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July 23, 1853. 1c

Select Poetry.

SING ME A SONG.

BY FANNY FERN.

"Oh! sing me a song as I fall asleep,
Said a little one with a lustrous eye,
Or tell me a tale of the flowers that peep
In the bright green woods that reach the sky
That peep in the spring when birdies sing,
And the heavens are blue as our Nelly's eyes
Or tell of the child with the angel wing
Who walks in the garden of paradise?"

I sang him a song—I told him a tale,
And watched by his couch, till we thought he slept,
For his cheek was white as the moonbeams pale,
That stealthy and bright near his pillow crept.
Then my words grew faint and my voice sang low,
And I said, in my dream, let the seraphs sing
But he whispered soft as I rose to go—
"Oh! tell of the child of the angel wing."

Tilden I sang again—but he restless grew,
And tossed his young arms as he wildly spoke,
And a burning red on his forehead flew;
As the moon went down and the morning broke,
But he spoke no more of the bright spring flowers,
And he thought no more of his sisters eyes!
One name alone in his feverish hours,
Was breathed in a whisper that pierced the skies.

"My mother," he said, and his eyes grew dim,
For the sense with her waving lustre fled,
And he never knew that she knelt by him
Whose son went down at his dying bed!
He has gone where the Seraphs sweetly sing—
His story was brief as the sunset dyes—
He walks with the child of the angel wing
In the flowery gardens of Paradise!

Choice Miscellany.

THE RASH MARRIAGE.

BY MRS. JULIA C. R. DORR

(CONTINUED)

CHAPTER VII.

Her lips to mine how often hath she joined,
Between each kiss her oaths of true-love swearing:
How many tales to please me hath she coined,
Dreading my love—the loss thereof still fearing:
Yet in the midst of all her pure protesting,
Her faith, her oaths, her tears, and all were jestings!
SHAKESPEARE.

"Well, if George Tilden is in town, it must be him whom I saw in the drawing-room a few moments since. I directed my wife's attention toward him, and it is strange they did not recognize each other—for he is a very old friend of hers, and, indeed, was for some years under her father's guardianship."

"A few years sometimes make great changes in personal appearance, Mr. Fletcher; and young Tilden is much altered since he was last at the North. He looks at least ten years older, and at first I hardly knew him myself."

"He is married, I believe. Is his wife with him?"

"Oh, no—he is still a bachelor, and likely to remain such. Some early disappointment, it is said, has so embittered his feelings toward the whole sex, that the ladies all agree in regarding him as a woman-hater."

Nevertheless, I think he would like to see Adelaide. I will go tell her he is here, and then, if she wishes, see if I can find him."

In pursuance of this plan, Mr. Fletcher passed through the whole suit of rooms in search of Ada; but she was no where visible; and stepping out upon the veranda that ran entirely around the house, he stood leaning against a pillar, enjoying the cool, sweet air and quiet moonlight.

Suddenly he heard low voices just round the corner. The speakers were hidden from his view, but he thought he recognized that of his wife; and drawing nearer, he was about to address her, when he stept back and stood silent and motionless beneath the vine-leaves that drooped over him. Could it be *his wife, his* Ada, in whose ear those earnest words were breathed—*did you really love me, Ada?*"

He thought it could not be; and he would have turned from the spot, lest he should intrude upon the privacy of some pair of young lovers, who had sought the quiet of the veranda, when the low response reached him—"*I did love you, George!*" Was he dreaming? It was his wife's voice—he could not be mistaken now; he heard the fervent words of blessing that burst from the lips of the first speaker, and without waiting for more—for he felt that his self-control would fail him if he did—he retraced his steps, and was again in the midst of festivity and mirth.

How strange it seemed! It was the same scene on which he had looked a few moments before. The same rich carpets were beneath his feet—the same lofty windows, curtained with crimson and gold, were before him—the same exquisite paintings were upon the walls; the flowers had not faded, nor the garlands withered; and from the crystal chandeliers the light streamed forth as brilliantly as ever. Bright eyes were beaming just as clearly—jewels were flashing—plumes were waving—but where was the glow, the radiance that made the scene one of enchantment from his own heart—and from that the sunlight had departed.

