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JOHN HALIFAX IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

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JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN.

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VOL. II.
Collection

of

British Authors

for Children

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JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1857.

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NOT many weeks afterwards, we went to live at Longfield, which henceforth became the family home for many years.

Longfield! happy Longfield! little nest of love, and joy, and peace — where the children grew up, and we grew old — where season after season brought some new change ripening in us and around us — where summer and winter, day and night, the hand of God’s providence was over our roof, blessing our goings out and our comings in, our basket and our store; crowning us with the richest blessing of all, that we were made a household where “brethren dwelt together in unity.”

Beloved Longfield! my heart, slow pulsing as befits one near the grave, thrills warm and young as I remember thee!

Yet how shall I describe it — the familiar spot; so familiar that it seems to need no description at all.

It was but a small place when we first came there. It led out of the high-road by a field-gate — the White Gate; from which a narrow path wound down to a stream, thence up a green slope to the house; a mere
farm-house, nothing more. It had one parlour, three decent bed-rooms, kitchen, and out-houses; we built extempore chambers out of the barn and cheese-room. In one of these the boys, Guy and Edwin slept; against the low roof of which the father generally knocked his head every morning when he came to call the lads. Its windows were open all summer round, and birds and bats used oftentimes to fly in, to the great delight of the youthful inmates.

Another infinite pleasure to the little folk was that, for the first year, the farm-house kitchen was made our dining-room. There, through the open door, Edwin's pigeons, Muriel's two doves, and sometimes a stately hen, walked in and out at pleasure. Whether our livestock, brought up in the law of kindness, were as well-trained and well-behaved as our children, I cannot tell; but certain it is that we never found any harm from this system, necessitated by our early straits at Longfield — this "liberty, fraternity, and equality."

Those words, in themselves true and lovely, but wrested to such false meaning, whose fatal sound was now dying out of Europe, merged in the equally false and fatal shout of "Gloire! gloire!" remind me of an event which I believe was the first that broke the delicious monotony of our new life.

It was one September morning. Mrs. Halifax, the children, and I were down at the stream, planning a bridge across it, and a sort of stable, where John's horse might be put up — the mother had steadily resisted the long-tailed grey ponies. For with all the necessary improvements at Longfield, with the large settlement that John insisted upon making on his wife and children, before he would use in his business any portion of her
fortune, we found we were by no means so rich as to make any great change in our way of life advisable. And, after all, the mother's best luxuries were to see her children merry and strong, her husband's face lightened of its care, and to know he was now placed beyond doubt in the position he had always longed for; for was he not this very day gone to sign the lease of Enderly Mills?

Mrs. Halifax had just looked at her watch, and she and I were wondering, with quite a childish pleasure, whether he were not now signing the important deed, when Guy came running to say a coach-and-four was trying to enter the White Gate.

"Who can it be? — But they must be stopped, or they'll spoil John's new gravel road that he takes such pride in. Uncle Phineas, would you mind going to see?"

Who should I see, but almost the last person I expected — who had not been beheld, hardly spoken of, in our household these ten years — Lady Caroline Brithwood, in her travelling-habit of green cloth, her velvet riding-hat, with its Prince of Wales' feathers, gayer than ever — though her pretty face was withering under the paint, and her lively manner growing coarse and bold.

"Is this Longfield? — Does Mr. Halifax — mon Dieu, Mr. Fletcher, is that you?"

She held out her hand with the frankest condescension, and in the brightest humour in the world. She insisted on sending on the carriage, and accompanying me down to the stream, for a "surprise" — a "scene."

Mrs. Halifax, seeing the coach drive on, had evidently forgotten all about it. She stood in the little dell which the stream had made, Walter in her arms — her figure thrown back, so as to poise the child's weight. Her right
hand kept firm hold of Guy, who was paddling barefoot in the stream; Edwin, the only one of the boys who never gave any trouble, was soberly digging away, beside little Muriel.

The lady clapped her hands. "Brava! bravissima! a charming family picture, Mrs. Halifax."

"Lady Caroline!"

Ursula left her children, and came to greet her old acquaintance, whom she had never once seen since she was Ursula March. Perhaps that fact touched her, and it was with a kind of involuntary tenderness that she looked into the sickly face, where all the smiles could not hide the wrinkles.

"It is many years since we met; and we are both somewhat altered, cousin Caroline."

"You are, with those three great boys. The little girl yours also? — Oh, yes, I remember William told me — poor little thing!" And with uneasy awe she turned from our blind Muriel, our child of peace.

"Will you come up to the house? my husband has only ridden over to Enderly; he will be home soon."

"And glad to see me, I wonder? For I am rather afraid of that husband of yours — eh, Ursula? Yet I should greatly like to stay."

Ursula laughed, and repeated the welcome. She was so happy herself — she longed to distribute her happiness. They walked, the children following, towards the house.

Under the great walnut-tree, by the sunk fence which guarded the flower-garden from the sheep and cows, Mrs. Halifax stopped and pointed down the green slope of the field, across the valley, to the wooded hills opposite.

"Isn't it a pretty view?" said Guy, creeping up and touching the stranger's gown; our children had lived too
much in an atmosphere of love to know either shyness or fear.

"Very pretty, my little friend."

"That's One-tree Hill. Father is going to take us all a walk there this afternoon."

"Do you like going walks with your father?"

"Oh, don't we!" An electric smile ran through the whole circle. It told enough of the blessed home-tale.

Lady Caroline laughed a sharp laugh. "Eh, my dear, I see how things are. You don't regret having married John Halifax, the tanner?"

"Regret!"

"Nay, be not impetuous. I always said he was a noble fellow — so does the earl now. And William — you can't think what a hero your husband is to William."

"Lord Ravenel?"

"Ay, my little brother that was — growing a young man now — a frightful bigot, wanting to make our house as Catholic as when two or three of us lost our heads for King James. But he is a good boy — poor William! I had rather not talk about him."

Ursula inquired courteously if her cousin Richard were well.

"Bah! — I suppose he is; he is always well. His late astonishing honesty to Mr. Halifax cost him a fit of gout — mais n'importe. If they meet, I suppose all things will be smooth between them?"

"My husband never had any ill-feeling to Mr. Brithwood."

"I should not bear him an undying enmity if he had. But you see 'tis election time, and the earl wishes to put in a gentleman, a friend of ours, for Kingswell. Mr. Halifax owns some cottages there, eh?"
"Mr. Fletcher does. My husband transacts business—"

"Stop! stop!" cried Lady Caroline. "I don't understand business; I only know that they want your husband to be friendly with mine. Is this plain enough?"

"Certainly: be under no apprehension. Mr. Halifax never bears malice against anyone. Was this the reason of your visit, Lady Caroline?"

"Eh — mon Dieu! what would become of us if we were all as straightforward as you, Mistress Ursula? But it sounds charming — in the country. No, my dear; I came — nay, I hardly know why. Probably, because I liked to come — my usual reason for most actions. Is that your salle-à-manger? Won't you ask me to dinner, ma cousine?"

"Of course," the mother said, though I fancied, afterwards, the invitation rather weighed upon her mind, probably from the doubt whether or no John would like it. But in little things, as in great, she had always this safe trust in him — that conscientiously to do what she felt to be right, was the surest way to be right in her husband's eyes.

So Lady Caroline was our guest for the day — a novel guest — but she made herself at once familiar and pleasant. Guy, a little gentleman from his cradle, installed himself her admiring knight attendant everywhere: Edwin brought her to see his pigeons; Walter, with sweet, shy blushes, offered her "a 'ittle fower;" and the three, as the greatest of all favours, insisted on escorting her to pay a visit to the beautiful calf not a week old.

Laughing, she followed the boys; telling them how lately in Sicily she had been presented to a week-old prince, son of Louis Philippe the young Duke of Orleans and the Princess Marie-Amelie. "And truly, children,
he was not half so pretty as your little calf. Ursula, I am sick of courts sometimes. I would turn shepherdess myself, if we could find a tolerable Arcadia."

"Is there any Arcadia like home?"

"Home!" — Her face expressed the utmost loathing, fear, and scorn. I remember hearing that the 'Squire since his return from abroad had grown just like his father; was drunk every day and all day long. "Is your husband altered, Ursula? He must be quite a young man still. Oh, what it is to be young!"

"John looks much older, people say; but I don't see it."

"Arcadia again! Can such things be? especially in England, that paradise of husbands, where the first husband in the realm sets such an illustrious example. How do you stay-at-home British matrons feel towards my friend the Princess of Wales?"

"God help her, and make her as good a woman as she is a wronged and miserable wife," said Ursula, sadly.

"Query, Can a 'good woman' be made out of a 'wronged and miserable wife'? If so, Mrs. Halifax, you should certainly take out a patent for the manufacture."

The subject touched too near home. Ursula wisely avoided it, by enquiring if Lady Caroline meant to remain in England.

"Cela depend." She turned suddenly grave. "Your fresh air makes me feel weary. Shall we go in-doors?"

Dinner was ready laid out — a plain meal; since neither the father nor any of us cared for table dainties; but I think if we had lived in a hut, and fed off wooden platters on potatoes and salt, our repast would have been fair and orderly, and our hut the neatest that a hut could be. For the mother of the family had in perfec-
tion almost the best genius a woman can have — the genius of tidiness.

We were not in the least ashamed of our simple dinner-table, where no difference was ever made for anybody. We had little plate, but plenty of snow-white napery and pretty china; and what with the scents of the flower-garden on one side, and the green waving of the elm-tree on the other, it was as good as dining out-of-doors.

The boys were still gathered round Lady Caroline, in the little closet off the dining-room where lessons were learnt; Muriel sat as usual on the door-sill, petting one of her doves that used to come and perch on her head and her shoulder, of their own accord, when I heard the child say to herself —

"Father's coming."

"Where, darling?"

"Up the farm-yard way. There — he is on the gravelwalk. He has stopped; I daresay it is to pull some of the jessamine that grows over the well. Now, fly away, dove! Father's here."

And the next minute a general shout echoed, "Father's here!"

He stood in the doorway, lifting one after the other up in his arms; having a kiss and a merry word for all — this good father!

O solemn name, which Deity Himself claims and owns! Happy these children, who in its fullest sense could understand the word "father!" to whom, from the dawn of their little lives, their father was what all fathers should be — the truest representative here on earth of that Father in heaven, who is at once justice, wisdom, and perfect love.
Happy, too — most blessed among women — the woman who gave her children such a father!

Ursula came — for his eye was wandering in search of her — and received the embrace, without which he never left her or returned.

“All rightly settled, John?”

“Quite settled.”

“I am so glad.” With a second kiss, not often bestowed in public, as congratulation. He was going to tell more, when Ursula said, rather hesitatingly — “We have a visitor to-day.”

Lady Caroline came out of her corner, laughing.

“You did not expect me, I see. Am I welcome?”

“Any welcome that Mrs. Halifax has given is also mine.”

But John’s manner, though polite, was somewhat constrained; and he felt, as it seemed to my observant eye, more surprise than gratification in this incursion on his quiet home. Also I noticed, that when Lady Caroline, in the height of her condescension, would have Muriel close to her at dinner, he involuntarily drew his little daughter to her accustomed place beside himself.

“She always sits here, thank you.”

The table-talk was chiefly between the lady and her host; she rarely talked to women when a man was to be had. Conversation veered between the Emperor Napoleon and Lord Wellington, Lord William Bentinck and Sardinian policy, the conjugal squabbles of Carlton House, and the one-absorbing political question of this year — Catholic emancipation.

“You are a staunch supporter of the Bill, my father says. Of course, you aid him in the Kingswell election, to-morrow?”
“I can scarcely call it an election,” returned John. He had been commenting on it to us that morning rather severely. An election! it was merely a talk in the King's Head parlour, a nomination, and show of hands by some dozen poor labourers, tenants of Mr. Brithwood and Lord Luxmore, who got a few pounds a-piece for their services, — and the thing was done.

“Who is the nominee, Lady Caroline?”

“A young gentleman of small fortune, but excellent parts, who returned with us from Naples.”

The lady's manner being rather more formal than she generally used, John looked up quickly.

“The election being to-morrow, of course his name is no secret?”

“Oh, no! Vermilye. Mr. Gerard Vermilye. Do you know him?”

“I have heard of him.”

As he spoke — either intentionally or no — John looked full at Lady Caroline. She dropped her eyes, and began playing with her bracelets. Both immediately quitted the subject of Kingswell election.

Soon after, we rose from the table; and Guy, who had all dinner-time fixed his admiring gaze upon the “pretty lady,” insisted on taking her down the garden and gathering for her a magnificent arum lily, the mother's favourite lily. I suggested gaining permission first; and was sent to ask the question.

I found John and his wife in serious, even painful conversation.

“Love,” he was saying, “I have known it for very long; but if she had not come here, I would never have grieved you by telling it.”

“Perhaps it is not true,” cried Ursula, warmly. “The
world is ready enough to invent cruel falsehoods about us women."

"'Us women!' Don't say that, Ursula. I will not have my wife named in the same breath with her."

"John!"

"I will not, I say. You don't know what it cost me even to see her touch your hand."

"John!"

The soft tone recalled him to his better self.

"Forgive me! but I would not have the least taint come near this wife of mine. I could not bear to think of her holding intercourse with a light woman — a woman false to her husband."

"I do not believe it. Caroline was foolish, she was never wicked. Listen! — If this were true, how could she be laughing with our children now? Oh! John — think — she has no children."

The deep pity passed from Ursula's heart to her husband's. John clasped fondly the two hands that were laid on his shoulders, as, looking up in his face, the happy wife pleaded silently for one whom all the world knew was so wronged and so unhappy.

"We will wait a little before we judge. Love, you are a better Christian than I."

All afternoon they both showed more than courtesy — kindness, to this woman, at whom, as anyone out of our retired household would have known, and as John did know well — all the world was already pointing the finger, on account of Mr. Gerard Vermilye. She, on her part, with her chameleon power of seizing and sunning herself in the delight of the moment, was in a state of the highest enjoyment. She turned "shepherdess," fed the poultry with Edwin, pulled off her jewelled orna-
ments, and gave them to Walter for play-things; nay, she even washed off her rouge at the spring, and came in with faint natural roses upon her faded cheeks. So happy she seemed, so innocently, childishly happy, that more than once I saw John and Ursula exchange satisfied looks, rejoicing that they had followed after the divine charity which “thinketh no evil.”

After tea we all turned out, as was our wont on summer evenings; the children playing about; while the father and mother strolled up and down the sloping field-path, arm in arm like lovers, or sometimes he fondly leaning upon her. Thus they would walk and talk together in the twilight, for hours.

Lady Caroline pointed to them. “Look! Adam and Eve modernised; Baucis and Philemon when they were young. Bon Dieu! what it is to be young!”

She said this in a gasp, as if wild with terror of the days that were coming upon her — the dark days.

“People are always young,” I answered, “who love one another as these do.”

“Love! what an old-fashioned word. I hate it! It is so — what would you say in English? — so déchirant. I would not cultivate une grande passion for the world.”

I smiled at the idea of the bond between Mr. and Mrs. Halifax taking the Frenchified character of “une grande passion.”

“But home-love, married love, love among children and at the fire-side; — you believe in that?”

She turned upon me her beautiful eyes; they had a scared look, like a bird’s driven right into the fowler’s net.

“C'est impossible — impossible!”

The word hissed itself out between her shut teeth —
“impossible.” Then she walked quickly on, and was her lively self once more.

When the evening closed, and the younger children were gone to bed, she became rather restless about the non-appearance of her coach. At last a lacquey arrived, on foot. She angrily enquired, “why a carriage had not been sent for her?”

“Master didn’t give orders, my lady,” answered the man, somewhat rudely.

Lady Caroline turned pale — with anger or fear — perhaps both.

“You have not properly answered your mistress’s question,” said Mr. Halifax.

“Master says, sir — begging my lady’s pardon for repeating it — but he says, ‘My lady went out against his will, and she may come home when and how she likes.’”

“My lady” burst out laughing, and laughed violently and long.

“Tell him, I will. Be sure you tell him I will. It is the last and the easiest obedience.”

John sent the lacquey out of the room; and Ursula said something about “not speaking thus before a servant.”

“Before a servant! Why, my dear, we furnish entertainment for our whole establishment, my husband and I. We are at the Mythe what the Prince Regent and the Princess of Wales are to the country at large. We divide our people between us; I fascinate — he bribes. Ha! ha! Well done. Richard Brithwood! I may come home ‘when and how I like?’ Truly, I’ll use that kind permission.”

Her eyes glittered with an evil fire: her cheeks were hot and red.
"Mrs. Halifax, I shall be thrown on your hospitality for an hour or two longer. Could you send a letter for me?"

"To your husband? Certainly."

"My husband? — Never! — Yes, to my husband."

The first part of the sentence was full of fierce contempt; the latter, smothered, and slowly desperate. "Tell me, Ursula, what constitutes a man one's husband? Brutality, tyranny — the tyranny which the law sanctions? Or kindness, sympathy, devotion, everything that makes life beautiful — everything that constitutes happiness and —"

"Sin."

The word in her ear was so low, that she started as if conscience only had uttered it — conscience, to whom only her intents were known.

John came forward, speaking gravely, but not unkindly.

"Lady Caroline, I am deeply grieved that this should have happened in my house, and through your visiting us against your husband's will."

"His will!"

"Pardon me; but I think a wife is bound to the very last to obey in all things not absolutely wrong, her husband's will. I am glad you thought of writing to Mr. Brithwood."

She shook her head, in mocking denial.

"May I ask, then — since I am to have the honour of sending it — to whom is this letter?"

"To — " I think she would have told a falsehood, if John's eyes had not been so keenly fixed upon her. "To — a friend."

"Friends are at all times dangerous to a lady who —"
"Hates her husband — ha! ha! Especially male friends?"

"Especially male friends."

Here Guy, who had lingered out of his little bed most unlawfully — hovering about, ready to do any chivalrous duty to his idol of the day — came up to bid her good night; and held up his rosy mouth, eagerly.

"I — kiss a little child! I!" — and from her violent laughter, she burst into a passion of tears.

The mother signed me to carry Guy away; she and John took Lady Caroline into the parlour, and shut the door.

Of course, I did not then learn what passed — but I did afterwards.

Lady Caroline's tears were evanescent, like all her emotions. Soon she became composed — asked again for writing materials — then countermanded the request.

"No, I will wait till to-morrow. Ursula, you will take me for the night?"

Mrs. Halifax looked appealingly to her husband, but he gave no assent.

"Lady Caroline, you should willingly stay, were it not, as you must know, so fatal a step. In your position, you should be most careful to leave the world and your husband no single handle against you."

"Mr. Halifax, what right have you —"

"None, save that of an honest man, who sees a woman cruelly wronged, and desperate with her wrong; who would thankfully save her if he could."

"Save me? From what — or whom?"

"From Mr. Gerard Vermilye, who is now waiting down the road, and whom, if Lady Caroline Brithwood
once flies to, or even sees, at this crisis, she loses her place among honourable English matrons for ever."

John said this, with no air of virtuous anger or contempt, but as the simple statement of a fact. The convicted woman dropped her face between her hands.

Ursula, greatly shocked, was some time before she spoke.

"Is it true, Caroline?"

"What is true?"

"That which my husband has heard of you?"

"Yes," she cried, springing up, and dashing back her beautiful hair — beautiful still, though she must have been five or six and thirty at least — "Yes, it is true — it shall be true. I will break my bonds, and live the life I was made for. I would have done it long ago, but for — no matter. Why, Ursula, he adores me; young and handsome as he is, he adores me. He will give me my youth back again, ay, he will."

And she sang out a French chanson, something about "la liberté et ses plaisirs, la jeunesse, l'amour."

The mother grew sterner — any such wife and mother would. Then and there, compassion might have died out of even her good heart, had it not been for the sudden noise over-head of children's feet — children's chattering. Once more the pitiful thought came — "She has no children."

"Caroline," she said, catching her gown as she passed, "when I was with you, you had a child which only breathed and died. It died spotless. When you die, how dare you meet that little baby?"

The singing changed to sobbing. "I had forgotten. My little baby! Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu?"

Mrs. Halifax, taking in earnest those meaningless
French ejaculations, whispered something about Him who alone can comfort and help us all.

"Him! I never knew Him, if indeed He be. No, no, there is no after-life."

Ursula turned away in horror. "John, what shall we do with her? No home! — no husband! — no God!"

"He never leaves Himself without a witness. Look love."

The wretched woman sat rocking to and fro — weeping and wringing her hands. "It was cruel — cruel! You should not have spoken about my baby. Now —"

"Tell me — just one word — I will not believe anybody's word except your own. Caroline, are you — still innocent?"

Lady Caroline shrank from her touch. "Don't hold me so. You may have one standard of virtue, I another."

"Still, tell me."

"And if I did, you, an 'honourable English matron' — was not that your husband's word? — would turn from me, most likely?"

"She will not," John said. "She has been happy, and you most miserable."

"Oh, most miserable."

That bitter groan went to both their hearts, Ursula leaned over her — herself almost in tears. "Cousin Caroline John says true — I will not turn from you. I know you have been sinned against — cruelly — cruelly. Only tell me that you yourself have not sinned."

"I have 'sinned,' as you call it."

John Halifax, Gentleman. II.
Ursula started — drew closer to her husband. Neither spoke.

“Mrs. Halifax, why don’t you take away your hand?”

“I? — let me think. This is terrible. Oh, John!”

Again Lady Caroline said, in her sharp, bold tone, “Take away your hand.”

“Husband, shall I?”

“No.”

For some minutes they stood together, both silent, beside this poor woman. I call her “poor,” as did they; knowing, that if a sufferer needs pity, how tenfold more does a sinner!

John spoke first. “Cousin Caroline.” She lifted up her head in amazement. “We are your cousins, and we wish to be your friends, my wife and I. Will you listen to us?”

She sobbed still, but less violently.

“Only, first — you must promise to renounce for ever guilt and disgrace.”

“I feel it none. He is an honourable gentleman — he loves me, and I love him. That is the true marriage. No, I will make you no such promise. Let me go.”

“Pardon me — not yet. I cannot suffer my wife’s kinswoman to elope from my own house, without trying to prevent it.”

“Prevent! — sir! Mr. Halifax! You forget who you are, and who I am — the daughter of the Earl of Laxmore.”

“Were you the King’s daughter, it would make no difference. I will save you in spite of yourself, if I can.
I have already spoken to Mr. Vermilye, and he has gone away."

"Gone away! the only living soul that loves me. Gone away! I must follow him — quick — quick."

"You cannot. He is miles distant by this time. He is afraid lest this story should come out to-morrow at Kingswell; and to be an M.P. and safe from arrest is better to Mr. Vermilye than even yourself, Lady Caroline."

John's wife, unaccustomed to hear him take that cool, worldly, half-sarcastic tone, turned to him somewhat reproachfully; but he judged best. For the moment, this tone had more weight with the woman of the world than any homilies. She began to be afraid of Mr. Halifax. Impulse, rather than resolution, guided her, and even these impulses were feeble and easily governed. She sat down again, muttering —

"My will is free. You cannot control me."

"Only so far as my conscience justifies me in preventing a crime."

"A crime?"

"It would be such. No sophistries of French philosophy on your part, no cruelty on your husband's, can abrogate the one law, which if you disown it as God's, is still man's — being necessary for the peace, honour, and safety of society."

"What law?"

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

People do not often utter this plain Bible word. It made Ursula start, even when spoken solemnly by her own husband. It tore from the self-convicted woman all the sentimental disguises with which the world then hid, and still hides — its corruptions. Her sin arose and
stared her blackly in the face — as sin. She cowered before it.

"Am I — that? And William will know it. Poor William!" She looked up at Ursula — for the first time with the guilty look; hitherto, it had been only one of pain or despair. "Nobody knows it, except you. Don't tell William. I would have gone long ago, but for him. He is a good boy; — don't let him guess his sister was —"

She left the word unspoken. Shame seemed to crush her down to the earth; shame, the precursor of saving penitence — at least, John thought so. He quitted the room, leaving her to the ministry of his other self, his wife. As he sat down with me, and told me in a few words what indeed I had already more than half guessed, I could not but notice the expression of his own face. And I recognized how a man can be at once righteous to judge, tender to pity, and strong to save; a man, the principle of whose life is, as John's was — that it should be made "conformable to the image" of Him, who was Himself on earth the image of God.

Ursula came out and called her husband. They talked for some time together. I guessed, from what I heard, that she wished Lady Caroline to stay the night here, but that he with better judgment was urging the necessity of her returning to the protection of her husband's home without an hour's delay.

"It is her only chance of saving her reputation. She must do it, at least temporarily, till some better measure can be taken. Tell her so, Ursula."

After a few minutes, Mrs. Halifax came out again. "I have persuaded her at last. She says she will do
whatever you think best. Only before, she goes, she wants to look at the children. May she?"

"Poor soul! — yes," John murmured, turning away. Stepping out of sight, we saw the poor lady pass through the quiet, empty house into the children's bedroom. We heard her smothered sob, at times, the whole way.

Then I went down to the stream, and helped John to saddle his horse, with Mrs. Halifax's old saddle — in her girlish days, Ursula used to be very fond of riding. "She can ride back again from the Mythe," said John. "She wishes to go, and it is best she should; so that nothing need be said, except that Lady Caroline spent a day at Longfield, and that my wife and I accompanied her safe home."

While he spoke, the two ladies came down the field-path. I fancied I heard, even now, a faint echo of that peculiarly sweet and careless laugh, indicating how light were all impressions on a temperament so plastic and weak — so easily re-moulded by the very next influence that fate might throw across her perilous way.

John Halifax assisted her on horseback, took the bridle under one arm and gave the other to his wife. Thus they passed up the path, and out at the White Gate.

I delayed a little while, listening to the wind, and to the prattle of the stream, that went singing along in daylight or in darkness, by our happy home at Longfield. And I sighed to myself, "Poor Lady Caroline!"
CHAPTER II.

Midnight though it was, I sat up until John and his wife came home. They said scarcely anything, but straightway retired. In the morning, all went on in the house as usual, and no one ever knew of this night's episode, except us three.

In the morning, Guy looked wistfully around him, asking for the "pretty lady;" and being told that she was gone, and that he would not be likely to see her again, seemed disappointed for a minute; but soon he went down to play at the stream, and forgot all.

Once or twice I fancied the mother's clear voice about the house was rarer than its wont; that her quick, active, cheerful presence — penetrating every nook, and visiting every creature, as with the freshness of an April wind — was this day softer and sadder; but she did not say anything to me, nor I to her.

John had ridden off early — to the flour-mill, which he still kept on, together with the house at Norton Bury — he always disliked giving up any old associations. At dinner-time he came home, saying he was going out again immediately.

Ursula looked uneasy. A few minutes after, she followed me under the walnut-tree, where I was sitting with Muriel, and asked me if I would go with John to Kingswell.

"The election takes place to-day, and he thinks it right to be there. He will meet Mr. Brithwood and Lord Luxmore; and though there is not the slightest need —
my husband can do all that he has to do alone — still, for my own satisfaction, I would like his brother to be near him."

They invariably called me their brother now; and it seemed as if the name had been mine by right of blood always.

Of course, I went to Kingswell, riding John's brown mare, he himself walking by my side. It was not often that we were thus alone together, and I enjoyed it much. All the old days seemed to come back again as we passed along the quiet roads and green lanes, just as when we were boys together, when I had none I cared for but David, and David cared only for me. The natural growth of things had made a difference in this, but our affection had changed its outward form only, not its essence. I often think that all loves and friendships need a certain three days' burial before we can be quite sure of their truth and immortality. Mine — it happened just after John's marriage, and I may confess it now — had likewise its entombment, bitter as brief. Many cruel hours sat I in darkness, weeping at the door of its sepulchre, thinking that I should never see it again; but, in the dawn of the morning, it rose, and I met it in the desolate garden, different, yet the very same. And after that, it walked with me continually, secure and imperishable evermore.

I rode, and John sauntered beside me along the footpath, now and then plucking a leaf or branch off the hedge, and playing with it, as was his habit when a lad. Often, I caught the old smile — not one of his three boys, not even handsome Guy, had their father's smile.

He was telling me about Enderly Mill, and all his plans there, in the which he seemed very happy. At
last, his long life of duty was merging into the life he loved. He looked as proud and pleased as a boy, in talking of the new inventions he meant to apply in cloth-weaving; and how he and his wife had agreed together to live for some years to come at little Longfield, strictly within their settled income, that all the remainder of his capital might go to the improvement of Enderly Mills and mill-people.

"I shall be master of nearly a hundred, men and women. Think what good we may do! She has half-a-dozen plans on foot already — bless her dear heart!"

It was easy to guess whom he referred to — the one who went hand-in-hand with him in everything.

"Was the dinner in the barn, next Monday, her plan, too?"

"Partly. I thought we would begin a sort of yearly festival for the old tan-yard people, and those about the flour-mill, and the Kingswell tenants — ah, Phineas, wasn't I right about those Kingswell folk?"

These were about a dozen poor families, whom, when our mortgage fell in, he had lured out of Sally Watkins' miserable alley to these old houses, where they had at least fresh country air, and space enough to live wholesomely and decently, instead of herding together like pigs in a sty.

"You ought to be proud of your tenants, Phineas. I assure you, they form quite a contrast to their neighbours, who are Lord Luxmore's."

"And his voters likewise, I suppose? — the 'free and independent burgesses' who are to send Mr. Vermilye to parliament?"

"If they can," said John, biting his lip with that resolute half-combative air which I now saw in him at
times, roused by things which continually met him in his dealings with the world — things repugnant alike to his feelings and his principles, but which he had still to endure, not having risen high enough to oppose, single-handed, the great mass of social corruption which at this crisis of English history kept gathering and gathering, until out of the very horror and loathsomeness of it, an outcry for purification arose.

"Do you know, Phineas, I might last week have sold your houses for double price? They are valuable, this election year, since your five tenants are the only voters in Kingswell who are not likewise tenants of Lord Luxmore. Don't you see how the matter stands?"

It was not difficult, for that sort of game was played all over England, connived at, or at least winked at, by those who had political influence to sell or obtain, until the Reform Bill opened up the election system in all its rottenness and enormity.

"Of course, I knew you would not sell your houses; and I shall use every possible influence I have to prevent your tenants selling their votes. Whatever may be the consequence, the sort of thing that this Kingswell election bids fair to be, is what any honest Englishman ought to set his face against, and prevent if he can."

"Can you?"

"I do not feel sure, but I mean to try. First, for simple right and conscience; secondly, because if Mr. Vermilye is not saved from arrest by being placed in Parliament, he will be outlawed and driven safe out of the country. You see?"

Ay, I did, only too well. Though I foresaw that whatever John was about to do, it must necessarily be
something that would run directly counter to Lord Luxmore — and he had only just signed the lease of Enderly Mills. Still, if right to be done — he ought to do it at all risks, at all costs; and I knew his wife would say so.

We came to the foot of Kingswell Hill, and saw the little hamlet — with its grey old houses, its small, ancient church, guarded by enormous yew-trees, and clothed with ivy that indicated centuries of growth.

A carriage overtook us; in it were two gentlemen, one of whom bowed in a friendly manner to John. He returned it.

"This is well; I shall have one honest gentleman to deal with to-day."

"Who is he?"

"Sir Ralph Oldtower, from whom I bought Longfield. An excellent man — I like him — even his fine old Roman face, like one of his knightly ancestors on the tomb of Kingswell church. There's something pleasant about his stiff courtesy and his staunch Toryism; for he fully believes in it, and acts up to his belief. A true English gentleman, and I respect him."

"Yet, John, Norton Bury calls you a democrat."

"So I am, for I belong to the people. But I nevertheless uphold a true aristocracy — the best men of the country — do you remember our Greeks of old? These ought to govern, and will govern, one day, whether their patent of nobility be birth and titles, or only honesty and brains."

Thus he talked on, and I liked to hear him, for talking was rare in his busy life of constant action. I liked to observe how during these ten years his mind had brooded over many things; how it had grown,
strengthened, and settled itself, enlarging both its vision and its aspirations; as a man does, who, his heart at rest in a happy home, his time and will to look out from thence into the troublous world outside, ready to do his work there likewise. That John was able to do it — ay, beyond most men — few would doubt who looked into his face; strong with the strength of an intellect which owed all its development to himself alone; calm with the wisdom which, if a man is ever to be wise, comes to him after he has crossed the line of thirty years. In that face, where day by day Time was writing its fit lessons — beautiful, because they were so fit — I ceased to miss the boyish grace, and rejoiced in the manhood present, in the old age that was to be.

It seemed almost too short a journey, when, putting his hand on the mare's bridle — the creature loved him, and turned to lick his arm the minute he came near — John stopped me to see the view from across Kingswell churchyard.

"Look, what a broad valley, rich in woods, and meadow-land, and corn. How quiet and blue lie the Welsh hills far away. It does one good to look at them. Nay, it brings back a little bit of me which rarely comes uppermost now, as it used to come long ago, when you read your namesake, and Shakspeare, and that Anonymous Friend who has since made such a noise in the world. I delight in him still. Think of a man of business liking Coleridge."

"I don't see why he should not."

"Nor I. Well, my poetic tastes may come out more at Enderly. Or perhaps when I am an old man, and
have fought the good fight, and — holloa, there! Matthew Hales, have they made you drunk already?"

The man — he was an old workman of ours — touched his hat, and tried to walk steadily past "the master," who looked at once both stern and sad.

"I thought it would be so! — I doubt if there is a voter in all Kingswell who has not got a bribe."

"It is the same everywhere," I said. "What can one man do against it, single-handed?"

"Single-handed or not, every man ought to do what he can. And no man knows how much he can do till he tries."

So saying, he went into the large parlour of the Luxmore Arms, where the election was going on.

A very simple thing, that election! Sir Ralph Oldtower, who was sheriff, sat at a table, with his son, the grave-looking young man who had been with him in the carriage; near them were Mr. Brithwood of the Mythe, and the Earl of Luxmore.

The room was pretty well filled with farmers' labourers and the like. We entered, making little noise; but John's head was taller than most heads present; the sheriff saw him at once, and bowed courteously. So did young Mr. Herbert Oldtower, so did the Earl of Luxmore. Richard Brithwood alone took no notice, but turned his back and looked another way.

It was now many years since I had seen the 'squire, Lady Caroline's husband. He had fulfilled the promise of his youth, and grown into a bloated, coarse-featured, middle-aged man; such a man as one rarely meets with now-a-days; for even I, Phineas Fletcher, have lived to see so great a change in manners and morals, that intemperance, instead of being the usual characteristic
of "a gentleman," has become a rare failing—a universally-contemned disgrace.

"Less noise there!" growled Mr. Brithwood. "Silence, you fellows at the door! Now, Sir Ralph, let's get the business over, and be back for dinner."

Sir Ralph turned his stately grey head to the light, put on his gold spectacles, and began to read the writ of election. As he finished, the small audience set up a feeble cheer.

The sheriff acknowledged it, then leaned over the table, talking with rather frosty civility to Lord Luxmore. Their acquaintance seemed solely that of business. People whispered that Sir Ralph never forgot that the Oldtowers were Crusaders when the Ravenels were—nobody. Also, the baronet, whose ancestors were all honourable men and stainless women, found it hard to overlook a certain royal bar-sinister, which had originated the Luxmore earldom, together with a few other blots which had tarnished that scutcheon since. So folk said; but probably Sir Ralph's high principle was at least as strong as his pride, and that the real cause of his dislike was founded on the too well-known character of the Earl of Luxmore.

They ceased talking; the sheriff rose, and briefly stated that Richard Brithwood, Esquire, of the Mythe, would nominate a candidate.

The candidate was Gerard Vermilye, Esquire; at the mention of whose name one Norton Bury man broke into a horse laugh, which was quenched by his immediate ejection from the meeting.

Then, Mr. Thomas Brown, steward of the Earl of Luxmore, seconded the nomination.

After a few words between the sheriff, his son,
and Lord Luxmore, the result of which seemed rather unsatisfactory than otherwise, Sir Ralph Oldtower again rose.

"Gentlemen and electors, there being no other candidate proposed, nothing is left me but to declare Gerard Vermilye, Esquire —"

John Halifax made his way to the table. "Sir Ralph, pardon my interruption, but may I speak a few words?"

Mr. Brithwood started up with an angry oath.

"My good Sir," said the baronet, with a look of reprehension which proved him of the minority who thought swearing ungentlemanly.

"By —, Sir Ralph, you shall not hear that low fellow!"

"Excuse me, I must, if he has a right to be heard. Mr. Halifax, are you a freeman of Kingswell?"

"I am."

This fact surprised none more than myself.

Brithwood furiously exclaimed that it was a falsehood. "The fellow does not belong to this neighbourhood at all. He was picked up in Norton Bury streets — a beggar, a thief, for all I know."

"You do know very well, Mr. Brithwood. Sir Ralph, I was never either a beggar or a thief. I began life as a working lad — a farm-labourer — until Mr. Fletcher, the tanner, took me into his employ."

"So I have always understood," said Sir Ralph, courteously. "And next to the man who is fortunate enough to boast a noble origin, I respect the man who is not ashamed of an ignoble one."

"That is not exactly my position either," said John, with a half smile. "But we are passing from the
question in hand, which is simply my claim to be a freeman of this borough."

"On what grounds?"

"You will find in the charter, a clause, seldom put in force, that the daughter of a freeman can confer the freedom on her husband. My wife's late father, Mr. Henry March, was a burgess of Kingswell. I claimed my rights, and registered, this year. Ask your clerk, Sir Ralph, if I have not spoken correctly."

The old white-headed clerk allowed the fact.

Lord Luxmore looked considerably surprised, and politely incredulous still. His son-in-law broke out into loud abuse of "this knavery."

"I will pass over this ugly word, Mr. Brithwood, merely stating that —"

"We are quite satisfied," interrupted Lord Luxmore, blandly. "My dear sir, may I request so useful a vote and so powerful an interest as yours, for our friend, Mr. Vermilye?"

"My lord, I should be very sorry for you to misapprehend me for a moment. It is not my intention, except at the last extremity, to vote at all. If I do, it will certainly not be for Mr. Brithwood's nominee. Sir Ralph, I doubt if, under some circumstances, which by your permission I am about to state, Mr. Gerard Vermilye can keep his seat, even if elected."

