

the marriage, but he remonstrated against it, both as a father and a physician, in the strongest manner, and worked so much upon Hannah's feelings, that she consented to be separated from her cousin for three years, until she came of age. Her reason told her that was no unfair test of so youthful an attachment. Her father's secret hope was that the test might fail, the affection wear away, and the union which, though sanctioned by law and custom, he believed nature totally disapproved of, might never come about.

It never did. Long before the three years were ended, young Thelluson died at Madeira of the family disease. Hannah restored her betrothal ring to her finger, saying calmly, "I am married now," and seemed to bear her sorrow quietly enough at first. But the quietness grew into a stupor of despair, ending in that state of mind almost akin to madness, in which one dwells hopelessly and agonizingly upon what might have been; for some people were cruel enough to hint that a wife's care might have lengthened her lover's life, and that his grief for Hannah's loss accelerated his fatal disease. Many a time when her father looked at her he almost wished he had let the hapless cousins marry—running all risks for themselves and their possible children. But all his life the physician had held the doctrine that hereditary taint, physical or moral, constitutes a stronger hindrance to marriage than any social bar. He had acted according to his faith, and he was not shaken from it because he had so keenly suffered for it.

After a time Hannah's sorrow wore itself out, or was blotted out by others following—her father's death, and the dispersion of the family. There was no mother living; but there were three sisters at first, then two, then only one,—her quiet, solitary self. For her great grief had left upon her an ineffaceable impression—not exactly of melancholy, but of exceeding quietness and settled loneliness of heart. She said to herself, "I never can suffer more than I have suffered;" and thenceforward all vicissitudes of fate became level to her—at least, she thought so then.

Such was her story. It had never been very public, and nobody ever talked of it or knew it now. Lady Dunsmore had not the least idea of it, or she would not have ended their conversation as she did.

"Good-bye now, and remember you have my best wishes—ay, even if you marry your brother-in-law. It is not nearly so bad as marrying your cousin. But I beg your pardon; my tongue runs away with me. All I mean to say, seriously, is that, my husband being one of those who uphold the bill for legalising such marriages, I am well up on the subject, and we both earnestly hope they will be legalised in time."

"Whether or not, it cannot concern me," said Miss Thelluson gently.

"The remedying of a wrong concerns everybody a little—at least I think so. How society can forbid a man's marrying his wife's sister, who is no blood relation at all, and yet allow him to marry his cousin—a proceeding generally unwise, and sometimes absolutely wicked—I cannot imagine. But forgive me again; I speak earnestly, for I feel earnestly."