He could not linger there. The gayety and splendor seemed mocking him—and with a hurried step he strode through those stately halls, gained the street, and, he scarcely knew how, reached his own house. He ran up the long flight of steps and rang the bell. The servant who admitted him stared wonderingly at his master, returned on foot alone, when the carriage was in waiting, not less than at the haggard cheek and glittering eye, of which he caught but a glimpse as Mr. Fletcher swept past him, muffled in the thick folds of his cloak, entered the library, and turned the key.

"Where is your master, James?" asked Mrs. Fletcher, as, not very long after, she rang the door-bell.

"In the library, madam, he returned half an hour ago."

Adelaide hastily ascended the stairs—laid aside her hood and shawl—paid a short visit to the nursery—imprinted a soft kiss upon little Kate's forehead, and then went down to the library.

She tapped lightly at the door, but no one opened it; she knocked still more loudly, at the same time calling her husband by name, but still there was no reply, and then she tried to open it herself. It was locked and she turned away.

"James, are you sure your master is in the library?"

"Yes, madam—I saw him go in with my own eyes."

Taking a lamp that stood upon the hall-table, she passed through the parlors into the little boudoir, of which we have before spoken. From thence there was another entrance to the library—and it usually stood open. Now, to her surprise, that also was not only shut, but locked—and an undefined fear began to creep into her heart. She listened intently, but could not catch the slightest sound. What if her husband were very ill?—and as that thought rushed over her, she shook the door violently.

"Willis! Willis!—are you there?"

"Do not disturb me—I wish to be alone."

Adelaide could hardly believe she heard her husband's voice—it was so changed—so hoarse—and the simple words seemed to be spoken with such an effort; but after standing irresolutely for a moment, she went up stairs to the nursery again.

For a long time she sat there in her galarobes, watching the quiet breathings of her child and harkening for Willis's step upon the stairs—but he did not come; and at last she stole quietly to her own room. The gray dawn was beginning to struggle with the darkness, and hurriedly throwing off the rich dress and dazzling jewels that looked so strangely out of place in that faint uncertain light, she wrapt herself in a loose dressing gown, and threw herself upon the bed, though with but little hope of sleep.

She was anxious and troubled—she scarcely knew why, for she attributed her husband's wish to be alone to some unexpected and important business. She never thought of charging it to the occurrences of the evening; and in fact, as she lay there, longing for her husband's presence and thinking what could keep him from her side, her exciting interview with George Tilden scarcely flitted athwart her memory.

At length she heard a movement in the library—the door opened softly, and Mr. Fletcher stepped cautiously across the hall and went into the street. Adelaide sprang to the window and looked out. Her husband was pacing back and forth in front of the house, with his arms folded, and his hat drawn over his face.

"I must know what is the matter," she murmured. "I will go down to the library and he will be in presently."

She did so, and before she had waited long her husband entered the room. He started when he saw her, but did not speak. She sprang forward and grasped his arm.

"Oh, Willis, Willis, what has happened? you look so strangely!"

With a smile of scorn he shook of the light burden

"Do I—? it is very singular!"

She gazed earnestly in his face. It wore a look that she had never seen before; and though he smiled, she felt that he was battling with some terrible sorrow to which he would not yield the mastery.

"You have heard some bad news, dear Willis—let me share it with you;" and twining her arms about him, she laid her head tenderly on his shoulder.

Forcibly he extricated himself from her embrace.

"Let me alone, Adelaide, unless you would drive me mad! Is it not enough for me to know that for five long years you have acted a lie, without being mocked in this way now?"

Adelaide sunk upon a chair, with a cheek white as ashes. The hour which she had so long instinctively dreaded, had come—she was sure of it—which way should she turn; she attempted to speak, but, though her lips moved, no audible sound came forth:

"I would rather have died, Adelaide," her husband continued more calmly, "I would rather have died, than to have heard what I did last night—the admission of your love for another. I have never once dreamed, during those years that you have slept so quietly by my side, that the heart that nestled so closely to my own, was all the while filled with another's image. Oh, Adelaide, why have you deceived me thus?"

Adelaide threw herself at his feet and buried her face in her hands.

"It was the admission of a past love that you heard—of a love that was dead and buried long ago. Oh, my husband, my husband! do not turn from me! hear my story before you condemn. I have done very, very wrong; but I am not the false and guilty thing you deem me," she exclaimed, twining her arms about his knees to detain him. "Indeed, indeed, I am not. Sit down here, and let me explain this matter to you. I will stay here at your feet—I will not touch you if you do not like—but, oh! listen to me this once!"

"Explain it if you can. Oh, Adelaide! I have believed you so good—so pure and true!"

With a faltering tongue—for before she had proceeded far with her tale she felt that every word she uttered was doing her cause more harm than good. Adelaide told her husband the whole story of her engagement with George Tilden—of their quarrel and their separation. Mr. Fletcher's brow grew dark as he listened.

"And when did this happen—this difficulty between you?"

"In September, 18—."

"And we were married the next January."

"We were. Oh, Willis do not look so sternly at me—my heart is breaking"—and she clasped her hands tightly over it, while her eyes sought his imploringly.

"There is no danger—mine would have broken last night, if hearts were not made of 'sterner stuff' than we think them," replied her husband as he turned upon her a glance in which contempt, anger, and tenderness were blended—"but go on—your story is not half told yet;—why did you marry me?"

Adelaide's eyes fell beneath the stern, searching gaze that seemed to pierce her very soul.—She tried to speak, but she could not.

"Speak, woman—why did you marry me?—Why did you bring me a worn, and wasted, and unloving heart, in exchange for one that had never thrilled at the sound of any other voice than yours? You do not pretend that you loved me—why did you become my wife?"

She could not answer. What could she say that would in any way soften her husband's heart. She could not tell him—while he was gazing so steadily and earnestly upon her; and while his cold, stern voice was benumbing every faculty of her soul—of the wrong motives that had led her to the altar—of the pride and resentment that had hurried her on. She could not tell him how earnestly she had tried to atone for the wrong she had done him—how resolutely she had striven with every vestige of her earlier love—how faithful she had been to him, even in thought, ever since she had been his wife, and how deeply and fervently she now loved him.—She knew he would think it was all mockery—a part of the farce she was playing—and so she kept silent while the tears rained through her fingers. Mr. Fletcher's keen, steady gaze wavered for a moment—and after waiting vainly for a reply, he approached still nearer to his trembling wife, and bent his head until it nearly touched her own.

"I will tell you why you married me, Adelaide Fletcher—me who so trusted you—you married me because I was rich—you sold yourself for my cursed gold! Fool that I was to think that you loved me! I forgot that I was rich, and that you were not—I forgot that in a woman's eye wealth is of more worth than her own truth and purity; and I really thought when you promised to become my wife it was because I was dear to you. You were not as good an actress when we were first married as you have since become—you had not learned your lesson as perfectly, and I sometimes thought you cold and distant, but latterly—oh, you have played your part well! You are weeping wildly. Do you pity me, Adelaide Fletcher? Do you indeed think it is a terrible thing for a man to learn that his wife—his own wife—she who has slept in his bosom, and whom he has trusted so entirely, has been all the while mocking him with a pretended love? You may well do it for it is a bitter thing; but I tell you, woman, at this moment I pity *you* more than I do myself. You have sold yourself for a mess of pottage, and I know you repent it—you would give worlds now, were they yours, if you could undo this deed, and be free to place your hand where your heart is."

