

"What is it Peter?" I asked, for the look struck me; but he only answered. "Nothing ma'am," and went on with his work. I waited breakfast for Mary until nine o'clock, an unheard of hour in our early household, and not till then did I begin to grow uneasy.

Nine o'clock passed, and ten, and still she did not come. Then my fears were aroused. Then I announced to Peter my intention of setting out to see what had detained her.

Again Peter looked at me with his peculiar look, and this time he drew from his pocket a letter, and handed it to me, saying as he did so:

"I think, ma'am, this will explain. I was to give it to you after ten o'clock."

It was a letter from Mary herself, telling me what she was resolved to do, and imploring my forgiveness for it.

There was no attempt to justify her conduct. She condemned herself utterly. She heaped reproaches on her guilty head; but she stated that to live without him was simply impossible; and that for her to cast him off was to consign him to utter ruin. With her and for her sake he could be strong and redeem the past; without her he was lost forever.

They remained away a fortnight. During that time I had several letters from her, and one from him. He wrote well and eloquently; but I put the letter in the flames, and would have cut off my hand rather than answer it.

I did not answer hers either. I could not. So she came back, not knowing if I would open my doors to her or speak a word of forgiveness. I saw her coming up the road in the evening alone.

O! my heart, my heart! Can I ever forget that hour?

I ran down stairs; I opened the door quickly; I folded her to my breast. Not a word did either of us speak; only our bursting sobs were heard.

They moved into their own house, and began life together as man and wife. Once for all, I had told him what

I thought of the part he had acted, then for her sake, outwardly, there was peace between us. I say outwardly, for in my heart I found it hard to forgive him; and I do not think he had ever cordially liked me, and far less now, when he had so grievously wronged me through my best beloved.

He seemed resolved to keep steady, and I believe that he sincerely loved and valued his wife, and desired to make her happy. For a time he kept to his good resolutions; then he broke out again, then again, then constantly, with only short intervals of abstinence between. A little child had been born to them during the first year,—a little tender flower, to whom both parents were passionately attached. It was not strong, and its delicate health caused them both, but particularly the mother, much anxiety. She tended it night and day with unwearied devotion. Her own health had suffered seriously in what she had undergone, both before and after her marriage, but she was never one to make much ado about herself, and less than ever now when her child required her unceasing care.

I saw her cheek growing paler and thinner day by day, and latterly a little hacking cough had begun to alarm me. But the child must be cared for, come what would. So she deprived herself of needed rest and attention in spite of all I could say or do. But it was not in human love to save the treasure early destined for the skies. God took it to Himself before it had learned to lisp the name of those who had loved it so fondly while on earth.

Are you a mother reader, or a father? Then I need not attempt to describe to you what Mary suffered, what even he, the drunken father, suffered! Alas, with him his grief but drove him to renewed excess. He drank for whole days and nights, even while his child was lying unburied in its coffin.

Oh, the anguish of those days and nights. Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow!