-room now it had become, since Linda lay like an infant in the arms of the king at last. At last and forever! There was no recall, no further hope. The girl's face bore the new expression, the seal which God first placed on Abel's young face, the protest of the body and the soul against sin's merited punishment, the reflected light from the torch of death! Florian took her left hand and gazed composedly on her face. There was something strange in her manner; a strange glory or triumph rested on her lips; there was more color and fire in her cheeks and eyes; and now she turned from Scott to him and back again—looking, looking like one hungry beyond words to tell, and looking yet again until death suddenly caught her weak breath, and with a sob and a muttered sentence, carried it to eternity and God. The last words were:

CHAPTER XI.

A month after Linda's burial it was snowing, and you could not see the houses on the next street. It promised to be a heavy snowstorm, not unusual for that district, and the dwellers by the river settled themselves comfortably for six months at their warm firesides. The Wallace home was gloomy and disordered; its members were all hidden from one another's sight, for none could look in the other's eyes and keep from tears, and Florian in his own room was busy packing clothes and books for an immediate departure to New York. He had realized the hermit's predictions as to his own feelings. While Linda was living he could speculate mournfully on his own grief and her departure for heaven, and feel disgusted with himself for his calculation and coldness. But Linda dead was another thing. To go about with the vision of that sweet face as it lay in its last narrow bed before him, with the moan of the Dion Trae and the falling, rough clouds dimming the ear day and night, with the funeral train, the sob, the pray-



ers, the tears and loneliness passing always passing through waking and sleeping dreams, and the throb of that fearful bell which told the tidings of their loss—oh! these were the circumstances of real grief—a grief that weighed on him like a mountain, and made him feel that life was something of a delusion and something still terribly real. Well, there was no help for it, and action was the only remedy. He had his affairs long since arranged. There was nothing left but to pack his traps and go, and he was working with feverish haste and unnecessary care. A knock at the door interrupted him and his mother entered at his bidding, calm as usual and the hair smoothly arranged over the placid cheeks. She was nervous, however, and distressed. Did he know what had become of Sara? It was rumored that she was married to Mr. Buck the preceding evening. Mr. Wallace had heard it just then in town. Winifred's calm acceptance of the ridiculous facts, and thought she must have perceived their absurdity.

and strode in frowning. Mr. Buck was there as painfully correct in costume as ever, and beside him Sara languished in her mourning robes. One glance was enough, but Florian pretended not to understand. "I thought it would be fair," said Mr. Buck, "to let you know of the relations which now exist between your sister and myself. We were married last evening at the rectory in the presence of the officials and the leading members of my church, who understand the peculiar circumstances which led to the ceremony at so sad and unfortunate a time."