"Oh no, not that—not that! Have mercy upon me Willis, and do not say that," was the agonized reply—for Adelaide forgot in the misery of this last thought the first charge that her husband had brought against her. "I would not be his wife if we were both free; I gave him the love of a light and careless girl—I give you that which is far stronger and deeper, that of a full grown—a woman's heart. Do not doubt me Willis—do not!" she whispered, and in her abandonment, her long, rich tresses escaping from the fillet that confined them, fell heavily upon the floor. She trembled violently, and Willis raised her and placed her upon the sofa. As he did so she threw her arms about him, but he quickly removed them, saying ironically as he did so:

"You are an excellent actress, Adelaide—you might make your fortune on the stage. As I look at you, weeping and trembling and clinging to me, I could almost imagine you in earnest."

"I am, I am! Oh, Willis, if you could only read my heart!"

"I have been trying for years and failed entirely; I shall not be fool enough to make the attempt again—you can deceive me no longer."

It was too much—Adelaide's wrung heart could endure no more, and her husband sprang forward just in time to prevent her from falling senseless on the carpet.

Mr. Fletcher bore her up stairs, laid her upon her bed, and rang for the maid. He remained by her side until he saw she was recovering, and then left the chamber, telling the girl that her mistress needed rest, and bidding her take care that she was not disturbed.

Did he have no relentings as he gazed upon that pale, death-like face? No, not one. He thought it was all a part of the play—one scene in the tragedy; or, if her sorrow was real, that it was sorrow for her detection—shame and mortification that her treachery was discovered.

Willis Fletcher had given to his wife a love nearly amounting to idolatry. Left an orphan at a very early age, and with neither brother nor sister to cling to, he had lavished upon her the whole wealth of a heart that had nothing else to love. Perhaps if his own affections had not been so exclusively confined to one channel—that which flowed toward her and their child—he might have judged her less harshly now; perhaps he might have seen how possible it was that her confiding, womanly heart should cling to him even the more closely because it had been rudely torn from its first resting-place—how his deep and abiding tenderness should be even more highly prized when contrasted with the jealousy and injustice of another.

But as it was, there was nothing to soften the bitterness of the thought that he had been deceived. "Why did she marry me? why did she marry me?" had he asked himself over and over again, while listening to Adelaide's confession. "She could not have loved me—why then did she become my wife?"

His eye glanced around the large and elegant room—upon the costly books—the rare paintings—the statuary—all the luxury and splendor that surrounded him, and there, as in a vision, Mr. Lindsleys comparatively humble home arose before him; was it strange that he thought he had found the solution of the enigma?

CHAPTER VIII.

He breathed his sorrow in an Indian ear,
But left it characled in his heart, to breed
Corruption there. None knew how wearily
The hours passed on beneath those lonely wall.
EDWIN MAY

Death found strange beauty in that cherub brow,
And dashed it out. MRS. SIGOURNEY.

The varied and extreme excitement of that night and morning had been more than Adelaide's slender frame could endure. Her fainting fit was but the precursor of a long and tedious, though not very violent illness. It was many weeks before she was able to leave her room, and nothing but the thought of her child kept her from wishing that she might never leave it until she was carried out a passive, senseless thing, incapable of feeling grief or pain.

Her husband visited her daily—many times each day, and was always kind and gentle in his demeanor toward her. An indifferent observer might have thought there was nothing wanting, but Adelaide had been ill before, and she felt the difference. Often she longed to retain the hand he extended to her, to draw him down to her bedside, that she might place her arms about his neck—press her lips to his, and read in his deep, earnest eyes, as she had so often done, the assurance of his love. But something always restrained her—she knew that he meant her to understand that the relations existing between them were not what they had once been, and that knowledge did much to retard her recovery.

One morning, about a week after she first left her room, Mr. Fletcher sent a servant to request her presence in the library, her heart leaped to her throat. She had not seen her husband alone once during her illness, and it was some minutes before she could gather strength to obey the summons. When she did so, she found Mr. Fletcher walking up and down the room, with his hands clasped behind him. His face was very pale, and there were lines about the mouth and eyes that spoke of internal suffering; yet he looked calm and resolute, like one who had a fearful struggle with his own heart, but had gained the victory.

He drew forth an easy-chair for her as she entered—and it was well that he did—for the room turned dark, and it seemed to her that she could never have reached it herself—but he did not speak for several minutes.