A murmur arose from the crowd of mechanics and labourers, who, awed by such propinquity to gentry and even nobility, had hitherto hung sheepishly back; but now, like all English crowds, were quite ready to "follow the leader," especially one they knew.

"Hear him! hear the master!" was distinguishable on all sides. Mr. Brithwood looked too enraged for
words; but Lord Luxmore, taking snuff with a sarcastic smile, said —

"Honores mutant mores! — I thought, Mr. Halifax, you eschewed politics?"

"Mere politics I do, but not honesty, justice, morality; and a few facts have reached my knowledge, though possibly not Lord Luxmore's, which make me feel that Mr. Vermilye's election would be an insult to all three; therefore, I oppose it."

A louder murmur rose.

"Silence, you scoundrels!" shouted Mr. Brithwood; adding his usual formula of speech, which a second time extorted the old baronet's grave rebuke.

"It seems, Sir Ralph, that democracy is rife in your neighbourhood. True, my acquaintance has not lain much among the commonality, but still I was not aware that the people choose the member of parliament."

"They do not, Lord Luxmore," returned the sheriff, somewhat haughtily. "But we always hear the people. Mr. Halifax, be brief. What have you to allege against Mr. Brithwood's nominee?"

"First, his qualification. He has not three hundred, nor one hundred a-year. He is deeply in debt, at Norton Bury and elsewhere. Warrants are out against him; and only as an M. P. can he be safe from outlawry. Add to this, an offence common as daylight, yet which the law dare not wink at when made patent — that he has bribed, with great or small sums, everyone of the fifteen electors of Kingswell; and I think I have said enough to convince any honest Englishman that Mr. Gerard Vermilye is not fit to represent them in Parliament."

Here a loud cheer broke from the crowd at the door
and under the open windows where, thick as bees, the villagers had now collected. They, the un-voting, and consequently un briable portion of the community — began to hiss indignantly at the fifteen unlucky voters. For though bribery was, as John had truly said, "as common as daylight," still, if brought openly before the public, the said virtuous public generally condemned it, if they themselves had not been concerned therein.

The sheriff listened uneasily to a sound, very uncommon at elections, of the populace expressing an opinion contrary to that of the lord of the soil.

"Really, Mr. Brithwood, you must have been as ignorant as I was of the character of your nominee, or you would have chosen some one else. Herbert" — he turned to his son, who, until the late dissolution, had sat for some years as member for Norton Bury — "Herbert, are you acquainted with any of these facts?"

Mr. Herbert Oldtower looked uncomfortable.

"Answer," said his father. "No hesitation in a matter of right and wrong. Gentlemen, and my worthy friends, will you hear Mr. Oldtower, whom you all know? Herbert, are these accusations true?"

"I am afraid so," said the grave young man, more gravely.

"Mr. Brithwood, I regret extremely that this discovery was not made before. What do you purpose doing?"

"By the Lord that made me, nothing! The borough is Lord Luxmore's; I could nominate Satan himself if I chose. My man shall stand."

"I think," Lord Luxmore said, with meaning, "it would be better for all parties that Mr. Vermilye should stand."

*John Halifax, Gentleman. II.*
“My lord,” said the baronet; and one could see that not only rigid justice, but a certain obstinacy, marked his character, especially when anything jarred against his personal dignity or prejudices; “you forget that, however desirous I am to satisfy the family to whom this borough belongs, it is impossible for me to see with satisfaction — even though I cannot prevent — the election of any person so unfit to serve his Majesty. If, indeed, there were another candidate, so that the popular feeling might decide this very difficult matter —”

“Sir Ralph,” said John Halifax, determinedly, “this brings me to the purpose for which I spoke. Being a landholder, and likewise a freeman of this borough, I claim the right of nominating a second candidate.”

Intense, overwhelming astonishment struck all present. Such a right had been so long unclaimed, that everybody had forgotten it was a right at all. Sir Ralph and his clerk laid their venerable heads together for some minutes, before they could come to any conclusion on the subject. At last, the sheriff rose.

“I am bound to say, that, though very uncommon, this proceeding is not illegal.”

“Not illegal?” almost screamed Richard Brithwood.

“No, illegal? I therefore wait to hear Mr. Halifax’s nomination. Sir, your candidate is, I hope, no democrat?”

“His political opinions differ from mine, but he is the only gentleman whom I in this emergency can name; and is one whom myself, and I believe all my neighbours, will be heartily glad to see once more in parliament. I beg to nominate Mr. Herbert OldtOWER.”

A decided sensation at the upper half of the room. At the lower half an unanimous, involuntary cheer; for
among our county families there were few so warmly respected as the Oldtowers.

Sir Ralph rose, much perplexed. "I trust that no one present will suppose I was aware of Mr. Halifax's intention. Nor, I understand, was Mr. Oldtower. My son must speak for himself."

Mr. Oldtower, with his accustomed gravity, accompanied by a not unbecoming modesty, said, that in this conjuncture, and being personally acquainted with both Mr. Brithwood and the Earl of Luxmore, he felt no hesitation in accepting the honour offered to him.

"That being the case," said his father, though evidently annoyed, "I have only to fulfill my duty as public officer to the crown."

Amidst some confusion, a show of hands was called for; and then a cry rose of "Go to the poll!"

"Go to the poll!" shouted Mr. Brithwood. "This is a family borough. There has not been a poll here these fifty years. Sir Ralph, your son's mad."

"Sir, insanity is not in the family of the Oldtowers. My position here is simply as sheriff of the county. If a poll be called for —"

"Excuse me, Sir Ralph, it would be hardly worth while. May I offer you —"

It was — only his snuff-box. But the Earl's polite and meaning smile filled up the remainder of the sentence.

Sir Ralph Oldtower drew himself up haughtily, and the fire of youth flashed indignantly from his grand old eyes.

"Lord Luxmore seems not to understand the duties and principles of us country gentlemen," he said coldly, and turned away, addressing the general meeting.
“Gentlemen, the poll will be held this afternoon, according to the suggestion of my neighbour here.”

“Sir Ralph Oldtower has convenient neighbours,” remarked Lord Luxmore.

“Of my neighbour, Mr. Halifax,” repeated the old baronet, louder, and more emphatically. “A gentleman,”—he paused, as if doubtful whether in that title he were awarding a right or bestowing a courtesy, looked at John, and decided—“a gentleman for whom, ever since I have known him, I have entertained the highest respect.”

It was the first public recognition of the position which for some time had been tacitly given to John Halifax in his own neighbourhood. Coming thus, from this upright and honourable old man, whose least merit it was to hold, and worthily, a baronetage four centuries old, it made John’s cheek glow with an honest gratification, and a pardonable pride.

“Tell her,” he said to me, when, the meeting having dispersed, he asked me to ride home and explain the reason of his detention at Kingswell—“Tell my wife all. She will be pleased, you know.”

Ay, she was. Her face glowed and brightened as only a wife’s can—a wife whose dearest pride is in her husband’s honour.

Nevertheless, she hurried me back again as quickly as I came.

As I once more rode up Kingswell hill, it seemed as if the whole parish were agog to see the novel sight. A contested election! truly, such a thing had not been known within the memory of the oldest inhabitant. The fifteen voters—I believe that was the number—were altogether bewildered by a sense of their own im-
importance. Also, by a new and startling fact — which I found Mr. Halifax trying to impress upon a few of them, gathered under the great yew-tree in the church-yard — that a man's vote ought to be the expression of his own conscientious opinion; and that for him to sell it was scarcely less vile than to traffic in the liberty of his son or the honour of his daughter. Among those who listened most earnestly, was a man whom I had before seen to-day — Jacob Baines, once the ringleader of the bread-riots, who had long worked steadily in the tan-yard, and then at the flour-mill. He was the honestest and faithfull est of all John's people — illustrating unconsciously that Divine doctrine, that, often, they love most to whom most has been forgiven.

The poll was to be held in the church — a not uncommon usage in country boroughs, but which from its rarity struck great awe into the Kingswell folk. The churchwarden was placed in the clerk's desk, to receive votes. Not far off, the sheriff sat in his family-pew, bare-headed; by his grave and reverent manner imposing due decorum, which was carefully observed by all except Lord Luxmore and Mr. Brithwood.

These two, apparently sure of their cause, had recovered their spirits, and talked and laughed loudly on the other side of the church. It was a very small building, narrow and cruciform; every word said in it was distinctly audible throughout.

"My lord, gentlemen, and my friends all," said Sir Ralph, rising gravely, "let me hope that every one will respect the sanctity of this place."

Lord Luxmore, who had been going about with his dazzling diamond snuff-box and equally dazzling smile, stopped in the middle of the aisle, bowed, replied,
"With pleasure — certainly!" and walked inside the communion, as if believing that his presence there conveyed the highest compliment he could pay the spot.

The poll began in perfect silence. One after the other, three farmers went up and voted for Mr. Vermilye. There was snuff under their noses — probably something heavier than snuff in their pockets.

Then came up the big, grey-headed fellow I have before mentioned — Jacob Baines. He pulled his forelock to Sir Ralph, rather shyly; possibly in his youth he had made the sheriff's acquaintance under less favourable circumstances. But he plucked up courage.

"Your honour, might a man say a word to 'ee?"

"Certainly! but be quick, my good fellow," replied the baronet, who was noted for his kindly manner to humble folk.

"Sir, I be a poor man. I lives in one o' my lord's houses. I hanna paid no rent for a year. Mr. Brown zays to me, he zays — 'Jacob, vote for Vermilye, and I'll forgive 'ee the rent, and here be two pound ten to start again wi'.' So, as I zays to Matthew Hales (he be Mr. Halifax's tenant, your honour, and my lord's steward ha' paid 'un nigh four pound for his vote), I sure us be poor men, and his lordship a lord and all that — it's no harm, I reckon."

"Holloa! cut it short, you rascal; you're stopping the poll. Vote, I say."

"Ay, ay, 'squire;" and the old fellow, who had some humour in him, pulled his hair again civilly to Mr. Brithwood. "Wait till I ha' got shut o' these."

And he counted out of his ragged pockets a handful of guineas. Poor fellow! how bright they looked; those guineas, that were food, clothing, life.
"Three was paid to I, two to Will Horrocks, and the rest to Matthew Hales. But, sir, we has changed our minds; and please, would'ee give back the money to them as owns it?"

"Still, my honest friend —"

"Thank'ee, Sir Ralph, that's it: we be honest; we couldn't look the master in the face else. Twelve year ago, come Michaelmas, he kept some on us from starving — may be worse. We bean't going to turn rascals on's hands now. Now I'll vote, sir, — and it won't be for Vermilye."

A smothered murmur of applause greeted old Jacob, as he marched back down the aisle, where on the stone benches of the porch was seated a rural jury, who discussed not overfavourably the merits of Lord Luxmore's candidate.

"He owes a power o' money in Norton Bury — he do."

"Why doesn't he show his face at the 'lection, like a decent gen'leman?"

"Fear'd o' bailiffs!" suggested the one constable, old and rheumatic, who guarded the peace of Kingswell. "He's the biggest swindler in all England."

"Curse him!" muttered an old woman. "She was a bonny lass — my Sally! Curse him!"

All this while, Lord Luxmore sat in lazy dignity in the communion-chair, apparently satisfied that as things always had been so they would continue to be; that despite the unheard-of absurdity of a contested election, his pocket-borough was quite secure. It must have been, to say the least, a great surprise to his lordship, when, the poll being closed, its result was found thus: Out of the fifteen votes, six were for Mr. Ver-
milye, nine for his opponent. Mr. Herbert Oldtower was therefore duly elected as member for the borough of Kingswell.

The earl received the announcement with dignified, incredulous silence; but Mr. Brithwood never spared language.

"It's a cheat — an infamous conspiracy! I will unseat him — by my soul I will!"

"You may find it difficult," said John Halifax, counting out the guineas deposited by Jacob Baines, and laying them in a heap before Mr. Brown, the steward. "Small as the number was, I believe any committee of the House of Commons will decide that nine honester votes were never polled. But I regret, my lord — I regret deeply, Mr. Brithwood," and there was a kind of pity in his eye — "that in this matter I have been forced as it were, to become your opponent. Some day perhaps, you may both do me the justice that I now can only look for from my own conscience."

"Very possibly," replied the earl, with a satirical bow. "I believe, gentlemen, our business is ended for to-day, and it is a long drive to Norton Bury. Sir Ralph might we hope for the honour of your company? No? Good day, my friends. Mr. Halifax, your servant."

"One word, my lord. Those workmen of mine, who are your tenants — I am aware what usually results when tenants in arrear vote against their landlords — if, without taking any harsher measures, your agent will be so kind as to apply to me for the rent —"

"Sir, my agent will use his own discretion."

"Then I rely on your lordship's kindliness — your sense of honour."
“Honour is only spoken of between equals,” said the earl, haughtily. “But on one thing Mr. Halifax may always rely — my excellent memory.”

With a smile and bow as perfect as if he were victoriously quitting the field, Lord Luxmore departed. Soon not one remained of all those who had filled the church and churchyard, making there a tumult that is chronicled to this very day by some ancient villagers, who still think themselves greatly ill-used because the Reform Act has blotted out of the list of English boroughs, the “loyal and independent” borough of Kingswell.

Sir Ralph Oldtower stood a good while talking with John; and finally, having sent his carriage on, walked with him down Kingswell Hill towards the manor-house. I, riding alongside, caught fragments of their conversation.

“What you say is all true, Mr. Halifax; and you say it well. But what can we do? Our English constitution is perfect — that is, as perfect as anything human can be. Yet corruptions will arise; we regret, we even blame — but we cannot remove them. It is impossible.”

“Do you think, Sir Ralph, that the maker of this world — which, so far as we can see, He means like all other of His creations gradually to advance toward perfection — do you think He would justify us in pronouncing any good work therein, ‘impossible?’”

“You talk like a young man,” said the baronet, half sadly. “Coming years will shew you the world, and the ways of it, in a clearer light.”

“I earnestly hope so.”

Sir Ralph glanced sideways at him — perhaps with
a sort of envy of the very youth which he thus charitably excused as a thing to be allowed for till riper wisdom came. Something might have smote the old man with a conviction, that in this youth was strength and life, the spirit of the new generation then arising, before which the old worn-out generation would crumble into its natural dust. Dust of the dead ages, honourable dust, to be reverently inurned, and never parricidally profaned by us the living age, who in our turn must follow the same downward path. Dust, venerable and beloved — but still only dust.

The conversation ended, we took our diverse ways; Sir Ralph giving Mr. Halifax a hearty invitation to the manorhouse, and seeing him hesitate, adding, that "Lady Oldtower would shortly have the honour of calling upon Mrs. Halifax."

John bowed. "But I ought to tell you, Sir Ralph, that my wife and I are very simple people — that we make no mere acquaintances, and only desire friends."

"It is fortunate, that Lady Oldtower and myself share the same peculiarity." And, shaking hands with a stately cordiality, the old man took his leave.

"John, you have made a step in the world to-day."

"Have I?" he said, absently, walking in deep thought, and pulling the hedge-leaves as he went along.

"What will your wife say?"

"My wife? bless her!" and he seemed to be only speaking the conclusion of his thinking. "It will make no difference to her — though it might to me. She married me in my low estate — but some day, God willing, no lady in the land shall be higher than my Ursula."

Thus as in all things each thought most of each
other, and both of him — whose will was to them beyond all human love, ay, even such love as theirs.

Slowly, slowly, I watched the grey turrets of the manorhouse fade away in the dusk; the hills grew indistinct, and suddenly we saw the little twinkling light that we knew was the lamp in Longfield parlour, shine out like a glow-worm across the misty fields.

"I wonder if the children are gone to bed, Phineas."

And the fatherly eyes turned fondly to that pretty winking light; the fatherly heart began to hover over the dear little nest of home.

"Surely, there's some one at the white gate, Ursula!"

"John! Ah — it is you."

The mother did not express her feeling after the fashion of most women; but I knew by her waiting there, and by the nervous tremble of her hand, how great her anxiety had been.

"Is all safe, husband?"

"I think so. Mr. Oldtower is elected — he must fly the country."

"Then she is saved."

"Let us hope she is. Come, my darling!" and he wrapped his arm round her, for she was shivering. "We have done all we could and must wait the rest. Come home. Oh!" with a lifted look and a closer strain, "thank God for home!"
CHAPTER III.

We always rose early at Longfield. It was lovely to see the morning sun climbing over One-tree Hill, catching the larchwood, and creeping down the broad slope of our field; thence up towards Redwood and Leckington — until, while the dews yet lay thick on our shadowed valley, Leckington Hill was all in a glow of light. Delicious, too, to hear the little ones running in and out, bright and merry as children ought to be in the first wholesome hours of the day — to see them feeding their chickens and petting their doves — calling every minute on father or mother to investigate and enjoy some wonder in farm-yard or garden. And either was ever ready to listen to the smallest of these little mysteries, knowing that nothing in childhood is too trivial for the notice, too foolish for the sympathy, of those on whom the Father of all men has bestowed the holy dignity of parenthood.

I could see them now, standing among the flowerbeds, out in the sunny morning, the father's tall head in the centre of the group — for he was always the important person during the brief hour or two that he was able to be at home. The mother close beside him, and both knotted round with an interlaced mass of little arms and little eager faces, each wanting to hear everything and to look at everything — everybody to be first and nobody last. None rested quiet or mute for a second, except the one who kept close as his shadow to
her father's side, and unwittingly was treated by him less like the other children, than like some stray spirit of another world, caught and held jealously, but without much outward notice, lest haply it might take alarm, and vanish back again unawares. Whenever he came home and did not see her waiting at the door, his first question was always — "Where's Muriel?"

Muriel's still face looked very bright this morning — the Monday morning after the election — because her father was going to be at home the whole day. It was the annual holiday he had planned for his workpeople. This only "dinnerparty" we had ever given — was in its character not unlike that memorable feast, to which were gathered the poor, the lame, the halt, and the blind — all who needed, and all who could not return, the kindness. There were great cooking preparations — everything that could make merry the heart of man — tea, to comfort the heart of woman, hard-working woman — and lots of bright pennies and silver groats to rejoice the very soul of youth.

Mrs. Halifax, Jem Watkins, and his Jenny, were as busy as bees all morning. John did his best to help, but finally the mother pleaded how hard it was that the children should miss their holiday-walk with him, so we were all dismissed from the scene of action, to spend a long, quiet, two-hours, lying under the great oak on One-tree Hill. The little ones played about till they were tired; then John took out the newspaper, and read about Ciudad Rodrigo and Lord Wellington's entry into Madrid — the battered eagles and the torn and bloody flags of Badajoz, which were on their way home to the Prince Regent.
“I wish the fighting were over, and peace were come,” said Muriel.

But the boys wished quite otherwise; they already gloried in the accounts of battles, played domestic games of French and English, acted garden sieges and blockades.

“How strange and awful it seems, to sit on this green grass, looking down our quiet valley, and then think of the fighting far away in Spain — perhaps this very minute, under this very sky. Boys, I'll never let either of you be a soldier.”

“Poor little fellows!” said I, “they can remember nothing but war time.”

“What would peace be like?” asked Muriel.

“A glorious time, my child — rejoicings everywhere, fathers and brothers coming home, work thriving, poor men's food made cheap, and all things prospering.”

“I should like to live to see it. Shall I be a woman then, father?”

He started. Somehow, she seemed so unlike an ordinary child, that while all the boy's future was merrily planned out — the mother often said, laughing, she knew exactly what sort of a young man Guy would be — none of us ever seemed to think of Muriel as a woman.

“Is Muriel anxious to be grown up? Is she not satisfied with being my little daughter always?”

“Always.”

Her father drew her to him, and kissed her soft, shut, blind eyes. Then, sighing, he rose, and proposed that we should all go home.

This first feast at Longfield was a most merry day. The men and their families came about noon. Soon
after, they all sat down to dinner; Jem Watkins's plan of the barn being universally scouted in favour of an open-air feast, in the shelter of a hay-rick, under the mild blue September sky. Jem presided with a ponderous dignity which throughout the day furnished great private amusement to Ursula, John, and me.

In the afternoon, all rambled about as they liked — many under the cicerone-ship of Master Edwin and Master Guy, who were very popular and grand indeed. Then the mother, with Walter clinging shy-eyed to her gown, went among the other poorer mothers there; talked to one, comforted another, counselled a third, and invariably listened to all. There was little of patronizing benevolence about her; she spoke freely, sometimes even with some sharpness, when reproving comment was needed; but her earnest kindness, her active goodness, darting at once to the truth and right of things, touched the women's hearts. While a few were a little wholesomely afraid of her — all recognized the influence of "the mistress," penetrating deep and sure, extending far and wide.

She laughed at me when I told her so — said it was all nonsense — that she only followed John's simple recipe, for making his work-people feel that he was a friend as well as a master.

"What is that?"

"To pay attention and consideration to all they say; and always to take care and remember to call them by their right Christian names."

I could not help smiling — it was an answer so like Mrs. Halifax, who never indulged in any verbal sentimentalism. Her part in the world was deeds.

It was already evening, when, having each contri-
buted our quota, great or small, to the entertainment, we all came and sat on the long bench under the walnut-tree. The sun went down red behind us, throwing a last glint on the upland field, where, from top to bottom, the young men and women were running in a long "thread-the-needle." Their voices and laughter came faintly down to us.

"I think they have had a happy day, John. They will work all the better to-morrow."

"I am quite sure of it."

"So am I," said Guy, who had been acting the young master all day, condescendingly stating his will and giving his opinion on every subject, greatly petted and looked up to by all, to the no small amusement of us elders.

"Why, my son?" asked the father, smiling.

But here Master Guy was posed, and everybody laughed at him. He coloured up with childish anger, and crept nearer his mother. She made a place for him at her side, looking appealingly at John.

"Guy has got out of his depth — we must help him into safe waters again," said the father. "Look here, my son, this is the reason — and it is well not to be 'quite sure' of a thing unless one knows the reason. Our people will work the better, because they will work from love. Not merely doing their duty, and obeying their master in a blind way, but feeling an interest in him and all that belong to him; knowing that he feels the same in them. Knowing, too, that although, being their superior in many things, he is their master and they his servants, he never forgets that saying, which I read out of the Bible, children, this morning: 'One is your master — even Christ, and all ye are brethren.' Do you understand?"
I think they did, for he was accustomed to talk with them thus — even beyond their years. Not in the way of preachifying — for these little ones had in their childish days scarcely any so-called "religious instruction," save the daily chapter out of the New Testament, and the father and mother's daily life, which was a simple and literal carrying out of the same. To that one test was brought, all that was thought, or said, or done, in our household, where it often seemed as if the Master were as visibly obeyed and followed as in the household which He loved at Bethany.

As to what doctrinal creed we held, or what sect we belonged to, I can give but the plain answer which John gave to all such inquiries — that we were Christians.

After these words from the Holy Book (which the children always listened to with great reverence, as to the Book which their parents most loved and honoured, the reading and learning of which was granted as a high reward and favour, and never carelessly allowed, or — horrible to think! — inflicted as a punishment), we ceased smiling at Guy, who in his turn ceased to frown. The little storm blew over, as our domestic storms usually did, leaving a clear, free heaven. Loving one another, of course we quarrelled sometimes; but we always made it up again, because — we loved one another.

"Father, I hear the click of the gate. There's somebody coming," said Muriel.

The father paused in a great romp with his sons — paused, as he ever did when his little daughter's soft voice was heard. "'Tis only a poor boy — who can he be?"

"One of the folk that come for milk most likely —"
but we have none to give away to-day. What do you want, my lad?"

The lad, who looked miserable and scared, opened his mouth with a stupid "Eh?"

Ursula repeated the question.

"I wants Jacob Baines."

"You'll find him with the rest, in front of that hay-rick, over his pipe and ale."

The lad was off like a shot.

"He is from Kingswell, I think. Can anything be the matter, John?"

"I will go and see. No, boys, no more games — I will be back presently."

He went, apparently rather anxious — as was easy to find out by only a glance at the face of Ursula. Soon she rose and went after him. I followed her.

We saw, close by the hay-rick, a group of men, angrily talking. The gossiping mothers were just joining them. Far off, in the field, the younger folk were still dancing merrily down their long line of "Thread-the-needle."

As we approached, we heard sobbing from one or two women, and loud curses from the men.

"What's amiss?" said Mr. Halifax, as he came in the midst — and both curses and sobbings were silenced. All began a confused tale of wrongs. "Stop, Jacob — I can't make it out."

"This lad ha' seen it all. And he bean't a liar in big things — speak up, Billy."

Somehow or other, we extracted the news brought by ragged Billy, who on this day had been left in charge of the five dwellings rented of Lord Luxmore. During the owners' absence there had been a distraint for rent;
every bit of the furniture was carried off; two or three aged and sick folk were left lying on the bare floor — and the poor families here would have to go home to nothing but their four walls.

Again, at repetition of the story, the women wept and the men swore.

"Be quiet," said Mr. Halifax again. But I saw that his honest English blood was boiling within him. "Jem" — and Jem Watkins started, so unusually sharp and commanding was his master's tone — "Saddle the mare — quick. I shall ride to Kingswell, and thence to the sheriff's."

"God bless 'ee, sir!" sobbed Jacob Baines' widowed daughter-in-law, who had left, as I overheard her telling Mrs. Halifax, a sick child to-day at home.

Jacob Baines took up a heavy knobbed stick which happened to be leaning against the hay-rick, and eyed it with savage meaning.

"Who be they as has done this, master?"

"Put that bludgeon down, Jacob."

The man hesitated — met his master's determined eye — and obeyed him, meek as a lamb.

"But what is us to do, sir?"

"Nothing. Stay here till I return — you shall come to no harm. You will trust me, my men?"

They gathered round him — those big, fierce-looking fellows, in whom was brute force enough to attack or resist anything — yet he made them listen to reason. He explained as much as he could of the injustice which had apparently been done them — injustice which had overstepped the law, and could only be met by keeping absolutely within the law.

"It is partly my fault, that I did not pay the rent
to-day — I will do so at once, I will get your goods back to-night, if I can. If not, you hale fellows can rough it, and we’ll take the women and children in till morning — can we not, love?"

"Ay, readily!" said the mother. "Don’t cry, my good women. Mary Baines, give me your baby. Cheer up, the master will set all right!"

John smiled at her in fond thanks — the wife who hindered him by no selfishness, but was his right hand and support in everything. As he mounted, she gave him his whip, whispering —

"Take care of yourself, mind. Come back, as soon as you can."

And lingeringly she watched him gallop down the field.

It was a strange three hours we passed in his absence. The misty night came down, and round about the house crept wailing the loud September wind. We brought the women into the kitchen — the men lit a fire in the farm-yard, and sat suddenly round it. It was as much as I could do to persuade Guy and Edwin to go to bed, instead of watching that "beautiful blaze." There, more than once, I saw the mother standing, with a shawl over her head, and her white gown blowing, trying to reason into patience those poor fellows, savage with their wrongs.

"How far have they been wronged, Phineas? What is the strict law of the case? Will any harm come to John for interfering?"

I told her, no, so far as I knew. That the cruelty and illegality lay in the haste of the distraint, and in the goods having been carried off at once, giving no oppor-
tunity of redeeming them. It was easy to grind the faces of the poor, who had no helper.

"Never mind; my husband will see them righted — at all risks."

"But Lord Luxmore is his landlord."

She looked troubled. "I see what you mean. It is easy to make an enemy. No matter — I fear not. I fear nothing while John does what he feels to be right — as I know he will; the issue is in higher hands than ours or Lord Luxmore's. — But where's Muriel?"

For as we sat talking, the little girl — whom nothing could persuade to go to bed till her father came home — had slipped from my hand, and gone out into the blustering night. We found her standing all by herself under the walnut-tree.

"I wanted to listen for father. When will he come?"

"Soon, I hope," answered the mother, with a sigh. "You must not stay out in the cold and the dark, my child."

"I am not cold, and I know no dark," said Muriel, softly.

And thus so it was with her always. In her spirit, as in her outward life, so innocent and harmless, she knew no dark. No cold looks — no sorrowful sights — no winter — no age. The hand laid upon her dear eyes, pressed eternal peace down on her soul. I believe she was, if ever human being was, purely and entirely happy. It was always sweet for us to know this — it is very sweet still, Muriel, our beloved!

We brought her within the house, but she persisted in sitting in her usual place, on the door-sill, "waiting" for her father. It was she who first heard the white gate swing, and told us he was coming.
Ursula ran down to the stream to meet him.

When they came up the path, it was not alone — John was helping a lame old woman, and his wife carried in her arms a sick child, on whom, when they entered the kitchen, Mary Baines threw herself in a passion of crying.

"What have they been doing to 'ee, Tommy? — 'ee warn't like this when I left 'ee. O they've been killing my lad, they have!"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Halifax; "we'll get him well again, please God. Listen to what the master's saying."

He was telling to the men who gathered round the kitchen-door, the results of his journey.

It was — as I had expected from his countenance the first minute he appeared — fruitless. He had found all things at Kingswell as stated. Then he rode to the sheriff's; but Sir Ralph was absent, sent for to Luxmore Hall on very painful business.

"My friends," said the master, stopping abruptly in his narrative, "for a few hours you must make up your minds to sit still and bear it. Every man has to learn that lesson at times. Your landlord has — I would rather be the poorest among you, than Lord Luxmore this night. Be patient; we'll lodge you all, somehow. To-morrow I will pay your rent — get your goods back — and you shall begin the world again, as my tenants, not Lord Luxmore's."

"Hurrah!" shouted the men, easily satisfied; as working people are, who have been used all their days to live from hand to mouth, and to whom the present is all in all. They followed the master, who settled them in the barn; and then came back to consult with his wife as to where the women could be stowed away. So, in a short
time, the five homeless families were cheerily disposed of — all but Mary Baines and her sick boy.

“What can we do with them?” said John, questioningly to Ursula.

“I see but one course. We must take him in; his mother says hunger is the chief thing that ails the lad. She fancies that he has had the measles; but our children have had it too, so there’s no fear. Come up stairs, Mary Baines.”

Passing, with a thankful look, the room where her own boys slept, the good mother established this forlorn young mother and her two children in a little closet outside the nursery door; cheered her with comfortable words; helped her ignorance with wise counsels — for Ursula was the general doctress of all the poor folk round. It was almost midnight before she came down to the parlour where John and I sat, he with little Muriel asleep in his arms. The child would gladly have slumbered away all night there, with the delicate, pale profile pressed close into his breast.

“Is all right, love? How tired you must be!” John put his left arm round his wife as she came and knelt by him, in front of the cheerful fire.

“Tired? Oh, of course; but you can’t think how comfortable they are up-stairs. Only poor Mary Baines does nothing but cry, and keep telling me that nothing ails her lad but hunger. Are they so very poor?”

John did not immediately answer; I fancied he looked suddenly uneasy, and imperceptibly pressed his little girl closer to him.

“The lad seems very ill. Much worse than our children were with measles.”

“Yet how they suffered, poor pets! especially Walter.
It was the thought of them made me pity her so. Surely I have not done wrong?"

"No — love; quite right and kind. Acting so, I think one need not fear. See, mother, how soundly Muriel sleeps. It's almost a pity to waken her — but we must go to bed now."

"Stay one minute," I said. "Tell us, John — I quite forgot to ask till now — what is that 'painful business' you mentioned, which called the sheriff to Lord Luxmore's?"

John glanced at his wife, leaning fondly against him, her face full of sweet peace, then at his little daughter asleep, then round the cheerful fire-lit room, outside which the autumn night-wind went howling furiously.

"Love, that we are so happy, we must not, dare not, condemn."

She looked at him with a shocked inquiry. "You don't mean — No; it is impossible!"

"It is true. She has gone away."

Ursula sank down, hiding her face. "Horrible! And only two days since she was here, 'kissing our children."

We all three kept a long silence; then I ventured to ask when she went away?

"This morning, early. They took — at least, Mr. Vermilye did — all the property of Lord Luxmore's that he could lay his hands upon — family jewels and money to a considerable amount. The earl is pursuing him now, not only as his daughter's seducer, but as a swindler and a thief."

"And Richard Brithwood?"

"Drinks — and drinks — and drinks. That is the beginning and the end of all."

There was no more to be said. She had dropped for
ever out of her old life, as completely as a star out of the sky. Henceforth, for years and years, neither in our home, nor, I believe, in any other, was there the slightest mention made of Lady Caroline Brithwood.

* * * * *

All the next day John was from home, settling the Kingswell affair. The ejected tenants — our tenants now — left us at last, giving a parting cheer for Mr. Halifax, the best master in all England.

Sitting down to tea, with no small relief that all was over, John asked his wife after the sick lad.

"He is very ill still, I think."

"Are you sure it is measles?"

"I imagine so; and I have seen nearly all childish diseases, except — no, that is quite impossible!" added the mother, hastily. She cast an anxious glance on her little ones; her hand slightly shook as she poured out their cups of milk. "Do you think, John — it was hard to do it when the child is so ill — I ought to have sent them away with the others?"

"Certainly not. If it were anything dangerous, of course Mary Baines would have told us. What are the lad's symptoms?"

As Ursula informed him, I thought he looked more and more serious; but he did not let her see.

"Make your mind easy, love; a word from Dr. Jessop will decide all. I will fetch him after tea. Cheer up! Please God, no harm will come to our little ones!"

The mother brightened again; with her all the rest; and the tea-table clatter went on, merry as ever. Then, it being a wet night, Mrs. Halifax gathered her boys round her knee for an evening chat over the kitchen-fire; while through the open door, out of the dim parlour
came "Muriel's voice," as we called the harpsichord. It seemed sweeter than ever this night, like — as her father once said, but checked himself, and never said it afterwards — like Muriel talking with angels.

He sat listening awhile, then, without any remark, put on his coat and went out to fetch the good doctor. I followed him down to the stream.

"Phineas," he said, "will you mind — don't notice it to the mother — but mind and keep her and the children down stairs till I come back?"

I promised. "Are you uneasy about Mary Baines's lad?"

"No; I have full trust in human means, and above all, in — what I need not speak of. Still, precautions are wise. Do you remember that day when, rather against Ursula's wish, I vaccinated the children?"

I remembered. Also that the virus had taken effect with all but Muriel; and we had lately talked of repeating the much-blamed and miraculous experiment upon her. I hinted this.

"Phineas, you mistake," he answered, rather sharply. "She is quite safe — as safe as the others. I wrote to Dr. Jenner himself. But don't mention that I spoke about this."

"Why?"

"Because to-day I heard that they have had the small-pox at Kingswell."

I felt a cold shudder. Though inoculation and vaccination had made it less fatal among the upper classes, this frightful scourge still decimated the poor, especially children. Great was the obstinacy in refusing relief; and loud the outcry in Norton Bury, when Mr. Halifax, who had met and known Dr. Jenner in London — finding no
practitioner that would do it, persisted in administering the vaccine virus himself to his children. But still, with a natural fear, he had kept them out of all risk of taking the smallpox until now.

"John, do you think ——"

"No; I will not allow myself to think. Not a word of this at home, mind. Good-bye!"

He walked away, and I returned up the path heavily as if a cloud of terror and dole were visibly hanging over our happy Longfield.

The doctor appeared; he went up to the sick lad; then he and Mr. Halifax were closeted together for a long time. After he was gone, John came into the kitchen, where Ursula sat with Walter on her knee. The child was in his little white night-gown, playing with his elder brothers, and warming his rosy toes.

The mother had recovered herself entirely: was content and gay. I saw John’s glance at her, and then — and then I feared.

"What does the doctor say? The child will soon be well?"

"We must hope so."

"John, what do you mean? I thought the little fellow looked better when I went up to see him last. And there — I hear the poor mother up-stairs crying."

"She may cry; she has need," said John, bitterly. "She knew it all the while. She never thought of our children; but they are safe. Be content, love — please God, they are quite safe. Very few take it after vaccination."

"It — do you mean the smallpox? Has the lad got smallpox? Oh, God help us! My children — my children!"

She grew white as death; long shivers came over her
from head to foot. The little boys, frightened, crept up to her; she clasped them altogether in her arms, turning her head with a wild, savage look, as if some one were stealing behind to take them from her.

Muriel, perceiving the silence, felt her way across the room, and touching her mother's face, said, anxiously, "Has anybody been naughty?"

"No, my darling; no!"

"Then never mind. Father says, nothing will harm us, except being naughty. Did you not, father?"

John snatched his little daughter up to his bosom, and called her for the hundredth time the name my poor old father had named her — the "blessed" child.

We all grew calmer; the mother wept a little, and it did her good: we comforted the boys and Muriel, telling them that in truth nothing was the matter, only we were afraid of their catching the little lad's sickness, and they must not go near him.

"Yes; she shall quit the house this minute — this very minute," said the mother, sternly, but with a sort of wildness too.

Her husband made no immediate answer; but as she rose to leave the room, he detained her. "Ursula, do you know the child is all but dying?"

"Let him die! The wicked woman! She knew it, and she let me bring him among my children — my own poor children!"

"I would she had never come. But what is done, is done. Love, think — if you were turned out of doors this bleak, rainy night — with a dying child."

"Hush! hush!" — She sank down with a sob.

"My darling!" whispered John, as he made her lean against him — her support and comfort in all things;
"do you think my heart is not ready to break, like yours? But I trust in God. This trouble came upon us while we were doing right; let us do right still, and we need not fear. Humanly speaking, our children are safe; it is only our own terror which exaggerates the danger. They may not take the disease at all. Then, how could we answer it to our conscience if we turned out this poor soul, and her child died?"

"No! no!"

"We will use all precautions. The boys shall be moved to the other end of the house."

I proposed that they should occupy my room, as I had had small-pox, and was safe.

"Thank you, Phineas; and even should they take it, Dr. Jenner has assured me that in every case after vaccination it has been the very slightest form of the complaint. Be patient, love; trust in God, and have no fear."

Her husband's voice gradually calmed her. At last, she turned and clung round his neck, silently and long. Then she rose up and went about her usual duties, just as if this horrible dread were not upon us.

