

weakness, temperance. Compare this blessed state with the gloomy, desponding air which pervades this house ; and then ask yourself, young lady, whether such can proceed from the gospel of peace?"

"Have they no religion?" said Mildred, in unaffected surprise.

"They have a zeal, but not according to knowledge. They trust too much to themselves, to their own good works, or what they consider as such—to the strict observance of religious exercises, sternly enforced ; and instead of becoming happier from the change, they render themselves miserable and all around them. Without intending it, they do more harm to the cause of true religion, than the veriest worldling that never gives it a thought. But seek that religion, the fruit of which is so beautifully described in the scriptures, and you will not only ensure happiness here, but eternal blessedness hereafter."

"Will they ever perceive their error?" asked Mildred.

"I hope so. But I fear that it will not be until some severe affliction has opened their eyes to the truth ; but suppose we leave the faults of our neighbours, and talk a little of our own."

"I do not mind confessing my sins to you," said Mildred, "because you are kind and gentle, but when Mrs. Stainer talks to me upon the subject, I feel proud and resentful. In short, very wicked."

"I do not doubt it," returned he, with a good natured smile. "But it is not exactly upon religion which I would speak to you at this moment."

With the coquetry natural to her sex, Mildred wondered what it could be. He did not leave her long in doubt.

"My dear young lady, there are strange reports in the village concerning you, which I would fain hope are not true. Is it possible that you can have any acquaintance, unknown to your good mother, with such a suspicious character as Captain Tasker?"

"It is true," said Mildred, firmly.

"I am sorry for you. I cannot suspect you of acting wrong wilfully. But, my dear child, you are deceived ; and if you do not open your eyes to the danger which surrounds you, I fear you may be lost. Tell me with the same beautiful candor which convinces me of your innocence, how you became acquainted with this man?"

Thus urged, and convinced of the excellence of the generous heart in which she trusted, Mildred related all that she knew of the man, in whose welfare she felt but too painfully interested. Mr. Strong listened to her with attention. He was deeply affected by her simple confession, and was

determined to do all in his power to rescue her from the temptation by which she was assailed. "Will you promise me, Mildred," he said, "to have no communication with Christian until after I have seen and conversed with him? Your secret is safe with me ; and I hope to prove to you ere long, that your confidence in me has not been misplaced."

"I am sure you are my friend," said Mildred.

"Yes, in the truest sense of that abused word. Will you give me this promise?"

"Cheerfully, if I did not think that circumstances might happen which might compel me to break it."

"Well, you will avoid him, if possible, and enter into no rash engagement, which would surely end in ruin."

"I will."

"Enough, here come our friends. Banish these worldly thoughts, and give your soul to God in prayer. He alone can rescue us from situations of difficulty and peril."

Mildred thought that she perceived an expression of scornful triumph pervading the features of young Stainer as he led his step-mother to her seat ; he cast a covert glance at the minister as he handed him the Bible, and rang the bell to summon the servants. They were scarcely assembled when the door again opened, and Charlotte Stainer walked in. She took her seat by the minister in silence. All eyes were turned upon her, and not without a start or glance of surprise. Her cheek was so deadly pale, her eyes so fixed and rayless that she looked like a person seemingly awake, yet under the influence of some ghastly dream. Mr. Strong felt deeply for her. His prayers were beautiful and consoling, but they seemed to have no effect upon the marble statue who knelt beside him. After the service of the evening was concluded, and Charlotte rose slowly from her knees, he laid his hand upon her pale brow, and said : "Peace be with you, my daughter ; that holy peace which the world can neither give nor take away." She looked mournfully up in his face. Large tears were gathering in her eyes. She went round to her father, and took his hand.

"Father, forgive me! I knew not what I said."

"Yes, if you can forgive yourself. To-morrow, Charlotte, shall settle all accounts between us. To-morrow, you must seek another home."

"Be it as you will. Give me your blessing to-night."

"Good night," said the old man, surlily. "We will talk more on this subject to-morrow." He suffered her to kiss him, but he gave no kiss in return. Mildred's heart bled for her. She would have followed her to her chamber, but Charlotte