"It is quite time that we understand fully"—he said at last—"the terms upon which we are henceforth to live. Of course the future cannot be to us as the past has been."

He paused, as if for a reply, but none came. Adelaide neither spoke nor moved. Her heart was overflowing with tenderness toward her husband, and for his evident suffering she grieved even more than for her own. Why then did she not pour forth the whole story of her love and sorrow; beg him to have mercy upon her as well as himself, and take her to his heart again? Because she knew that she had deceived him once intentionally—what right had she to suppose that he would believe her now?—and she felt that a second repulse would kill her.

"I presume you would not desire a public separation—a divorce?" Mr. Fletcher asked the question hesitatingly, and as if he dreaded the answer. Adelaide started—she had never thought of the thing, and she shook her head to say so, but her words were almost inaudible.

"For the sake of our child," he continued, in a voice that trembled in spite of every effort to render it firm—"for the sake of our child, and also to avoid the gossip and scandal which would otherwise be occasioned, I should wish that our outer life—that which the world must see and know—might be the same as heretofore. I should wish that when we meet our friends in the social circle, and even when we are in the presence of the servants, our demeanor might be such as not to occasion remark, and that only in private might we be strangers."

Strangers! had it come to that? After another long pause, during which he evidently expected Adelalde to speak, Mr. Fletcher went on—

"The term I have used sounds perhaps unnecessarily harsh—but with my views of the marriage relation—views that you have heard me explain a hundred times, I can adopt no other that will express my meaning. There can be no sanctity in marriage save where it is hallowed by a mutual love. We cannot meet merely as friends—we must be more or nothing. It is better therefore that there should be no intercourse between us save in the presence of others."

Still Adelaide replied not.

"I would like, Mrs. Fletcher to have you deal frankly with me. It is now very necessary that we should understand each other fully."

Adelaide grasped for breath, and her lips moved for a minute or two before any sound issued from them—

"It shall be as you say."

Her husband bowed his head. In his heart of hearts he had hoped for a different answer.—It was not a strong hope, and he was hardly conscious that he cherished it, but it was just enough to make him feel disappointed that she yielded without a murmur to his wishes, and he regarded this as an additional proof that she had never loved him.

"You will oblige me by drawing upon Barrett & Co. whenever you need money, and as freely as ever. They will receive orders from me to furnish you with whatever funds you may require."

He ceased, and for a half hour they sat in silence, scarcely conscious of the lapse of time. At length Adelaide felt that she could endure it no longer, and she rose feebly from her chair—

"Have you any thing further to say to me, Mr. Fletcher?"

"Nothing more," was the answer. A cold bow was exchanged between them, and thus the husband and wife parted.

"It is all over—oh, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" cried Adelaide, as she reached her own chamber and fell almost fainting upon the bed. "Kate, Kate, you warned and counseled me, but I would not heed you. In my headstrong folly I would not listen to your entreaties, and now it is too late, and you are not here to comfort me! Would I were at rest beside you, Kate—that my poor heart would break at once, and forever!"

"Oh, mamma, mamma," warbled a sweet, childish voice, "see pity fowers Katy find in the garden!" and the little creature climbed up on a chair, and thence to the bed, and strove to remove the hands that covered her mother's face.

Adelaide drew the little one to her heart, and wept more calmly than before. She had yet something to live for.

Months rolled slowly by. Mr Fletcher and Adelaide seldom met save in the social circle and at the table, and there they were never alone.—Day by day their alienation became more perfect—day by day their hearts grew further and further apart, and the cloud that hung over them more dense and dark.

They were very wretched both of them; but neither party read aright the feelings of the other. Mr. Fletcher did not realize how impossible it was for Adelaide to make the least advance toward a reconciliation, while she was conscious that no words she could utter would be sufficient to outweigh the evidence of the past—of those years that her husband thought were years of hypocrisy and deceit.