Mary Baines and her children stayed in the house. Next day, about noon, the little lad died.

It was the first death that had ever happened under our roof. It shocked us all very much, especially the children. We kept them far away on the other side of the house — out of the house, when possible — but still they would be coming back and looking up at the window, at which, as Muriel declared, the little sick boy "had turned into an angel and flown away." The mother allowed the fancy to remain; she thought it wrong and horrible that a child's first idea of death should be
“putting into the pit-hole.” Truer and more beautiful was Muriel’s instinctive notion of “turning into an angel and flying away.” So we arranged that the poor little body should be coffined and removed before the children rose next morning.

It was a very quiet tea-time. A sense of awe was upon the little ones, they knew not why. Many questions they asked about poor Tommy Baines, and where he had gone to, which the mother only answered after the simple manner of scripture — he “was not, for God took him.” But when they saw Mary Baines go crying down the field-path, Muriel asked “why she cried? how could she cry, when it was God who had taken little Tommy?”

Afterwards she tried to learn of me privately, what sort of place it was he had gone to, and how he went; whether he had carried with him all his clothes, and especially the great bunch of woodbine she sent to him yesterday; and above all, whether he had gone by himself, or if some of the “angels,” which held so large a place in Muriel’s thoughts and of which she was ever talking, had come to fetch him and take care of him. She hoped — indeed, she felt sure — they had. She wished she had met them, or heard them about in the house.

And seeing how the child’s mind was running on the subject, I thought it best to explain to her as simply as I could, the solemn putting off of life and putting on of immortality. I wished that my darling, who could never visibly behold death, should understand it as no image of terror, but only as a calm sleep and a joyful waking in another country, the glories of which eye had not seen nor ear heard.
"Eye has not seen!" repeated Muriel, thoughtfully; "can people see there, Uncle Phineas?"
"Yes, my child. There is no darkness at all."

She paused a minute, and said earnestly, "I want to go — I very much want to go. How long do you think it will be before the angels come for me?"

"Many, many years, my precious one," said I, shuddering; for truly she looked so like them, that I began to fear they were close at hand.

But a few minutes afterwards she was playing with her brothers and talking to her pet doves, so sweet and human-like, that the fear passed away.

We sent the children early to bed that night, and sat long by the fire, consulting how best to remove infection, and almost satisfied that in these two days it could not have taken any great hold on the house. John was firm in his belief in Dr. Jenner and vaccination. We went to bed greatly comforted, and the household sank into quiet slumbers, even though under its roof slept, in deeper sleep, the little dead child.

That small closet, which was next to the nursery I occupied, safely shut out by it from the rest of the house, seemed very still now. I went to sleep thinking of it, and dreamed of it afterwards.

In the middle of the night a slight noise woke me, and I almost fancied I was dreaming still; for there I saw a little white figure gliding past my bed's foot; so softly and soundlessly — it might have been the ghost of a child — and it went into the dead child's room.

For a moment, that superstitious instinct which I believe we all have, paralyzed me. Then I tried to listen. There was most certainly a sound in the next room — a faint cry, quickly smothered — a very human
cry. All the stories I had ever heard of supposed death and premature burial rushed horribly into my mind. Conquering alike my superstitious dread or fear of entering the infected room, I leaped out of bed, threw on some clothes, got a light, and went in.

There lay the little corpse, all safe and still — for ever. And like its own spirit watching in the night at the head of the forsaken clay, sat Muriel.

I snatched her up and ran with her out of the room, in an agony of fear.

She hid her face on my shoulder, trembling. “I have not done wrong, have I? I wanted to know what it was like — that which you said was left of little Tommy. I touched it — it was so cold. Oh! Uncle Phineas! *that* isn’t poor little Tommy?”

“No, my blessed one — no, my dearest child! Don’t think of it any more.”

And, hardly knowing what was best to be done, I called John, and told him where I had found his little daughter. He never spoke, but snatched her out of my arms into his own, took her in his room, and shut the door.

From that time our fears never slumbered. For one whole week we waited, watching the children hour by hour, noting each change in each little face; then Muriel sickened.

It was I who had to tell her father, when as he came home in the evening I met him by the stream. It seemed to him almost like the stroke of death.

“Oh, my God! not her! Any but her!” And by that I knew, what I had long guessed, that she was the dearest of all his children.

Edwin and Walter took the disease likewise, though
lightly. No one was in absolute danger except Muriel. But for weeks we had what people call “sickness in the house;” that terrible overhanging shadow which mothers and fathers well know; under which one must live and move, never resting night nor day. This mother and father bore their portion, and bore it well. When she broke down, which was not often, he sustained her. If I were to tell of all he did — how, after being out all day, night after night he would sit up watching by and nursing each little fretful sufferer, patient as a woman, and pleasant as a child-play-mate — perhaps those who talk loftily of “the dignity of man” would smile. I pardon them.

The hardest minute of the twenty-four hours was, I think, that when, coming home, he caught sight of me afar off waiting for him, as I always did, at the White Gate; and many a time, as we walked down to the stream, I saw — what no one else saw but God. After such times I used often to ponder over what great love His must be, who, as theclearest revelation of it, and of its nature, calls Himself “the Father.”

And He brought us safe through our time of anguish: He left us every one of our little ones.

One November Sunday, when all the fields were in a mist, and the rain came pouring softly and incessantly upon the patient earth which had been so torn and dried up by east winds, that she seemed glad enough to put aside the mockery of sunshine and melt in quiet tears, we once more gathered our flock together in thankfulness and joy.

Muriel came down stairs triumphantly in her father’s arms, and lay on the sofa smiling; the firelight dancing on her small white face — white and unscarred.
disease had been kind to the blind child; she was, I think, more sweet-looking than ever. Older, perhaps; the round prettiness of childhood gone — but her whole appearance wore that inexpressible expression, in which, for want of a suitable word, we all embody our vague notions of the unknown world, and call "angelic."

"Does Muriel feel quite well — quite strong and well?" the father and mother both kept saying every now and then, as they looked at her. She always answered, "Quite well."

In the afternoon, when the boys were playing in the kitchen, and John and I were standing at the open door, listening to the dropping of the rain in the garden, we heard, after its long silence, Muriel's "voice."

"Father, listen!" whispered the mother, linking her arm through his as he stood at the door. Soft and slow came the notes of the old harpsichord — she was playing one of the abbey anthems. Then it melted away into melodies we knew not — sweet and strange. Her parents looked at one another — their hearts were full of thankfulness and joy.

"And Mary Baines' little lad is in the church-yard."

The father spoke a few parting words, and the mother was at last reassured and left her, John and I, to the task of searching the street, the church-yard, and the cloisters of the abbey, for the housemaid, who had certainly left her in care. For more than an hour we wandered about, asking, searching, jetting, and praying, as if by our united efforts we might call her back. We met with no success, and in the end, we retired to the better supplies of a neighborhood inn.
CHAPTER IV.

"What a comfort! the daylight is lengthening. I think this has been the very dreariest winter I ever knew. Has it not, my little daughter? Who brought her these violets?"

And John placed himself on a corner of my own particular arm-chair, where, somehow or other, Muriel always lay curled up at tea-time now — (ay, and many hours in the day-time, though we hardly noticed it at first). Taking between his hands the little face, which broke into smiles at the merest touch of the father's fingers, he asked her, "when she intended to go a walk with him?"

"To-morrow."

"So we have said for a great many to-morrows, but it is always put off. What do you think, mother — is the little maid strong enough?"

Mrs. Halifax hesitated; said something about "east winds."

"Yet I think it would do her good if she braved east winds, and played out of doors as the boys do. Would you not like it, Muriel?"

The child shrank back with an involuntary "Oh, no."

"That is because she is a little girl necessarily less strong than the lads are. Is it not so, Uncle Phineas?" continued her father, hastily, for I was watching them.

"Muriel will be quite strong when the warm weather comes. We have had such a severe winter. Everyone
of the children has suffered," said the mother, in a cheerful tone, as she poured out a cup of cream for her daughter, to whom was now given, by common consent, all the richest and rarest of the house.

"I think everyone has," said John, looking round on his apple-cheeked boys; it must have been a sharp eye that detected any decrease of health, or increase of suffering, there. "But my plan will set all to rights. I spoke to Mrs. Tod yesterday. She will be ready to take us all in. Boys, shall you like going to Enderly? You shall go as soon as ever the larch-wood is green."

For, at Longfield, already we began to make a natural almanack and chronological table. "When the may was out" — "When Guy found the first robin's nest" — "When the field was all cowslips" — and so on.

"Is it absolutely necessary we should go?" said the mother, who had a strong home-clinging, and already began to hold tiny Longfield as the apple of her eye.

"I think so, unless you will consent to let me go alone to Enderly."

She shook her head.

"What, with those troubles at the mills? How can you speak so lightly?"

"Not lightly, love — only cheerfully. The troubles must be borne; why not bear them with as good heart as possible? They cannot last — let Lord Luxmore do what he will. If, as I told you, we re-let Longfield for this one summer to Sir Ralph, we shall save enough to put the mill in thorough repair. If my landlord will not do it, I will; and add a steam-engine, too."

Now the last was a daring scheme, discussed many a winter night by us three in Longfield parlour. At
first, Mrs. Halifax had looked grave — most women would, especially wives and mothers, in those days when every innovation was regarded with horror, and improvement and ruin were held synonymous. She might have thought so too, had she not believed in her husband. But now, at mention of the steam-engine, she looked up and smiled.

"Lady Oldtower asked me about it to-day. She said, 'she hoped you would not ruin yourself, like Mr. Miller of Glasgow!' I said I was not afraid."

Her husband returned a bright look. "It is easier to make the world trust one, when one is trusted by one's own household."

"Ah! never fear; you will make your fortune yet, in spite of Lord Luxmore."

For, all winter, John had found out how many cares come with an attained wish. Chiefly, because, as the earl had said, his lordship possessed an "excellent memory." The Kingswell election had worked its results in a hundred small ways, wherein the heavy hand of the landlord could be laid upon the tenant. He bore up bravely against it; but hard was the struggle between might and right, oppression and staunch resistance. It would have gone harder, but for one whom John now began to call his "friend;" at least, one who invariably called Mr. Halifax so — our neighbour, Sir Ralph Oldtower.

"How often has Lady Oldtower been here, Ursula?"

"She called first, you remember, after our trouble with the children; she has been twice since, I think. To-day, she wanted me to bring Muriel and take luncheon at the Manor House. I shall not go — I told her so."

"But gently, I hope? — you are so very out-spoken,
love. You made her clearly understand that it is not from incivility we decline her invitations? — Well — never mind! Some day we will take our place, and so shall our children, with any gentry in the land."

I think — though John rarely betrayed it — he had strongly this presentiment of future power, which may often be noticed in men who have carved out their own fortunes. They have in them the instinct to rise; and as surely as water regains its own level, so do they, from however low a source, ascend to theirs.

Not many weeks after, we removed in a body to Enderly. Though the chief reason was, that John might be constantly on the spot, superintending his mills, yet I fancied I could detect a secondary reason, which he would not own even to himself; but which peered out unconsciously in his anxious looks. I saw it when he tried to rouse Muriel into energy, by telling her how much she would enjoy Enderly Hill; how sweet the primroses grew in the beech-wood, and how wild and fresh the wind swept over the common, morning and night. His daily longing seemed to be to make her love the world, and the things therein. He used to turn away, almost in pain, from her smile, as she would listen to all he said, then steal off to the harpsichord, and begin that soft, dreamy music, which the children called "talking to angels."

We came to Enderly through the valley, where was John's cloth-mill. Many a time in our walks he and I had passed it, and stopped to listen to the drowsy fall of the miniature Niagara, or watch the incessant turning—turning of the great water-wheel. Little we thought he should ever own it, or that John would be pointing it.
JOHN HALIFAX. 71

out to his own boys, lecturing them on "under-shot," and "over-shot," as he used to lecture me.

It was sweet, though half-melancholy, to see Enderly again; to climb the steep meadows, and narrow mule-paths, up which he used to help me so kindly. He could not now; he had his little daughter in his arms. It had come, alas! to be a regular thing that Muriel should be carried up every slight ascent, and along every hard road. We paused half-way up on a low wall, where I had many a time rested, watching the sunset over Nunneley Hill — watching for John to come home. Every night — at least after Miss March went away — he usually found me sitting there.

He turned to me and smiled. "Dost remember, lad?" at which appellation Guy widely stared. But, for a minute, how strangely it brought back old times, when there were neither wife nor children — only he and I! This seat on the wall, with its small twilight picture of the valley below the mill, and Nunneley heights, with that sentinel row of sun-set trees — was all mine — mine solely — for evermore.

"Enderly is just the same, Phineas. Twelve years have made no change — except in us." And he looked fondly at his wife, who stood a little way off, holding firmly on the wall, in a hazardous group, her three boys. "I think the chorus and comment on all life might be included in two brief phrases given by our friend Shakspeare, one to Hamlet the other to Othello; "'Tis very strange,' and "'Tis better as it is.'"

"Ay, ay," said I, thoughtfully. Better as it was; better, a thousand times!

I went to Mrs. Halifax, and helped her to describe the prospect to the inquisitive boys; finally coaxing the
refractory Guy up the winding-road, where, just as if it had been yesterday, stood my old friends, my four Lombardy poplars, three together and one apart.

Mrs. Tod descried us afar off, and was waiting at the gate; a little stouter, a little rosier — that was all. In her delight, she absolutely forgot herself so as to address the mother as Miss March; at which long-unspoken name Ursula started, her colour went and came, and her eyes turned restlessly towards the church hard by.

"It is all right — Miss — Ma'am, I mean. Tod bears in mind Mr. Halifax's orders, and has planted lots o' flower-roots and evergreens."

"Yes, I know."

And when she had put all her little ones to bed — we wondering where the mother was, went out towards the little churchyard, and found her quietly sitting there.

We were very happy at Enderly. Muriel brightened up before she had been there many days. She began to throw off her listlessness, and go about with me everywhere. It was the season she enjoyed most — the time of the singing of birds, and the springing of delicate-scented flowers. I myself never loved the beechwood better than did our Muriel. She used continually to tell us, this was the happiest spring she had ever had in her life.

John was much occupied now. He left his Norton Bury business under efficient care, and devoted himself almost wholly to the cloth mill. Early and late he was there. Very often Muriel and I followed him, and spent whole mornings in the mill meadows. Through them the stream on which the machinery depended was led by various contrivances, checked or increased in its flow,
making small ponds, or locks, or waterfalls. We used to stay for hours listening to its murmur, to the sharp, strange cry of the swans that were kept there, and the twitter of the water-hen to her young among the reeds. Then the father would come to us and remain a few minutes — fondling Muriel, and telling me how things went on at the mill.

One morning, as we three sat there, on the brickwork of a little bridge, underneath an elm tree, round the roots of which the water made a pool so clear, that we could see a large pike lying like a black shadow, half-way down; John suddenly said —

“What is the matter with the stream? Do you notice, Phineas?”

“I have seen it gradually lowering — these two hours. I thought you were drawing off the water.”

“Nothing of the kind — I must look after it. Good bye, my little daughter. Don’t cling so fast; father will be back soon — and isn’t this a sweet sunny place for a little maid to be lazy in?”

His tone was gay, but he had an anxious look. He walked rapidly down the meadows, and went into his mill. Then I saw him retracing his steps, examining where the stream entered the bounds of his property. Finally, he walked off towards the little town at the head of the valley — beyond which, buried in woods, lay Luxmore Hall. It was two hours more before we saw him again.

Then he came towards us, narrowly watching the stream. It had sunk more and more — the muddy bottom was showing plainly.

“Yes — that’s it — it can be nothing else! I did not think he would have dared to do it.”
"Do what, John? Who?"
"Lord Luxmore." He spoke in the smothered tones of violent passion. "Lord Luxmore has turned out of its course the stream that works my mill."

I tried to urge that such an act was improbable; in fact, against the law.

"Not against the law of the great against the little! Besides, he gives a decent colouring — says he only wants the use of the stream three days a week, to make fountains at Luxmore Hall. But I see what it is — I have seen it coming a whole year. He is determined to ruin me!"

John said this in much excitement. He hardly felt Muriel's tiny creeping hands.

"What does 'ruin' mean? Is anybody making father angry?"
"No, my sweet — not angry — only very, very miserable!"

He snatched her up, and buried his head in her soft, childish bosom. She kissed him and patted his hair.

"Never mind, dear father. You say nothing signifies, if we are only good. And father is always good."
"I wish I were."

He sat down with her on his knee; the murmur of the elm-leaves, and the slow dropping of the stream, soothed him. By and by, his spirit rose, as it always did, the heavier it was pressed down.

"No, Lord Luxmore shall not ruin me! I have thought of a scheme. But first, I must speak to my people — I shall have to shorten wages for a time."
"How soon?"

"To-night. If it must be done — better done at once, before winter sets in. Poor fellows! it will go hard
with them — they'll be hard upon me. But it is only
temporary; I must reason them into patience, if I can; —
God knows, it is not they alone who want it."

He almost ground his teeth as he saw the sun shining
on the far white wing of Luxmore Hall.

"Have you no way of righting yourself? If it is an
unlawful act, why not go to law?"

"Phineas, you forget my principle — only mine,
however; I do not force it upon any one else — my firm
principle, that I will never go to law. Never! I would
not like to have it said, in contradistinction to the old
saying, 'See how these Christians fight!'"

I urged no more; since, whether abstractedly the
question be right or wrong, there can be no doubt that
what a man believes to be evil, to him it is evil.

"Now, Uncle Phineas, go you home with Muriel.
Tell my wife what has occurred — say, I will come
to tea as soon as I can. But I may have some little
trouble with my people here. She must not alarm her-
self."

No, the mother never did. She wasted no time in
puerile apprehensions — it was not her nature; she had
the rare feminine virtue of never "fidgetting" — at least,
externally. What was to be borne — she bore: what was
to be done — she did; but she rarely made any "fuss"
about either her doings or her sufferings.

To-night, she heard all my explanation; understood
it, I think, more clearly than I did — probably from
being better acquainted with her husband's plans and
fears. She saw at once the position in which he was
placed; a grave one, to judge by her countenance.

"Then you think John is right?"

"Of course I do."
I had not meant it as a question, or even a doubt. But it was pleasant to hear her thus answer. For, as I have said, Ursula was not a woman to be led blindfold, even by her husband. Sometimes they differed on minor points, and talked their differences lovingly out; but on any great question she had always this safe trust in him — that if one were right and the other wrong, the erring one was much more likely to be herself than John.

She said no more; but put the children to bed; then came down stairs with her bonnet on.

"Will you come with me, Phineas? Or are you too tired? I am going down to the mill."

She started, walking quickly — yet not so quick but that on the slope of the common she stooped to pick up a crying child, and send it home to its mother in Enderly village.

It was almost dark, and we met no one else except a young man, whom I had occasionally seen about of evenings. He was rather odd looking, being invariably muffled up in a large cloak and a foreign sort of hat.

"Who is that, watching our mills?" said Mrs. Halifax, hastily.

I told her all I had seen of the person.

"A Papist, most likely — I mean a Catholic." (John objected to the opprobrious word "Papist.") "Mrs. Tod says there are a good many hidden hereabouts. They used to find shelter at Luxmore."

And that name set both our thoughts anxiously wandering; so that not until we reached the foot of the hill did I notice that the person had followed us almost to the mill-gates.

In his empty mill, standing beside one of its silenced
looms, we found the master. He was very much dejected — Ursula touched his arm before he even saw her.

"Well, love — you know what has happened?"

"Yes, John. But never mind."

"I would not — except for my poor people."

"What do you intend doing? That which you have wished to do all the year."

"Our wishes come as a cross to us sometimes," he said, rather bitterly. "It is the only thing I can do. The water-power being so greatly lessened, I must either stop the mills, or work them by steam."

"Do that, then. Set up your steam-engine."

"And have all the country down upon me for destroying hand-labour? Have a new set of Luddites coming to burn my mill, and break my machinery? That is what Lord Luxmore wants. Did he not say he would ruin me? — Worse than this, — he is ruining my good name. If you had heard those poor people whom I sent away to-night! What must they, who will have short work these two months, and after that machinery-work, which they fancy is taking the very bread out of their mouths — what must they think of the master?"

He spoke — as we rarely heard John speak: as worldly cares and worldly injustice cause even the best of men to speak sometimes.

"Poor people!" he added, "how can I blame them? I was actually dumb before them to-night, when they said I must take the cost of what I do, — they must have bread for their children. But so must I for mine. Lord Luxmore is the cause of all."

Here I heard — or fancied I heard — out of the black shadow behind the loom, a heavy sigh. John and Ursula were too anxious to notice it.
"Could anything be done?" she asked. "Just to keep things going till your steam-engine is ready? Will it cost much?"

"More than I like to think of. But it must be; — nothing venture — nothing have. You and the children are secure anyhow, that's one comfort. But oh, my poor people at Enderly!"

Again Ursula asked if nothing could be done?

"Yes — I did not think of one plan — but —"

"John, I know what you thought of."

She laid her hand on his arm, and looked straight up at him — eye to eye. Often, it seemed that from long habit they could read one another's minds in this way, clearly as a book. At last John said —

"Would it be too hard a sacrifice, love?"

"How can you talk so! We could do it easily, by living in a plainer way; by giving up one or two trifles. Only outside things, you know. Why need we care for outside things?"

"Why, indeed?" he said, in a low, fond tone.

So I easily found out how they meant to settle the difficulty; namely, by setting aside a portion of the annual income which John, in his almost morbid anxiety lest his family should take harm by any possible non-success in his business, had settled upon his wife. Three months of little renunciations — three months of the old narrow way of living, as at Norton Bury — and the poor people at Enderly might have full wages, whether or no there was full work. Then in our quiet valley there would be no want, no murmurings; and, above all, no blaming of the master.

They decided it all — in fewer words than I have
taken to write it — it was so easy to decide when both were of one mind.

"Now," said John, rising, as if a load were taken off his breast — "now, do what he will, Lord Luxmore cannot do me any harm."

"Husband, don't let us speak of Lord Luxmore."

Again that sigh — quite ghostly in the darkness. They heard it likewise, this time.

"Who's there?"

"Only I. Mr. Halifax — don't be angry with me."

It was the softest, mildest voice — the voice of one long used to oppression; and the young man whom Ursula had supposed to be a Catholic appeared from behind the loom.

"I do not know you, sir. How came you to enter my mill?"

"I followed Mrs. Halifax. I have often watched her and your children. But you don't remember me."

Yes; when he came underneath the light of the one tallow candle, we all recognized the face — more wan than ever — with a sadder and more hopeless look in the large grey eyes.

"I am surprised to see you here, Lord Ravenel."

"Hush! I hate the very sound of the name. I would have renounced it long ago. I would have hid myself away from him and from the world, if he would have let me."

"He — do you mean your father?"

The boy — no, he was a young man now, but scarcely looked more than a boy — assented silently, as if afraid to utter the name.

"Would not your coming here displease him?" said
John, always tenacious of trenching a hair's breadth upon any lawful authority.

"It matters not—he is away. He has left me these six months alone at Luxmore."

"Have you offended him?" asked Ursula, who had cast kindly looks on the thin face, which perhaps reminded her of another—now for ever banished from our sight, and his also.

"He hates me because I am a Catholic, and wish to become a monk."

The youth crossed himself, then started and looked round, in terror of observers. "You will not betray me? You are a good man, Mr. Halifax, and you spoke warmly for us. Tell me—I will keep your secret—are you a Catholic too?"

"No, indeed."

"Ah! I hoped you were. But you are sure you will not betray me?"

Mr. Halifax smiled at such a possibility. Yet, in truth, there was some reason for the young man's fears; since, even in those days, Catholics were hunted down both by law and by public opinion, as virulently as Protestant nonconformists. All who kept out of the pale of the national church were denounced as schismatics, deists, atheists—it was all one.

"But why do you wish to leave the world?"

"I am sick of it. There never was but one in it I cared for, or who cared for me—and now—Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis."

His lips moved in a paroxysm of prayer—helpless, parrot-learnt, Latin prayer; yet, being in earnest, it seemed to do him good. The mother, as if she heard in fancy that pitiful cry, which rose to my memory
too — "Poor William! — don't tell William!" — turned and spoke to him kindly, asking him if he would go home with us.

He looked exceedingly surprised. "I — you cannot mean it? After Lord Luxmore has done you all this evil?"

"Is that any reason why I should not do good to his son — that is, if I could. Can I?"

The lad lifted up those soft grey eyes, and then I remembered what his sister had said of Lord Ravenel's enthusiastic admiration of Mr. Halifax. "Oh, you could — you could."

"But I and mine are heretics, you know!"

"I will pray for you. Only let me come and see you — you and your children."

"Come, and welcome."

"Heartily welcome, Lord —"

"No — not that name, Mrs. Halifax? Call me as they used to call me at St. Omer — Brother Anselmo."

The mother was half inclined to smile; but John never smiled at any one's religious beliefs, howsoever foolish. He held in universal sacredness that one rare thing — sincerity.

So henceforward "Brother Anselmo" was almost domesticated at Rose Cottage. What would the earl have said, had a little bird flown over to London and told him that his only son, the heir-apparent to his title and political opinions, was in constant and open association — for clandestine acquaintance was against all our laws and rules — with John Halifax the mill-owner, John Halifax the radical, as he was still called sometimes; imbibing principles, modes of life and of thought, which,
to say the least, were decidedly different from those of
the house of Luxmore!

Above all, what would that noble parent have said,
had he been aware that this, his only son, for whom,
report whispered, he was already planning a splendid
marriage — as grand in a financial point of view as
that he planned for his only daughter — that Lord Ra-
venel was spending all the love of his loving nature in
the half-paternal, half lover-like sentiment which a young
man will sometimes lavish on a mere child — upon John
Halifax's little blind daughter, Muriel!

He said, "She made him good" — our child of
peace. He would sit gazing on her almost as if she
were his guardian angel — his patron saint. And the
little maid in her quiet way was very fond of him; de-
lighting in his company when her father was not by.
But no one ever was to her like her father.

The chief bond between her and Lord Ravenel —
or "Anselmo," as he would have us call him — was
music. He taught her to play on the organ, in the
empty church close by. There, during the long mid-
summer evenings, they two would sit down for hours in
the organ-gallery, while I listened down below; hardly
believing that such heavenly sounds could come from
those small child-fingers; almost ready to fancy she had
called down some celestial harmonist to aid her in play-
ing. Since, as we used to say — but by some instinct
never said now — Muriel was so fond of "talking with
the angels."

Just at this time, her father saw somewhat less of
her than usual. He was oppressed with business cares;
daily, hourly vexations. Only twice a week the great
water wheel, the delight of our little Edwin as it had
once been of his father, might be seen slowly turning; and the water-courses along the meadows, with their mechanically-forced channels, and their pretty sham cataracts, were almost always low or dry. It ceased to be a pleasure to walk in the green hollow, between the two grassy hills, which heretofore Muriel and I had liked even better than the Flat. Now she missed the noise of the water — the cry of the water-hens — the stirring of the reeds. Above all, she missed her father, who was too busy to come out of his mill to us, and hardly ever had a spare minute, even for his little daughter.

He was setting up that wonderful novelty — a steam-engine. He had already been to Manchester and elsewhere, and seen how the new power was applied by Arkwright, Hargreaves, and others; his own ingenuity and mechanical knowledge furnished the rest. He worked early and late — often with his own hands — aided by the men he brought with him from Manchester. For it was necessary to keep the secret — especially in our primitive valley — until the thing was complete. So the ignorant, simple mill-people, when they came for their easy Saturday's wages, only stood and gaped at the mass of iron, and the curiously-shaped brickwork, and wondered what on earth "the master" was about? But he was so thoroughly "the master," with all his kindness, that no one ventured either to question or interfere.
CHAPTER V.

Summer waned. Already the beech-wood began to turn red, and the little yellow autumn flowers to show themselves all over the common, while in the midst of them looked up the large purple eye of the ground-thistle. The mornings grew hazy and dewy. We ceased to take Muriel out with us in our slow walk along John’s favourite “terrace” before anyone else was stirring. Her father at first missed her sorely, but always kept repeating that “early walks were not good for children.” At last he gave up the walk altogether, and used to sit with her on his knee in front of the cottage till breakfast-time.

After that, saying with a kind of jealousy “that every one of us had more of his little daughter than he,” — he got into a habit of fetching her down to the mill every day at noon, and carrying her about in his arms, wherever he went, during the rest of his work.

Many a time I have seen the rough, coarse, blue-handed, blue-pinafored women of the mill stop and look wistfully after “master and little blind miss.” I often think that the quiet way in which the Enderly mill-people took the introduction of machinery, and the peaceableness with which they watched for weeks the setting up of the steam-engine, was partly owing to their strong impression of Mr. Halifax’s goodness as a father, and the vague, almost superstitious interest which attached to the pale, sweet face of Muriel.
Enderly was growing dreary, and we began to anticipate the cosy fireside of Longfield.

"The children will all go home looking better than they came; do you not think so, Uncle Phineas? — Especially Muriel?"

To that sentence I had to answer with a vague assent; after which I was fain to rise and walk away, thinking how blind love was — all love save mine, which had a gift for seeing the saddest side of things.

When I came back, I found the mother and daughter talking mysteriously apart. I guessed what it was about, for I had overheard Ursula saying they had better tell the child — it would be "something for her to look forward to — something to amuse her next winter."

"It is a great secret, mind," the mother whispered, after its communication.

"Oh, yes!" The tiny face, smaller than ever, I thought, flushed brightly. "But I would much rather have a little sister, if you please. Only" — and the child suddenly grew earnest — "will she be like me?"

"Possibly; sisters often are alike."

"No, I don't mean that; but — you know?" And Muriel touched her own eyes.

"I cannot tell, my daughter. In all things else, pray God she may be like you, Muriel, my darling — my child of peace!" said Ursula, embracing her with tears.

After this confidence, of which Muriel was very proud, and only condescended, upon gaining express permission, to reconfide it to me, she talked incessantly of the sister that was coming, until "little Maud" — the name she chose for her — became an absolute entity in the household.
The dignity and glory of being sole depositary of this momentous fact, seemed for a time to put new life—bright human life—into this little maid of eleven years old. She grew quite womanly, as it were; tried to help her mother in a thousand little ways, and especially by her own solitary branch of feminine industry—poor darling! She set on a pair of the daintiest elfin socks that ever were knitted. I found them, years after—one finished, one with the needles (all rusty) stuck through the fine worsted ball, just as the child had laid it out of her hand. Ah, Muriel, Muriel!

The father took great delight in this change, in her resuming her simple work, and going about constantly with her mother.

“What a comfort she will be to Ursula one day—an eldest daughter always is. So will she; will she not, Uncle Phineas?”

I smiled assentingly. Alas! his burthens were heavy enough! I think I did right to smile.

“We must take her down with us to see the steam-engine first worked. I wish Ursula would have gone home without waiting for to-morrow. But there is no fear—my men are so quiet and good-humoured. What in most mills has been a day of outrage and dread, is with us quite a festival. Boys, shall you like to come? Edwin, my practical lad, my lad that is to carry on the mill—will you promise to hold fast by Uncle Phineas, if I let you see the steam-engine work?”

Edwin lifted up from his slate bright, penetrating eyes. He was quite an old man in his ways—wise even from his babyhood, and quiet even when Guy snubbed him; but, I noticed, he did not come to “kiss
and make friends” so soon as Guy. And though Guy was much the naughtiest, we all loved him best. Poor Guy! he had the frankest, warmest, tenderest boy-heart, always struggling to be good, and never able to accomplish it.

"Father," cried Guy, "I want to see the steam-engine move; but I'll not be a baby like Edwin; I'll not hold Uncle Phineas' hand."

Hereupon ensued one of those summer storms which sometimes swept across the family horizon, in the midst of which Muriel and I stole out into the empty church, where, almost in the dark — which was no dark to her — for a long hour she sat and played. By-and-by the moon looked in, showing the great gilt pipes of the organ, and the little fairy figure sitting below.

Once or twice she stooped from the organ-loft to ask me where was Brother Anselmo, who usually met us in the church of evenings, and whom to-night — this last night before the general household moved back to Longfield — we had fully expected.

At last he came, sat down by me, and listened. She was playing a fragment of one of his Catholic masses. When it ended, he called "Muriel!"

Her soft, glad answer came down from the gallery. "Child, play the 'Miserere' I taught you."

She obeyed, making the organ wail like a tormented soul. Truly, no tales I ever heard of young Wesley and the infant Mozart ever surpassed the wonderful playing of our blind child.

"Now, the 'Dies Irae.' — It will come," he muttered, "to us all."

The child struck a few notes, heavy and dolorous, filling the church like a thunder-cloud, then suddenly
left off, and opening the flute-stop, burst into altogether different music.

“That is Handel — 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'”

Exquisitely she played it, the clear treble notes seeming to utter like a human voice, the very words:

“I know that my Redeemer liveth. He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.”

“And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

With that, she ceased.

“More, more!” we both cried.

“Not now — no more now.”

And we heard her shutting up the stops and closing the organ-lid.

“But my little Muriel has not finished her tune?”

“She will, some day,” said the child.

So she came down from the organ-loft, feeling her way, along the aisles; and we all went out together, locking the church-door.

Lord Ravenel was rather sad that night: he was going away from Luxmore for some time. We guessed why — because the earl was coming. Bidding us good-bye, he said, mournfully, to his little pet: “I wish I were not leaving you. Will you remember me, Muriel?”

“Stoop down; I want to see you.”

This was her phrase for a way she had of passing her extremely sensitive fingers over the faces of those she liked. After which, she always said she “saw” them.

“Yes; I shall remember you.”

“And love me?”
“And love you, Brother Anselmo.”

He kissed, not her cheek or mouth, but her little child-hands, reverently, as if she had been the saint he worshipped, or, perhaps, the woman whom afterwards he would learn to adore. Then he went away.

“Truly,” said the mother, in an amused aside to me, as with a kind of motherly pride she watched him walk hastily down between those chestnut-trees, known of old — “truly, time flies fast. Things begin to look serious — eh, father? Five years hence we shall have that young man falling in love with Muriel.”

But John and I looked at the still soft face, half a child’s and half an angel’s.

“Hush!” he said, as if Ursula’s fancy were profanity; then eagerly snatched it up and laughed, confessing how angry he should be if anybody dared to “fall in love” with Muriel.

Next day was the one fixed for the trial of the new steamengine; which trial being successful, we were to start at once in a post-chaise for Longfield; for the mother longed to be at home, and so did we all.

There was rather a dolorous good-bye, and much lamenting from good Mrs. Tod, who, her own bairns grown up, thought there were no children worthy to compare with our children. And truly, as the three boys scampered down the road — their few regrets soon over, eager for anything new — three finer lads could not be seen in the whole county.

Mrs. Halifax looked after them proudly — mother-like, she gloried in her sons; while John, walking slowly, and assuring Mrs. Tod over and over again that we should all come back next summer, went down the steep hill, carrying, hidden under many wraps and nestled
close to his warm shoulder, his little frail winter-rose —
his only daughter.

In front of the mill we found a considerable crowd;
for, the time being ripe, Mr. Halifax had made public
the fact that he meant to work his looms by steam, the
only way in which he could carry on the mill at all.
The announcement had been received with great surprise
and remarkable quietness, both by his own work-people
and all along Enderly valley. Still there was the usual
amount of contemptuous scepticism, incident on any new
experiment. Men were peering about the locked door
of the engine-room with a surly curiosity; and one
village oracle, to prove how impossible it was that such
a thing as steam could work anything, had taken the
trouble to light a fire in the yard and set thereon his
wife's best tea-kettle, which, as she snatched angrily
away, scalded him slightly, and caused him to limp away
swearing, a painful illustration of the adage, that "a little
knowledge is a dangerous thing."

"Make way, my good people," said Mr. Halifax; and
he crossed the mill-yard, his wife on his arm, followed
by an involuntary murmur of respect.

"He be a fine fellow, the master; he sticks at
nothing," was the comment heard made upon him by
one of his people, and probably it expressed the feeling
of the rest. There are few things which give a man
more power over his fellows than the thoroughly English
quality of daring.

Perhaps this was the secret why John had as yet
passed safely through the crisis which had been the
destruction of so many mill-owners, namely, the intro-
duction of a power which the mill-people were con-
vinced would ruin hand-labour. Or else the folk in our
valley, out of their very primitiveness, had more faith in the master; for certainly, as John passed through the small crowd, there was only one present who raised the old fatal cry of "Down with machinery!"

"Who said that?"

At the master's voice — at the flash of the master's eye — the little knot of work-people drew back, and the malcontent, whoever he was, shrunk into silence.

Mr. Halifax walked past them, entered his mill, and unlocked the door of the room which he had turned into an engine-room, and where, along with the two men he had brought from Manchester, he had been busy almost night and day for this week past, in setting up his machinery. They worked — as the Manchester fellows said they had often been obliged to work — under lock and key.

"Your folk be queer 'uns, Mr. Halifax. They say there's six devils inside on her, theer."

And the man pointed to the great boiler which had been built up in an out-house adjoining.

"Six devils, say they? — Well, I'll be Maister Michael Scot — eh, Phineas? — and make my devils work hard."

He laughed, but he was much excited. He went over, piece by piece, the complicated but delicate machinery; rubbed here and there at the brass-work, which shone as bright as a mirror; then stepped back, and eyed it with pride, almost with affection.

"Isn't it a pretty thing? — If only I have set it up right — if it will but work."

His hands shook — his cheeks were burning — little Edwin came peering about at his knee; but he pushed the child hastily away; then he found some
slight fault with the machinery, and while the workmen rectified it, stood watching them, breathless with anxiety. His wife came to his side.

"Don't speak to me — don't, Ursula. If it fails, I am ruined."

"John!" — She just whispered his name, and the soft, firm fold of her fingers closed round his, strengthening, cheering. Her husband faintly smiled.

"Here!" — He unlocked the door, and called to the people outside. "Come in, two of you fellows, and see how my devils work. Now then! Boys, keep out of the way: my little girl" — his voice softened — "my pet will not be frightened? Now, my men — ready?"

He opened the valve.

