

tangents, and cosines; I do despise this abominable Spherical Trigonometry—I always did hate mathematics, and why Mr. Marshall insists on my studying these studies is more than I can see.” And she burst into tears.

“Let me see, Minnie, dear,” soothingly said Esther; and as the troublesome sum was pointed out, continued, “Oh! I can tell you a little about that in a few moments that will make it quite clear, I think; so now to begin,” and in fact, a few words, a few figures on the slate, and Maria wondered that it had so puzzled her.

“Well,” she exclaimed, “I believe I do understand, and thank you ever and ever so much, darling Ettie; but I never should if I had been obliged to do the sum alone; but,” she continued, “I don’t know but this study is good for me. I am sure it cultivates one Christian grace, at least,—humility—for I never look at poor Day’s Mathematics without feeling what a fool I am.—Any letters?” she suddenly exclaimed, springing to meet two girls, who were coming up the long staircase.

“Yes! one for Jennie, and one for Miss Esther Hastings, Hopedale, Mass.—a paper for you, Maria, and for the rest of you—nothing. I am sorry to dash your hopes thus from the highest pinnacle of expectation down to the lowest depths of despairing certainty, but so it is,” said Emily Sidney, the bearer of the letters; “and now, my dear Miss Hastings, if you have finished devouring the contents of that large document, will you do me the favor to accompany me

to Mr. Marshall’s study? as he wishes to see us there a few moments.”

Passing her arm around Esther’s waist in school-girl fashion, they descended the staircase; and the group of girls went on talking as before. Some moments passed, when Emily and Esther re-appeared—Emily was half supporting the fainting form of her friend, and walked hastily by the wondering girls.

“For heaven’s sake, what is the matter with Esther Hastings?” exclaimed Maria Brooks.

In mute astonishment they looked at each other, till Emily came out of Esther’s room, and in answer to their numerous inquiries, replied briefly, “Mr. Marshall has just had a telegraphic dispatch, saying that her father is very sick, and may not live till she gets home.”

“Can I be of any service,” said Maria, “in packing her trunk, or any such thing?”

“No, Maria, I can do all that is necessary,” returned Emily; “but I must go to Esther again.”

“Poor Esther,” ejaculated more than one, after Emily left them; “she idolizes her father, and what will become of her if he dies!”

“I pity her from the bottom of my heart,” said Virginia; “she has only a step-mother, and I know she does not love her much, for she never speaks of her.”

The school bell soon rang, and the girls quickly obeyed the summons, leaving the long hall unoccupied.

A few hours had slipped away, but to Esther’s ex-

cited mind the time had seemed interminable. That precious time was passing, and she not yet on her way: her father might die, and she might not hear his parting words—receive his parting kiss.

She had roused herself from the stupor into which the sadness had at first thrown her, and busied herself mechanically in getting ready for her journey. Now all was ready, and she went out into the hall to bid adieu to her old friends. Mr. Marshall led her to the carriage, Emily accompanied her, and with a fervent embrace, whispered, "God bless and comfort you, dearest."

Esther could not speak, but her warm grasp of the hand she held tightened, and tears gushed to her eyes. They were the first she had shed. She scarcely heeded the introduction which Mr. Marshall gave her to the gentleman who was to take charge of her, but fell back into a corner of the coach, and drawing her veil down, gave vent to her tears. How her heart rebelled against this severe blow which God had dealt her; "First my mother, and now my father," she bitterly thought, "all—all that is left me, and what have I done to deserve this?" She could not pray—she could think of nothing, see nothing but the death-bed of her father, and God had done it. Bitter and scalding tears flowed, but they did not relieve her burdened heart. The coach stopped; her companion half lifted her from it and led her into the depot. Curious eyes Esther felt were upon her, and, hastily controlling her emotion, she sat down, feeling as if her heart was crushed under its load of misery.

The shrill whistle sounded, and the rushing, mighty tread of the locomotive was heard—all was hurry and confusion, and she found herself, she hardly knew how, seated in a car and rapidly passing towards home. Home! the thought was agony! How she had looked forward to this homeward journey, and how different was all from what she had anticipated! She sat in silence brooding over her woes, feeling almost as if wronged, when she was startled by the words of her companion, the first he had addressed to her. "Whom the Lord *loveth*, he chasteneth."

