

answer, and, with flushed cheek and downcast eye, she stood before him.

"I am pleased at least to see you are not so well schooled in falsehood as to deny it."

Amy at last gathered courage to look up, and timidly exclaimed:

"Believe me, I intended seeking you this very night, to inform you of everything."

"A remarkable coincidence indeed. 'Tis a pity you were so tardy in fulfilling your resolution. But, 'tis not for that alone I am so justly irritated. No! I might have forgiven your want of confidence. I might have passed over in silence, your disregard of an indulgent parent's authority, in proceeding in so important a matter without consulting him; but, think you, I can easily forgive the choice you have made? You beggarly adventurer, without fortune, rank or talent! Is it such as him you have selected?"

"He is at least my cousin," murmured Amy, in a pleading tone.

"Don't talk to me of relationship. It but increases his ingratitude. Is it not enough that I have ever treated him with marked kindness, and interested myself in his welfare, solely to gratify your childish partiality, though I never liked the boy?" This, by the way, was not strictly true, for he had been, on the contrary, a favorite with Mr. Morton, till the latter had discovered, thanks to the intervention of his wife, his affection for his daughter. "But this is not all. Look at his private character! Frivolous, vain, superficial. Is he the one ever to rise to eminence in any honorable career, or even to earn a decent maintenance for himself? No! but he can spend the fortune he expects you to receive, the fortune that he woos,—not yourself, foolish girl!"

"Who can have given you so unjust a description of my cousin's character?" asked Amy, roused at this calumny of one who she well knew was the very reverse of what he had been accused of.

"One whose testimony may be relied on, young lady," replied her father, "though she has, it appears, incurred your dislike, for no apparent cause whatever. Louisa——"

The door of the adjoining closet opened, and the stepmother quietly walked in.

"You were asking, Miss Morton, who had so ably described Mr. Charles Delmour? 'Twas I, and I am ready, if necessary, to repeat what I have said."

Amy could scarcely credit the evidence of her senses. This woman, who should have blushed to mention his name, now stood forward as his accuser, reproaching him with the very traits which she had so eminently displayed during

their acquaintance. The lady, however, calmly went on.

"He was my brother's college friend, and on his entreaty, we were induced to invite him to spend the vacations at home. He came. 'Tis enough to say, 'twas with feelings of sincere relief we saw him depart, resolving never to yield to my brother's request again to invite him. However, we were not put to the proof, for Edmund, soon after his return to college, discovered his companion's real character, and sought another friend, whose tastes and sentiments were more in accordance with his own."

"What say you to that?" asked Mr. Morton, turning to his daughter, "Is not such testimony sufficient?"

Amy's gentle spirit was roused beyond endurance. All her stepmother's injustice, and slights rose to her recollection, joined to her base calumny of the absent, and lastly, her audacity in thus bringing forward the period of her life, the remembrance of which should have caused her to blush for her former heartlessness and selfishness. Calmly then, and firmly, she answered in reply to her father's last words:

"I have only to say, that her statement is entirely untrue, and no one (here she bent a meaning glance on her stepmother) knows its incorrectness better than herself."

"Morton, will you suffer this?" exclaimed his wife, flinging herself in a paroxysm of tears upon a couch. Will you suffer me to be insulted, outraged in your presence, for having obeyed your mandates, in watching over your ungrateful child?"

His wife's passionate appeal, her tears, were irresistible, and with a tone and manner he had never yet employed, a tone and manner his daughter never forgot, he exclaimed:

"Leave the room, unworthy girl!"

The words had not died on his lips, ere the door closed upon her, and he was left to the somewhat difficult task of restoring his much injured wife to composure.

Another hour passed on, and yet the light shone from the window of Mr. Morton's library. He was seated at his table writing, while his young wife, who had entirely recovered her spirits, leaned upon his shoulder, evidently dictating to him.

That letter was to Charles Delmour, and was as bitter, as galling, as the imagination of a slighted and vindictive woman could render it. Every taunt which could hurt his self-love; every reproach of interested views, which she knew would wound his proud, independent spirit to the quick, was there. But her master stroke was