With a strange noise, that made the two Enderly men spring back as if the six devils were really let loose upon them, the steam came rushing into the cylinder. There was a slight motion of the piston-rod.

"All's right! it will work!"

No, it stopped.

John drew a deep breath.

It went on again, beginning to move slowly up and down, like the strong right arm of some automaton giant. Greater and lesser cog-wheels caught up the motive power, revolving slowly and majestically, and with steady, regular rotation, or whirling round so fast, you could hardly see that they stirred at all. Of a sudden, a soul had been put into that wonderful creature of man's making, that inert mass of wood and metal, mysteriously combined. The monster was alive!

Speechless John stood watching it. Their trial over, his energies collapsed; he sat down by his wife's side, and taking Muriel on his knee, bent his head over hers.
“Is all right, father?” the child whispered.
“All quite right, my own.”
“You said you could do it, and you have done it,” cried his wife, her eyes glowing with triumph, her head erect and proud.

John dropped his lower, lower still. “Yes,” he murmured; “yes, thank God.”

Then he opened the door, and let all the people in to see the wondrous sight.

They crowded in by dozens, staring about in blank wonder, gaping curiosity, ill-disguised alarm. John took pains to explain the machinery, stage by stage, till some of the more intelligent caught up the principle, and made merry at the notion of “devils.” But they all looked with great awe at the master, as if he were something more than man. They listened open-mouthed to every word he uttered, cramming the small engine-room till it was scarcely possible to breathe, but keeping at a respectful distance from the iron-armed monster, that went working, working on, as if ready and able to work on to everlasting.

John took his wife and children out into the open air. Muriel, who had stood for the last few minutes by her father’s side, listening with a pleased look to the monotonous regular sound, like the breathing of the demon, was unwilling to go.

“I am very glad I was with you to-day, — very glad, father,” she kept saying.

He said, as often — twice as often — that next summer, when he came back to Enderly, she should be with him at the mills every day, and all day over, if she liked.

There was nothing to be done but to hasten as
quickly and merrily as possible to our well-beloved Longfield.

Waiting for the post-chaise, Mr. Halifax and the boys sat down on the bridge over the defunct and silenced waterfall, on the muddy steps of which, where the stream used to dash musically over, weeds and long grasses, mingled with the drooping water-fern, were already beginning to grow.

"It looks desolate, but we need not mind that now," said Mrs. Halifax.

"No," her husband answered. "Steam power once obtained, I can apply it in any way I choose. My people will not hinder; they trust me — they like me."

"And, perhaps, are just a little afraid of you. No matter, it is a wholesome fear. I should not like to have married a man whom nobody was afraid of."

John smiled; he was looking at the horseman riding towards us along the high road. "I do believe, that is Lord Luxmore. I wonder whether he has heard of my steam-engine. Love, will you go back into the mill or not?"

"Certainly not." The mother seated herself on the bridge, her boys around her; — John avouched, with an air like the mother of the Gracchi, or like the Highland woman who trained one son after another to fight and slay their enemy — their father's murderer.

"Don't jest," said Ursula. She was much more excited than her husband. Two angry spots burnt on her cheeks when Lord Luxmore came up, and, in passing, bowed.

Mrs. Halifax returned it, haughtily enough. But at the moment a loud cheer broke out from the mill hard by, and "Hurrah for the master!" "Hurrah for Mr. Halifax!" was distinctly heard. The mother smiled, right proudly.
Lord Luxmore turned to his tenant — they might have been on the best terms imaginable from his bland air.

"What is that rather harsh noise I hear, Mr. Halifax?"

"It is my men cheering me."

"Oh, how charming! so grateful to the feelings. And why do they cheer you, may I ask?"

John briefly told him, speaking with perfect courtesy as he was addressed.

"And this steam-engine — I have heard of it before — will greatly advantage your mills?"

"It will, my lord. It renders me quite independent of your stream, of which the fountains at Luxmore can now have the full monopoly."

It would not have been human nature, if a spice of harmless malice — even triumph — had not sparkled in John's eye, as he said this. He was walking by the horse's side, as Lord Luxmore had politely requested him.

They went a little way up the hill together, out of sight of Mrs. Halifax, who was busy putting the two younger boys into the chaise.

"I did not quite understand. Would you do me the favour to repeat your sentence?"

"Merely, my lord, that your cutting off of the water-course has been to me one of the greatest advantages I ever had in my life; for which, whether meant or not, allow me to thank you."

The earl looked full in John's face, without answering; then spurred his horse violently. The animal started off, full speed.

"The children. Good God — the children!"

Guy was in the ditch-bank, gathering flowers — but
Muriel — For the first time in our lives, we had forgotten Muriel.

She stood in the horse's path — the helpless, blind child, the next instant, she was knocked down.

I never heard a curse on John Halifax's lips but once — that once. Lord Luxmore heard it too. The image of the frantic father, snatching up his darling from under the horse's heels, must have haunted the earl's good memory for many a day.

He dismounted, saying, anxiously, "I hope the little girl is not injured? It was accident — you see — pure accident."

But John did not hear; he would scarcely have heard heaven's thunder. He knelt with the child in his arms by a little runnel in the ditch-bank. When the water touched her, she opened her eyes with that wide, momentary stare so painful to behold.

"My little darling!"

Muriel smiled, and nestled to him. "Indeed, I am not hurt, dear father."

Lord Luxmore, standing by, seemed much relieved, and again pressed his apologies.

No answer.

"Go away," sobbed out Guy, shaking both his fists in the nobleman's face. "Go away — or I'll kill you — wicked man! I would have done it, if you had killed my sister."

Lord Luxmore laughed at the boy's fury — threw him a guinea, which Guy threw back at him with all his might, and rode placidly away.

"Guy — Guy —" called the faint, soft voice which had more power over him than any other, except his
mother's. "Guy must not be angry. Father, don't let him be angry."

But the father was wholly occupied in Muriel — looking in her face, and feeling all her little fragile limbs, to make sure that in no way she was injured.

It appeared not; though the escape seemed almost miraculous. John recurred, with a kind of trembling tenacity, to the old saying in our house, that "nothing ever harmed Muriel."

"Since it is safe over, and she can walk — you are sure you can, my pet? — I think we will not say anything about this to the mother; at least, not till we reach Longfield."

But it was too late. There was no deceiving the mother. Every change in every face struck her instantaneously. The minute we rejoined her, she said —

"John, something has happened to Muriel."

Then he told her, making as light of the accident as he could; as, indeed, for the first ten minutes we all believed, until alarmed by the extreme pallor and silence of the child.

Mrs. Halifax sat down by the roadside, bathed Muriel's forehead, and smoothed her hair; but still the little curls lay motionless against the mother's breast, — and still to every question, she only answered "that she was not hurt."

All this while the post-chaise was waiting.

"What must be done?" I enquired of Ursula; for it was no use asking John anything.

"We must go back again to Enderly," she said, decidedly.

So, giving Muriel into her father's arms, she led the way, and, a melancholy procession, we again ascended the hill to Rose Cottage door.

John Halifax, Gentleman. II.
CHAPTER VI.

Without any discussion, our plans were tacitly changed — no more was said about going home to dear Longfield. Every one felt, though no one trusted it to words, that the journey was impossible. For Muriel lay, day after day, on her little bed in an upper chamber, or was carried softly down in the middle of the day by her father, never complaining, but never attempting to move or talk. When we asked her if she felt ill, she always answered, "Oh, no! only so very tired." Nothing more.

"She is dull, for want of the others to play with her. The boys should not run out and leave their sister alone," said John, almost sharply, when one bright morning the lads' merry voices came down from the Flat, while he and I were sitting by Muriel's sofa in the still parlour.

"Father, let the boys play without me, please. Indeed I do not mind. I had rather lie quiet here."

"But it is not good for my little girl always to be quiet, and it grieves father."

"Does it?" She roused herself, sat upright, and began to move her limbs, but wearily.

"That is right, my darling. Now let me see how well you can walk."

Muriel slipped to her feet and tried to cross the room, catching at table and chairs — now, alas! not only for guidance but actual support. At last she began to stagger, and said, half crying, —
"I can't walk, I am so tired. Oh, do take me in your arms, dear father."

Her father took her, looked long in her sightless face, then buried his against her shoulder, saying nothing. But I think in that moment he too saw, glittering and bare, the long-veiled Hand which, for this year past, I had seen stretched out of the immutable heavens, claiming that which was Its own. Ever after, there was discernible in John's countenance a something which all the cares of his anxious yet happy life had never written there — an ineffaceable record, burnt in with fire.

He held her in his arms all day. He invented all sorts of tales and little amusements for her; and when she was tired of these, he let her lie in his bosom and sleep. After her bed-time, he asked me to go out with him on the Flat.

It was a misty night. The very cows and asses stood up large and spectral as shadows. There was not a single star to be seen.

We took our walk along the terrace and came back again, without exchanging a single word. Then John said hastily —

"I am glad her mother was so busy to-day — too busy to notice."

"Yes," I answered; unconnected as his words were.

"Do you understand me, Phineas? Her mother must not on any account be led to imagine, or to fear — anything. You must not look as you looked this morning. You must not, Phineas."

He spoke almost angrily. I answered in a few quieting words. We were silent, until over the common we caught sight of the light in Muriel's window. Then I felt rather than heard the father's groan.
“Oh, God! my only daughter — my dearest child!”

Yes, she was the dearest. I knew it. Strange mystery, that He should so often take, by death or otherwise, the dearest — always the dearest. Strange, that He should hear us cry — us writhing in the dust, “O! Father, anything, anything but this!” But our Father answers not; and meanwhile the desire of our eyes, be it a life, a love, or a blessing — slowly, slowly goes — is gone. And yet we have to believe in our Father. Perhaps of all trials to human faith this is the sorest. Thanks be to God if He puts into our hearts such love towards Him, that even while He slays us we can trust Him still.

This father — this broken-hearted earthly father, could.

When we sat at the supper-table, Ursula, John, and I, the children being all in bed, no one could have told that there was any shadow over us, more than the sadly-familiar pain of the darling of the house being “not so strong as she used to be.”

“But I think she will be, John. We shall have her quite about again, before —”

The mother stopped, slightly smiling. It was, indeed, an especial mercy of heaven which put that unaccountable blindness before her eyes, and gave her other duties and other cares to intercept the thought of Muriel. While, from morning till night, it was the incessant secret care of her husband, myself, and good Mrs. Tod, to keep her out of her little daughter’s sight, and prevent her mind from catching the danger of one single fear.

Thus, within a week or two, the mother lay down
cheerfully upon her couch of pain, and gave another child to the household — a little sister to Muriel.

Muriel was the first to whom the news was told. Her father told it. His natural joy and thankfulness seemed for the moment to efface every other thought.

“She is come, darling! little Maud is come. I am very rich — for I have two daughters now.”

“Muriel is glad, father.” But she showed her gladness in a strangely quiet, meditative way, unlike a child — unlike even her old self.

“What are you thinking of, my pet?”

“That — though father has another daughter, I hope he will remember the first one sometimes.”

“She is jealous!” cried John, in the curious delight with which he always detected in her any weakness, any fault, which brought her down to the safe level of humanity. “See, Uncle Phineas, our Muriel is actually jealous.”

But Muriel only smiled.

That smile — so serene — so apart from every feeling or passion appertaining to us who are “of the earth, earthy,” smote the father to the heart’s core.

He sat down by her, and she crept up into his arms.

“What day is it, father?”

“The first of December.”

“I am glad. Little Maud’s birthday will be in the same month as mine.”

“But you came in the snow, Muriel, and now it is warm and mild.”

“There will be snow on my birthday, though. There always is. The snow is fond of me, father. It would
like me to lie down and be all covered over, so that you could not find me anywhere.”

I heard John try to echo her weak, soft laugh.

“This month it will be eleven years since I was born, will it not, father?”

“Yes, my darling.”

“What a long time! Then, when my little sister is as old as I am, I shall be — that is, I should have been — a woman grown. Fancy me twenty years old, as tall as mother, wearing a gown like her, talking and ordering, and busy about the house. How funny!” And she laughed again. “Oh! no, father, I couldn’t do it. I had better remain always your little Muriel, weak and small, who liked to creep close to you, and go to sleep in this way.”

She ceased talking — very soon she was sound asleep. But — the father!

Muriel faded, though slowly. Sometimes she was so well for an hour or two, that the Hand seemed drawn back into the clouds, till of a sudden we discerned it there.

One Sunday — it was ten days or so after Maud’s birth, and the weather had been so bitterly cold that the mother had herself forbidden our bringing Muriel to the other side of the house where she and the baby lay. — Mrs. Tod was laying the dinner, and John stood at the window playing with his three boys.

He turned abruptly, and saw all the chairs placed round the table — all save one.

“Where is Muriel’s chair, Mrs. Tod?”

“Sir, she says she feels so tired like, she’d rather not come down to-day,” answered Mrs. Tod, hesitatingly. “Not come down?”
“Maybe better not, Mr. Halifax. Look out at the snow. It'll be warmer for the dear child to-morrow.”

“You are right. Yes, I had forgotten the snow. She shall come down to-morrow.”

I caught Mrs. Tod’s eyes; they were running over. She was too wise to speak of it — but she knew the truth as well as we.

This Sunday — I remember it well — was the first day we sat down to dinner with the one place vacant.

For a few days longer, her father, every evening when he came in from the mills, persisted in carrying her down, as he had said, holding her on his knee during tea, then amusing her and letting the boys amuse her for half-an-hour or so before bed-time. But at the week’s end even this ceased.

When Mrs. Halifax, quite convalescent, was brought triumphantly to her old place at our happy Sunday dinner-table, and all the boys came pressing about her, vying which should get most kisses from little sister Maud — she looked round, surprised amidst her smiling, and asked,

“Where is Muriel?”

“She seems to feel this bitter weather a good deal,” John said. “And I thought it better she should not come down to dinner.”

“No,” added Guy, wondering and dolefully, “sister has not been down to dinner with us for a great many days.”

The mother started; looked first at her husband, and then at me.

“Why did nobody tell me this?”

“Love — there was nothing new to be told.”

“Has the child had any illness that I do not know of?”
“No.”
“Has Dr. Jessop seen her?”
“Several times.”

“Mother,” said Guy, eager to comfort, for naughty as he was sometimes, he was the most tenderhearted of all the boys, especially to Muriel and to his mother—“sister isn’t ill a bit, I know. She was laughing and talking with me just now—saying she knows she could carry baby a great deal better than I could. She is as merry as ever she can be.”

The mother kissed him in her quick eager way—the sole indication of that maternal love which was in her almost a passion. She looked more satisfied.

Nevertheless, when Mrs. Tod came into the parlour, she rose and put little Maud into her arms.

“Take baby, please, while I go up to see Muriel.”

“Don’t—now don’t, please, Mrs. Halifax,” cried earnestly the good woman.

Ursula turned very pale. “They ought to have told me,” she muttered; “John, you must let me go and see my child.”

“Presently—presently—Guy, run up and play with Muriel. Phineas, take the others with you. You shall go up-stairs in one minute, my darling wife!”

He turned us all out of the room, and shut the door. How he told her that which it was necessary she should know—that which Dr. Jessop himself had told us this very morning—how the father and mother bore this first open revelation of their unutterable grief—for ever remained unknown.

I was sitting by Muriel’s bed, when they came up-stairs. The darling lay listening to her brother, who was squatted on her pillow, making all sorts of funny talk.
There was a smile on her face; she looked quite rosy: I hoped Ursula might not notice, just for the time being, the great change the last few weeks had made.

But she did — who could ever blindfold a mother? For a moment I saw her recoil — then turn to her husband with a dumb, piteous, desperate look, as though to say, "Help me — my sorrow is more than I can bear!"

But Muriel, hearing the step, cried with a joyful cry, "Mother! it's my mother!"

The mother folded her to her breast.

Muriel shed a tear or two there — in a satisfied, peaceful way; the mother did not weep at all. Her self-command, so far as speech went, was miraculous. For her look — but then she knew the child was blind.

"Now," she said, "my pet will be good, and not cry? It would do her harm. We must be very happy to-day."

"Oh, yes." Then, in a fond whisper, "Please, I do so want to see little Maud?"

"Who?" with an absent gaze.

"My little sister Maud — Maud that is to take my place, and be everybody's darling now."

"Hush, Muriel," said the father, hoarsely.

A strangely soft smile broke over her face — and she was silent.

The new baby was carried up-stairs, proudly, by Mrs. Tod, all the boys following. Quite a levée was held round the bed, where, laid close beside her, her weak hands being guided over the tiny face and form, Muriel first "saw" her little sister. She was greatly pleased. With a grave elder-sisterly air she felt all over the baby-limbs, and when Maud set up an indignant cry, began hushing her with so quaint an imitation of motherliness, that we were all amused.
"You'll be a capital nurse in a month or two, my pretty!" said Mrs. Tod.

Muriel only smiled. "How fat she is! — and look, how fast her fingers take hold! And her head is so round, and her hair feels so soft — as soft as my doves' necks at Longfield. What colour is it? Like mine?"

It was; nearly the same shade. Maud bore, the mother declared, the strongest likeness to Muriel.

"I am so glad. But these?" touching her eyes anxiously.

"No — my darling. Not like you there," was the low answer.

"I am very glad. Please, little Maud, don't cry — it's only sister touching you. How wide open your eyes feel! I wonder," — with a thoughtful pause.— "I wonder if you can see me. Little Maud, I should like you to see sister."

"She does see, of course; how she stares!" cried Guy. And then Edwin began to argue to the contrary, protesting that as kittens and puppies could not see at first, he believed little babies did not: which produced a warm altercation among the children gathered round the bed, while Muriel lay back quietly on her pillow, with her little sister fondly hugged to her breast.

The father and mother looked on. It was such a picture — these five darlings, these children which God had given them — a group perfect and complete in itself, like a root of daisies, or a branch of ripening fruit, which not one could be added to, or taken from —

No. I was sure, from the parents' smile, that, this once, Mercy had blinded their eyes, so that they saw nothing beyond the present moment.

The children were wildly happy. All the afternoon they kept up their innocent little games by Muriel's bed-
side; she sometimes sharing, sometimes listening apart. Only once or twice came that wistful, absent look, as if she were listening partly to us, and partly to those we heard not; as if through the wide open orbs the soul were straining at sights wonderful and new — sights unto which her eyes were the clear-seeing, and ours the blank and blind.

It seems strange now, to remember that Sunday afternoon, and how merry we all were; how we drank tea in the queer bed-room at the top of the house; and how afterwards Muriel went to sleep in the twilight, with baby Maud in her arms. Mrs. Halifax sat beside the little bed, a sudden blazing up of the fire showing the intentness of her watch over these two, her eldest and youngest, fast asleep; their breathing so soft, one hardly knew which was frailest, the life slowly fading or the life but just begun. Their breaths seemed to mix and mingle, and the two faces, lying close together, to grow into a strange likeness each to each. At least, we all fancied so.

Meanwhile, John kept his boys as still as mice, in the broad window-seat, looking across the white snowy sheet, with black bushes peering out here and there, to the feathery beech-wood, over the tops of which the new moon was going down. Such a little young moon! and how peacefully — nay, smilingly — she set among the snows!

The children watched her till the very last minute, when Guy startled the deep quiet of the room by exclaiming — “There — she’s gone.”

“Hush!”

“No, mother, I am awake,” said Muriel. “Who is gone, Guy?”
"The moon — such a pretty little moon."

"Ah, Maud will see the moon some day." She dropped her cheek down again beside the baby sister, and was silent once more.

This is the only incident I remember of that peaceful, heavenly hour.

Maud broke upon its quietude by her waking and wailing; and Muriel very unwillingly let the little sister go.

"I wish she might stay with me — just this one night; and to-morrow is my birth-day. Please, mother may she stay?"

"We will both stay, my darling. I shall not leave you again."

"I am so glad;" and once more she turned round, as if to go to sleep.

"Are you tired, my pet?" said John, looking intently at her.

"No, father."

"Shall I take your brothers down stairs?"

"Not yet, dear father."

"What would you like, then?"

"Only to lie here, this Sunday evening, among you all."

He asked her if she would like him to read aloud as he generally did on Sunday evenings.

"Yes, please; and Guy will come and sit quiet on the bed beside me and listen. That will be pleasant. Guy was always very good to his sisters — always."

"I don't know that," said Guy, in a conscience-stricken tone. "But I mean to be, when I grow a big man — that I do."

No one answered. John opened the large Book — the Book he had taught all his children to long for and
to love — and read out of it their favourite history of Joseph and his brethren. The mother sat by him at the fireside, rocking Maud softly on her knees. Edwin and Walter settled themselves on the hearth-rug, with great eyes intently fixed on their father. From behind him the candle-light fell softly down on the motionless figure in the bed, whose hand he held, and whose face he every now and then turned to look at — then, satisfied, continued to read.

In the reading his voice had a fatherly, flowing calm — as Jacob's might have had, when "the children were tender," and he gathered them all round him under the palm-trees of Succoth — years before he cried unto the Lord that bitter cry — (which John hurried over as he read) — "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

For an hour, nearly, we all sat thus — with the wind coming up the valley, howling in the beech-wood, and shaking the casement as it passed outside. Within, the only sound was the father's voice. This ceased at last: he shut the Bible, and put it aside. The group — that last perfect household picture — was broken up. It melted away into things of the past, and became only a picture, for evermore.

"Now, boys — it is full time to say good-night. There, go and kiss your sister."

"Which?" said Edwin, in his funny way. "We've got two now; and I don't know which is the biggest baby."

"I'll thrash you if you say that again," cried Guy. "Which, indeed? Maud is but the baby. Muriel will be always 'sister.'"

"Sister" faintly laughed, as she answered his fond
kiss — Guy was often thought to be her favourite brother.

"Now, off with you, boys; and go down stairs quietly — mind, I say quietly."

They obeyed — that is, as literally as boy-nature can obey such an admonition. But an hour after, I heard Guy and Edwin arguing vociferously in the dark, on the respective merits and future treatment of their two sisters, Muriel and Maud.

John and I sat up late together that night. He could not rest — even though he told me he had left the mother and her two daughters as cosy as a nest of wood-pigeons. We listened to the wild night, till it had almost howled itself away; then our fire went out, and we came and sat over the last faggot in Mrs. Tod's kitchen — the old Debateable Land. We began talking of the long-ago time, and not of this time at all. The vivid present — never out of either mind for an instant — we in our conversation did not touch upon, by at least ten years. Nor did we give expression to a thought which strongly oppressed me, and which I once or twice fancied I could detect in John likewise — how very like this night seemed to the night when Mr. March died; the same silentness in the house — the same windy whirl without — the same blaze of the wood-fire on the same kitchen ceiling.

More than once, I could almost have deluded myself that I heard the faint moans and footsteps over-head — that the staircase door would open, and we should see there Miss March, in her white gown, and her pale, steadfast look.

"I think the mother seemed very well and calm to-night," I said, hesitatingly, as we were retiring.
"She is. God help her — and us all!"
"He will."
This was all we said.
He went up-stairs the last thing, and brought down word that mother and children were all sound asleep.
"I think I may leave them until daylight to-morrow. And now, Uncle Phineas, go you to bed, for you look as tired as tired can be."
I went to bed; but all night long I had disturbed dreams, in which I pictured over and over again, first the night when Mr. March died — then the night at Longfield, when the little white ghost had crossed by my bed's foot, into the room where Mary Baines' dead boy lay. And continually, towards morning, I fancied I heard through my window, which faced the church, the faint, distant sound of the organ, as when Muriel used to play it.
Long before it was light, I rose. As I passed the boys' room, Guy called out to me —
"Halloa! Uncle Phineas, is it a fine morning? — for I want to go down into the wood and get a lot of beech-nuts and fir-cones for sister. It's her birth-day to-day, you know."
It was, for her. But for us — Oh, Muriel, our darling — darling child!
Let me hasten over the story of that morning, for my old heart quails before it still.
John went early to the room up-stairs. It was very still. Ursula lay calmly asleep, with baby Maud in her bosom; on her other side, with eyes wide open to the daylight lay, — that which for more than ten years we had been used to call "blind Muriel." She saw, now.
The same day, at evening, we three were sitting in the parlour; we elders only — it was past the children’s bed-time. Grief had spent itself dry; we were all very quiet. Even Ursula, when she came in from fetching the boys’ candle, as had always been her custom, and though afterwards I thought I had heard her going upstairs, likewise from habit, — where there was no need to bid any mother’s good-night now — even Ursula sat in the rocking-chair, nursing Maud, and trying to still her crying with a little foolish baby-tune that had descended as a family lullaby from one to the other of the whole five — how sad it sounded!

John — who sat at the table, shading the light from his eyes, an open book lying before him, of which he never turned one page — looked up at her.

"Love you must not tire yourself. Give me the child."

"No, no! Let me keep my baby — she comforts me so." And the mother burst into uncontrollable weeping.

John shut his book and came to her. He supported her on his bosom, saying a soothing word or two at intervals, or, when the paroxysm of her anguish was beyond all bounds, supporting her silently till it had gone by; never once letting her feel that, bitter as her sorrow was, his was heavier than hers.

Thus, during the whole of the day, had he been the stay and consolation of the household. For himself — the father’s grief was altogether dumb.

At last, Mrs. Halifax became more composed. She sat beside her husband, her hand in his, neither speaking, but gazing, as it were, into the face of this their great sorrow, and from thence up to the face of God. They
felt that He could help them to bear it; ay, or anything else that it was His will to send — if they might thus bear it, together.

We all three sat thus, and there had not been a sound in the parlour for ever so long, when Mrs. Tod opened the door and beckoned me.

"He will come in — he's crazy-like, poor fellow! He has only just heard —"

She broke off with a sob. Lord Ravenel pushed her aside and stood at the door. We had not seen him since the day of that innocent jest about his "falling in love" with Muriel. Seeing us all so quiet, and the parlour looking as it always did when he used to come of evenings — the young man drew back, amazed.

"It is not true! No, it could not be, true!" he muttered.

"It is true," said the father. "Come in."

The mother held out her hand to him. "Yes, come in. You were very fond of —"

Ah, that name! — now nothing but a name! For a little while we all wept sore.

Then we told him — it was Ursula who did it chiefly — all particulars about our darling. She told him, but calmly, as became one on whom had fallen the utmost sorrow and crowning consecration of motherhood — that of yielding up her child, a portion of her own being, to the corruption of the grave — of resigning the life which out of her own life had been created, unto the Creator of all.

Surely, distant and peculiar from every other grief, every other renunciation, must be that of a woman who is thus chosen to give her very flesh and blood, the fruit of her own womb, unto the Lord!

John Halifax, Gentleman. II.
This dignity, this sanctity, seemed gradually to fall upon the mourning mother, as she talked about her lost one; repeating often — "I tell you this, because you were so fond of Muriel."

He listened silently. At length he said, "I want to see Muriel."

The mother lit a candle, and he followed her upstairs.

Just the same homely room — half-bedchamber, half-nursery — the same little curtainless bed where, for a week past, we had been accustomed to see the wasted figure and small pale face lying, in smiling quietude, all day long.

It lay there still. In it, and in the room, was hardly any change. One of Walter's playthings was in a corner of the window-sill, and on the chest of drawers stood the nosegay of Christmas roses which Guy had brought for his sister yesterday morning. Nay, her shawl — a white, soft, furry shawl, that she was fond of wearing — remained still hanging up behind the door. One could almost fancy the little maid had just been said "good-night" to, and left to dream the childish dreams on her nursery pillow, where the small head rested so peacefully, with that pretty babyish nightcap tied over the pretty curls.

There she was, the child who had gone out of the number of our children — our earthly children — for ever.

Her mother sat down at the side of the bed, her father at its foot, looking at her. Lord Ravenel stood by, motionless; then stooping down, he kissed the small marble hand.

"Good-bye, good-bye, my little Muriel!"
And he left the room abruptly, in such an anguish of grief that the mother rose and followed him.

John went to the door and locked it, almost with a sort of impatience; then came back and stood by his darling, alone. He never saw — no, nor anything in the world except that little face, even in death so strangely like his own. The face which had been for eleven years the joy of his heart, the very apple of his eye.

For a long time he remained gazing, in a stupor of silence; then, sinking on his knees, he stretched out his arms across the bed, with a bitter cry —

"Come back to me, my darling, my first-born! Come back to me, Muriel, my little daughter — my own little daughter!"

But thou wert with the angels, Muriel — Muriel!
CHAPTER VII.

We went home, leaving all that was mortal of our darling sleeping at Enderly, underneath the snows.

For twelve years after then, we lived at Longfield; in such unbroken, uneventful peace, that looking back seems like looking back over a level sea, whose leagues of tiny ripples make one smooth glassy plain.

Let me recall, at the first wave that rose, ominous of change, — a certain spring evening, when Mrs. Halifax and I were sitting, as was our wont, under the walnut-tree. The same old walnut-tree, hardly a bough altered, though many of its neighbours and kindred had grown from saplings into trees — even as some of us had grown from children almost into young men.

"Edwin is late home from Norton Bury," said Ursula.

"So is his father."

"No — this is just John's time. Hark! there are the carriage-wheels!"

For Mr. Halifax, a prosperous man now, drove daily to and from his mills, in as tasteful an equipage as any of the country gentry between here and Enderly.

His wife went down to the stream to meet him, as usual, and they came up the field-path together.

Both were changed from the John and Ursula of whom I last wrote. She, active and fresh-looking still, but settling into that fair largeness which is not un-becoming a lady of middle-age, he, inclined to a slight stoop, with the lines of his face more sharply defined, and the hair wearing away off his forehead up to the crown. Though still not a grey thread was discernible
in the crisp locks at the back, which successively five little ones had pulled, and played with, and nestled in; not a sign of age, as yet, in “father’s curls.”

As soon as he had spoken to me, he looked round as usual for his children, and asked if the boys and Maud would be home to tea?

“I think Guy and Walter never do come home in time when they go over to the Manor-house.”

“They’re young — let them enjoy themselves,” said the father, smiling. “And you know, love, of all our ‘fine’ friends, there are none you so heartily approve of as the Oldtowers.”

These were not of the former race. Good old Sir Ralph had gone to his rest, and Sir Herbert reigned in his stead; — Sir Herbert, who in his dignified gratitude never forgot a certain election day, when he first made the personal acquaintance of Mr. Halifax. The Manor-house family brought several other “county families” to our notice, or us to theirs. These, when John’s fortunes grew rapidly — as many another fortune grew, in the beginning of the thirty years’ peace, when unknown, petty manufacturers first rose into merchant princes and cotton lords — these gentry made a perceptible distinction, often amusing enough to us, between John Halifax, the tanner of Norton Bury, and Mr. Halifax the prosperous owner of Enderly Mills. Some of them, too, were clever enough to discover, what a pleasant and altogether “visitable” lady was Mrs. Halifax, daughter of the late Mr. March, a governor in the West Indies, and cousin of Mr. Brithwood of the Mythe. But Mrs. Halifax, with quiet tenacity, altogether declined being visited as anything but Mrs. Halifax, wife of John Halifax, tanner, or mill-owner, or whatever he might be.
All honours and all civilities that did not come through him, and with him, were utterly valueless to her.

To this her peculiarity was added another of John's own, namely, that all his life he had been averse to what is called "society"; had eschewed "acquaintances," and— but most men might easily count upon their fingers the number of those who, during a life-time, are found worthy of the sacred name of "friend." Consequently, our circle of associations was far more limited than that of many families holding an equal position with us— on which circumstance our neighbours commented a good deal. But little we cared; no more than we had cared for the chit-chat of Norton Bury. Our whole hearts were bound up within our own home— our happy Longfield.

"I do think this place is growing prettier than ever," said John, when, tea being over—a rather quiet meal, without a single child—we elders went out again to the walnut-tree bench. "Certainly, prettier than ever;" and his eye wandered over the quaint, low house, all odds and ends— for nearly every year something had been built, or something pulled down; then crossing the smooth bit of lawn, Jem Watkins's special pride, it rested on the sloping field, yellow with tall buttercups, wavy with growing grass. "Let me see— how long have we lived here? Phineas, you are the one for remembering dates. What year was it we came to Longfield?"

"Eighteen hundred and twelve. Thirteen years ago."

"Ah, so long!"

"Not too long," said Mrs. Halifax, earnestly. "I hope we may end our days here. Do not you, John?"

He paused a little before answering. "Yes, I wish it; but I am not sure how far it would be right to do it."

"We will not open that subject again," said the
mother, uneasily. “I thought we had all made up our minds that little Longfield was a thousand times pleasanter than Beechwood, grand as it is. But John thinks he never can do enough for his people at Enderly.”

“Not that alone, love. Other reasons combined. Do you know, Phineas,” he continued, musingly, as he watched the sun set over Leckington Hill — “sometimes I fancy my life is too easy — that I am not a wise steward of the riches that have multiplied so fast. By fifty, a man so blest as I have been, ought to have done something of really use in the world — and I am forty-five. Once, I hoped to have done wonderful things ere I was forty-five. But somehow, the desire faded.”

His wife and I were silent. We both knew the truth; that calm as had flowed his outer existence, in which was omitted not one actual duty, still, for these twelve years, all the high aims which make the glory and charm of life as duties make its strength, all the active energies and noble ambitions which especially belong to the prime of manhood, in him had been, not dead perhaps, but sleeping. Sleeping, beyond the power of any human voice to waken them, under the daisies of a child’s grave at Enderly.

I know not if this was right — but it was scarcely unnatural. In that heart, which loved as few men love, and remembered as few men remember — so deep a wound could never be thoroughly healed. A certain something in him seemed different ever after, as if a portion of the father’s own life had been taken away with Muriel, and lay buried in the little dead bosom of his first-born, his dearest child.

“You forget,” said Mrs. Halifax, tenderly — “you forget, John, how much you have been doing, and intend
to do. What with your improvements at Enderly, and your Catholic Emancipation — your Abolition of Slavery and your Parliamentary Reform — why, there is hardly any scheme for good, public or private, to which you do not lend a helping hand."

"A helping purse, perhaps, which is an easier thing, much."

"I will not have you blaming yourself. Ask Phineas, there — our household Solomon."

"Thank you, Ursula," said I, submitting to the not rare fortune of being loved and laughed at.

"Uncle Phineas, what better could John have done in all these years, than look after his mills, and educate his three sons?"

"Have them educated, rather," corrected he, sensitive over his own painfully-gained and limited acquirements. Yet this feeling had made him doubly careful to give his boys every possible advantage of study, short of sending them from home, to which he had an invincible objection. And three finer lads, or better educated, there could not be found in the whole county.

"I think, John, Guy has quite got over his fancy of going to Cambridge with Ralph Oldtower."

"Yes; college life would not have done for Guy," said the father, thoughtfully.

"Hush! we must not talk about them, for here come the children."

It was now a mere figure of speech to call them so, though, in their home-talk, loving simplicity, they would neither have been ashamed nor annoyed at the epithet — these two tall lads, who in the dusk looked as man-like as their father.

"Where is your sister, boys?"
“Maud stopped at the stream with Edwin,” answered Guy, rather carelessly. His heart had kept its childish faith; the youngest, pet as she was, was never anything to him but “little Maud.” One — whom the boys still talked of, softly and tenderly, in fireside evening talks, when the winter winds came and the snow was falling — one only was ever spoken of by Guy as “sister.”

Maud, or Miss Halifax, as from the first she was naturally called — as naturally as our lost darling was never called anything else than Muriel — came up, hanging on Edwin’s arm, which she was fond of doing, both because it happened to be the only arm low enough to suit her childish stature, and because she was more especially “Edwin’s girl,” and had been so always. She had grown out of the likeness that we longed for in her cradle days, or else we had grown out of the perception of it; for though the external resemblance in hair and complexion still remained, nothing could be more unlike in spirit than this sprightly elf, at once the plague and pet of the family — to our Muriel.

“Edwin’s girl” stole away with him, merrily chattering. Guy sat down beside his mother, and slipped his arm round her waist. They still fondled her with a child-like simplicity — these her almost grown-up sons; who had never been sent to school for a day, and had never learned from other sons of far different mothers, that a young man’s chief manliness ought to consist in despising the tender charities of home.

“Guy, you foolish boy!” as she took his cap off and pushed back his hair, trying not to look proud of his handsome face, “what have you been doing all day?”

“Making myself agreeable, of course, mother.”

“That he has,” corroborated Walter, whose great ob-
ject of hero-worship was his eldest brother. "He talked with Lady Oldtower, and he sang with Miss Oldtower and Miss Grace. Never was there such a fellow as our Guy."

"Nonsense!" said his mother, while Guy only laughed, too accustomed to this family admiration to be much disconcerted or harmed thereby.

"When does Ralph return to Cambridge?"

"Not at all. He is going to leave college, and be off to help the Greeks. Father, do you know everybody is joining the Greeks? Even Lord Byron is off with the rest. I only wish I were."

"Heaven forbid!" muttered the mother.

"Why not? I should have made a capital soldier, and liked it too, better than anything."

"Better than being my right hand at the mills, and your mother's at home? — Better than growing up to be our eldest son, our comfort and our hope? — I think not, Guy."

"You are right, father," was the answer, with an uneasy look. For this description seemed less what Guy was, than what we desired him to be. With his easy, happy temper, generous but uncertain, and his showy, brilliant parts, he was not nearly so much to be depended on as the grave Edwin who was already a thorough man of business, and plodded between Enderly mills and a smaller one which had taken the place of the flour mill at Norton Bury, with indomitable perseverance.

Guy fell into a brown study, not unnoticed by those anxious eyes, which lingered oftener upon his face than on that of any of her sons. Mrs. Halifax said, in her quick, decisive way, that it was "time to go in."

So the sunset picture outside changed to the home-
group within; the mother sitting at her little table, where the tall silver candlestick shed a subdued light on her work-basket, that never was empty, and her busy fingers, that never were still. The father sat beside her; he kept his old habit of liking to have her close to him; ay, even though he was falling into the middle-aged comforts of an arm-chair and newspaper. There he sat, sometimes reading aloud, or talking; sometimes lazily watching her, with silent, loving eyes, that saw beauty in his old wife still.