It seemed as if the stranger must have read her thoughts. She looked at him, and read in his dark eyes sympathy for her, yet she also felt a little self-condemned, as if he had known how unsubmitive she had been to the will of God. He continued talking with her, and gradually her reserve gave way. She told him much of herself, of her idolized father, and found a sad relief in talking of her sorrows.

The gentle and compassionate words which Mr. Percival addressed to her, fell like balm upon her heart, and the hope that all might yet be well, that her father might recover, somewhat cheered her. But now Mr. Percival must leave her, he said, for here their paths separated. He placed her on the boat, and saw that all was arranged for her comfort, and with a few hurried but kindly words of sympathy and encouragement, left her. Once more alone, Esther surrendered herself to her grief. Sitting on the promenade deck, she raised her veil, that the fresh breeze might cool her fevered brow. Two gentlemen

sat near her, and were talking busily. They seemed to be old friends, delighted to meet each other after a long absence. Their voices fell on Esther's ear, but she heeded them not, till the name of Hastings arrested her attention—she listened eagerly, as one remarked, half carelessly, "You remember Hastings, the rich lumber merchant?"

"Hastings!—yes, he married that handsome Margaret Wilton for his second wife, didn't he?—well, what of him?" rejoined the other, "hasn't failed, has he?"

"No, I guess not," was the reply, "but he's lying at the point of death!"

"I want to know," returned his friend, "well, he will be a great loss to the community. Let me see—he is President of the Merchant's Bank, isn't he?—How does that Bank flourish?" he continued, and then the conversation turned on bank stock, railroad stock, and the like.—Esther had sank back at the mention of her father's name, feeling more keenly than ever her loneliness and misery. "How heartless all the world is!" she thought; "and I am to live years in it, probably." Hours passed, and she had at length reached Bangor. A servant was waiting for her on the wharf—"Is he alive, James?" she asked, as he assisted her to the carriage.

"Yes, Miss Esther, and asking for you when I came away."

"Drive fast," she said, and in a few moments she had reached home. Scarcely heeding the servant who opened the hall door, she rushed hastily to her

father's room, flinging her bonnet off as she almost flew up the staircase. The room was dark, and the heavy breathing of the sick man alone broke the silence.

"Has Ettie come?" she heard articulated with difficulty, and in another moment she had sprung to the bed, and kissed repeatedly the forehead, cheeks and lips of her dying father, exclaiming again and again, "You *must not die*, oh, my father!"

"This must not be," said the physician who stood near, in a low tone; "Calm yourself, Miss Esther, this agitation may hasten the fatal crisis."

Esther obeyed involuntarily, and in silence seated herself by the bedside, while her father, in low, broken accents, said:

"Thank God that I have seen my child before I die—oh, Ettie, you have ever been a dutiful child," he continued, "and may God bless you;—I die content—"

He paused, as if exhausted, then resumed, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *Thou* art with me—my trust is in our Saviour—I shall soon join your mother."

Incoherent words now alone fell from his lips, till suddenly he seemed again conscious, and looking at his young and beautiful wife, who stood by his side, he said, "My beautiful Margaret, forgive me if I have wronged you in making you the wife of an old man—you have made life very sweet to me." He took her hand, and with a feeble grasp laid it on Esther's—"love each other," he said, "for my sake." Again

his mind wandered,—“Annie!” he exclaimed, wildly starting up and stretching out his arm, as if to embrace some one; “we meet again.”—He fell back—“Jesus,” he murmured, and all was over—Esther Hastings was fatherless. Calmly Mrs. Hastings bent over the dead man, and imprinted a kiss upon his brow, then led Esther from the room.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE STEP-MOTHER.

SOME days had passed, and the rich man slept in that narrow resting-place, where all the dwellers on earth must at last lie down together. His business matters had been investigated, but, contrary to the expectations of all, it was found, that what property he possessed would meet the demands of his creditors alone, leaving comparatively nothing for his wife and child. He had been largely engaged in navigation, and for several years past he had met with heavy losses, as was well known; but it had not been supposed that so large a portion of his fortune had been thus lost.

The necessity of making some definite arrangements for the future, which this change of circumstances rendered unavoidable, had been of service to Esther, as it had in a measure prevented her from brooding over her sorrows. But one day an unusual number of kind and well-meaning friends had called on her to offer their sympathy. Their words, it seemed to her, opened the wound afresh, and their inquiries at last became torture to her. It was now evening, and, sitting alone in her chamber, she wept long and bitterly