"You married me because I was rich—you sold yourself for my cursed gold!" those words were constantly ringing in her ears. She knew that they had not been spoken carelessly and unmeaningly—they had been breathed in tones that expressed the deepest conviction, and she could not wonder that the charge had been brought against her; but what could she do?—Galling, humiliating [illegible] he, who had surrounded her with so much luxury, regarded it now only as the price of her truth. She could not exonerate herself; she could say nothing in her own defence.

Then, gradually, as day after day her husband continued, as at first, cold, formal, and distantly polite, the conviction forced itself upon her mind that he had lost all love for her—that their estrangement had ceased to be a matter of the least concern to him. And so she avoided him more studiously than ever. She held herself still more coldly aloof, thinking that he loathed her very presence. Her home was desolate. In the long evenings, after little Katy was fast asleep, it was such torture to sit alone in her room; to hear her husband's step in the library; to know that he was so near her in loneliness and bitterness of spirit, and yet feel that they were as effectually separated as if the waters of an ocean rolled between them.

So she fled from the solitude and dreariness of her own chamber, and mingled more freely than before in the circles of gayety and fashion. She tried to forget her misery, by plunging into a whirlpool of excitement. There, too, she occasionally met her husband; and sometimes she could steal away into some quiet corner, and gaze upon him unobserved—with none to mark the starting tears.

It had been Mr. Fletcher's wish that their unhappy difficulties might not become matter for gossip, and speculation with the world about them, and he accordingly never neglected any attention that the usages of society prescribed.

But he thought her frivolous and heartless.—He did not know that the smiles he saw were worn only because he had desired that their estrangement might not be made public, and because, to conceal her grief, she was forced to assume the mask of gayety. He did not know that often, in the darkness and silence of night, she had stolen to the door of his room, listening intently if happily she might catch the faintest echo of a sigh; and then, shivering and trembling, crept back to her couch again, to weep and moan until the morning. He did not know that once she had found the door ajar, and knowing by his quiet and regular breathing that he was asleep, had glided softly into the room, and watched him through her blinding tears. He did not know that she had bent over him until her raven hair mingled with his own; that, carried away by an irresistible impulse, she had stooped until her lips touched his, and that then, frightened and abashed, she had flown away like a startled bird. He dreamed of her that night. He thought that she was in his arms, showering soft kisses upon his lips and brow. Ah! had he but known that "it was not all a dream!"

There was now but one connecting link between them, and that was their child. Her they both worshipped. The happiest moments Mr. Fletcher knew were those in which he sent for little Katy, and snatching her up in his arms bore her to the library, and kept her for hours together, listening to her artless prattling, and receiving and returning her fond caresses.

One day, while he was playing with her, she burst into tears for some trifling cause, and her father reproved her, telling her it was "naughty to cry."

"No, not naughty, mamma cry. Mamma not naughty," said the child, shaking her bright curls very decidedly.

"Mamma cries! What does mamma cry for?" asked Mr. Fletcher, while his heart beat quickly.

"Katy not know. Mamma kiss Katy, and mamma cry—oh, very bad!" she replied, clasping her small hands together. "Poor mamma! Kate sorry—papa sorry, too?"

Mr. Fletcher clasped the little tell-tale to his heart, but he could draw nothing more from her. Perhaps if she had looked closely in her father's face, she might have thought "papa, cried," too.

The little fairy was the only connecting link between them, and at length that was also broken.

They were at a large party one evening, when a messenger came to them. Their child was very ill. With blanched cheeks and trembling hearts they hurried homeward. Scarlet fever, in its most malignant form, had laid its withering hand upon their darling, and in less than twenty-four hours they knew that there was no hope—their sweet little Katy must die!

There were four days and nights of agony, and then Adelaide, in the midst of that mother-sorrow, for the expression of which earth has no language, blessed God that it was over—that the little quivering limbs were still, and that the tiny hand that had clasped her fingers so closely all through the death-struggle would no longer be tossed wildly in fierce paroxysms of pain.

They stood by the tiny coffin; but not together. Their tears fell like rain upon the little pale face that lap within it; but they did not mingle.—Each one alone wept over their dead, and shrank from intruding upon the grief of the other.