The young folk scattered themselves about the room. Guy and Walter at the unshuttered window — we had a habit of never hiding our home-light — were looking at the moon, and laying bets, *sotto voce*, upon how many minutes she would be in climbing over the oak on the top of One-tree Hill. Edwin sat, reading hard — his shoulders up to his ears, and his fingers stuck through his hair, developing the whole of his broad, knobbed, knotted forehead, where, Maud declared, the wrinkles had already begun to show. For Mistress Maud herself, she flitted about in all directions, interrupting everything, and doing nothing.

"Maud," said her father, at last, "I am afraid you give a great deal of trouble to Uncle Phineas."

Uncle Phineas tried to soften the fact, but the little lady was certainly the most trying of his pupils. Her mother she had long escaped from, for the advantage of both. For, to tell the truth, while in the invisible atmosphere of moral training the mother's influence was invaluable, in the minor branch of lesson-learning, there might have been found many a better teacher than Ursula Halifax. So the children's education was chiefly left to me; other tutors succeeding as was necessary; and
it had just begun to be considered whether a lady governess ought not to "finish" the education of Miss Halifax. But always at home. Not for all the knowledge and all the accomplishments in the world, would these parents have suffered either son or daughter — living souls entrusted them by the Divine Father — to be brought up anywhere out of their own sight, out of the shelter and safeguard of their own natural home.

"Love, when I was waiting to-day in Jessop's bank —"

(Ah! that was another change, to which we were even yet not familiar, the passing away of our good doctor and his wife, and his brother and heir turning the old dining-room into a "County Bank — open from ten till four.")

"While waiting there, I heard of a lady who struck me as likely to be an excellent governess for Maud."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Halifax, not over-enthusiastically. Maud became eager to know "what the lady was like?" I at the same time inquiring "who she was?"

"Who? I really did not ask," John answered, smiling. "But of what she is, Jessop gave me first-rate evidence — a good daughter, who teaches in Norton Bury anybody's children for any sort of pay, in order to maintain an ailing mother. Ursula, you would let her teach our Maud, I know?"

"Is she an Englishwoman?" — For Mrs. Halifax, prejudiced by a certain French lady who had for a few months completely upset the peace of the Manor-house, and even slightly tainted her own favourite, pretty Grace Oldtower, had received coldly this governess plan from the beginning. "Would she have to live with us?"

"I think so, decidedly."
"Then it can't be. The house will not accommodate her. It will hardly hold even ourselves. No, we cannot take in anybody else at Longfield."

"But—we may have to leave Longfield."

The boys here turned to listen; for this question had already been mooted, as all family questions were. In our house we had no secrets: the young folk, being trusted, were ever trustworthy; and the parents, clean-handed and pure-hearted, had nothing that they were afraid to tell their children.

"Leave Longfield!" repeated Mrs. Halifax; "surely—surely—" But glancing at her husband, her tone of impatience ceased.

He sat gazing into the fire with an anxious air.

"Don't let us discuss that question—at least, not to-night. It troubles you, John. Put it off till to-morrow."

No, that was never his habit. He was one of the very few who, a thing being to be done, will not trust it to uncertain "to-morrows." His wife saw that he wanted to talk to her, and listened.

"Yes, the question does trouble me a good deal. Whether now that our children are growing up, and our income is doubling and trebling year by year, we ought to widen our circle of usefulness, or close it up permanently within the quiet bound of little Longfield. Love, which say you?"

"The latter, the latter—because it is far the happiest."

"I am afraid, not the latter, because it is the happiest."

He spoke gently, laying his hand on his wife's shoulder, and looking down on her with that peculiar
look which he always had when telling her things that he knew were sore to hear. I never saw that look on any living face save John's; but I have seen it once in a picture — of two Huguenot lovers. The woman is trying to fasten round the man's neck the white badge that will save him from the massacre (of St. Bartholomew) — he, clasping her the while, gently puts it aside — not stern, but smiling. That quiet, tender smile, firmer than any frown, will, you feel sure, soon control the woman's anguish, so that she will sob out — any faithful woman would — "Go, die! Dearer to me than even thyself are thy honour and thy duty!"

When I saw this noble picture, it touched to the core this old heart of mine — for the painter, in that rare expression, might have caught John's. Just as in a few crises of his life I have seen it, and especially in this one, when he first told to his wife that determination which he had slowly come to — that it was both right and expedient for us to quit Longfield, our happy home for so many years, of which the mother loved every flower in the garden, every nook and stone in the walls.

"Leave Longfield!" she repeated again, with a bitter sigh.

"Leave Longfield!" echoed the children, first the youngest, then the eldest, but rather in curiosity than regret. Edwin's keen, bright eyes were just lifted from his book, and fell again; he was not a lad of much speech, or much demonstration of any kind.

"Boys, come and let us talk over the matter."

They came at once and joined in the circle; respectfully, yet with entire freedom, they looked towards their father — these, the sons of his youth, to whom he had
been from their birth not only parent and head, but companion, guide, and familiar friend. They honoured him, they trusted him, they loved him; not, perhaps, in the exact way that they loved their mother; for it often seems Nature's own ordinance, that a mother's influence should be strongest over her sons, while the father's is greatest over his daughters. But even a stranger could not glance from each to each of those attentive faces, so different, yet with a curious "family look" running through them all, without seeing in what deep, reverent affection, such as naturally takes the place of childish fondness, these youths held their father.

"Yes, I am afraid, after much serious thought on the matter, and much consultation with your mother here,—that we ought to leave Longfield."

"So I think," said Mistress Maud, from her foot-stool; which putting forward of her important opinion shook us all from gravity to merriment, that compelled even Mrs. Halifax to join. Then, laying aside her work, and with it the saddened air with which she had bent over it, she drew her chair closer to her husband, slipping her hand in his, and leaning against his shoulder. Upon which Guy, who had at first watched his mother anxiously, doubtful whether or no his father's plan had her approval, and therefore ought to be assented to,—relapsed into satisfied, undivided attention.

"I have again been over Beechwood Hall. You all remember Beechwood?"

Yes. It was the "great house" at Enderly, just on the slope of the hill, below Rose Cottage. The beechwood itself was part of its pleasure-ground, and from its gardens honest James Tod, who had them in keeping,
had brought many a pocketful of pears for the boys, many a sweet-scented nosegay for Muriel.

"Beechwood has been empty a great many years, father? Would it be a safe investment to buy it?"

"I think so, Edwin, my practical lad," answered the father, smiling. "What say you, children? Would you like living there?"

Each one made his or her comment. Guy's countenance brightened at the notion of "lots of shooting and fishing" about Enderly, especially at Luxmore; and Maud counted on the numerous visitors that would come to John Halifax, Esquire, of Beechwood Hall.

"Neither of which excellent reasons happen to be your father's," said Mrs. Halifax, shortly. But John, often tenderer over youthful frivolities than she, answered —

"I will tell you, boys, what are my reasons. When I was a young man, before your mother and I were married, indeed before I had ever seen her, I had strongly impressed on my mind the wish to gain influence in the world — riches if I could — but at all events, influence. I thought I could use it well, better than most men; those can best help the poor who understand the poor. And I can; since, you know, when Uncle Phineas found me, I was —"

"Father," said Guy, flushing scarlet, "we may as well pass over that fact. We are gentlefolks now."

"We always were, my son."

The rebuke, out of its very mildness, cut the youth to the heart. He dropped his eyes, colouring now with a different and a holier shame.

"I know that. Please, will you go on, father."

"And now," the father continued, speaking as much
out of his own thoughts as aloud to his children —
"now, twenty-five years of labour have won for me the
position I desired. That is, I might have it for the
claiming. I might take my place among the men who
have lately risen from the people, to guide and help the
people — the Cannings, Huskissoms, Peels."

"Would you enter parliament? Sir Herbert asked
me to-day if you ever intended it. He said there was
nothing you might not attain to, if you would give your-
self up entirely to politics."

"No, Guy, no. Wisdom, like charity, begins at home.
Let me learn to rule in my own valley, among my own
people, before I attempt to guide the state. And that brings
me back again to the pros and cons about Beechwood Hall."

"Tell them, John; tell all out plainly to the children."
The reasons were — first, the advantage of the boys
themselves; for John Halifax was not one of those phi-
lanthropists who would benefit all the world except their
own household and their own kin. He wished — since
the higher a man rises, the wider and nobler grows his
sphere of usefulness — not only to lift himself, but his
sons after him; — lift them high enough to help on the ever-
advancing tide of human improvement, among their own
people first, and thence extending outward in the world
whithersoever their talents or circumstances might call them.

"I understand," cried the eldest son, his eyes
sparkling; "you want to found a family. And so it shall
be — we will settle at Beechwood Hall; all coming
generations shall live to the honour and glory of your
name — our name —"

"My boy, there is only one Name to whose honour
we should all live. One Name 'in whom all the gene-
rations of the earth are blessed.' In thus far only do I

John Halifax, Gentleman. II.
wish to ‘found a family,’ as you call it, that our light may shine before men — that we may be a city set on a hill — that we may say plainly unto all that ask us, ‘For me and my house we will serve the Lord.’"

It was not often that John Halifax spoke thus; adopting solemnly the literal language of the Book — his and our life’s guide, no word of which was ever used lightly in our family. We all listened, as in his earnestness he rose, and, standing upright in the firelight, spoke on.

“I believe, with His blessing, that one may ‘serve the Lord’ as well in wealth as in poverty, in a great house as in a cottage like this. I am not doubtful, even though my possessions are increased. I am not afraid of being a rich man. Nor a great man neither, if I were called to such a destiny.”

“It may be — who knows?” said Ursula, softly.

John caught his wife’s eyes, and smiled.

“Love, you were a true prophet once, with a certain ‘Yes, you will,’ but now — Children, you know when I married your mother I had nothing, and she gave up everything for me. I said, I would yet make her as high as any lady in the land, — in fortune I then meant, thinking it would make her happier; but she and I are wiser now. We know that we never can be happier than we were in the old house at Norton Bury, or in this little Longfield. By making her lady of Beechwood I should double her responsibilities and treble her cares; give her an infinitude of new duties, and no pleasures half so sweet as those we left behind. Still, of herself and for herself, my wife shall decide.”

Ursula looked up at him; tears stood in her eyes, though through them shone all the steadfastness of faithful love. “Thank you, John. I have decided. If you
wish it, if you think it right, we will leave Longfield and go to Beechwood."

He stopped and kissed her forehead, saying only — "We will go."

Guy looked up, half-reproachfully, as if the father were exacting a sacrifice; but I question whether the greater sacrifice were not his who took rather than hers who gave.

So all was settled — we were to leave beloved Longfield. It was to be let, not sold; let to a person we knew, who would take jealous care of all that was ours, and we might come back and see it continually; but it would be ours — our own home — no more.

Very sad — sadder even than I had thought — was the leaving all the familiar things; the orchard and the flower-garden, the meadow and the stream, the woody hills beyond, every line and wave of which was pleasant and dear almost as our children's faces. Ay, almost as that face which for a year — one little year, had lived in sight of, but never beheld their beauty; the child who one spring day had gone away merrily out of the white gate with her three brothers, and never came back to Longfield any more.

Perhaps this circumstance, that her fading away and her departure happened away from home, was the cause why her memory — the memory of our living Muriel, in her human childhood — afterwards clung more especially about the house at Longfield. The other children altered, imperceptibly yet so swiftly, that from year to year we half forgot their old likenesses. But Muriel's never changed. Her image, only a shade, yet often more real than any of these living children, seemed perpetually among us. It crept through the house at dusk;
in winter fire-light it sat smiling in dim corners; in spring mornings it moved about the garden borders, with tiny soft footsteps neither seen nor heard. The others grew up — would be men and women shortly — but the one child that "was not," remained to us always a child.

I thought, even the last evening — the very last evening that John returned from Enderly, and his wife went down to the stream to meet him, and they came up the field together, as they had done so for many, many years; — ay, even then I thought I saw his eyes turn to the spot where a little pale figure used to sit on the door-sill, listening and waiting for him, with her dove in her bosom. We never kept doves now.

And the same night, when all the household was in bed — even the mother, who had gone about with a restless activity, trying to persuade herself that there would be at least no possibility of accomplishing the flitting to-morrow — the last night, when John went as usual to fasten the house-door, he stood a long time outside, looking down the valley.

"How quiet everything is. You can almost hear the tinkle of the stream. Poor old Longfield!" And I sighed, thinking we should never again have such another home.

John did not answer. He had been mechanically bending aside and training into its place a long shoot of wild clematis — virgin's bower, which Guy and Muriel had brought in from the fields and planted, a tiny root; it covered the whole front of the house now. Then he came and leaned beside me over the wicket-gate, looking fixedly up into the moonlight blue.

"I wonder if she knows we are leaving Longfield?"

"Who?" said I; for a moment forgetting.

"The child."
CHAPTER VIII.

Father and son — a goodly sight, as they paced side by side up and down the gravel walk — (alas! the pretty field-path belonged to days that were!) — up and down the broad, sunshiny walk, in front of the breakfast-room windows of Beechwood Hall.

It was early — little past eight o'clock; but we kept Longfield hours and Longfield ways still. And besides, this was a grand day — the day of Guy's coming of age. Curious it seemed to watch him, as he walked along by his father, looking every inch "the young heir," and perhaps not unconscious that he did so; — curious enough, remembering how meekly the boy had come into the world, at a certain old house at Norton Bury, one rainy December morning, twenty-one years ago.

It was a bright day to-day — bright as all our faces were, I think, as we gathered round the cosy breakfast-table. There, as heretofore, it was the mother's pride and the father's pleasure that not one face should be missing — that, summer and winter, all should assemble for an hour of family fun and family chat, before the busy cares of the day; and by general consent, which had grown into habit, every one tried to keep unclouded this little bit of early sunshine, before the father and brothers went away. No sour or dreary looks, no painful topics were ever brought to the breakfast-table.

Thus, it was against all custom, when Mr. Halifax, laying down his newspaper with a grave countenance, said —
“This is very ill news. Ten Bank failures in the Gazette to-day.”

“But it will not harm us, father.”

“Edwin is always thinking of ‘us,’ and ‘our business,’” remarked Guy, rather sharply. It was one of the slight — the very slight — jars in our household, that these two lads, excellent lads both, as they grew into manhood did not exactly “pull together.”

“Edwin is scarcely wrong in thinking of ‘us,’ since upon us depend so many,” observed the father, in that quiet tone with which, when he did happen to interfere between his sons, he generally smoothed matters down and kept the balance even. “Yet, though we are ourselves secure, I trust, the losses everywhere around us make it the more necessary that we should not parade our good fortune by launching out into any of Guy’s magnificences — eh, my boy?”

The youth looked down. It was well known in the family, that since we came to Beechwood his pleasure-loving temperament had wanted all sorts of improvements on our style of living — fox-hounds, dinner-parties, balls; that the father’s ways, which, though extended to liberal hospitalities, forbade outward show, and made our life a thorough family life still — were somewhat distasteful to that most fascinating young gentleman, Guy Halifax, Esquire, heir of Beechwood Hall.

“You may call it ‘magnificence,’ or what you choose; but I know I should like to live a little more as our neighbours do. And I think we ought too — we that are known to be the wealthiest family —”

He stopped abruptly — for the door opened; and Guy had too much good taste and good feeling, to discuss our riches before Maud’s poor governess — the tall,
grave, sad-looking, sad-clothed Miss Silver; the same whom John had seen at Mr. Jessop's bank; and who had been with us four months — ever since we came to Beechwood.

One of the boys rose and offered her a chair; for the parents set the example of treating her with entire respect — nay, would gladly have made her altogether one of the family, had she not been so very reserved.

Miss Silver came forward with the daily nosegay which Mrs. Halifax had confided to her superintendence.

"They are the best I can find, madam — I believe Watkins keeps all his greenhouse flowers for to-night."

"Thank you, my dear. These will do very well. — Yes, Guy, persuade Miss Silver to take your place by the fire. She looks so cold."

But Miss Silver, declining the kindness, passed on to her own seat opposite.

Ursula busied herself over the breakfast equipage, rather nervously. Though an admirable person, Miss Silver in her extreme and all but repellant quietness was one whom the mother found it difficult to get on with. She was scrupulously kind to her: and the governess was as scrupulously exact in all courtesy and attention; still that impassible, self-contained demeanour, that great reticence — it might be shyness, it might be pride, — sometimes, Ursula privately admitted, "fidgetted" her.

To-day was to be a general holiday for both masters and servants; a dinner at the mills; and in the evening something which, though we call it a tea-drinking, began to look, I was amused to see, exceedingly like "a ball." But on this occasion both parents had yielded to
their young people's wishes, and half the neighbourhood had been invited by the universally-popular Mr. Guy Halifax, to celebrate his coming of age.

"Only once in the way," said the mother, half ashamed of herself for thus indulging the boy — as giving his shoulder a fond shake, she called him "a foolish fellow."

Then we all dispersed; Guy and Walter to ride to the Manor-house, Edwin vanishing with his sister, to whom he was giving daily Latin lessons in the school-room.

John asked me to take a walk on the hill with him.

"Go, Phineas," whispered his wife — "it will do him good. And don't let him talk too much of old times. This is a hard week for him."

The mother's eyes were mournful, for Guy and "the child" had been born within a year and three days of each other; but she never hinted — it never would have struck her to hint — "this is a hard week for me."

That grief — the one great grief of their life, had come to her more wholesomely than to her husband: either because men, the very best of men, can only suffer, while women can endure; or because in the mysterious ordinance of nature Maud's baby lips had sucked away the bitterness of the pang from the bereaved mother, while her loss was yet new. It had never been left to rankle in that warm heart, which had room for every living child, while it cherished, in tenderness above all sorrow, the child that was no more.

John and I, in our walk, stood a moment by the low church-yard wall, and looked over at that plain white stone, where was inscribed her name, "Muriel Joy
Halifax,” — a line out of that New Testament miracle-story she delighted in, “Whereas I was blind, now I see,” — and the date when she saw. Nothing more: it was not needed.

“December 5, 1813,” said the father, reading the date. “She would have been quite a woman now. How strange! My little Muriel!”

And he walked thoughtfully along, almost in the same footprints where he had been used to carry his darling up the hill-side to the brow of Enderly Flat. He seemed in fancy to bear her in his arms still — this little one, whom, as I have before said, Heaven, in its compensating mercy, year by year, through all changes, had made the one treasure that none could take away — the only child left to be a child for ever.

I think, as we rested in the self-same place, the sunny nook where we used to sit with her for hours together, the father’s heart took this consolation so closely and surely into itself, that memory altogether ceased to be pain. He began talking about the other children — especially Maud — and then of Miss Silver, her governess.

“I wish she were more likeable, John. It vexes me sometimes to see how coldly she returns the mother’s kindness.”

“Poor thing! — she has evidently not been used to kindness. You should have seen how amazed she looked yesterday when we paid her a little more than her salary, and my wife gave her a pretty silk dress to wear tonight. I hardly knew whether she would refuse it, or burst out crying — in girlish fashion.”

“Is she a girl? Why, the boys say she looks thirty
at least. Guy and Walter laugh amazingly at her dowdy
dress and her solemn, haughty ways."

"That will not do, Phineas. I must speak to them.
They ought to make allowances for poor Miss Silver, of
whom I think most highly."

"I know you do; but do you heartily like her?"

"For most things, yes. And I sincerely respect her,
or, of course, she would not be here. I think people
should be as particular over choosing their daughter's
governess as their son's wife; and having chosen, should
show her almost equal honour."

"You'll have your sons choosing themselves wives
soon, John. I fancy Guy has a soft place in his heart
for that pretty Grace Oldtower."

But the father made no answer. He was always
tenacious over the lightest approach to such jests as
these. And besides just at this moment Mr. Brown,
Lord Luxmore's steward, passed — riding solemnly along.
He barely touched his hat to Mr. Halifax.

"Poor Mr. Brown! He has a grudge against me
for those Mexican speculations I refused to embark in;
he did, and lost everything but what he gets from Lord
Luxmore. I do think, Phineas, the country has been
running mad this year after speculation. There is sure
to come a panic afterwards, and indeed it seems already
beginning."

"But you are secure? You have not joined in the
mania, and the crash cannot harm you? Did I not hear
you say, that you were not afraid of losing a single
penny?"

"Yes — unfortunately," with a troubled smile.

"John, what do you mean?"

"I mean, that to stand upright while one's neigh-
bours are falling on all sides, is a most trying position. Misfortune makes people unjust. The other day at the sessions, I got cold looks enough from my brother magistrates — looks that would have set my blood boiling twenty years ago. And — you saw in the Norton Bury Mercury that article about 'grasping plebeian millionaires' — 'wool-spinners, spinning out of their country's vitals.' — That's meant for me, Phineas. Don't look incredulous. Yes — for me."

"How disgraceful!"

"Perhaps so — but to them more than to me. I feel sorry, because of the harm it may do me — especially among working people, who know nothing but what they hear and believe everything that is told them. They see I thrive and others fail — that my mills are the only cloth mills in full work, and I have more hands than I can employ. Every week I am obliged to send new comers away. Then they raise the old cry — that my machinery has ruined labour. So, you see, for all that Guy says about our prosperity, his father does not sleep exactly upon a bed of roses."

"It is wicked — atrocious!"

"Not at all. Only natural — the penalty one has to pay for success. It will die out most likely; meantime, we will mind it as little as we can."

"But are you safe? — your life —" For a sudden fear crossed me — a fear not unwarranted by more than one event of this year — this terrible 1825.

"Safe? — Yes —" and his eyes were lifted, "I believe my life is safe — if I have work to do. Still, for others' sake, I have carried this month past whenever I go to and from the Coltham bank, besides my cash box — this."
He shewed me, peering out of his breast-pocket, a small pistol.
I was greatly startled.
"Does your wife know?"
"Of course. But she knows too, that nothing but the last extremity would force me to use it: also that my carrying it, and its being noised about that I do so, may prevent my ever having occasion to use it. God grant I never may! Don't let us talk about this."

He stopped, gazing with a sad abstraction down the sunshiny valley — most part of which was already his own property. For whatever capital he could spare from his business he never sunk in speculation, but took a patriarchal pleasure in investing it in land, chiefly for the benefit of his mills and those concerned therein.

"My poor people — they might have known me better! But I suppose one never attains one's desire without its being leavened with some bitterness. If there was one point I was anxious over in my youth, it was to keep up through life a name like the Chevalier Bayard — how folk would smile to hear of a tradesman emulating Bayard — 'Sans peur et sans reproche!' And so things might be — ought to be. So perhaps they shall be yet, in spite of this calumny."

"How shall you meet it? What shall you do?"
"Nothing. Live it down."

He stood still, looking across the valley to where the frosty line of the hill-tops met the steel-blue, steadfast sky. Yes, I felt sure he would "live it down."

We dismissed the subject, and spent an hour or more in pleasant chat, about many things. Passing homeward through the beech-wood, where through the bare tree-
tops a light snow was beginning to fall, John said, musingly —

"It will be a hard winter — we shall have to help our poor people a great deal. Christmas dinners will be much in request."

"There's a saying, that the way to an Englishman's heart is through his stomach. So, perhaps, you'll get justice by spring."

"Don't be angry, Phineas. As I tell my wife, it is not worth while. Half the wrongs people do to us are through sheer ignorance. We must be patient. 'In your patience possess ye your souls.'"

He said this, more to himself than aloud, as if carrying out the thread of his own thought. Mine following it, and observing him, involuntarily turned to another passage in our Book of books, about the blessedness of some men, even when reviled and persecuted.

Ay, and for all his many cares, John Halifax looked like a man who was "blessed."

Blessed, and happy too, throughout that day, especially in the midst of the mill-yard dinner — which reminded me forcibly of that feast, at which guests were gathered out of the highways and hedges — guests, such as John Halifax liked to have — guests who could not, by any possibility, "recompense" him. Yet it did one's heart good to hear the cheer that greeted the master, ay, and the young master too, who was to-day for the first time presented as such; — as the firm henceforward was to be, "Halifax and Son."

And full of smiling satisfaction was the father's look, when in the evening he stood in the midst of his children, waiting for "Guy's visitors," as he pertinaciously declared them to be — these fine people, for whose
entertainment our house had been these three days turned upside down; the sober old dining-room converted into a glittering ball-room, and the entrance-hall a very “bower of bliss” — all green boughs and Chinese lanterns. John protested he should not have known his own study again; and that, if these festive transformations were to happen frequently, he should soon not even know himself!

Yet for all that, and in spite of the comical horror he testified at this first bouleversement of our quiet home ways, I think he had a real pleasure in his children’s delight; in wandering with them through the decorated rooms, tapestried with ivy and laurel, and arbor vitae; in making them all pass in review before him, and admiring their handiwork and themselves.

A goodly group they made — our young folk: there were no “children” now — for even Maud, who was tall and womanly for her age, had bloomed out in a ball dress, all white muslin and camélias, and appeared every inch “Miss Halifax.” Walter, too, had lately eschewed jackets, and began to borrow razors; while Edwin, though still small, had a keen, old-man-like look, which made him seem — as he was, indeed, in character — the eldest of the three. Altogether, they were “a fine family,” such as any man might rejoice to see growing or grown up around him.

But my eyes naturally sought the father, as he stood among his boys, taller than any of them, and possessing far more than they that quality for which John Halifax had always been remarkable — dignity. True, Nature had favoured him beyond most men, giving him the stately, handsome presence befitting middle age, throwing a kind of apostolic grace over the high, half-
bald crown, and touching with a softened grey the still curly locks behind. But these were mere accidents; the true dignity lay in himself and his own personal character, independent of any exterior.

It was pleasant to watch him, and note how advancing years had given rather than taken away from, his outward mien. As ever, he was distinguishable from other men, even to his dress — which had something of the Quaker about it still, in its sober colour, its rarely-changed fashion, and its exceeding neatness. Mrs. Halifax used now and then to laugh at him for being so particular over his daintiest of cambric and finest of lawn — but secretly she took the greatest pride in his appearance.

"John looks well to-night," she said, coming in and sitting down by me, her eyes following mine. One would not have guessed from her quiet gaze that she knew — what John had told me she knew, this morning. But these two in their perfect union had a wonderful strength — a wonderful fearlessness. And she had learned from him, what perhaps originally was foreign to her impressionable and somewhat anxious mind — that steadfast faith, which, while ready to meet every ill when the time comes, until the time waits cheerfully, and will not disquiet itself in vain.

Thus, for all their cares, her face as well as his, was calm and bright. Bright, even with the prettiest girlish blush, when John came up to his wife and admired her — as indeed was not surprising.

She laughed at him, and declared she always intended to grow lovely in her old age. "I thought I ought to dress myself grandly, too, on Guy's birthday. Do you like me, John?"

"Very much: I like that black velvet gown, sub-
stantial, soft and rich, without any show. And that lace frill round your throat — what sort of lace is it?"

"Valenciennes. When I was a girl, if I had a weakness it was for black velvet and Valenciennes."

John smiled, with visible pleasure that she had even a "weakness" gratified now. "And you have put on my brooch at last, I see."

"Yes; but —" and she shook her head — "remember your promise!"

"Phineas, this wife of mine is a vain woman. She knows her own price is 'far above rubies' — or diamonds either. No, Mrs. Halifax, be not afraid; I shall give you no more jewels."

She did not need them. She stood amidst her three sons with the smile of a Cornelia. She felt her husband's eyes rest on her, with that quiet perfectness of love — better than any lover's love —

"The fullness of a stream that knew no fall" —

the love of a husband who has been married nearly twentyfive years.

Here a troop of company arrived, and John left me to assume his duty as host.

No easy duty, as I soon perceived; for times were hard, and men's minds troubled. Every one, except the light-heeled, light-hearted youngsters, looked grave.

... Many yet alive remember this year, 1825 — the panic year. War having ceased, commerce, in its worst form, started into sudden and unhealthy overgrowth. Speculations of all kinds sprung up like fungi, out of dead wood, flourished a little, and dropped away. Then came ruin, not of hundreds, but thousands, of all ranks and classes. This year, and this month in this year,
the breaking of many established firms, especially bankers, foretold that the universal crash had just begun.

It was felt even in our retired country neighbourhood, and among our friendly guests this night, both gentle and simple — and there was a mixture of both, as only a man in Mr. Halifax's position could mix such heterogeneous elements — towns-people and country-people, dissenters and church-folk, professional men and men of business. John dared to do it — and did it. But though through his own personal influence, many of different ranks whom he liked and respected, meeting in his house, learned to like and respect one another, still, even to-night, he could not remove the cloud which seemed to hang over all — a cloud so heavy, that none present liked referring to it. They hit upon all sorts of extraneous subjects, keeping far aloof from the one which evidently pressed upon all minds — the universal distress abroad, the fear that was knocking at almost every man's door but ours.

Of course, the talk fell on our neighbours — country talk always does. I sat still, listening to Sir Herbert Oldtower, who was wondering that Lord Luxmore suffered the Hall to drop into disgraceful decay, and had began cutting down the pine-woods round it.

"Woods, older than his title by many a century — downright sacrilege! And the property being entailed, too — actual robbery of the heir! But I understand anybody may do anything with Lord Ravenel — a mere selfish, cynical, idle voluptuary!"

"Indeed you are mistaken, Sir Herbert!" cried Mr. Jessop of Norton Bury — a very honest fellow was Josiah Jessop. "He banks with me — that is, there are some poor Catholics in this neighbourhood whom I
pay — but bless me! he told me not to tell. No, indeed. Cynical he may be; idle, perhaps — most men of fashion are — but Lord Ravenel is not the least like his father — is he, Mr. Halifax?"

"I have not seen Lord Ravenel for many years."

And as if, even to this day, the mention of the young man's name brought back thoughts of the last day we had seen him — a day which, its sadness having gone by, still kept its unspoken sacredness, distinct from all other days — John moved away and went and talked to a girl whom both he and the mother liked above most young girls we knew — simple, sunny-faced Grace Oldtower.

Dancing began. Spite of my Quaker education, or perhaps for that very reason, I delighted to see dancing. Dancing, such as it was then, when young folk moved breezily and lightly, as if they loved it; skimming like swallows down the long lines of the Triumph — graceful winding in and out through the graceful country-dance — lively always, but always decorous. In those days people did not think it necessary to the pleasures of dancing that any stranger should have liberty to snatch a shy, innocent girl round the waist, and whirl her about in mad waltz or awkward polka till she stops, giddy and breathless, with burning cheek and tossed hair, looking, — as I would not have liked to see our pretty Maud look.

No; though while watching the little lady to-night, I was inclined to say to her —

"When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that."

And in her unwearied spirits she seemed as if she would readily have responded to the wish.
We did not see Guy among the dancers, who were now forming in a somewhat confused square, in order to execute a new dance called quadrilles, of which Miss Grace Oldtower was to be the instructress.

"Where is Guy?" said the mother who would have missed him among a room full of people. "Have you seen Guy anywhere, Miss Silver?"

Miss Silver, who sat playing tunes — she had declined dancing — turned, colouring visibly.

"Yes, I have seen him; he is in the study."

"Would you be so kind as to fetch him?"

The governess rose and crossed the room, with a stately walk — statelier than usual. Her silk gown, of some rich soft colour, fashioned after Mrs. Halifax's taste, and the chaplet of bay-leaves, which Maud had insisted upon putting in her dark hair, made an astonishing change in Miss Silver. I could not help noticing it to Mrs. Halifax.

"Yes, indeed, she looks well. John says her features are fine; but, for my part, I don't care for your statuesque faces; I like colour — expression. See that bright little Grace Oldtower! — a thoroughly English rose; — I like her. Poor Miss Silver! I wish —"

What, out of compunction for a certain sharpness with which she had spoken, Mrs. Halifax was about to wish, remained undeclared. For, just this minute, Guy entered, and leaning his handsome head and his tender *petits soins* over the "English rose," as his mother called her, led her out to the dancing.

We sat down and looked on.

"Guy danced lazily; he is rather pale too, I fancy."

"Tired, probably. He was out far too long on the
ice to-day, with Maud and Miss Silver. What a pretty creature his partner is!” added Ursula, thoughtfully.

“The children are growing up fast,” I said.

“Ay, indeed. To think that Guy is actually twenty-one — the age when his father was married!”

“Guy will be reminding you of that fact some day soon.”

Mrs. Halifax smiled. “The sooner the better, if only he makes a worthy choice — if only he brings me a daughter whom I can love.”

And I fancied there was love — motherly love — in the eyes that followed through the graceful mazes of her dancing the bonny English Rose.

Guy and his partner sat down beside us. His mother noticed that he had turned very pale again, and the lad owned to be in some pain: he had twisted his foot that morning, in helping Maud and Miss Silver across the ice; but it was a mere trifle — not worth mentioning.

It passed over, with one or two anxious inquiries on the mother’s part, and a soft, dewy shadow over the down-dropped cheek of the little Rose, who evidently did not like to think of any harm coming to her old play-fellow. Then Sir Herbert appeared to lead Mrs. Halifax into supper, Guy limped along with pretty Grace on his arm, and all the guests, just enough to fill our longest table in John’s study, came thronging round in a buzz of mirthfulness.

Either the warm, hospitable atmosphere, or the sight of the merry youngsters, or the general influence of social pleasantness, had for the time being dispelled the cloud. But certainly it was dispelled. The master of the feast looked down two long lines of happy faces — his own as bright as theirs — down to where, at the foot of
the table, the mother and mistress sat. She had been slightly nervous at times during the evening, but now she appeared thoroughly at ease and glad — glad to see her husband take his place at the head of his own hospitable board, in the midst of his own friends and his own people, honoured and beloved. It seemed a good omen — an omen that the bitter things outside would pass away.

How bitter they had been, and how sore the wife's heart still felt, I could see from the jealous way in which, smiling and cheerful as her demeanour was, she caught every look, every word of those around her, which might chance to bear reference to her husband; in her quick avoidance of every topic connected with these disastrous times, and, above all, in her hurried grasp of a newspaper that some careless servant brought in fresh from the night-mail, wet with sleet and snow.

"Do you get your country paper regularly?" asked some one at table. And then some others appeared to recollect the *Norton Bury Mercury*, and its virulent attacks on their host — for there ensued an awkward pause, during which I saw Ursula's face beginning to burn. But she conquered her wrath.

"There is often much interest in our provincial papers, Sir Herbert. My husband makes a point of taking them all in — bad and good — of every shade of politics. He believes it is only by hearing all sides that you can truly judge of the state of the country."

"Just as a physician must hear all symptoms before he decides on the patient's case. At least, so our good old friend Doctor Jessop used to say."

"Eh?" said Mr. Jessop, the banker, catching his own name, and waking up from a brown study, in
which he had seemed to see nothing — except, perhaps, the newspaper, which, in its printed cover, lay between himself and Mrs. Halifax. "Eh? did anyone — Oh, I beg pardon — beg pardon — Sir Herbert," hastily added the old man; who was a very meek and worthy soul, and had been perhaps more subdued than usual this evening.

"I was referring," said Sir Herbert, with his usual ponderous civility, "to your excellent brother, who was so much respected among us — for which respect, allow me to say, he did not leave us without an inheritor."

The old banker answered the formal bow with a kind, of nervous hurry; and then Sir Herbert, with a loud premise of his right as the oldest friend of our family, tried to obtain silence for the customary speech, prefatory to the customary toast of "Health and prosperity to the heir of Beechwood."

There was great applause and filling of glasses; great smiling and whispering; everybody glancing at poor Guy, who turned red and white, and evidently wished himself a hundred miles off. In the confusion I felt my sleeve touched, and saw leaning towards me, hidden by Maud's laughing, happy face, the old banker. He held in his hand the newspaper which seemed to have so fascinated him.

"It's the London Gazette. Mr. Halifax gets it three hours before any of us. I may open it? It is important to me. Mrs. Halifax would excuse, eh?"

Of course she would. Especially if she had seen the old man's look, as his trembling fingers vainly tried to unfold the sheet without a single rustle's betraying his surreptitious curiosity.

Sir Herbert rose, cleared his throat, and began.
"Ladies and gentlemen, I speak as a father myself, and as the son of a father whom — whom I will not refer to here, except to say that his good heart would have rejoiced to see this day. The high esteem in which Sir Ralph always held Mr. Halifax, has descended, and will descend —"

Here some one called out —
"Mr. Jessop! Look at Mr. Jessop!"

The old man had suddenly sunk back, with a sort of choking groan. His eyes were staring blankly, his cheek was the colour of ashes. But when he saw every one looking at him, he tried desperately to recover himself.

"'T is nothing. Nothing of the slightest moment. Eh?" clutching tightly at the paper which Mrs. Halifax was kindly removing out of his hand. "There's no news in it — none, I assure you."

But from his agitation — from the pitiful effort he made to disguise it — it was plain enough that there was news. Plain also, as in these dangerous and critical times men were only too quick to divine, — in what that news consisted. Tidings, which now made every newspaper a sight of fear, — especially this — the London Gazette.

Edwin caught and read the fatal page — the fatal column — known only too well.

"W—'s have stopped payment."

W—'s was a great London house, the favourite banking-house in our county, with which many provincial banks, and Jessop's especially, were widely connected, and would be no one knew how widely involved.

"W—'s stopped payment!"

A murmur — a hush of momentary suspense, as the Gazette was passed hurriedly from hand to hand; and
then our guests, one and all, sat looking at one another in breathless fear, suspicion, or assured dismay. For, as every one was aware (we knew our neighbours' affairs so well about innocent Enderly), there was not a single household of that merry little company upon whom, near or remote, the blow would not fall — except ours.

No polite disguise could gloss over the general consternation. Few thought of Jessop — only of themselves. Many a father turned pale; many a mother melted into smothered tears. More than one honest countenance that five minutes before had beamed like the rising sun, all friendliness and jocularity, I saw shrink into a wizened, worldly face, with greedy selfishness peering out of the corners of its eyes, eager to conceal its own alarms and dive as far as possible into the terrors of its neighbours.

"There will be a run on Jessop's bank to-morrow," I heard one person saying; glancing to where the poor old banker still sat, with a vacant, stupified smile, assuring all around him that "nothing had happened; really, nothing."

"A run? I suppose so. Then it will be 'Sauve qui peut,' and the devil take the hindmost."

