

## V I O L A ;

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'TIS AN OLD TALE, AND OFTEN TOLD.

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "SHADOWS AND SUNSHINE."

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THIS let me hope, that when in public view  
 I bring my pictures, men may feel them true :  
 " This is a likeness," may they all declare,  
 " And I have seen him, but I know not where."  
 For I should mourn the mischief I had done,  
 If, as the likeness, all would fix on one. .  
 No ! let the guiltless, if there such be found,  
 Launch forth the spear, and deal the deadly wound.  
 How can I so the cause of virtue aid,  
 Who am myself attainted and afraid ?

CRABBE.

What ! write in a book,  
 Where the learned may look,  
 Which the critic may con at his leisure ?

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## CHAPTER I.

Earth has one boon for all her children—death :  
 Open thy arms, O mother ! and receive me !  
 Take off the bitter burthen from the slave,  
 Give me my birthright ! give the grave, the grave !

F. A. KEMBLE.

Ah, woe ! alas ! pain ever, for ever !—SHELLEY.

THE sun had not yet risen on our vast metropolis, the gray hues of twilight mingled almost imperceptibly with the deep blue of night, as one by one her starry gems paled before the glimmer of the approaching dawn.

The morning star, last and brightest of heaven's host, still lingered in the firmament as if loth to bid the world farewell.

The leaves of the only tree in a churchyard adjoining our dwelling quivered fitfully in the breeze, whilst a solitary bird chirped its one dreamy note—and was silent.

Man had not yet awoke to his daily toil ; the plough,

the loom, the engine, were at rest, the world itself seemed buried in slumber: it was as though the primal curse had not been fulminated, and repose and inaction, instead of labour and travail, were the inheritance of the sons of Adam. Silence was all around, broken only by the convulsive gasps, the long-drawn sighs of the soul that was struggling to fling off its mortal coil, and bound into the regions of eternal light.

The man of science stood by the bed of death, but he proffered no succour, for he felt that a stronger than he was there, and slowly and sadly he withdrew from the desolate chamber. A minute longer, and I gazed on the face of the dead. I was the chief mourner, —alas! I was the *only* mourner there. I remember but one thing more: I remember the nurse with her puckered, withered face, her slow, stealthy step, and callous demeanour, curtaining o'er those glazed eyes with their stiffening lids, and, as she did so, she bade me, with superstitious awe, touch that inanimate piece of marl "lest I should dream of it." My angel mother! would that I could have dreamed of thee for ever! I think I threw myself upon the corpse, but I remember naught else: —that was a blessed time of oblivion.

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I woke—"how happy they who wake no more,"—to the vague, shuddering, twilight recollection, which precedes the full, gushing noonday revelation of misery, that rushes with tenfold bitterness to the heart. Indeed how could I be long forgetful of that last dread scene when the same withered old crone hung over me, and told me in harsh accents to "cheer up," for that a gentleman had been each day to inquire after me,—a friend.

"Heaven help me!" I replied, "I have no friends."

"Ah! that is what every one says at first, Miss; but you'll learn as one friend goes, another rises in his place. We make new friendships for ourselves as the old ones drop off."

This, I thought, is the philosophy of the poor, and this have I now to learn.

“But,” resumed the woman, “the gentleman wishes to see you as soon as the doctor gives him leave.”

The apothecary came; he was happy, he said, to find me so resigned. Alas! mine was the resignation of despair; that deadliest and most stagnant calm, that torpor of the soul, when foul and noxious weeds oft take firm root in the desolate waste, but where never blooms the “immortal amaranth,” or flower of paradise.

In less than a week, I was allowed to see my unknown visitant. Punctual to the time and hour appointed, he came. There was an emphatic knock at the street-door, a card was presented to me, and, in another minute, Mr. Charles Sidney stood before me. He was a cousin of my mother, second cousin to me,—*my nearest surviving relation*. I had seen him at rare intervals, when he came to transfer a little stock for us, or to instruct my mother in that only veritable alchymy by which a few shillings are eked out to produce the value of as many guineas. He now dragged forth a chair, took out his silk pocket-handkerchief, and sedulously wiped from the worn-out cushion sundry particles of dust that told a tale of neglected housewifery. He then seated himself, and after balancing the chair to and fro for a few seconds, commenced as follows:—

“This is a sad affliction, cousin Dorothy.” I bowed my head, for I could not answer. “However,” he continued, in the same dry, measured tone, “it was in the course of nature; we must all go, sooner or later. You have nothing to reproach yourself with; you have fulfilled your duty, Dorothy, and the remembrance that you have done so, must be a vast comfort to you now; but, bless me! how poor she has died! I had no idea it had come to that pass. How very absurd it was thus to conceal her circumstances from