

Hitherto Ellen Douglas had seen no one who had made even a transient impression upon her heart, but since she had seen O'Donnel this indifference was gone, and she felt "a change come o'er the spirit of her dream."

Satisfied with the pleasure she found in his society, she sought not to fathom the cause, but indulged in that happiness which his presence inspired.

O'Donnel also, forgetful of his early love, daily sought her society, in which the world, the dreams of ambition he had cherished, the hopes in which he had indulged, and even Constance, hitherto the object of his love, were banished from his memory. Those volumes which had lately occupied his attention, and exercised his active mind, either lay unopened before him, or his eye only glanced with a vacant look over their contents. With the impetuosity and want of reflection which characterised his disposition, he sought not to struggle with and combat his increasing affection for the beautiful girl whom he daily met, and in whose presence Constance was forgotten. True it was, that at eve, when he sought his solitary chamber, conscience-stricken and sunk in remorse, he could not help reviewing his conduct, so faithless to her whom his heart's devotion was due; but the following day, when the bright smile of Ellen greeted him, and her eyes, so full of that witchery which belongs to happy youth, beamed a welcome upon him, he again yielded himself up to the fascination which she inspired.

In this state of mind Charles forgot everything that was not connected with Ellen Douglas, and thus his letters, which had hitherto been despatched with such punctuality to Ardmore, and which had contained the out-pourings of his open, ingenuous heart, became less frequent, and as Charles could not dissemble, the altered strain in which they were written betokened the changed affections of the writer.

Rendered unhappy when absent from Ellen, by the tormenting thought of his inconstancy towards Constance, Charles eagerly sought her presence, in which he found a temporary oblivion, and with the recklessness of his disposition he gave himself wholly up to the passion which was quickly undermining his peace of mind.

CHAPTER XIV.

The miserable have no other medicine,
But only hope.

SHAKESPEARE.

It was evening at Ardmore, and Captain Fitzgerald and Constance were seated before the

blazing fire, which threw a ruddy light over the antique furniture of the apartment. The ample curtains were closely drawn, a pair of tall candles were burning on the table, and everything wore that air of comfort and warmth which constitute the charm of a winter's evening. Fitzgerald occupied a large arm-chair which stood at one side of the fire-place, while Constance was seated at the other.

Notwithstanding the appearance of cheerfulness which reigned throughout the apartment, the brow of Fitzgerald was contracted, and his features wore an expression of disappointment, while the face of Constance betrayed that grief which strives to shun observation only to sink more deeply in the heart. The circumstance which had irritated her father, only caused her to look pale and sad, and her face, of which the habitual expression was repose, now wore an appearance of deep melancholy, which was painful to witness in one so young.

Long and silently the father and daughter sat together, both apparently watching the light wreaths of smoke as they curled in fantastic figures and danced for a moment over the blazing fire and then vanished up the chimney; but their eyes wore an intensity of expression which told that their minds were far otherwise occupied. At length Fitzgerald broke the silence, which had hitherto been interrupted only by the crackling of the fire.

"I wonder," said he, "what can have prevented Charles from writing for such a length of time. If nothing ails him I will blame him severely for his neglect. If this post does not bring a letter, I will write immediately to Mr. Allison, and enquire the cause of his remissness.

"My dear father," replied Constance soothingly, "you may rest assured that Charles is not to blame for his long silence, which, I doubt not, he will soon satisfactorily explain. He may be indisposed; circumstances may have occurred to prevent him from writing. Indeed, a thousand little accidents may have come in the way. Charles is not forgetful of us, and I feel assured that his excuse will be satisfactory."

"What can detain the letters so late to-night?" resumed Fitzgerald after a long pause; "they should have arrived at least an hour ago."

"The roads are so bad, father, and this is such a boisterous night, we can hardly expect them for a little while yet. Hark! how the storm rages without," she continued, and while they listened they could hear the hail and sleet rattling against the casement.

Again the silence was resumed, and continued till a servant entered the room, and presented