"What say you to all this, Mr. Halifax?"

John still kept his place. He sat perfectly quiet, and had never spoken a syllable.

When Sir Herbert, who was the first to recover from the shock of these ill-tidings, called him by his name, Mr. Halifax looked quickly up. It was to see, instead of those two lines of happy faces, faces already gathering in troubled groups, faces angry, sullen, or miserable, all of which, with a vague distrust, seemed instinctively turned upon him.

"Mr. Halifax," said the baronet; and one could see
how, in spite of his steadfast politeness, he too was not without his anxieties — "this is an unpleasant breaking-in upon your kindly hospitalities. I suppose, through this unpropitious event, each of us must make up our minds to some loss. Let me hope yours will be trifling."

John made no answer.

"Or, perhaps — though I can hardly hope anything so fortunate — perhaps this failure will not affect you at all?"

He waited — as did many others, for Mr. Halifax's reply; which was long in coming. However, since all seemed to expect it, it did come at last; but grave and sad as if it were the announcement of some great misfortune.

"No, Sir Herbert; it will not affect me at all."

Sir Herbert, and not he alone — looked surprised — uneasily surprised. Some mutters there were of "congratulation." Then arose a troubled murmur of talking, in which the master of the house was forgotten; until the baronet said, "My friends, I think we are forgetting our courtesy. Allow me to give you without more delay — the toast I was about to propose, — 'Health, long life, and happiness to Mr. Guy Halifax.'"

And so poor Guy's birthday toast was drunk; almost in silence; and the few words he said in acknowledgment were just listened to, scarcely heard. Every one rose from table, and the festivities were over.

One by one all our guests began to make excuse. One by one, involuntarily perhaps, yet not the less painf

fully and plainly, they all shrunk away from us, as if in the universal trouble we, who had nothing to fear, had no part nor lot. Formal congratulations, given with pale lips and wandering eyes: brusque adieux, as some of
the more honest or less courteous showed but too obviously how cruelly, even resentfully, they felt the inequalities of fortune; hasty departures, full of a dismay that rejected angrily every shadow of consolation; — all things John had to meet and to bear.

He met them with composure; scarcely speaking a word, as indeed what was there to say? To all the friendly speeches, real or pretended, he listened with a kind of sad gravity: of all harsher words than these — and there were not a few — he took not the least notice, but held his place as master of the house; generously deaf and blind to everything that it were as well the master of the house should neither hear nor see.

At last he was left, a very Pariah of prosperity, by his own hearth, quite alone.

The last carriage had rolled away; the tired household had gone to bed; there was no one in the study but me. John came in and stood leaning with both his arms against the fire-place, motionless and silent. He leant there so long, that at last I touched him.

"Well, Phineas!"

I saw this night's events had wounded him to the core.

"Are you thinking of these honest, friendly, disinterested guests of ours? Don't! They are not worth a single thought."

"Not an angry thought, certainly." And he smiled at my wrath — a sad smile.

"Ah, Phineas! now I begin to understand what is meant by the curse of prosperity."
A great, eager, but doggedly-quiet crowd, of which each had his or her — for it was half women — individual terror to hide, his or her individual interest to fight for, and cared not a straw for that of any one else.

It was market-day, and this crowd was collected and collecting every minute, before the bank at Norton Bury. It included all classes, from the stout farmer’s wife, or market-woman, to the pale, frightened lady of “limited income,” who had never been in such a throng before; from the aproned mechanic to the gentleman who sat in his carriage at the street corner, confident that whatever poor chance there was, his would be the best.

Everybody was, as I have said, extremely quiet. You heard none of the jokes that always rise in and circulate through a crowd; none of the loud outcries of a mob. All were intent on themselves and their own business; on that fast-bolted red-baize door, and on the green blind of the windows, which informed them that it was “open from ten till four.”

The Abbey clock struck three-quarters. Then there was a slight stirring, a rustling here and there of paper, as some one drew out and examined his bank-notes; openly, with small fear of theft — they were not worth stealing.

John and I, a little way off, stood looking on, where we had once watched a far different crowd; for Mr. Jessop owned the doctor’s former house, and in sight of the green Bank blinds were my dear old father’s known windows.
Guy's birthday had fallen on a Saturday. This was Monday morning. We had driven over to Norton Bury, John and I, at an unusually early hour. He did not exactly tell me why, but it was not difficult to guess. Not difficult to perceive how strongly he was interested, even affected — as any man, knowing all the circumstances, could not but be affected — by the sight of that crowd, all the sadder for its being such a patient, decent, respectable crowd, out of which so large a proportion was women.

I noticed this latter fact to John.

"Yes, I was sure it would be so. Jessop's bank has such a number of small depositors and issues so many small notes. He cannot cash above half of them without some notice. If there comes a run, he may have to stop payment this very day; and then, how wide the misery would spread among the poor, God knows."

His eye wandered pitifully over the heaving mass of anxious faces, blue with cold, and growing more and more despondent as every minute they turned with a common impulse from the closed bank-door to the Abbey clock, glittering far up in the sunshiny atmosphere of morning.

Its finger touched the one heel of the great striding X — glided on to the other — then ten strokes fell leisurely and regularly upon the clear, frosty air; then the chimes — Norton Bury was proud of its Abbey chimes — burst out in the tune of "Life let us Cherish."

The bells went through all the tune, to the very last note — then ensued silence. The crowd were silent too — almost breathless with intent listening — but alas! not to the merry Abbey chimes.

The bank door remained closed — not a rattle at
the bolts, not a clerk's face peering out above the blind. The house was as shut-up and desolate as if it were entirely empty.

Five whole minutes — by the Abbey clock — did that poor, patient crowd wait on the pavement. Then a murmur arose. One or two men hammered at the door; some frightened women, jostled in the press, began to scream.

John could bear it no longer. "Come along with me," he said, hurriedly. "I must see Jessop — we can get in at the garden door."

This was a little gate round the corner of the street, well known to us both in those brief "courting days," when we came to tea of evenings, and found Mrs. Jessop and Ursula March in the garden watering the plants and tying up the roses. Nay, we passed out of it into the same summer parlour, where — I cannot tell if John ever knew of the incident, at all events he never mentioned it to me — there had been transacted a certain momentous event in Ursula's life and mine. Entering by the French window, there rose up to my mental vision, in vivid contrast to all present scenes, the picture of a young girl I had once seen sitting there, with head drooped, knitting. Could that day be twenty-five years ago?

No summer parlour now — its atmosphere was totally changed. It was a dull, dusty room, of which the only lively object was a large fire, the under half of which had burnt itself away unstirred into black dingy caverns. Before it, with breakfast untasted, sat Josiah Jessop — his feet on the fender, his elbows on his knees, the picture of despair.

"Mr. Jessop, my good friend!"
"No, I haven't a friend in the world, or shall not have, an hour hence. Oh! it's you, Mr. Halifax? — You have not an account to close? You don't hold any notes of mine, do you? John put his hand on the old man's shoulder, and repeated that he only came as a friend.

"Not the first 'friend' I have received this morning. I knew I should be early honoured with visitors;" and the banker attempted a dreary smile. "Sir Herbert and half-a-dozen more are waiting for me up-stairs. The biggest fish must have the first bite — eh, you know?"

"I know," said John, gloomily. "Hark! those people outside will hammer my door down! — Speak to them, Mr. Halifax — tell them I'm an old man — that I was always an honest man — always. If only they would give me time — hark! — just hark! Heaven help me! do they want to tear me in pieces?"

John went out for a few moments, then came back and sat down beside Mr. Jessop.

"Compose yourself" — the old man was shaking like an aspen leaf. "Tell me, if you have no objection to give me this confidence, exactly how your affairs stand."

With a gasp of helpless thankfulness, looking up in John's face, while his own quivered like a frightened child's, — the banker obeyed. It seemed "that great as was his loss by W—'s failure, it was not absolute ruin to him. In effect, he was at this moment perfectly solvent, and by calling in mortgages &c., could meet both the accounts of the gentry who banked with him, together with all his own notes now afloat in the county, principally among the humbler ranks, petty
tradespeople, and such like, — if only both classes of customers would give him time to pay them.

"But they will not. There will be a run upon the bank and then all's over with me. It's a hard case — solvent as I am — ready and able to pay every farthing — if only I had a week's time. As it is I must stop payment to-day. Hark! they are at the door again! Mr. Halifax, for God's sake quiet them!"

"I will; only tell me first what sum, added to the cash you have available, would keep the bank open — just for a day or two."

At once guided and calmed, the old man's business faculties seemed to return. He began to calculate, and soon stated the sum he needed: I think it was three or four thousand pounds.

"Very well; I have thought of a plan. But first — those poor fellows outside. — Thank Heaven, I am a rich man, and everybody knows it. Phineas, that inkstand, please."

He sat down and wrote: curiously the attitude and manner reminded me of his sitting down and writing at my father's table, after the bread riot — years and years ago. Soon, a notice, signed by Josiah Jessop, and afterwards by himself, to the effect that the bank would open, "without fail," at one o'clock this day, — was given by John to the astonished clerk, to be posted in the window.

A responsive cheer outside showed how readily those outside had caught at even this gleam of hope. Also — how implicitly they trusted in the mere name of a gentleman who all over the county was known for "his word being as good as his bond," — John Halifax.

The banker breathed freer; but his respite was short:
an imperative message came from the gentlemen above stairs, desiring his presence. With a kind of blind dependence, he looked towards John.

"Let me go in your stead. You can trust me to manage matters to the best of my power?"

The banker overwhelmed him with gratitude.

"Nay, that ought to be my word, standing in this house, and remembering" — His eyes turned to the two portraits — grimly-coloured daubs, yet with a certain apology of likeness too, which broadly smiled at one another from opposite walls — the only memorials now remaining of the good doctor and his cheery little old wife. "Come, Mr. Jessop, leave the matter with me; believe me, it is not only a pleasure, but a duty."

The old man melted into senile tears.

I do not know how John managed the provincial magnates, who were sitting in council considering how best to save, first themselves, then the bank, lastly — If the poor public outside had been made acquainted with that ominous "lastly!". Or if to the respectable conclave above-stairs, who would have recoiled indignantly at the vulgar word "jobbing," had been hinted a phrase — which ran oddly in and out of the nooks of my brain, keeping time to the murmur in the street, "Vox populi, vox Dei" — truly, I should have got little credit for my Latinity.

John came out in about half an hour, with a cheerful countenance; told me he was going over to Coltham for an hour or two — would I wait his return?

"And all is settled?" I asked.

"Will be soon, I trust. I can't stay to tell you more now. Good-bye."

I was no man of business, and could assist in nothing.
So I thought the best I could do was to pass the time in wandering up and down the familiar garden, idly watching the hoar-frost on the arbutus leaves, and on the dry stems of what had been dear little Mrs. Jessop's favourite roses — the same roses I had seen her among on that momentous evening — the evening when Ursula's bent neck flushed more crimson than the sunset itself, as I told her John Halifax was "too noble to die for any woman's love."

No — he had lived for it — earned it — won it. And musing over these long-ago times, my heart melted — foolish old heart that it was! with a trembling joy, to think that Providence had, in some way, used my poor useless hand to give to him this blessing, a man's chiefest blessing, of a virtuous and loving wife — which had crowned his life for all these wonderful years.

As it neared one o'clock, I could see my ancient friend the Abbey clock with not a wrinkle in his old face, staring at me through the bare Abbey trees. I began to feel rather anxious. I went into the deserted office; and thence, none forbidding, ensconced myself behind the sheltering Bank blinds.

The crowd had scarcely moved; a very honest, patient, weary crowd, dense in the centre, thinning towards the edges. On its extremest verge, waiting in a curricle, was a gentleman, who seemed observing it with a lazy curiosity. I, having like himself apparently nothing better to do, observed this gentleman.

He was dressed in the height of the mode, combined, with a novel and eccentric fashion, which had been lately set by that extraordinary young nobleman whom everybody talked about — my Lord Byron. His neckcloth was loose, his throat bare, and his hair fell long and
untidy. His face, that of a man about thirty — I fancied I had seen it before, but could not recall where — was delicate, thin, with an expression at once cynical and melancholy. He sat in his carriage, wrapped in furs, or looked carelessly out on the scene before him, as if he had no interest therein — as if there was nothing in life worth living for.

“Poor fellow!” said I to myself, recalling the bright, busy, laughing faces of our growing up lads, recalling especially their father's — full of all that active energy and wise cheerfulness which gives zest to existence; God forbid any man should die till he has lived to learn it! — “poor fellow! I wish his moodiness could take a lesson from us at home!”

But the gentleman soon retired from my observation under his furs! for the sky had gloomed over, and snow began to fall. Those on the pavement shook it drearily off, and kept turning every minute to the abbey clock — I feared it would take the patience of Job to enable them to hold out another quarter of an hour.

At length some determined hand again battered at the door. I fancied I heard a clerk speaking out of the first-floor window.

“Gentlemen” — how tremblingly polite the voice was! — “Gentlemen, in five minutes — positively five minutes — the bank will —”

The rest of the speech was drowned and lost. Dashing round the street corner, the horses all in a foam, came our Beechwood carriage. Mr. Halifax leaped out.

Well might the crowd divide for him — well might they cheer him. For he carried a canvas bag — a great, ugly, grimy-coloured bag — a precious, precious bag, with the consolation — perhaps the life — of hundreds in it!”
I knew, almost by intuition, what he had done — what, in one or two instances, was afterwards done by other rich and generous Englishmen, during the crisis of this year.

The bank door flew open like magic. The crowd came pushing in; but when John called out to them, “Good people, pray let me pass!” they yielded and suffered him to go in first. He went right up to the desk, behind which, flanked by a tolerable array of similar canvas bags, full of gold — but nevertheless waiting in mortal fear, and as white as his own neck-cloth — the old banker stood.

“Mr. Jessop,” John said, in a loud, distinct voice, that all might hear him, “I have the pleasure to open an account with you. I feel satisfied that in these dangerous times no credit is more safe than yours. Allow me to pay in to-day the sum of five thousand pounds.”

“Five thousand pounds!”

The rumour of it was repeated from mouth to mouth. In a small provincial bank, such a sum seemed unlimited. It gave universal confidence. Many who had been scrambling, swearing, almost fighting, to reach the counter and receive gold for their notes, put them again into their pockets, uncashed. Others, chiefly women, got them cashed with a trembling hand — nay, with tears of joy. A few who had come to close accounts, changed their minds, and even paid money in. All were satisfied — the run upon the bank ceased.

Mr. Halifax stood aside, looking on. After the first murmur of surprise and pleasure, no one seemed to take any notice of him, or of what he had done. Only one old widow woman, as she slipped three bright guineas
under the lid of her market-basket, dropped him a curtsey in passing by.

"It's your doing, Mr. Halifax. The Lord reward you, sir."

"Thank you," he said, and shook her by the hand. I thought to myself, watching the many that came and went, unmindful, "only this Samaritan!"

No — one person more, standing by, addressed him by name. "This is indeed your doing, and an act of benevolence which I believe no man alive would have done, except Mr. Halifax."

And the gentleman who spoke — the same I had seen out-side in his curricle — held out a friendly hand.

"I see you do not remember me. My name is Ravenel."

"Lord Ravenel!"

John uttered this exclamation — and no more. I saw that this sudden meeting had brought back, with a cruel tide of memory, the last time they met — by the small nursery bed, in that upper chamber at Enderly.

However, this feeling shortly passed away, as must needs be; and we all three began to converse together.

While he talked, something of the old "Anselmo" came back into Lord Ravenel's face: especially when John asked him if he would drive over with us to Enderly.

"Enderly — how strange the word sounds! — yet I should like to see the place again. Poor old Enderly!"

Irresolutely — all his gestures seemed dreamy and irresolute — he drew his hand across his eyes — the same white, long-fingered, womanish hand which had used to guide Muriel's over the organ keys.

"Yes — I think I will go back with you to Enderly. But first I must speak to Mr. Jessop here."
It was about some poor Catholic families, who, as we had before learnt, had long been his pensioners.

"You are a Catholic still then?" I asked. "We heard the contrary."

"Did you? — Oh, of course. One hears such wonderful facts about oneself. Probably you heard also, that I have been to the Holy Land, and turned Jew — called at Constantinople, and come back a Mohommedan."

"But are you of your old faith?" John said. "Still a sincere Catholic?"

"If you take Catholic in its original sense, certainly. I am a Universalist. I believe everything — and nothing. Let us change the subject." The contemptuous scepticism of his manner altered, as he enquired after Mrs. Halifax and the children. "No longer children now, I suppose?"

"Scarcely. Guy and Walter are as tall as yourself; and my daughter —"

"Your daughter?" — with a start — "oh yes, I recollect. Baby Maud. Is she at all like — like —"

"No."

Neither said more than this; but it seemed as if their hearts warmed to one another, knitted by the same tender remembrance.

We drove home. Lord Ravenel muffled himself up in his furs, complaining bitterly of the snow and sleet.

"Yes, the winter is setting in sharply," John replied, as he reined in his horses at the turnpike gate. "This will be a hard Christmas for many."

"Ay, indeed, sir," said the gate-keeper, touching his hat.

"And if I might make so bold — it's a dark night and the road's lonely —" he added, in a mysterious whisper.
"Thank you, my friend. I am aware of all that." But as John drove on, he remained for some time very silent.

On, across the bleak country, with the snow pelting in our faces — along roads so deserted, that our carriage-wheels made the only sound audible, and that might have been heard distinctly for miles.

All of a sudden, the horses were pulled up. Three or four ill-looking figures had started out of a ditch-bank, and caught hold of the reins.

"Holloa there! — What do you want?"

"Money."

"Let go my horses! They're spirited beasts. You'll get trampled on."

"Who cares?"

This brief colloquy passed in less than a minute. It showed at once our position — miles away from any house — on this desolate moor; showed plainly our danger — John's danger.

He himself did not seem to recognise it. He stood upright on the box seat, the whip in his hand.

"Get away, you fellows, or I must drive over you!"

"Thee'd better!" With a yell, one of the men leaped up and clung to the neck of the plunging mare — then was dashed to the ground between her feet. The poor wretch uttered one groan and no more. John sprang out of his carriage, caught the mare's head, and backed her.

"Hold off! — the poor fellow is killed, or may be in a minute. Hold off, I say."

If ever these men, planning perhaps their first ill deed, were struck dumb with astonishment, it was to see the gentleman they were intending to rob take up their comrade in his arms, drag him towards the carriage-
lamps, rub snow on his face, and chafe his heavy hands. But all in vain. The blood trickled down from a wound in the temples — the head, with its open mouth dropping, fell back upon John's knee.

"He is quite dead."

The others gathered round in silence, watching Mr. Halifax, as he still knelt, with the dead man's head leaning against him, mournfully regarding it.

"I think I know him. Where does his wife live?"

Some one pointed across the moor, to a light, faint as a glow-worm. "Take that rug out of my carriage — wrap him in it." The order was at once obeyed. "Now carry him home. I will follow presently."

"Surely not," expostulated Lord Ravenel, who had got out of the carriage and stood, shivering and much shocked, beside Mr. Halifax. "You would not surely put yourself in the power of these scoundrels? What brutes they are — the lower orders!"

"Not altogether — when you know them. Phineas, will you drive Lord Ravenel on to Beechwood?"

"Excuse me — certainly not," said Lord Ravenel, with dignity. "We will stay to see the result of the affair. What a singular man Mr. Halifax is, and always was," he added, thoughtfully, as he muffled himself up again in his furs, and relapsed into silence.

Soon, following the track of those black figures across the snow, we came to a cluster of peat huts, alongside of the moorland road. John took one of the carriage-lamps in his hand, and went in, without saying a word. To my surprise Lord Ravenel presently dismounted and followed him. I was left with the reins in my hand, and two or three of those ill-visaged men hovering about the carriage; but no one attempted to do me any harm.
Nay, when John reappeared, after a lapse of some minutes one of them civilly picked up the whip and put it into his hand.

"Thank you. Now, my men, tell me what did you want with me just now?"


"And a likely way you went about to get it! Stopping me in the dark, on a lonely road, just like common robbers. I did not think any Enderly men would have done a thing so cowardly."

"We bean't cowards," was the surly answer. "Thee carries pistols, Mr. Halifax."

"You forced me to do it. My life is as precious to my wife and children, as — as that poor fellow's to his." — John stopped. "God help us, my men! it's a hard world for us all sometimes. Why did you not know me better? Why not come to my house and ask honestly for a dinner and a half-crown? — you should have both, any day."

"Thank'ee, sir," was the general cry. "And, sir," begged one old man, "you'll hush up the 'crowner's 'quest — you and this gentleman here. You won't put us in jail, for taking to the road, Mr. Halifax?"

"No; — unless you attack me again. But I am not afraid — I'll trust you. Look here!" He took the pistol out of his breast-pocket, cocked it, and fired its two barrels harmlessly into the air. "Now, good-night; and if ever I carry fire-arms again, it will be your fault, not mine."

So saying, he held the carriage-door open for Lord Ravenel, who took his place with a subdued and thoughtful air: then mounting the box-seat, John drove, in somewhat melancholy silence, across the snowy, starlit moors to Beechwood.
CHAPTER X.

In the home-light.

It was a scene — glowing almost as those evening pictures at Longfield. Those pictures, photographed on memory by the summer sun of our lives, and which no paler after-sun could have power to re-produce. Nothing earthly is ever re-produced in the same form. I suppose Heaven meant it to be so; that in the perpetual progression of our existence, we should be reconciled to loss, and taught that change itself is but another form for aspiration. Aspiration, which never can rest, or ought to rest, in anything short of the One absolute Perfection — the One all-satisfying Good, "in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

I say this, to excuse myself for thoughts, which at times made me grave — even in the happy home-light of John's study; where, for several weeks after the last incident I have recorded, the family were in the habit of gathering every evening. For poor Guy was a captive. The "mere trifle" had turned out to be a sprained foot, which happening to a tall and strong young man became serious. He bore his imprisonment restlessly enough at first, but afterwards grew more reconciled — took to reading, drawing, and society — and even began to interest himself in the pursuits of his sister Maud, who every morning had her lessons in the study.

Miss Silver first proposed this. She had evinced more feeling than was usual to her, since Guy's accident; showed him many little feminine kindesses — out of
compunction, it seemed; and altogether was much improved. Of evenings, as now, she always made one of the "young people," who were generally grouped together round Guy's sofa—Edwin, Walter, and little Maud. The father and mother sat opposite—as usual, side by side, he with his newspaper, she with her work. Or sometimes, falling into pleasant idleness, they would slip hand in hand, and sit talking to one another in an under-tone, or silently and smilingly watch the humours of their children.

For me, I generally took to my nook in the chimney-corner—it was a very ancient fire-place, with settles on each side, and dogs instead of a grate, upon which many a faggot hissed and crackled its merry brief life away. Nothing could be more cheery and comfortable than this old-fashioned, low-roofed room, three sides of which were peopled with books—all the books which John had gathered up during the course of his life. Perhaps it was their long-familiar, friendly faces which made this his favourite room his own especial domain. But he did not keep it tabooed from his family; he liked to have them about him, even in his studious hours.

So, of evenings, we all sat together as now, each busy, and none interrupting the rest. At intervals, flashes of talk or laughter broke out, chiefly from Guy, Walter, or Maud, when Edwin would look up from his everlasting book, and even the grave governess relax into a smile. Since she had learnt to smile, it became more and more apparent how very handsome Miss Silver was. "Handsome" is, I think, the fittest word for her; that correctness of form and colour, which attracts the eye chiefly, and perhaps the eye of men rather than of
women; — at least, Mrs. Halifax could never be brought to see it. But then her peculiar taste was for slender, small brunettes, like Grace Oldtower; whereas Miss Silver was large and fair.

Fair, in every sense, most decidedly. And now that she evidently began to pay a little more attention to her dress and her looks, we found out that she was also young.

"Only twenty-one to-day, Guy says," I remarked one day to Ursula.

"How did Guy know it?"

"I believe he discovered the wonderful secret from Maud."

"Maud and her brother Guy have grown wonderful friends since his illness. Do you not think so?"

"Yes, I found the two of them — and even Miss Silver — as merry as possible, when I came into the study this morning."

"Did you?" said the mother, with an involuntary glance at the group opposite.

There was nothing particular to observe. They all sat in most harmless quietude, Edwin reading, Maud at his feet, playing with the cat, Miss Silver busy at a piece of that delicate muslin-work with which young women then used to ornament their gowns. Guy had been drawing a pattern for it, and now leant back upon his sofa, shading off the fire with his hand, and from behind it gazing, as I had often seen him gaze lately, with a curious intentness — at the young governess.

"Guy," said his mother, (and Guy started), "what were you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing; that is —" here by some accident, Miss Silver quitted the room. "Mother, come over here,
I want your opinion. There, sit down — though it's nothing of the least importance."

Nevertheless, it was with some hesitation that he brought out the mighty question, namely, that it was Miss Silver's birth-day to-day; that he thought we ought to remember it, and give her some trifle, as a present.

"And I was considering, this large 'Flora' I ordered from London, — she would like it extremely: she is so fond of botany."

"What do you know about botany?" said Edwin, sharply and rather irrelevantly as it seemed, till I remembered how he plumed himself upon his knowledge of this science, and how he had persisted in taking Maud, and her governess also, long wintry walks across the country, "in order to study the cryptogamia."

Guy vouchsafed no answer to his brother; he was too much absorbed in turning over the pages of the beautiful Flora on his knee.

"What do you say, all of you? Father, don't you think she would like it? Then, suppose you give it to her?"

At this inopportune moment Miss Silver returned. She might have been aware that she was under discussion — at least so much of discussion as was implied by Guy's eager words and his mother's silence, for she looked around her uneasily, and was about to retire.

"Do not go," Guy exclaimed, anxiously.

"Pray do not," his mother added; "we were just talking about you, Miss Silver. My son hopes you will accept this book from him, and from us all, with all kind birthday wishes."

And rising, with a little more gravity than was her wont, Mrs. Halifax touched the girl's forehead with her lips, and gave her the present.
Miss Silver coloured, and drew back. “You are very good, but indeed I would much rather not have it.”

“Why so? Do you dislike gifts, or this gift in particular?”

“Oh, no; certainly not.”

“Then,” said John, as he too came forward and shook hands with her with an air of hearty kindness, “pray take the book. Do let us show how much we respect you; how entirely we regard you as one of the family.”

Guy turned a look of grateful pleasure to his father; but Miss Silver, colouring more than ever, still held back.

“No, I cannot; indeed I cannot.”

“Why can you not?”

“For several reasons.”

“Give me only one of them — as much as can be expected from a young lady,” said Mr. Halifax, good-humouredly.

“Mr. Guy ordered the Flora for himself. I must not allow him to renounce his pleasure for me.”

“It would not be renouncing it if you had it,” returned the lad, in a low tone, at which once more his younger brother looked up, angrily.

“What folly about nothing! how can one read with such a clatter going on?”


“Edwin is right,” said the father, in a tone which indicated his determination to end the discussion, a tone which even Miss Silver obeyed. “My dear young lady,
I hope you will like your book; Guy, write her name in it at once."

Guy willingly obeyed, but was a good while over the task; his mother came and looked over his shoulder. "Louisa Eugenie — how did you know that, Guy. Louisa Eugenie Sil — is that your name, my dear?"

The question, simple as it was, seemed to throw the governess into much confusion, even agitation. At last, she drew herself up with the old repulsive gesture, which of late had been slowly wearing off.

"No — I will not deceive you any longer. My right name is Louise Eugenie D'Argent."

Mrs. Halifax started. "Are you a Frenchwoman?"

"On my father's side — yes."

"Why did you not tell me so?"

"Because, if you remember, at our first interview, you said no Frenchwoman should educate your daughter. And I was homeless — friendless."

"Better starve than tell a falsehood," cried the mother, indignantly.

"I told no falsehood. You never asked me of my parentage."

"Nay," said John, interfering, "you must not speak in that manner to Mrs. Halifax. Why did you renounce your father's name?"

"Because English people would have scouted my father's daughter. You knew him — everybody knew him — he was D'Argent the Jacobin — D'Argent the Rouge."

She threw out these words defiantly, and quitted the room.

"This is a dreadful discovery. Edwin, you have seen most of her — did you ever imagine —"
"I knew it, mother," said Edwin, without lifting his eyes from his book. "After all, French or English, it makes no difference."

"I should think not, indeed!" cried Guy, angrily. "Whatever her father is, if anyone dared to think the worse of her —"

"Hush! — till another time," said the father, with a glance at Maud, who, with wide-open eyes, in which the tears were just springing, had been listening to all these revelations about her governess.

But Maud's tears were soon stopped, as well as this painful conversation, by the entrance of our daily, or rather nightly, visitor for these six weeks past, Lord Ravenel. His presence, always welcome, was a great relief now. We never discussed family affairs before people. The boys began to talk to Lord Ravenel: and Maud took her privileged place on a footstool beside him. From the first sight she had been his favourite, he said, because of her resemblance to Muriel. But I think, more than any fancied likeness to that sweet lost face, which he never spoke of without tenderness inexpressible, there was something in Maud's buoyant youth — just between childhood and girlhood, having the charms of one and the immunities of the other — which was especially attractive to this man, who, at three-and-thirty, found life a weariness and a burthen — at least, he said so.

Life was never either weary or burthensome in our house — not even to-night, though our friend found us less lively than usual — though John maintained more than his usual silence, and Mrs. Halifax fell into troubled reveries. Guy and Edwin, both considerably excited, argued and contradicted one another more warmly than
even the Beechwood liberty of speech allowed. For Miss Silver, she did not appear again.

Lord Ravenel seemed to take these slight désagré-
ments very calmly. He stayed his customary time, smiling languidly as ever at the boys' controversies, or listening with a half-pleased, half-melancholy laziness to Maud's gay prattle, his eye following her about the room with the privileged tenderness that twenty years' seniority allows a man to feel and show towards a child. At his wonted hour he rode away, sighingly contrasting pleasant Beechwood with dreary and solitary Luxmore.

After his departure, we did not again close round the fire. Maud vanished; the younger boys also; Guy settled himself on his sofa, having first taken the pains to limp across the room and fetch the Flora, which Edwin had carefully stowed away in the book-case. Then making himself comfortable, as the pleasure-loving lad liked well enough to do, he lay dreamily gazing at the title-page, where was written her name, and "From Guy Halifax, with —"

"What are you going to add, my son?"

He, glancing up at his mother, made her no answer, and hastily closed the book.

She looked hurt; but saying nothing more, began moving about the room, putting things in order before retiring. John sat in the arm chair — meditative. She asked him what he was thinking about?

"About that man, Jacques D'Argent."

"You have heard of him, then?"

"Few had not, twenty years ago. He was one of the most 'blatant beast' of the Reign of Terror. A fellow without honesty, conscience, or even common de-
cency."
"And that man's daughter we have had in our house, teaching our innocent child!"

Alarm and disgust were written on every feature of the mother's face. It was scarcely surprising. Now that the ferment which had convulsed society in our younger days was settling down, — though still we were far from that ultimate calm which enables posterity to judge fully and fairly such a remarkable historical crisis as the French Revolution — most English people looked back with horror on the extreme opinions of that time. If Mrs. Halifax had a weak point, it was her prejudice against anything French or Jacobinical. Partly, from that tendency to moral conversation which in most persons, especially women, strengthens as old age advances; partly, I believe, from the terrible warning given by the fate of one — of whom for years we had never heard — whose very name was either unknown to, or forgotten by, our children.

"John, can't you speak? Don't you see the frightful danger?"

"Love, try and be calmer."

"How can I? Remember — remember Caroline."

"Nay, we are not talking of her, but of a girl whom we know, and have had good opportunity of knowing. A girl, who, whatever may have been her antecedents, has lived for six months blamelessly in our house."

"Would to Heaven she had never entered it! But it is not too late. She may leave — she shall leave, immediately."

"Mother!" burst out Guy. Never since she bore him, had his mother heard her name uttered in such a tone.

She stood petrified.
"Mother, you are unjust, heartless, cruel. She shall not leave; she shall not, I say!"

"Guy, how dare you speak to your mother in that way?"

"Yes, father, I dare. I'll dare anything rather than —"

"Stop. Mind what you are saying — or you may repent it."

And Mr. Halifax, speaking in that low tone to which his voice fell in serious displeasure, laid a heavy hand on the lad's shoulder. Father and son exchanged fiery glances. The mother, terrified, rushed between them.

"Don't John! Don't be angry with him. He could not help it, — my poor boy!"

At her piteous look, Guy and his father both drew back. John put his arm round his wife, and made her sit down. She was trembling exceedingly.

"You see, Guy, how wrong you have been. How could you wound your mother so?"

"I did not mean to wound her," the lad answered. "I only wished to prevent her from being unjust and unkind to one whom she must show all justice and kindness. One whom I respect, esteem — whom I love."

"Love!"

"Yes, mother! Yes, father! I love her. I intend to marry her."

Guy said this with an air of quiet determination, very different from the usual impetuosity of his character. It was easy to perceive that a great change had come over him; that in this passion, the silent growth of which no one had suspected, he was most thoroughly in
earnest. From the boy he had suddenly started up into the man; and his parents saw it.

They looked at him, and then mournfully at one another. The father was the first to speak.

“All this is very sudden. You should have told us of it before.”

“I did not know it myself till — till very lately,” the youth answered more softly, lowering his head and blushing.

“Is Miss Silver — is the lady aware of it?”

“No.”

“That is well,” said the father, after a pause. “In this silence you have acted as an honourable lover should, towards her; as a dutiful son should act, towards his parents.”

Guy looked pleased. He stole his hand nearer his mother’s, but she neither took it nor repelled it; she seemed quite stunned.

At this point I noticed that Maud had crept into the room; — I sent her out again as quickly as I could. Alas! this was the first secret that needed to be kept from her; the first painful mystery in our happy, happy home!

In any such home the “first falling in love,” whether of son or daughter, necessarily makes a great change. Greater if the former than the latter. There is often a pitiful truth — I know not why it should be so, but so it is — in the foolish rhyme, which the mother had laughingly said over to me this morning! —

“My son’s my son till he gets him a wife,
My daughter’s my daughter all her life.”

And when, as in this case, the son wishes to marry one whom his father may not wholly approve, whom
his mother does not heartily love, surely the pain is
deeplened tenfold."

Those who in the dazzled vision of youth see only
the beauty and splendour of love — first love, who
deeom it comprises the whole of life, beginning, aim,
and end — may marvel that I, who have been young,
and now am old, see as I saw that night, not only the
lover's, but the parents' side of the question. I felt over-
whelmmed with sadness, as, viewing the three, I counted
up in all its bearings and consequences, near and remote,
this attachment of poor Guy's.

"Well, father," he said at last, guessing by in-
tuition that the father's heart would best understand
his own.

"Well, my son," John answered, sadly.

"You were young once."

"So I was;" with a tender glance upon the lad's
heated and excited countenance. "Do not suppose I
cannot feel with you. Still, I wish you had been less
precipitate."

"You were little older than I am when you mar-
rried?"

"But my marriage was rather different from this
projected one of yours. I knew your mother well, and
she knew me. Both of us had been tried — by trouble
which we shared together, by absence, by many and
various cares. We chose one another, not hastily or
blindly, but with free will and open eyes. No, Guy,"
he added, speaking earnestly and softly, "mine was
no sudden fancy, no frantic passion. I honoured your
mother above all women. I loved her as my own soul."

"So do I love Louise. I would die for her any
day."
At the son’s impetuosity the father smiled; not incredulously, only sadly.

All this while the mother had sat motionless, never uttering a sound. Suddenly, hearing a footstep and a light knock at the door, she darted forward and locked it, crying, in a voice that one could hardly have recognized as hers —

“No admittance! Go away.”

A note was pushed in under the door. Mrs. Halifax picked it up; — opened it, read it mechanically, and sat down again; taking no notice even when Guy, catching sight of the hand-writing, eagerly seized the paper.

It was merely a line, stating Miss Silver’s wish to leave Beechwood immediately; signed with her full name — her right name — “Louise Eugenie D’Argent.”

A postscript added: “Your silence I shall take as permission to depart; and shall be gone early to-morrow.”

“To-morrow! Gone to-morrow! And she does not even know that — that I love her. Mother, you have ruined my happiness. I will never forgive you — never!”

Never forgive his mother! His mother, who had borne him, nursed him, reared him; who had loved him with that love — like none other in the world — the love of a woman for her first-born son, all these twenty-one years!

It was hard. I think the most passionate lover, in reasonable moments, would allow that it was hard. No marvel that even her husband’s clasp could not remove the look of heart-broken, speechless suffering which settled stonily down in Ursula’s face, as she watched her boy — storming about, furious with uncontrollable passion and pain.

At last, mother-like, she forgot the passion in pity of the pain.
"He is not strong yet; he will do himself harm. Let me go to him! John, let me!" Her husband released her.

Faintly, with a weak, uncertain walk, she went up to Guy and touched his arm.

"You must keep quiet, or you will be ill. I cannot have my son ill — not for any girl. Come, sit down — here, beside your mother."

She was obeyed. Looking into her eyes, and seeing no anger there, nothing but grief and love, the young man's right spirit came into him again.

"O, mother, mother, forgive me! I am so miserable — so miserable."

He laid his head on her shoulder. She kissed and clasped him close — her boy who never could be wholly hers again, who had learned to love some one else dearer than his mother.

After a while she said, "Father, shake hands with Guy. Tell him, that we forgive his being angry with us; that perhaps, some day —"

She stopped, uncertain as to the father's mind, or seeking strength for her own.

"Some day," John continued, "Guy will find out that we can have nothing in the world — except our children's good — so dear to us as their happiness."

Guy looked up, beaming with hope and joy. "O, father! O mother! will you, indeed —"

"We will indeed say nothing," the father answered, smiling; "nothing, until to-morrow. Then we will all three talk the matter quietly over, and see what can be done."

Of course, I knew to a certainty the conclusion they would come to.
CHAPTER XI.

Late that night, as I sat up pondering over all that had happened, Mrs. Halifax came into my room.