Oh, it was very, very terrible!—a dead child in the house, and the father and the mother mourning each in a separate room; each yearning for the sympathy and companionship of the other, and refusing to seek it; each feeling that their estrangement was worse than death, and yet using no effort to prevent the grief that lay between them from growing broader and deeper.

Katy was buried! The single sunbeam that illumined their life-path faded away, and all was darkness.

CHAPTER IX

Didst thou not know I loved thee well?
Thou didst not! And art gone
In bitterness of soul
Come back!
If but one hour to learn
The secrets of the folded heart,
That seemed to thee so stern. HEMANS.

About two months after Katy's death, business of importance called Mr. Fletcher to the south, and he left home with the intention of being absent four or five weeks.

He bade Adelaide adieu, in the presence of a transient guest, in a calm, quiet voice, and she responded just as quietly. But as he was closing the door, he turned suddenly and met her eye, fixed upon him with an expression that thrilled his heart. It was but for a moment, and even as he gazed it passed away; but he could not forget it. That glance haunted him day and night—in solitude, and in the crowded mart; walking or sleeping, it was before him ever, and brought to the heart that had begun to grow cold, stern, and proud, all the glow and warmth of its early days. He began to wonder if he had not been too harsh—too unforgiving; to ask himself if it were not possible that Adelaide had indeed learned to love him since she had been his wife; that she had indeed tried to atone for the error she had committed: in short, if they had not both suffered enough—more than enough? He recalled what little Katy had said of her Mother's tears—he was sure (now he thought of it) that his wife's cheek was far thinner and paler than it used to be; and he resolved that if her love was not his already, he would make one more an effort to win it.

Urged on, as he was, by thoughts like these, he dispatched his business with unexampled rapidity, and was on his homeward journey much earlier than he was expected. His newly-awakened hope lent him wings, and he gave himself hardly an hour's rest until he stood before his own door.

As he rang the bell, he glanced upward at the windows. Not a light was to be seen, and he wondered that the hall-lamp was not burning.

"Why are you so dark here, James? Where is your mistress?" he asked, as the servant opened the door.

"My mistress, sir? She has been gone two weeks."

"Well," said Mr. Fletcher, for he did not choose to ask any more questions, "let me have lights and a fire in the library immediately, and supper as soon as possible—I am cold and hungry."

James hurried away. Mr. Fletcher waited impatiently in the hall while the lights were being brought, and the fire kindled. Adelaide seldom left home for any length of time, and never in the winter; and he racked his brain with vain conjectures as to the cause of her sudden departure.

"The library is in order, sir, and supper will be ready in a very few minutes."

Immediately, upon entering the room, Mr. Fletcher went to his writing desk, to dispose of some papers he had carried about his person, and the first thing that met his eye, when he raised the lid, was a letter addressed to himself, in his wife's handwriting. His first emotion was one of surprise, until he recollected that she had a key which fitted the lock; the next was one of half fear. Hastily he broke the seal, and read as follows:

"I can endure the life we are now leading no longer—and I must leave you. My absence will be a relief to you—I am sure it will; and, as for me, I cannot stay here, and see in your presence each day, where I can here your voice and meet your eye, and yet feel that your most indifferent acquaintance is as much—nay more to you than I am.

"While our child lived, I struggled against those feelings: I could not leave her without a mother's care, and I had no right to take her with me—no right to cause your heart another sorrow; or to bear her from a home of luxury like this, to one of toil and privation. But now, she needs me no longer—no one needs me, and I must go.

"You desired that our difficulties might not be made public; and, on that account, also, I have hesitated long before concluding to take this step. But, if you could know how I have suffered during the last year, I am sure you would forgive this apparent disregard of your wishes. I could die, Willis, to save you a single pang; but this torture is far worse than death—and I cannot bear it.

"There is yet another reason why I leave you—I cannot be a dependant on your bounty. I cannot stay here, in the midst of affluence and splendor, and feel that you believe that for such baubles I bartered my truth and purity of heart.

