

CHAPTER XX.

MORE than a year has gone by since Eva returned a widow to "Brandonville." Very busy and useful has been that year. She was not known in fashionable circles except in name, but the poor and afflicted, and many who had been won back from the pathway of ruin on which their tender feet had just begun to tread, knew her and blessed her. Mr. and Mrs. Brandon fully realized what a mistake Arthur made when he exiled himself from the noble woman who was his wife.

She is sitting in the grey October twilight, a dreamy smile upon her face. Her thoughts have gone back to other days. She is picturing herself as she was when she first met Alan Horten, a happy, careless, light-hearted girl, on whose golden head sorrow had never rested. All she had experienced since then, what tempests of grief, temptation and remorse had swept over her soul. But now she had found peace and calm, yes, and happiness too, that is the happiness which cannot fail to come to those whose consciences do not upbraid them, but not that supreme bliss she had once dreamed of, that was too beautiful, too blissful, to be hers—she did not deserve it. True, she was free, and likely by this time Alan knew it; but how could she expect to be the same to him now as she was then. He knew she was the wife of another, and would it not be only natural for him to marry, though he had said her memory was the only wife he would ever know. But that was over a year ago.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, Mrs. Brandon," said a servant at the door, presenting a card. As she read the name a bright wave of color lighted her fair face. The past years, with all their misery, seemed to fall away from her, and she forgot everything but that Alan Horten, the fond, faithful lover of her girlhood's happy days, whom she feared to allow herself to hope ever to see again, was here. Her heart beat with love, hope and joyous happiness.

"Show the gentleman in here," she answered.

With a quick, sudden impulse, for which she could never account, she snatched the widow's cap from her head, and as Alan entered she stood before him in all her youthful beauty, with her bright, golden hair clustering in a little graceful dis-