She looked round; asked me, according to her wont, if there was anything I wanted before she retired for the night? — (Ursula was as good to me as any sister) — then stood by my easy-chair. I would not meet her eyes, but I saw her hands fluttering in their restless way.

I pointed to her accustomed chair.

"No, I can't sit down. I must say good night." Then, coming at once to the point — "Phineas, you are always up first in the morning. Will you — John thinks it had better be to you — will you give a message from us to — Maud's governess?"

"Yes. What shall I say?"

"Merely, that we request she will not leave Beechwood until we have seen her."

If Miss Silver had overheard the manner and tone of "request," I doubt if it would not have hastened rather than delayed her departure. But, God help the poor mother! her wounds were still fresh.

"Would it not be better," I suggested, "if you were to write to her?"

"I can't; no, I can't" — spoken with the sharpness of exceeding pain. Soon after, as in a faint apology, she added, "I am so tired; we are very late to night."

"Yes; it is almost morning. I thought you were both in bed."
"No; we have been sitting talking in Guy's room. His father thought it would be better."

"And is all settled?"

"Yes."

Having told me this, and having as it were by such a conclusion confessed it was right, the question should be thus "settled," Guy's mother seemed more herself.

"Yes," she repeated; "John thinks it ought to be. At least, that she should know Guy's — the feeling with which Guy regards her. If, after the probation of a year, it still remains, and he is content to begin life on a small income, we have given our consent to our son's marriage."

It struck me how the mother's mind entirely dwelt on the one party in this matter — "Guy's feelings" — "Our son's marriage" — and so on. The other side of the question, or the possibility of any hindrance there, never seemed to enter her imagination. Perhaps it would not, even into mine, for I shared the family faith in its best-beloved Guy; but for Mrs. Halifax's so entirely ignoring the idea that any consent except her son's and his parents' was necessary to this marriage.

"It will not part him from us so very much, you see, Phineas," she said, evidently trying to view the bright side — "and she has no relatives living — not one. For income — Guy will have the entire profit of the Norton Bury mills; and they might begin, as we did, in the old Norton Bury house — the dear old house."

The thought of her own young days seemed to come, soothingly and sweet, taking the sting out of her pain, showing her how it was but right and justice that Nature's holy law should be fulfilled — that children, in
their turn, should love, and marry, and be happy, like their parents.

"Yes," she answered, as I gently hinted this; "I know you are right; all is quite right, and as it should be, though it was a shock at first. No matter; John esteem her — John likes her. For me — oh, I shall make a capital — what is it? — a capital mother-in-law — in time!"

With that smile, which was almost cheerful, she bade me good night — rather hastily, perhaps, as if she wished to leave me while her cheerfulness lasted. Then I heard her step along the passage, pausing once — most likely at Guy's room door; her own closed, and the house was in silence.

I rose early in the morning; — not one whit too early, for I met Miss Silver in the hall, bonneted and shawled, carrying down with her own hands a portion of her chattels. She evidently contemplated an immediate departure. It was with the greatest difficulty that, without betraying my reasons, which, of course, was impossible, I could persuade her to change her determination.

Poor girl! last night's events had apparently shaken her from that indifference which she seemed to think the best armour of a helpless, proud governess against the world. She would scarcely listen to a word. She was in extreme agitation; half-a-dozen times she insisted on leaving, and then sat down again.

I had not given her credit for so much wholesome irresolution — so much genuine feeling. Her manner almost convinced me of a fact which everyone else seemed to hold as certain, but which I myself should have like to see proved; namely, that Guy, in asking her love,
would have — what in every right and happy marriage
a man ought to have — the knowledge that the love
was his before he asked for it.

Seeing this, my heart warmed to the girl. I re-
spected her brave departure — I rejoiced that it was
needless. Willingly I would have quieted her distress
with some hopeful, ambiguous word, but that would have
been trenching, as no one ever ought to trench, on the
lover’s sole right. So I held my tongue, watching with
an amused pleasure the colour hovering to and fro over
that usually impassive face. At last, at the opening of
the study-door — we stood in the hall still — those
blushes rose up to her forehead in one involuntary tide.

But it was only Edwin, who had lately taken to a
habit of getting up very early, — to study mathematics.
He looked surprised at seeing me with Miss Silver.

“What is that box? She is not going?”

“No; I have been entreating her not. Add your per-
suasions, Edwin.”

For Edwin, with all his quietness, was a lad of much
wisdom, great influence, and no little penetration. I felt
inclined to believe that though as yet he had not been
let into the secret of last night, he guessed it pretty
well already.

He might have done, by the peculiar manner in
which he went up to the governess and took her hand.

“Pray stay; I beg of you.”

She made no more ado, but stayed.

I left her with Edwin, and took my usual morning
walk, up and down the garden, till breakfast-time.

A strange and painful breakfast it was, even though
the most important element in its painfulness, Guy, was
happily absent. The rest of us kept up a fragmentary,
awkward conversation, every one round the room looking, as indeed one might have expected they would look, — with one exception.

Miss Silver, who, from her behaviour last night, and her demeanour to me this morning, I had supposed would now have gathered up all her haughtiness to resist Guy's parents — as, ignorant both of his feelings and their intentions towards her, a young lady of her proud spirit might well resist — was, to my astonishment, as mild and meek as this soft spring morning. Nay, like it, seemed often on the very verge of the melting mood. More than once, her drooping eyelashes were gemmed with tears. And when, the breakfast-table being quickly deserted — Edwin, indeed, had left it almost immediately — she, sitting absently in her place, was gently touched by Mrs. Halifax, she started up, with the same vivid rush of colour that I had before noticed. It completely altered the expression of her face; made her look ten years younger — ten years happier, and, being happier, ten times more amiable.

This expression — I was not the only one to notice it — was, by some intuition, reflected on the mother's. It made softer than any speech of hers to Miss Silver — the few words —

"My dear, will you come with me into the study?"

"To lessons? Yes. I beg your pardon! Maud — where is Maud?"

"Never mind lessons just yet. We will have a little chat with my son. Uncle Phineas, you'll come? Will you come, too, my dear?"

"If you wish it." And with an air of unwonted obedience, she followed Mrs. Halifax.

Poor Guy! — confused young lover! — meeting for
the first time after his confession the acknowledged object of his preference — I really felt sorry for him! And, except that women have generally twice as much self-control in such cases as men — and Miss Silver proved it — I might even have been sorry for her. But then her uncertainties would soon be over. She had not to make — all her family being aware she was then and there making it — that terrible "offer of marriage," which, I am given to understand, is, even under the most favourable circumstances, as formidable as going up to the cannon's mouth.

I speak of it jestingly, as we all jested uneasily that morning, save Mrs. Halifax, who scarcely spoke a word. At length, when Miss Silver, growing painfully restless, again referred to "lessons," she said —

"Not yet. I want Maud for half an hour. Will you be so kind as to take my place, and sit with my son the while?"

"Oh, certainly!"

I was vexed with her — really vexed — for that ready assent; but then, who knows the ins and outs of women's ways? At any rate, for Guy's sake this must be got over — the quicker the better. His mother rose.

"My son, my dear boy!" She leant over him, whispering — I think she kissed him — then slowly, quietly, she walked out of the study. I followed. Outside the door we parted, and I heard her go up-stairs to her own room.

It might have been half an hour afterwards, when Maud and I, coming in from the garden, met her standing in the hall. No one was with her, and she was doing nothing; two very remarkable facts in the daily life of the mother of the family.
Maud ran up to her with some primroses.

"Very pretty, very pretty, my child."

"But you don't look at them — you don't care for them — I'll go and shew them to Miss Silver."

"No," was the hasty answer. "Come back, Maud — Miss Silver is occupied."

Making some excuse, I sent the child away, for I saw that even Maud's presence was intolerable to her mother. That poor mother, whose suspense was growing into positive agony!

She waited — standing at the dining-room window — listening — going in and out of the hall, — for another ten minutes.

"It is very strange — very strange indeed. He promised to come to tell me; surely at least he ought to come and tell me first — me, his mother —"

She stopped at the word, oppressed by exceeding pain.

"Hark! was that the study door?"

"I think so; one minute more and you will be quite certain."

Ay! one minute more, and we were quite certain. The young lover entered — his bitter tidings written on his face.

"She has refused me, mother. I never shall be happy more."

Poor Gay! — I slipped out of his sight and left the lad alone with his mother.

Another hour passed of this strange, strange day. The house seemed painfully quiet. Maud, disconsolate and cross, had taken herself away to the beech-wood with Walter; the father and Edwin were busy at the mills, and had sent word that neither would return to
dinner. I wandered from room to room, always excepting that shut-up room where, as I took care, no one should disturb the mother and son.

At last, I heard them both going up-stairs — Guy was still too lame to walk without assistance. I heard the poor lad's fretful tones, and the soothing, cheerful voice that answered them. "Verily," thought I, "if, since he must fall in love, Guy had only fixed his ideal standard of womanhood a little nearer home — if he had only chosen for his wife a woman a little more like his mother!" But I suppose that would have been expecting impossibilities.

Well, he had been refused! — our Guy, whom we all would have imagined irresistible — our Guy, "whom to look on was to love." Some harsh folk might say this might be a good lesson for the lad — nay, for most lads; but I deny it. — I doubt if any young man, meeting at the outset of life a rejection like this, which either ignorance or heedlessness on the woman's part had made totally unexpected, ever is the better for it: perhaps, for many years, cruelly the worse. For, most women being quicksighted about love, and most men — especially young men — blind enough in its betrayal, — any woman who wilfully allows an offer only to refuse it, lowers not only herself but her whole sex, for a long, long time after, in the lover's eyes. At least, I think so; — as I was thinking, in the way old bachelors are prone to moralize over such things, when, coming out of Guy's room, I met Mrs. Halifax.

She crossed the passage, hastily but noiselessly, to a small ante-room which Miss Silver had for her own private study — out of which half-a-dozen stairs led to the
chamber where she and her pupil sat. The ante-room was open, the bed-chamber door closed.

"She is in there?"

"I believe she is."

Guy's mother stood irresolute. Her knit brow and nervous manner betrayed some determination she had come to, which had cost her hard: suddenly she turned to me.

"Keep the children out of the way, will you, Phineas? Don't let them know — don't let anybody know — about Guy."

"Of course not."

"There is some mistake — there must be some mistake. Perhaps she is not sure of our consent — his father's and mine; very right of her — very right! I honour her for her indecision. But she must be assured to the contrary — my boy's peace must not be sacrificed. You understand, Phineas?"

Ay, perhaps better than she did herself, poor mother! Yet, when in answer to the hasty knock, I caught a glimpse of Miss Silver opening the door — Miss Silver, with hair all falling down dishevelled, and features swollen with crying, — I went away completely at fault, as the standers-by seemed doomed to be in all love affairs. I began to hope that this would settle itself somehow — in all parties understanding one another after the good old romantic fashion, and "living very happy to the end of their lives."

I saw nothing more of anyone, until tea time: when Mrs. Halifax and the governess came in together. Something in their manner struck me — one being subdued and gentle, the other tender and kind. Both, however, were exceedingly grave — nay, sad; but it appeared to
be that sadness which is received as inevitable, and is quite distinct from either anger or resentment.

Neither Guy nor Edwin, nor the father, were present. When John's voice was heard in the hall, Miss Silver had just risen to retire with Maud.

"Good night," the mother answered in the same whisper — rose, kissed her kindly, and let her go.

When Edwin and his father appeared, they too looked remarkably grave — as grave as if they had known by intuition all the trouble in the house. Of course, no one referred to it. The mother merely noticed how late they were, and how tired they both looked. Supper passed in silence, and then Edwin took up his candle to go to bed.

His father called him back. "Edwin, you will remember?"

"I will, father."

"Something is amiss with Edwin," said his mother, when the two younger boys had closed the door behind them. "What did you wish him to remember?"

Her husband's sole reply was to draw her to him with that peculiarly tender gaze, which she knew well to be the fore-warning of trouble; trouble he could not save her from — could only help her to bear. Ursula laid her head on his shoulder with one deep sob of long-smothered pain.

"I suppose you know all. I thought you would soon guess. Oh, John, our happy days are over! Our children are children no more."

"But ours still, love — always will be ours."

"What of that, when we can no longer make them happy? When they look for happiness to others and not to us? My own poor boy! To think that his mother can
neither give him comfort, nor save him pain, any more."

She wept bitterly.

When she was somewhat soothed, John, making her sit down by him, but turning a little from her, bade her tell him all that had happened to-day. A few words explained the history of Guy’s rejection, and its cause.

“She loves someone else. When I — as his mother — went and asked her the question, she confessed this.”

“And what did you say?”

“What could I say? I could not blame her. I was even sorry for her. She cried so bitterly, and begged me to forgive her. I said I did, freely, and hoped she would be happy.”

“That was right. I am glad you said so. Did she tell you who he — this lover, was?”

“No. She said she could not, until he gave her permission. That whether they would ever be married, she did not know. She knew nothing, save that he was good and kind, and the only creature in the world who had ever cared for her.”

“Poor girl!”

“John,” — startled by his manner — “you have something to tell me? You know who this is — this man who has stood between my son and his happiness?”

“Yes, I do know.”

I cannot say how far the mother saw — what, as if by a flash of lightning, I did; but she looked up in her husband’s face, with a sudden speechless dread.

“Love, it is a great misfortune, but it is no one’s blame — neither ours, nor theirs — they never thought of Guy’s loving her. He says so — Edwin himself.”

“Is it Edwin?” — in a cry as if her heart was break-
ing. "His own brother — his very own brother! O my poor Guy!"

Well might the mother mourn! Well might the father look as if years of care had been added to his life that day! For a disaster like this happening in any household — especially a household where love is recognized as a tangible truth, neither to be laughed at, passed carelessly over, nor lectured down — makes the family cease to be a family; in many things, from hence-forward. The two strongest feelings of life clash; the bond of brotherly unity, in its perfectness, is broken for ever.

For some minutes we sat, bewildered as it were, thinking of the tale as if it had been told of some other family than ours. Mechanically the mother raised her eyes; the first object they chanced to meet was a rude water-colour drawing, kept, coarse daub as it was, because it was the only reminder we had of what never could be recalled — one red-cheeked child with a hoop, staring at another red-cheeked child with a nosegay — supposed to represent little Edwin and little Guy.

"Guy taught Edwin to walk. Edwin made Guy learn his letters. How fond they were of one another — those two boys. Now — brother will be set against brother! They will never feel like brothers — never again."

"Love —" 

"Don't, John! don't speak to me just yet. It is so terrible to think of. Both my boys — both my two noble boys! to be made miserable for that girl's sake. Oh! that she had never darkened our doors. Oh! that she had never been born."

"Nay, you must not speak thus. Remember — Edwin loves her — she will be Edwin's wife."
"Never!" cried the mother, desperately; "I will not allow it. Guy is the eldest. His brother has acted meanly. So has she. No, John, I will not allow it."

"You will not allow what has already happened — what Providence has permitted to happen? Ursula, you forget — they love one another."

This one fact — this solemn upholding of the pre-eminent right and law of love, — which law John believed in, they both believed in, so sacredly and firmly — appeared to force itself upon Mrs. Halifax's mind. Her passion subdued.

"I cannot judge clearly. You can — always. Husband, help me!"

"Poor wife! — poor mother!" he muttered, caressing her, and in that caress himself all but giving way — "Alas! that I should have brought thee into such a sea of trouble."

Perhaps he referred to the circumstance of his bringing Miss Silver into our house; perhaps to his own blindness, or want of parental caution, in throwing the young people continually together. However, John was not one to lament over things inevitable; or by overweening blame of his own want of foresight, to imply a doubt of the foreseeing of Providence.

"Love," he said, "I fear we have been too anxious to play Deus ex machinâ with our children, forgetting in whose Hands are marrying and giving in marriage — life's crosses and life's crowns. Trouble has come when we looked not for it. We can but try to see the right course, and seeing it, to act upon it."

Ursula assented — with a bursting heart it seemed — but still she assented, believing even as in her young days, that her husband's will was wisest, best.
He told her, in few words, all that Edwin had that day confessed to his father; how these two, being much together, had become attached to one another, as young folks will — couples whom no one would ever think suited each for each, — except Nature, and the instinct of their own hearts. Absorbed in this love — which, Edwin solemnly declared, was never openly declared till this morning — they neither of them thought of Guy. And thus things had befallen — things which no earthly power could remove or obliterate — things in which, whatever way we looked, all seemed darkness. We could but walk blindly on, a step at a time, trusting to that Faith, of which all our lives past had borne confirmation — the firm faith that evil itself is to the simple and God-fearing but the disguised messenger of good.

Something like this John said, talking as his wife loved to hear him talk — every quiet, low word dropping like balm upon her grieved heart; not trying to deceive her into the notion that pain is not pain, but showing her how best to bear it. At length she looked up, as if with God's help — and her husband's comforting — she could bear it.

"Only one thing — Guy does not know. He need not know just yet — not till he is stronger. Surely, Edwin will not tell him?"

"No; he promised me he would not. Do not start so. Indeed, there is no fear."

But that very assurance seemed to rouse it. She began straining her ears to catch the least noise in the rooms overhead — the boys' rooms. Guy and Walter shared one; Edwin had his to himself.

"They surely will not meet. Yet Guy sometimes likes
sitting over Edwin's fire. Hark! — was not that the creaking of Guy's room-door?"

"Love —" detaining her.

"I know, John. I am not thinking of going. Guy might suspect something. No, indeed I am not afraid. They were always fond of one another — my boys."

She sat down, violently forcing herself not to listen, not to fear. But the truth was too strong for her.

"Hark! I am sure they are talking. John, you said Edwin promised?"

"Faithfully promised."

"But if, by some accident, Guy found out the truth? Hark! they are talking very loud. That is a chair fallen. Oh, John — don't keep me! My boys — my boys." And she ran up-stairs in an agony.

What a sight for a mother's eyes. Two brothers — of whom it had been our boast that from babyhood they had never been known to lift a hand against each other — now struggling together like Cain and Abel. And from the fury in their faces, the quarrel might have had a similar ending.

"Guy! — Edwin!" But the mother might as well have shrieked to the winds.

The father came and parted them. "Boys, are you gone mad? fighting like brutes in this way. Shame, Guy! Edwin, I trusted you."

"I could not help it, father. He had no right to steal into my room; no right to snatch her letter from me."

"It was her letter, then?" cried Guy, furiously. "She writes to you? You were writing back to her?"

Edwin made no answer; but held out his hand for the letter, with that look of white passion in him so
rarely seen — perhaps not thrice since his infancy. Guy took no heed.

"Give it me back, Guy; — I warn you."

"Not till I have read it. I have a right."

"You have none. She is mine."

"Yours?" Guy laughed in his face.

"Yes, mine. Ask my father — ask my mother. They know."

"Mother!" — the letter fell from the poor lad's hand. "Mother, you would not deceive me. He only says it to vex me. I was in a passion, I know. Mother, it isn't true?"

His piteous tone — the almost childish way in which he caught at her sleeve, as she turned from him — ah, poor Guy!

"Edwin, is it my brother Edwin? Who would have thought it?" Half-bewildered, he looked from one to the other of us all; but no one spoke, no one contradicted him.

Edwin, his passion quite gone, stooped in a sorrowful and humble way to pick up his betrothed's letter. Then Guy flew at him, and caught him by the collar.

"You coward! — how dared you? — No, I won't hurt him; she is fond of him. Go away, everyone of you. Oh, mother, mother, mother!"

He fell on her neck, sobbing. She gathered him in her arms, as she had used to do in his childhood; and so we left them.

"As one whom his mother comforteth."

Ay, Prophet of Israel, thou wert wise.
CHAPTER XII.

John and I sat over the study fire till long after midnight.

Many an anxious watch I had kept with him, but none sadder than this. Because now, for the first time, our house was divided against itself. A sorrow had entered it, not from without but from within — a sorrow which we could not meet and bear, as a family. Alas! darker and darker had the bitter truth forced itself upon us, that neither joy nor affliction would ever find us as a family again.

I think all parents must feel cruelly a pang like this — the first trouble in which they cannot help their children — the first time when those children must learn to stand alone, each for himself, compelled to carry his own burden and work out, well or ill, his individual life. When the utmost the wisest or tenderest father can do, is to keep near with outstretched hand that the child may cling to, assured of finding sympathy, counsel, and love.

If this father had stood aloof all his life, on some pinnacle of paternal "pride," paternal "dignity" — if he had not made himself his boys' companion, counsellor, and friend, how great would have been his terrors now!

For, as we both knew well — too well to trust ourselves to say it — if there was one thing in the world that ruins a lad, drives him to desperation, shuts the door upon him, and opens many another door, of which
the entrance is the very gate of hell — it is such a disappointment as this which had happened to our Guy.

His father saw it all. Saw it clearer, crueller, than even his mother could see. Yet when, very late, almost at dawn, she came in, with the tidings that Guy was himself again now — sleeping as quietly as a child — her husband was able to join in her deep thankfulness, and give her hope for the days to come.

"But what is to be done with Guy?"

"God knows," John answered. But his tone expressed a meaning different from that generally conveyed in the words: a meaning which the mother caught at once, and rested on.

"Ay — you are right. He knows!" — And so they went away together, almost content.

Next morning I woke late; the sunshine falling across my bed, and the sparrows chattering loud in the ivy. I had been dreaming with a curious pertinacity, of the old days at Rose Cottage, the days when John first fell in love with Ursula.

"Uncle Phineas." I heard myself called.
It was John's son, who sat opposite, with wan, wild eyes, and a settled anguish on his mouth — that merry, handsome mouth — the only really handsome mouth in the family.

"You are up early, my boy."

"What was the good of lying in bed? I am not ill. Besides, I wish to go about as usual. I don't wish anybody to think that — that I care."

He stopped — evidently fighting hard against himself. A new lesson, alas! for our Guy.

"Was I too violent last night? I did not mean it. I mean to be a man. Not the first man whom a lady
has refused — eh?” And braving it out, he began to whistle; but the lips fell — the frank brow grew knotted with pain. The lad broke into a passion of misery.

The chief business was, that he had been deceived. Unwittingly, we well believed — but still deceived. Many little things he told me — Guy’s was a nature that at once spent and soothed itself, by talking — of Miss Silver’s extreme gentleness and kindness towards him; a kindness which seemed so like, so cruelly like love.

“Love! — Oh, she loved me. She told me so. Of course! — I was Edwin’s brother.”

Ay, there was the sting, which never could be removed; which might rankle in the boy’s heart for life. He had not only lost his love, but what is more precious than love — faith in womankind. He began to make light of his losings — to think the prize was not so great after all. He sat on my bed, singing — Guy had a fine voice and ear — singing out of mockery, songs which I had an especial aversion to — light songs written by an Irishman, Mr. Thomas Moore, about girls and wine, and being “far from the lips we love,” but always ready enough “to make love to the lips we are near.” Then, laughing at me, he threw up the window and looked out.

I think it was wrong of those two, wrong and selfish, as all lovers are — young lovers in the flush of their happiness; I think it was cruel of Edwin and Louise to walk up and down there, in the elder brother’s very eyes.

For a moment he struggled against his passion.

“Uncle Phineas, just look here. How charming! Ha, ha! Did you ever see such a couple of fools?”
Fools, may be, but happy; happy to the very core — thoroughly engrossed in their happiness. The elder brother was almost maddened by it.

"He must mind what he does — tell him so, Uncle Phineas — it would be safer. He must mind, or I will not answer for myself. I was fond of Edwin — I was indeed — but now it seems sometimes as if I hated him."

"Guy!"

"Oh, if it had been a stranger, and not he! If it had been anyone in the world except my brother!"

And in that bitter cry, the lad's heart melted again; it was such a tender heart — his mother's heart.

After a time he recovered himself, and came down with me to breakfast, as he had insisted upon doing; met them all, even Miss Silver — and Edwin, who had placed himself by her side with an air of right. These lovers, however deeply grieved they looked — and to do them justice, it was really so — needed not to be grieved over by any of us.

Nor, looking at the father and mother, would we have dared to grieve over them. In the silent watches of the night, heart to heart, husband and wife had taken counsel together; together had carried their sorrow to the only Lightener of burthens. It seemed that theirs was lightened; that even in this strange entanglement of fate they were able to wait patiently — trusting unto the Almighty Mercy not only themselves but the children He had given them.

When, breakfast being over, John according to his custom read the chapter and the prayer — no one rose up or went out; no one refused, even in this anguish of strife,
jealousy, and disunion — to repeat after him the "Our Father" of their childhood.

I believe every one of us remembered for years, with an awe that was not altogether pain, this morning's chapter and prayer.

When it was ended, worldly troubles closed round us again.

Nothing seemed natural. We hung about in twos and threes, uncertain what to do. Guy walked up and down, alone. His mother asked him if, seeing his foot was so well, he would like to go down to the mills as usual; but he declined. Miss Silver made some suggestion about "lessons," which Edwin jealously negatived immediately and proposed that she and Maud should take a drive somewhere.

Mrs. Halifax eagerly assented. "Lady Oldtower has been wanting them both for some time. You would like to go, would you not, for a day or two?" said she, addressing the governess.

Guy caught at this. "Going away, are you. When?"

He put the question to Miss Silver direct — his eyes blazing right into her own. She made some confused reply, about "leaving immediately."

"In the carriage, of course? Shall I have the honour of driving you?"

"No," said Edwin, decisively.

A fierce, vindictive look passed between the brothers — a look terrible in itself — more terrible in its warning of days to come. No wonder the mother shuddered — no wonder the young betrothed, pale and alarmed, slipped out of the room. Edwin followed her. Then Guy, snatching up his sister, lifted her roughly on his knee.
“Come along, Maud. You’ll be my girl now. Nobody else wants you. Kiss me, child.”

But the little lady drew back.

“So, you hate me too? Edwin has been teaching you? Very well. Get away, you cheat!”

He pushed her violently aside. Maud began to cry.

Her father looked up from his book — the book he had not been reading — though he had seemingly thought it best to take no notice of what was passing around him.

“Come here, Maud, my child. Guy, you should not be unkind to your little sister. Try and command yourself, my dear boy!”

The words, though spoken gently, almost in a whisper, were more than the lad’s chafed spirit could brook.

“Father, you insult me. I will not bear it. I will quit the room.”

He went out, shutting the door passionately after him. His mother rose up to follow him — then sat down again. The eyes that she lifted to her husband were deprecating, beseeching, heavy with a speechless pain.

For John — he said nothing. Not though, as was plain to see, this, the first angry or disrespectful word he had ever received from any one of his children, struck him like an arrow; for a moment stirred him even to wrath — holy wrath — the just displeasure of a father who feels that the least portion of his child’s sin is the sin against him. Perhaps this very feeling, distinct from, and far beyond, all personal indignation, all sense of offended dignity, made the anger strangely brief — so brief, that when the other children, awed and startled,
looked for some ebullition of it, — lo! it was all gone. In its stead was something at which the children, more awed still, crept out of the room.

Ursula even, alarmed, looked in his face as if for the first time she could not comprehend her husband.

"John, you should forgive poor Guy; he did not intend any harm."

"No — no."

"And he is so very miserable. Never before did he fail in his duty to you."

"But what if I have failed in mine to him? — What if — you used to say I could not understand Guy — what if I have come short towards him? I, that am accountable to God for every one of my children."

"John — John" — she knelt down and put her arms round his neck. "Husband, do not look unhappy. I did not mean to blame you — we may be wrong, both of us — all of us. But we will not be afraid. We know Who pities us, even as we pity our children."

Thus she spoke, and more to the same purport; but it was a long time before her words brought any consolation. Then the parents talked together, trying to arrange some plan whereby Guy’s mind might be occupied and soothed, or else Edwin removed out of his sight for a little while. Once I hinted at the advantage of Guy’s leaving home; but Mrs. Halifax seemed to shrink from this project as though it were a foreboding of perpetual exile.

"No, no; anything but that. Beside, Guy would not wish it. He has never left me in his life. His going would seem like the general breaking up of the family."

Alas! she did not, would not see that the family was
already "broken." Broken, more than either absence, marriage, or death itself could have effected.

One thing more we had to consider — a thing at once natural and right in any family, namely, how to hide its wounds from the chattering, scandalous world. And so, when by a happy chance there came over that morning our good friend Lady Oldtower and her carriage full of daughters, Mrs. Halifax communicated, with a simple dignity that quelled all comment, the fact of "my son Edwin's engagement," and accepted the invitation for Maud and Miss Silver, which was willingly repeated and pressed.

One thing I noticed, that in speaking of or to the girl who in a single day from merely the governess had become, and was sedulously treated as, our own, Mrs. Halifax invariably called her as heretofore, "Miss Silver," or "my dear;" never by any chance "Louise," or "Made-moiselle D'Argent."

Before she left Beechwood, Edwin came in and hurriedly spoke to his mother. What he said was evidently painful to both.

"I am not aware of it, Edwin; I had not the slightest intention of offending her. Is she already made your judge and referee as to the actions of your mother?"

Edwin was a good lad, though perhaps a little less loving than the rest of the boys. His self-restraint, his exceeding patience, lulled the threatened storm.

"But you will be kind to her, mother? — I know you will."

"Did I not say so?"

"And may I bring her to you here?"

"If you choose."
It was the first open recognition between the mother and her son's betrothed. Their other meeting had been in public, when, with a sedulous dread, both had behaved exactly as usual, and no word or manner had betrayed their altered relations. Now, when for the first time it was needful for Miss Silver to be received as a daughter elect, with all the natural sympathy due from one woman to another under similar circumstances, all the warmth of kindness due from a mother to her son's chosen wife — then the want, the mournful want, made itself felt.

Mrs. Halifax stood at the dining-room window, trying vainly to regain self-control.

"If I could only love her! If only she had made me love her!" she muttered, over and over again.

I hoped, from the bottom of my soul, that Edwin had not heard her — had not seen her involuntarily recoil, as he led to his mother his handsome girl that he seemed so proud of, his happy, affianced wife. Happiness melts some natures, like spring and sunshine. Louise looked up with swimming eyes.

"Oh! be kind to me! Nobody was ever kind to me till I came here!"

The good heart gave way: Mrs. Halifax opened her arms.

"Be true to Edwin — love Edwin, and I shall love you — I am sure I shall."

Kissing her once or twice, the mother let fall a few tears; then sat down, still keeping the girl's hand, and busying herself with various little kindnesses about her.

"Are you sure you are well wrapped up? Edwin, see that she has my fur cloak in the carriage. What
cold fingers! Have some wine before you start, my dear."

Miss Silver altogether melted; sobbing, she murmured something about forgiveness.

"Nay, did I say a word about forgiveness? Then, do not you. Let us be patient — we shall all be happy in time."

"And — Guy?"

"Guy will be himself soon," returned the mother, rather proudly. "We will not mention him, if you please, my dear."

At this moment, Guy must have heard the carriage-wheels and guessed Miss Silver was going; for he appeared at the parlour door. He found his mother toying with Miss Silver's hand; — Edwin standing by, proud and glad, with his arm clasped round Louise.

He did not remove it. In his brother's very face, perhaps because of the expression of that face — the lover held fast his own.

Mrs. Halifax rose up, alarmed. "She is just going, Guy. Shake hands, and bid her good-bye."

The girl's hand, which was sorrowfully and kindly extended, Guy snatched and held fast.

"Let her pass," cried Edwin, angrily.

"Most certainly. I have not the least wish to detain her. Good-bye! A pleasant journey!" And still keeping her hand, he gazed with burning eyes on the features he had so loved — as boys do love — with a wild imaginative passion, kindled by beauty alone. "I shall claim my right — just for once — may I, sister Louise?"

With a glance of defiance at Edwin, Guy caught his brother's betrothed round the waist and kissed her — once — twice — savagely.
It was done so suddenly and under such an ingenious disguise of "right," that open vengeance was impossible. But as Edwin hurried Louise away, the look that passed between the two young men was enough to blot out henceforward all friendship, all brotherhood. That insult would never be forgotten.

She was gone — the house was free of her and Edwin too. Guy was left alone with me and his mother. Mrs. Halifax sat sewing. She seemed to take no note of his comings and goings — his restless starts — his fits of dark musing, when his face grew like the face of some stranger, some one whom he would have shrank from — any one but our own merry Guy.

"Mother" — the voice startled me — such irritable, intolerable bitterness, marred its once pleasant tones. "When do they come back?"

"Do you mean —"

"I mean those people."

"In a week or so. Your brother returns to-night, of course."

"My brother, eh? Better not say it — it's an ugly word."

Mrs. Halifax attempted no reproof; she knew that it would have been useless — worse than useless — then.

"Mother," Guy said at last, coming up and leaning against her chair, "you must let me go."

"Where, my son?"

"Anywhere — out of their sight — those two. You see, I cannot bear it. It maddens me — makes me wicked — makes me not myself. Or rather makes me truly myself, which is altogether wicked."

"No, Guy — no, my own boy. Have patience — all this will pass away."

*John Halifax, Gentleman.* II.
"It might, if I had anything to do. Mother," kneeling down by her with a piteous gaze — "mother, you need not look so wretched. I wouldn't harm Edwin — would not take from him his happiness; but to live in sight of it day after day, hour after hour — I can't do it! Do not ask me — let me get away."

"But where?"

"Anywhere, as I said; only let me go far away from them, where no possible news of them can reach me. In some place, oh, mother darling! where I can trouble no one and make no one miserable."

The mother feebly shook her head. As if such a spot could be found on earth, while she lived!

But she saw that Guy was right. To expect him to remain at home was cruelty. As he had said, he could not bear it — few could. Few even among women — of men much fewer. One great renunciation is possible, sometimes easy, as death may be; but to "die daily?" In youth, too, with all the passions vehement, the self-knowledge and self-control small? No; Nature herself, in that universal desire to escape, which comes with such a trial, hints at the unnaturalness of the ordeal; in which, soon or late, the weak become paralyzed or callous; the strong — God help them! — are apt to turn wicked.

Guy's instinct of flight was, his mother felt, wisest, safest, best.

"My boy, you shall have your desire; you shall go."

I had not expected it of her — at least, not so immediately. I had thought, bound up in him as she was, accustomed to his daily sight, his daily fondness — for he was more with her, and "petted" her more than any other of the children — I had thought to have seen
some reluctance, some grieved entreaty — but no! Not even when, gaining her consent, the boy looked up as if her allowing him to quit her was the greatest kindness she had ever in his life bestowed.

“And when shall I go?”

“Whenever you choose.”

“To-day; perhaps I might get away to-day?”

“You can, if you wish, my dear boy.”

But no sooner had she said it, than the full force and meaning of the renunciation seemed to burst upon her. Her fingers, which had been smoothing Guy’s hand as it lay on her lap, tightly closed round it; with the other hand she put back his hair, gazing — gazing, as if it were impossible to part with him.

“Guy — oh, Guy, my heart is breaking! Promise that you will try to be yourself again — that you will never be anything other than my own good boy, if I agree to let you go?” What he answered, or what further passed between them was not for me either to hear or to know. I left the room immediately.

When, some time after John’s hour for returning from the mills, I also returned to the house, I found that everything was settled for Guy’s immediate departure.

There was some business in Spain — something about Andalusian wool — which his father made the ostensible reason for the journey. It would occupy him and distract his mind, besides giving him constant necessity of change. And, they say, travel is the best cure for the heart-ache. We hoped it might prove so.

Perhaps the sorest point, and one that had been left undecided till both parents saw that in Guy’s present mood any opposition was hurtful, even dangerous, was
the lad's obstinate determination to depart alone. He refused his mother's companionship to London, even his father's across the country to the nearest point where one of those new and dangerous things called railways tempted travellers to their destruction. But Guy would go by it — the maddest and strangest way of locomotion pleased him best. So it was settled he should go, as he pleaded, this very day.

A strange day it seemed — long and yet how short! Mrs. Halifax was incessantly busy. I caught sight of her now and then, flitting from room to room, with Guy's books in her hand — Guy's linen thrown across her arm. Sometimes she stood a few minutes by the window, doing a few stitches of necessary work, which, when even nurse Watkins offered to do — Jenny, who had been a rosy lass when Guy was born — she refused abruptly, and went stitching on.

There were no regular meals that day; better not, perhaps. I saw John come up to his wife as she stood sewing, and bring her a piece of bread and a glass of wine — but she could not touch either.

"Mother, try," whispered Guy, mournfully. "What will become of me if I have made you ill?"

"Oh, no fear, no fear!" She smiled, took the wine and swallowed it — broke off a bit of the bread, — and went on with her work.

The last hour or two passed so confusedly that I do not well remember them. I can only call to mind seeing Guy and his mother everywhere side by side, doing everything together, as if grudging each instant remaining till the final instant came. I have also a vivid impression of her astonishing composure, of her calm voice when talking to Guy about indefinite trifles,
or, though that was seldom, to any other of us. It never faltered — never lost its rich, round, cheerfulness of tone; as if she wished him to carry it as such, and no other — the familiar mother's voice — in his memory across the seas.

Once only it grew sharp, when Walter, who hovered about disconsolately, knelt down to fasten his brother's portmanteau.

"No! Let go! I can do everything myself."

And now the time was fast flying — her boy must depart.

All the household collected in the hall to bid Mr. Guy good-bye — Guy, whom everybody was so fond of. They believed — which was all that anyone, save ourselves, ever knew — that sudden business had called him away on a long and anxious journey. They lingered about him, respectfully, with eager, honest blessings, such as it was good the lad should have — good that he should bear away with him from England and from home.

Finally, Guy, his father and his mother, went into the study by themselves. Soon even his father came out and shut the door, that there should be not a single witness to the last few words between mother and son. These being over, they both came into the hall together, brave and calm — which calmness was maintained even to the last good-bye.

Thus we sent our Guy away, cheerfully and with blessings — away into the wide, dangerous world; alone, with no guard or restraint, except (and in that except lay the whole mystery of our cheerfulness) — the fear of God, his father's counsels, and his mother's prayers.
CHAPTER XIII.

Two years rolled over Beechwood — two eventful years. The last of the children ceased to be a child; and we prepared for that great era in all household history, the first marriage in the family. It was to be celebrated very quietly, as Edwin and Louise both desired. Time had healed over many a pang, and taught many a soothing lesson; still it could not be supposed that this marriage was without its painfulness.