"Willis, Willis—you wronged me there! I was young and thoughtless. I imagined myself scorned and slighted; and when you offered me your hand, I accepted it—scarce knowing what I did. But God knows I never thought of your wealth—I had not fallen as low as that!

"I have secured a situation as governess, with a salary that will be sufficient for my moderate wants, and by the time you are at home again I shall be far away. I tell you this, because I know, that little as you care for me now, you would not like to feel that I was destitute of the comforts of life.

"I intended to have written a long letter—to have laid my whole heart bare before you, that you might see how entirely it is, and has long been your own. But I cannot do it: my pen is palsied (as my tongue has long been) by feeling that you will believe nothing I may say. The secrecy that I maintained with regard to my past history was worse than folly; but surely the agony of this one thought ought to be enough to atone for it.

"And now farewell, Willis, my husband! May the blessing of the Most High be upon you evermore! Would that I could hear your voice but once again—then could I go forth upon my lonely way with a stronger heart. But it may not be: unloved, and unforgiven—I must bid you farewell forever!"

"Not unloved nor unforgiven! Oh, Adelaide, my wife, come back to me again!—I cannot live without you!" exclaimed Mr. Fletcher, as the letter fell from his nerveless hand. "I have driven you to this, my beloved, by my harshness and cruelty, and now my punishment is greater than I can bear!"

He took up the letter again, and re-read it carefully. It gave him no clue to her destination; but he had found in it the key to the heart he had learned to believe so destitute of feeling—so cold and worldly. "My pen is palsied, as my tongue has long been, by feeling you will believe nothing I may say." He read the sentence over and over again: it seemed so strange that he had never thought of it before. He recalled their last interview, previous to Adelaide's illness, and he remembered how tauntingly—how scornfully he had told her that she could deceive him no longer, and how sternly he had bidden her cease to mock him with her pretended love. And yet, after all that, he had wondered why she held herself so coldly aloof, and made no effort to soften his heart. He marveled now at his own blindness, and springing up, he rang the bell violently.

James answered the summons.

"Did Mrs. Fletcher leave word how long she intended to be gone?"

"No, sir."

"Did she take the cars or the boat?"

"She went with the carriage."

"Send Robert to me."

In a few moments the coachman appeared, hat in hand

"Where did you leave your mistress, Robert?"

"At L——, sir."

"When did she tell you to come after her?"

"She did not tell me to come at all, sir. She was going on farther with some friends, who were to meet her there."

"When did she expect them?"

"She thought they would be there before she was, but they were not. She would not let me wait; for she said they would come before night, and I had better return immediately."

"Had she much baggage?"

"Only one trunk, sir."

"Very well, you may go."

Willis Fletcher was alone—wife and child were gone. One was at rest, but as for the other, oh! where was she? All night he walked the floor impatiently, for not until the morning dawned could he pursue his inquiries.

It wore away at last, and a few faint glimmerings in the east foretold the coming day. He went forth with a strong heart. He would find her. No power on earth should keep her from him, now that he knew she loved him; he would bring her back to her happy home again; he would tell her how fondly his heart had clung to her even when he believed her false; he would bid her forget those long months of sorrow, and while he held her in his arms and kissed away the tears that had dimmed her eyes so long, he, too, would plead for forgiveness—he would tell her that he, too, had erred.

One month afterward Willis Fletcher again sat in the room alone—but how he had altered! The fire had faded from his eye—his cheeks were wan and haggard, and his whole bearing hopeless and desponding. You would have thought that many years had flung their lengthening shadows upon his pathway, since you last looked upon him.

He could not find Adelaide—he had used every endeavor, but he could trace her no farther than L——. The landlord of the hotel there remembered that on such a day a lady stopped at his house and dismissed her carriage immediately; that shortly after a party of travelers arrived, and that the lady went on with them—they said, but he could not trace—they knew not their names. Whether they went north or south he was sure he could not tell; the place was a complete thoroughfare—and he had never