Guy still remained abroad; his going had produced the happy result intended. Month after month his letters came each more hopeful than the last, each bringing balm to the mother's heart. Then he wrote to others beside his mother: Maud and Walter replied to him in long home-histories; and began to talk without hesitation — nay, with great pride and pleasure — "of my brother who is abroad."

The family wound was closing, the family peace about to be restored; Maud even fancied Guy ought to come home to "our wedding;" — but then she had never been told the whole of past circumstances; and, besides, she was still too young to understand love matters. Yet so mercifully had time smoothed down all things, that it sometimes appeared even to us elders as if those three days of bitterness were a mere dream — as if the year we dreaded had passed as calmly as any other year. Save that in this interval Ursula's hair had began to turn from brown to grey; and John first mentioned, so cursorily that I cannot even now remember
when or where, that slight pain, almost too slight to
complain of, which he said warned him in climbing En-
derly Hill that he could not climb so fast as when he
was young. And I returned his smile, telling him we
were evidently growing old men; and must soon set our
faces to descend the hill of life. Easy enough I was in
saying this, thinking, as I often did, with great content,
that there was not the faintest doubt which of us would
reach the bottom first.

Yet I was glad to have safely passed my half cen-
tury of life — glad to have seen many of John's cares
laid to rest, more especially those external troubles which
I have not lately referred to — for, indeed, they were
absorbed and forgotten in the home-troubles that came
after. He had lived down all slanders, as he said he
would. Far and near travelled the story of the day
when Jessop's bank was near breaking; far and near,
though secretly — for we found it out chiefly by its
results — poor people whispered the tale of a gentle-
man who had been attacked on the high roads, and
whose only attempt at bringing the robbers to justice
was to help the widow of one and send the others safe
out of the country, at his own expense, not Govern-
ment's. None of these were notable or showy deeds —
scarcely one of them got, even under the disguise of
asterisks, into the newspaper; the "Norton Bury Mer-
cury," for its last dying sting, still complained, (and
very justly), that there was not a gentleman in the
county whose name so seldom headed a charity subscrip-
tion as that of John Halifax, Esquire, of Beechwood.
But the right made its way, as, soon or late, the right
always does; he believed his good name was able to
defend itself, and it did defend itself; he had faith in
the only victory worth having — the universal victory of Truth; and truth conquered at last.

To drive with him across the country — he never carried pistols now — or to walk with him, as one day before Edwin's wedding we walked, a goodly, through the familiar streets of Norton Bury, was a perpetual pleasure to the rest of the family. Everybody knew him, everybody greeted him, everybody smiled as he passed — as though his presence and his recognition were good things to have and to win. His wife often laughed, and said she doubted whether even Mr. O'Connell of Derrynane, who was just now making a commotion in Ireland, lighting the fire of religious and political discord from one end to the other of County Clare; — she doubted if even Daniel O'Connell had more popularity among his own people than John Halifax had in the primitive neighbourhood where he had lived so long.

Mrs. Halifax herself was remarkably gay this morning. She had had letters from Guy; together with a lovely present, for which he said he had ransacked all the magasins des modes in Paris — a white embroidered China shawl. It had arrived this morning — Lord Ravenel being the bearer. This was not the first time by many that he had brought us news of our Guy, and thereby made himself welcome at Beechwood. More welcome than he might have been otherwise; for his manner of life was so different from ours. Not that Lord Ravenel could be accused of any likeness to his father; but blood is blood, and education and habits are not to be easily overcome. The boys laughed at him for his aristocratic, languid ways; Maud teased him for his mild cynicism and the little interest he seemed to
take in anything; while the mother herself was somewhat restless about his coming, wondering what possible good his acquaintance could do to us, or ours to him, seeing we moved in totally different spheres. But John himself was invariably kind, nay tender over him—we all guessed why. And perhaps even had not the young man had so many good points, while his faults were more negations than positive ill qualities, we likewise should have been tender over him—for Muriel’s sake.

He had arrived at Beechwood this morning, and falling as usual into our family routine, had come with us to Norton Bury. He looked up with more interest than usual in his pensive eyes, as he crossed the threshold of our old house, and told Maud how he had come there many years ago with his father.

“That was the first time I ever met your father,” I overheard him say to Maud—not without feeling; as if he thought he owed fate some gratitude for the meeting.

Mrs. Halifax, in the casual civil enquiry which was all the old earl ever won in our house, asked after the health of Lord Luxmore.

“He is still at Compiègne. Does not Guy mention him? Lord Luxmore takes the greatest pleasure in Guy’s society.”

By her start, this was evidently new and not welcome tidings to Guy’s mother. No wonder. Any mother in England would have shrank from the thought that her best-beloved son—especially a young man of Guy’s temperament, and under Guy’s present circumstances—was thrown into the society which now surrounded
the debauched dotage of the too-notorious Earl of Luxmore.

"My son did not mention it. He has been too much occupied in business matters, to write home frequently, since he reached Paris. However, his stay there is limited;" and this seemed to relieve her. "I doubt if he will have much time left to visit Compiègne."

She said no more than this, of course, to Lord Luxmore's son; but her disquiet was sufficiently apparent.

"It was I who brought your son to Compiègne — where he is a universal favourite, from his wit and liveliness. I know no one who is a more pleasant companion than Guy."

Guy's mother bowed — but coldly.

"I think, Mrs. Halifax, you are aware that the earl's tastes and mine differ widely — have always differed. But he is an old man, and I am his only son. He likes to see me sometimes, and I go: — though, I must confess, I take little pleasure in the circle he has around him."

"In which circle, as I understand, my son is constantly included?"

"Why not? It is a very brilliant circle. The whole court of Charles Dix can afford none more amusing. For the rest, what matters? One learns to take things as they seem, without peering below the surface. One wearies of impotent Quixotism against unconquerable evils."

"That is not our creed at Beechwood," said Mrs. Halifax, abruptly, as she ceased the conversation. But ever and anon it seemed to recur to her mind — ay, through all the mirth of the young people, — all the graver pleasure which the father took in the happiness of his son Edwin; his good son, who had never given him a single care. He declared, this settling of Edwin
had been to him almost like the days when he himself used to come of evenings, hammer in hand, to put up shelves in the house, or nail the currant-bushes against the wall, doing everything _con amore_, and with the utmost care, knowing it would come under the quick-observer of eyes of Ursula March.

"That is, of Ursula Halifax — for I don't think I let her see a single one of my wonderful doings until she was Ursula Halifax. — Do you remember, Phineas, when you came to visit us the first time, and found us gardening?"

"And she had on a white gown and a straw hat with blue ribbons. What a young thing she looked! — hardly older than Mistress Maud here."

John put his arm round his wife's waist — not so slender as it had been, but comely and graceful still, repeating — with something of the musical cadence of his boyish readings of poetry — a line or two from the sweet old English song:

> "And when with envy Time transported  
> Shall think to rob us of our joys,  
> You'll in your girls again be courted,  
> And I'll go wooing with my boys."

Ursula laughed, and for the time being the shadow passed from her countenance. Her husband had happily not noticed it; and apparently she did not wish to tell him her trouble. She let him spend a happy day, even grew happy herself in response to his care to make her so, by the resolute putting away of all painful present thoughts, and calling back of sweet and soothing memories belonging to the old married home. John seemed determined that if possible, the marriage that was to be should be as sacred and as hopeful as their own.
So full of it were we all, that not until the day after, when Lord Ravenel had left us,—longing apparently to be asked to stay for the wedding, but John did not ask him—I remembered what he had said about Guy's association with Lord Luxmore's set. It was recalled to me by the mother's anxious face, as she gave me a foreign letter to post.

"Post it yourself, will you, Phineas? I would not have it miscarry, or be late in its arrival, on any account."

No, for I saw it was to her son, at Paris.

"It will be the last letter I shall need to write," she added, again lingering over it, to be certain that all was correct—the address being somewhat illegible for that free, firm hand of hers. "My boy is coming home."

"Guy coming home! To the marriage?"

"No; but immediately after. He is quite himself now. He longs to come home."

"And his mother?"

His mother could not speak. Like light to her eyes, like life to her heart, was the thought of Guy's coming home. All that week she looked ten years younger. With a step buoyant as any girl's, she went about the marriage preparations; together with other preparations, perhaps dearer still to the motherly heart, where, if any preference did lurk, it was for the one for whom—possibly from whom—she had suffered most, of all her children.

John too, though the father's joy was graver and not unmixed with some anxiety—anxiety which he always put aside in his wife's presence—seemed eager to have his son at home.

"He is the eldest son," he repeated more than once, when talking to me of his hope that Guy would now
settle permanently at Beechwood. "After myself, the head of the family."

After John! It was almost ridiculous to peer so far into the future as that.

Of all the happy faces I saw the day before the marriage, I think the happiest was Mrs. Halifax's, as I met her coming out of Guy's room, which ever since he left had been locked up, unoccupied. Now his mother threw open the door with a cheerful air.

"You may go in if you like, Uncle Phineas. Does it not look nice?"

It did indeed, with the fresh white curtains; the bed laid all in order; the book-shelves arranged, and even the fowling-piece and fishing-rod put in the right places.

The room looked very neat, I said, with an amused doubt as to how long it was to remain so.

"That is true, indeed. How he used to throw his things about! A sad untidy boy!" And his mother laughed; but I saw all her features were trembling with emotion.

"He will not be exactly a boy now. I wonder if we shall find him much changed."

"Very likely. Brown, with a great beard; he said so in one of his letters. I shall hardly know my boy again." — With a lighting-up of the eye that furnished a flat contradiction to the mother's statement.

"Here are some of Mrs. Tod's roses, I see."

"She made me take them. She said, Master Guy always used to stop and pick a bunch as he rode past. She hopes she shall see him ride past on Sunday next. Guy must pay her one of his very first visits; the good old soul!"

I hinted that Guy would have to pay visits half
over the country, to judge by the number of invitations I had heard of.

"Yes. Everybody wants to steal my boy. Everybody has a welcome for him. — How bright old Watkins has polished that gun! — Sir Herbert says, Guy must come over to the shooting next week. He used to be exceedingly fond of going to the Manor-house."

I smiled, to see the innocent smile of this good mother, who would have recoiled at the accusation of match-making. Yet I knew she was thinking of her great favourite, pretty Grace Oldtower; who was Grace Oldtower still, and had refused, gossip said, half the brilliant matches in the country, to the amazement and strong disapprobation of all her friends — excepting Mrs. Halifax.

"Come away, Phineas!" slightly sighing, as if her joy weighed her down, or as if conscious that she was letting fancy carry her too far into the unknown future. "His room is quite ready now, whatever time the boy arrives. Come away."

She shut and locked the door. To be opened — when?

Morning broke, and none could have desired a brighter marriage-morning. Sunshine out of doors — sunshine on all the faces within; only family faces, — for no other guests had been invited, and we had kept the day as secret as we could; there was nothing John disliked more than a show wedding. Therefore it was with some surprise that while they were all up-stairs adorning themselves for church, Maud and I, standing at the hall-door, saw Lord Ravenel's travelling carriage drive up to it, and Lord Ravenel himself, with a quicker
and more decided gesture than was natural to him, spring out.

Maud ran into the porch; startling him much, apparently; for indeed she was a sweet vision of youth, happiness, and grace, in her pretty bridesmaid's dress.

"Is this the wedding-morning? I did not know — I will come again to-morrow;" and he seemed eager to escape back to his carriage.

This action relieved me from a vague apprehension of ill tidings, and made less painful the first question which rose to my lips, "Had he seen Guy?"

"No."

"We thought for the moment it might be Guy come home," Maud cried. "We are expecting him. Have you heard of him since we saw you? Is he quite well?"

"I believe so."

I thought the answer brief; but then he was looking intently upon Guy's sister, who held his hands in her childish, affectionate way; she had not yet relinquished her privilege of being Lord Ravenel's "pet." When, hesitatingly, he proposed returning to Luxmore, unwilling to intrude upon the marriage, the little lady would not hear of it for a moment. She took the unexpected guest to the study, left him there with her father, explained to her mother all about his arrival; and his having missed seeing Guy — appearing entirely delighted.

I came into the drawing-room, and sat watching the sun shining on marriage-garments and marriage-faces, all as bright as bright could be, including the mother's. It had clouded over for a few moments, when the postman's ring was heard; but she said at once that it was most unlikely Guy would write — she had told him
there was no need to write. So she stood content, smoothing down the soft folds of her beautiful shawl, which Guy meant her to wear to-day. This, together with his fond remembrance of her, seemed almost as comfortable as the visible presence of her boy. Her boy, who was sure to come to-morrow.

"John, is that you? How softly you came in. And Lord Ravenel! He knows we are glad to see him. Shall we make him one of our own family for the time being, and take him with us to see Edwin married?"

Lord Ravenel bowed.

"Maud tells us you have not seen Guy. I doubt if he will be able to arrive to-day; but we fully expect him to-morrow."

Lord Ravenel bowed again. Mrs. Halifax said something about this unexpected arrival of his.

"He came on business," John answered quickly, and Ursula made no more enquiries.

She stood, talking with Lord Ravenel — as I could see her stand now, playing with the deep fringe of her shawl; the sun glancing on that rich silk dress of her favourite silvergrey; a picture of matronly grace and calm content, as charming as even the handsome, happy bride.

I was still looking at her, when John called me aside. I followed him into the study.

"Shut the door."

By his tone and look, I knew in a moment that something had happened.

"Yes. I'll tell you presently — if there's time."

While he was speaking, some violent pain — physical or mental, or both — seemed to seize him. I had
my hand on the door to call Ursula, but he held me fast, with a kind of terror.

"Call no one. I am used to it. Water!"

He drank a glassful, which stood by, breathed once or twice heavily, and gradually recovered himself. The colour had scarcely come back into his face, when we heard Maud run laughing through the hall.

"Father, where are you? We are waiting for you?"

"I will come in two minutes, my child."

Having said this, in his own natural voice, he closed the door again, and spoke to me rapidly.

"Phineas, I want you to stay away from church; make some excuse, or I will for you. Write a letter for me to this address in Paris. Say — Guy Halifax's father will be there, without fail, within a week, to answer all demands."

"All demands!" I echoed, bewildered.

He repeated the sentence word for word. "Can you remember it? Literally, mind! And post it at once, before we return from church."

Here the mother's call was heard. "John, are you coming?"

"In a moment, love," for her hand was on the door outside; but her husband held the other handle fast. He then went on, breathlessly. "You understand, Phineas? And you will be careful — very careful? She must not know — not till to-night."

"One word. Guy is alive and well?"

"Yes — yes."

"Thank God!"

But Guy's father was gone while I spoke. Heavy as the news might be — this ill news which had struck me with apprehension the moment I saw Lord Ravenel — it
was still endurable. I could not conjure up any grief so bitter as the boy's dying.

Therefore, with a quietness that came naturally under the compulsion of such a necessity as the present, I rejoined the rest, made my excuses, and answered all objections. I watched the marriage party leave the house. A simple procession — the mother first, leaning on Edwin; then Maud, Walter, and Lord Ravenel; John walked last, with Louise upon his arm. Thus I saw them move up the garden, and through the beech-wood, to the little church on the hill.

I then wrote the letter and sent it off. That done, I went back into the study. Knowing nothing — able to guess nothing — a dull patience came over me, the patience with which we often wait for unknown, inevitable misfortunes. Sometimes I almost forgot Guy in my startled remembrance of his father's look as he called me away, and sat down — or rather dropped down — into his chair. Was it illness? yet he had not complained; and scarcely had a day's sickness from year to year. And as I watched him and Louise up the garden, I had noticed his free, firm gait, without the least sign of unsteadiness or weakness. Besides, he was not one to keep any but a necessary secret from those who loved him. He could not be seriously ill, or we should have known it.

Thus I pondered, until I heard the church bells ring out merrily. The marriage was over.

I was just in time to meet them at the front gates, which they entered — our Edwin and his wife — through a living line of smiling faces, treading upon a carpet of strewn flowers. Enderly would not be defrauded of its welcome — all the village escorted the young couple in triumph home. I have a misty recollection of how happy
everybody looked; how the sun was shining, and the people cheering — a mingled phantasmagoria of sights and sounds, in which I only saw one person distinctly, — John.

He waited while the young folk passed in — stood on the hall-steps — in a few words thanked his people, and bade them to the general rejoicing. They, uproarious, answered in loud hurrahs, and one energetic voice cried out —

"One cheer more for Master Guy!"

Guy's mother turned delighted — her eyes shining with proud tears.

"John — thank them; tell them that Guy will thank them himself to-morrow."

The master thanked them, but either he did not explain, or the honest rude voices drowned all mention of the latter fact — that Guy would be home to-morrow.

All this while, and at the marriage-breakfast likewise, Mr. Halifax kept the same calm demeanour. Once only, when the rest were all gathered round the bride and bridegroom, he said to me —

"Phineas — is it done?"

"What is done?" asked Ursula, suddenly pausing.

"A letter I asked him to write for me this morning."

Now I had all my life been proud of John's face — that it was a safe face to trust in — that it could not, or if it could, it would not, boast that stony calm under which some men are so proud of disguising themselves and their emotions from those nearest and dearest to them. If he were sad, we knew it; if he were happy, we knew it too. It was his principle, that nothing but the strongest motive should make a man stoop to even the smallest hypocrisy.
Therefore, hearing him thus speak to his wife, I was struck with great alarm. Mrs. Halifax herself seemed uneasy.

"A business letter, I suppose?"

"Partly on business. I will tell you all about it this evening."

She looked re-assured. "Just as you like; you know I am not curious." But passing on, she turned back. "John, if it was anything important to be done — anything that I ought to know at once, you would not keep me in ignorance?"

"No — my dearest! No!"

Then what had happened must be something in which no help availed? something altogether past and irreparable; something which he rightly wished to keep concealed, for a few hours at least, from his other children, so as not to mar the happiness of this day, of which there could be no second, this crowning day of their lives — this wedding-day of Edwin and Louise.

So, he sat at the marriage-table; he drank the marriage health; he gave them both a marriage-blessing. Finally, he sent them away, smiling and sorrowful — as is the bounden duty of young married couples to depart — Edwin pausing even on the carriage-step to embrace his mother with especial tenderness, and whisper her to "give his love to Guy."

"It reminds one of Guy's leaving," said the mother, hastily brushing back the tears that would spring and roll down her smiling face. She had never, until this moment, reverted to that miserable day. "John, do you think it possible the boy can be at home to-night?"

John answered emphatically, but very softly, "No."

"Why not? My letter would reach him in full time.
Lord Ravenel has been to Paris and back since then. But — ” turning full upon the young nobleman — ”I think you said you had not seen Guy?"

"No."

"Did you hear anything of him?"

"I — Mrs. Halifax — ”

Exceedingly distressed, almost beyond his power of self-restraint, the young man looked appealingly to John, who replied for him:

"Lord Ravenel brought me a letter from Guy this morning."

"A letter from Guy — and you never told me. How very strange!"

Still, she seemed only to think it “strange.” Some difficulty or folly, perhaps — you could see by the sudden flushing of her cheek and her quick, distrustful glance at Lord Ravenel, what she imagined it was — that the boy had confessed to his father. With an instinct of concealment — the mother’s instinct — for the moment she asked no questions.

We were all still standing at the hall-door. Unresisting, she suffered her husband to take her arm in his and bring her into the study.

"Now — the letter, please! Children, go away; I want to speak to your father. — The letter, John?"

Her hand, which she held out, shook much. She tried to unfold the paper — stopped, and looked up piteously.

"It is not to tell me he is not coming home? I can bear anything, you know — but he must come home."

John only answered, "Read," — and took firm hold of her hand while she read — as we hold the hand of one undergoing great torture, — which must be under-
gone, and which no human love can either prepare for, or remove, or alleviate.

The letter, which I saw afterwards, was thus —

"Dear Father and Mother,

I have disgraced you all. I have been drunk — in a gaming-house. A man insulted me — it was about my father — but you will hear — all the world will hear presently. I struck him — there was something in my hand, and — the man was hurt.

"He may be dead by this time. I don't know.

"I am away to America to-night. I shall never come home any more. God bless you all.

"Guy Halifax.

"P. S. I got my mother's letter to-day. Mother — I was not in my right senses, or I should not have done it. Mother, darling! forget me. Don't let me have broken your heart."

Alas, he had broken it!

"Never come home any more! — Never come home any more!"

She repeated this over and over again, vacantly: nothing but these five words.

Nature refused to bear it; or rather, Nature mercifully helped her to bear it. When John took his wife in his arms, she was insensible; and remained so, with intervals, for hours.

This was the end of Edwin's wedding-day.
JOHN HALIFAX.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lord Ravenel knew — as all Paris did by this time — the whole story. Though, as he truly said, he had not seen Guy. The lad was hurried off immediately, for fear of justice: but he had written from shipboard to Lord Ravenel, begging him himself to take the letter and break the news to us at Beechwood.

The man he had struck was not one of Lord Luxmore's set — though it was through some of his "noble" friends Guy had fallen into his company. He was an Englishman, lately succeeded to a baronetcy and estate; his name — how we started to hear it, though by Lord Ravenel and by us for his sake, it was both pronounced and listened to, as if none of us had ever heard it before — Sir Gerard Vermilye.

As soon as Ursula recovered, Mr. Halifax and Lord Ravenel went to Paris together. This was necessary, not only to meet justice, but to track the boy — to whose destination we had no clue but the wide word, America. Guy's mother hurried them away — his mother, who rose from her bed, and moved about the house like a ghost — up-stairs and down-stairs — everywhere — excepting in that room, which was now once more locked, and the outer blind drawn down, as if Death himself had taken possession there.

Alas! we learned now, that there may be sorrows bitterer even than death.

Mr. Halifax went away. Then followed a long season of torpid gloom — days or weeks, I hardly remember —
during which we, living shut up at Beechwood, knew that our name — John's stainless, honourable name — was in every-body's mouth — parrotted abroad in every society — canvassed in every newspaper. We tried, Walter and I, to stop them at first, dreading lest the mother might read in some foul print or other scurrilous tales about her boy; or, as long remained doubtful, learn that he was proclaimed through France and England as a homicide — an assassin. But concealments were idle — she would read everything — hear everything — meet everything — even those neighbours who out of curiosity or sympathy, called at Beechwood. Not many times, though; they said they could not understand Mrs. Halifax. So, after a while, they all left her alone, except good little Grace Oldtower.

"Come often," I heard her say to this girl, whom she was fond of: they had sat talking a whole morning — idly and pensively; of little things around them, never once referring to things outside. "Come often, though the house is dull. Does it not feel strange, with Mr. Halifax away?"

Ay, this was the change — stranger at first than what had befallen Guy — for that long seemed a thing we could not realize; like a story told of some other family than ours. The present tangible blank was the house with its head and master away.

Curiously enough, but from his domestic habits easily accountable, he had scarcely ever been more than a few days absent from home before. We missed him continually; in his place at the head of the table; in his chair by the fire; his quick ring at the hall bell, when he came up from the mills — his step — his voice — his laugh. The life and soul of the house seemed to
have gone out of it, from the hour the father went away.

I think in the wonderful workings of things — as we know all things do work together for good — this fact was good for Ursula. It taught her that, in losing Guy, she had not lost all her blessings. It showed her what in the passion of her mother-love she might have been tempted to forget — many mothers do — that beyond all maternal duty, is the duty that a woman owes to her husband; beyond all loves, is the love that was hers before any of them were born.

So, gradually, as every day John's letters came, — and she used to watch for them and seize them as if they had been love-letters; as every day she seemed to miss him more, and count more upon his return; referring all decisions, and all little pleasures planned for her, to the time "when your father comes home;" — hope and comfort began to dawn in the heart of the mourning mother.

And when at last John fixed the day of his coming back, I saw Ursula tying up the small bundle of his letters — his letters, of which in all her happy life she had had so few tender, comforting, comfortable letters.

"I hope I shall never need to have any more," she said, half-smiling — the faint smile which began to dawn in her poor face, as if she must accustom it to look bright again in time for her husband's coming.

And when the day arrived, she put all the house in trim order, dressed herself in her prettiest gown, sat patient while Maud brushed and curled her hair — how white it had turned of late! — and then waited,
with a flush on her cheek — like that of a young girl waiting for her lover — for the sound of carriage-wheels.

All that had to be told about Guy — and it was better news than anyone of us had hoped for — John had already told in his letters. When he came back, therefore, he was burthened with no trouble undisclosed — greeted with no anguish of fear or bitter remembrance. As he sprang out of the post-chaise, it was to find his wife standing at the door, and his home smiling for him its brightest welcome. No blessing on earth could be like the blessing of the father's return.

John looked pale, but not paler than might have been expected. Grave, too — but it was a soft seriousness altogether free from the restlessness of keen anxiety. The first shock of this heavy misfortune was over. He paid all his son's debts; he had, as far as was possible, saved his good name; he had made a safe home for the lad, and heard of his safely reaching it, in the New World. Nothing more was left but to cover over the inevitable grief, and hope that time would blot out the intolerable shame. That since Guy's hand was clear of blood — and, since his recovery, Sir Gerard Vermilye had risen into a positive hero of society — men's minds would gradually lose the impression of a deed committed in heat of youth, and repented of with such bitter atonement.

So the father took his old place, and looked round on the remnant of his children, grave indeed, but not weighed down by incurable suffering. Something, deeper even than the hard time he had recently passed through, seemed to have made his home more than ever dear to
him. He sat in his arm-chair, never weary of noticing everything pleasant about him, of saying how pretty Beechwood looked, and how delicious it was to be at home. And perpetually, if any chance unlinked it, his hand would return to its clasp of Ursula's; — the minute she left her place by his side, his restless "Love, where are you going?" would call her back again. And once, when the children were out of the room, and I, sitting in a dark corner, was probably thought absent likewise, I saw John take his wife's face between his two hands, and look in it — the fondest, most lingering, saddest look! — then fold her tightly to his breast.

"I must never be away from her again. Mine — for as long as I live, mine — *my* wife, *my* Ursula!"

She took it all naturally, as she had taken every expression of his love these nine-and-twenty years. I left them, standing eye to eye, heart to heart, as if nothing in this world could ever part them.

Next morning was as gay as any of our mornings used to be, for, before breakfast, came Edwin and Louise. And after breakfast, the father and mother and I walked up and down the garden for an hour, talking over the prospects of the young couple. Then the post came — but we had no need to watch for it now. It only brought a letter from Lord Ravenel.

John read it, somewhat more seriously than he had been used to read these letters — which for the last year or so had come often enough — the boys usually quizzing, and Mistress Maud vehemently defending, the delicate small handwriting, the exquisite paper, the coronetted seal and the frank in the corner. John liked to have them, and his wife also — she being not
indifferent to the fact, confirmed by many other facts, that if there was one man in the world whom Lord Ravenel honoured and admired, it was John Halifax of Beechwood. But this time her pleasure was apparently damped; and when Maud, claiming the letter as usual, spread abroad, delightedly, the news that "her" Lord Ravenel was coming shortly, I imagined this visit was not so welcome as usual to the parents.

Yet still, as many a time before, when Mr. Halifax closed the letter, he sighed, looked sorrowful, saying only, "Poor Lord Ravenel!"

"John," asked his wife, speaking in a whisper, for by tacit consent all public allusion to his doings at Paris was avoided in the family — "did you, by any chance, hear anything of — you know whom I mean?"

"Not one syllable."

"You inquired?" He assented. "I knew you would. She must be almost an old woman now, or perhaps she is dead. Poor Caroline!"

It was the first time for years and years that this name had been breathed in our household. Involuntarily it carried me back — perhaps others besides me — to the day at Longfield when little Guy had devoted himself to his "pretty lady;" when we first heard that other name, which by a curious conjuncture of circumstances had since become so fatally familiar, and which would henceforward be like the sound of a dead-bell in our family — Gerard Vermilye.

On Lord Ravenel's re-appearance at Beechwood — and he seemed eager and glad to come — I was tempted to wish him away. He never crossed the threshold but his presence brought a shadow over the parents' looks —
and no wonder. The young people were gay and friendly as ever; made him always welcome with us; and he rode over daily from desolate, long-uninhabited Luxmore, where, in all its desolation, he appeared so fond of abiding.

He wanted to take Maud and Walter over there one day, to see some magnificent firs that were being cut down in a wholesale massacre, leaving the grand old hall as bare as a workhouse front. But the father objected; he was clearly determined that all the hospitalities between Luxmore and Beechwood should be on the Beechwood side.

Lord Ravenel apparently perceived this. "Luxmore is not Compiègne," he said to me, with his dreary smile, half-sad, half-cynical. "Mr. Halifax might indulge me with the society of his children."

And as he lay on the grass — it was full summer now — watching Maud's white dress flit about under the trees, I saw, or fancied I saw, something different to any former expression that had ever lighted up the soft languid mien of William Lord Ravenel.

"How tall that child has grown lately! She is about nineteen, I think?"

"Not seventeen till December."

"Ah, so young? — Well, it is pleasant to be young! — Dear little Maud!"

He turned on one side, hiding the sun from his eyes with those delicate ringed hands — which many a time our boys had laughed at, saying they were mere lady's hands, fit for no work at all.

Perhaps Lord Ravenel felt the cloud that had come over our intercourse with him; a cloud which, considering late events, was scarcely unnatural: for when evening came, his leave-taking, always a regret, seemed now as
painful as his blasé indifference to all emotions, pleasant or unpleasant, could allow. He lingered — he hesitated — he repeated many times how glad he should be to see Beechwood again; how all the world was to him "flat, stale, and unprofitable," except Beechwood.

John made no special answer; except that frank smile not without a certain kindly satire, under which the young nobleman's Byronic affectations generally melted away like mists in the morning. He kindled up into warmth and manliness.

"I thank you, Mr. Halifax — I thank you heartily for all you and your household have been to me. I trust I shall enjoy your friendship for many years. And if, in any way, I might offer mine, or any small influence in the world —"

"Your influence is not small," John returned earnestly. "I have often told you so. I know no man who has wider opportunities than you have."

"But I have let them slip — for ever."

"No, not for ever. You are young still; you have half a lifetime before you."

"Have I?" And for the moment one would hardly have recognised the sallow, spiritless face, that with all the delicacy of boyhood still, at times looked so exceedingly old. "No, no, Mr. Halifax, who ever heard of a man beginning life at seven-and-thirty?"

"Are you really seven-and-thirty?" asked Maud.

"Yes — yes, my girl. Is it so very old?"

He patted her on the shoulder, took her hand, gazed at it — the round, rosy, girlish hand — with a melancholy tenderness; — then bade "Good-bye" to us all generally, and rode off.

It struck me then, though I hurried the thought away
— it struck me afterwards, and does now with renewed surprise — how strange it was that the mother never noticed or took into account certain possibilities that would have occurred naturally to any worldly mother. I can only explain it by remembering the unworldliness of our lives at Beechwood, the heavy cares which now pressed upon us from without, and the notable fact — which our own family experience ought to have taught us, yet did not — that in cases like this, often those whom one would have expected to be most quicksighted, are the most strangely, irretrievably, mournfully blind.

When, the very next day, Lord Ravenel, not on horseback but in his rarely-used luxurious coronetted carriage, drove up to Beechwood, every one in the house except myself was inconceivably astonished to see him back again.

He said that he had delayed his journey to Paris, but gave no explanation of that delay. He joined as usual in our midday dinner; and after dinner, still as usual, took a walk with me and Maud. It happened to be through the beech-wood, almost the identical path that I remembered taking, years and years ago, with John and Ursula. I was surprised, to hear Lord Ravenel allude to the fact, a well-known fact in our family; for I think all fathers and mothers like to relate, and all children to hear, the slightest incidents of the parents’ courting days.

"You did not know father and mother when they were young?" said Maud, catching our conversation and flashing back her innocent, merry face upon us.

"No, scarcely likely." And he smiled. "Oh, yes — it might have been — I forget, I am not a young man
now. How old were Mr. and Mrs. Halifax when they married?"

"Father was twenty-one and mother was eighteen — only a year older than I." And Maud, half ashamed of this suggestive remark, ran away. Her gay candour proved to me — perhaps to others besides me — the girl's entire free-heartedness. The frank innocence of childhood was still hers.

Lord Ravenel looked after her and sighed. "It is good to marry early; do you not think so, Mr. Fletcher?"

I told him — (I was rather sorry after I had said it, if one ought to be sorry for having, when questioned, given one's honest opinion) — I told him that I thought those happiest who found their happiness early, but that I did not see why happiness should be rejected because it was the will of Providence that it should not be found till late.

"I wonder," he said, dreamily, "I wonder whether I shall ever find it."

I asked him — it was by an impulse irresistible — why he had never married?

"Because I never found any woman either to love or to believe in. Worse," he added, bitterly, "I did not think there lived the woman who could be believed in."

We had come out of the beech-wood and were standing by the low churchyard wall; the sun glittered on the white marble headstone on which was inscribed, "Muriel Joy Halifax."

Lord Ravenel leaned over the wall, his eyes fixed upon that little grave. After a while, he said, sighing, —

"Do you know, I have thought sometimes that, had
she lived, I could have loved — I might have married — that child!"

Here Maud sprang towards us. In her playful tyranny, which she loved to exercise and he to submit to, she insisted on knowing what Lord Ravenel was talking about.

"I was saying," he answered, taking both her hands and looking down into her bright, unshrinking eyes, "I was saying, how dearly I loved your sister Muriel."

"I know that," and Maud became grave at once. "I know you care for me because I am like my sister Muriel."

"If it were so, would you be sorry or glad?"

"Glad, and proud too. But you said, or you were going to say, something more. What was it?"

He hesitated long, then answered —

"I will tell you another time."

Maud went away rather cross and dissatisfied, but evidently suspecting nothing. For me, I began to be seriously uneasy about her and Lord Ravenel.

Of all kinds of love, there is one which common sense and romance have often combined to hold obnoxious, improbable, or ridiculous, but which has always seemed to me the most real and pathetic form that the passion ever takes; — I mean, love in spite of great disparity of age. Even when this is on the woman's side, I can imagine circumstances that would make it far less ludicrous and pitiful; and there are few things to me more touching, more full of sad earnest, than to see an old man in love with a young girl.

Lord Ravenel's case would hardly come under this category; yet the difference between seventeen and thirty-seven was sufficient to warrant in him a trembling un-
certainty, an eager catching at the skirts of that vanishing youth whose preciousness he never seemed to have recognized till now. It was with a mournful interest that all day I watched him follow the child about, gather her posies, help her to water her flowers, and accommodate himself to those whims and fancies, of which, as the pet and the youngest, Mistress Maud had her full share.

When, at her usual hour of half-past nine, the little lady was summoned away to bed, "to keep up her roses," he looked half resentful of the mother's interference.

"Maud is not a child now; and this may be my last night —" he stopped, sensitively, at the involuntary foreboding.

"Your last night? Nonsense! you will come back soon again. You must — you shall!" said Maud, decisively.

"I hope I may — I trust in Heaven I may!"

He spoke low, holding her hand distantly and reverently, not attempting to kiss it, as in all his former farewells he had invariably done.

"Maud, remember me! However or whenever I come back, dearest child, be faithful, and remember me!"

Maud fled away with a sob of childish pain — partly anger, the mother thought — and slightly apologized to the guest for her daughter's "naughtiness."

Lord Ravenel sat silent for a long, long time.

Just when we thought he proposed leaving, he said, abruptly, "Mr. Halifax, may I have five minutes' speech with you in the study?"

The five minutes extended to half an hour. Mrs. Halifax wondered what on earth they were talking
about. I held my peace. At last the father came in alone.

"John, is Lord Ravenel gone?"

"Not yet."

"What could he have wanted to say to you?"

John sat down by his wife, picked up the ball of her knitting, rolled and unrolled it. She saw at once that something had grieved and perplexed him exceedingly. Her heart shrunk back — that still sore heart! — recoiled with a not unnatural fear.

"Oh, husband, is it any new misfortune?"

"No, love," cheering her with a smile; "nothing that fathers and mothers in general would consider as such. He has asked me for our Maud."

"What for?" was the mother's first exceedingly simple question — and then she guessed its answer. "Impossible! Ridiculous — absolutely ridiculous! She is only a child."

"Nevertheless, Lord Ravenel wishes to marry our little Maud."

"Lord Ravenel wishes to marry our Maud!"

Mrs. Halifax repeated this to herself more than once, before she was able to entertain it as a reality. When she did, the first impression it made upon her mind was altogether pain.

"Oh, John! I hoped we had done with these sort of things; I thought we should have been left in peace with the rest of our children."

John smiled again; for indeed, there was a comical side to her view of the subject; but its serious phase soon returned; doubly so, when, looking up, they both saw Lord Ravenel standing before them. Firm his attitude was, firmer than usual; and it was with something
of his father’s stately air, mingled with a more chivalric and sincerer grace; that he stooped forward and kissed the hand of Maud’s mother.

“Mr. Halifax has told you all, I believe?”

“He has.”

“May I then, with entire trust in you both, await my answer?”

He waited it, patiently enough, with little apparent doubt as to what it would be. Besides, it was only the prior question of parental consent, not the vital point of Maud’s preference. And, with all his natural humility, Lord Ravenel might be forgiven if, brought up in the world, he was aware of his position therein; — nor quite unconscious that it was not merely William Ravenel, but the only son and heir of the Earl of Luxmore, who came a wooing.

Not till after a long pause, and even a whispered word or two between the husband and wife, who knew each other’s minds so well that no more consultation was needed — did the suitor again, with a more formal air, ask for an answer.

“It is difficult to give. I find that my wife, like myself, had no idea of your feelings. The extreme suddenness —”

“Pardon me; my intention has not been sudden. It is the growth of many months — years, I might almost say.”

“We are the more grieved.”

“Grieved?”

Lord Ravenel’s extreme surprise startled him from the mere suitor into the lover; he glanced from one to the other in undisguised alarm. John hesitated; the
mother said something about the "great difference between them."

"In age, do you mean? I am aware of that," he answered, with some sadness. "But twenty years is not an insuperable bar in marriage."

"No," said Mrs. Halifax, thoughtfully.

"And for any other disparity — in fortune — or rank —"

"I think, Lord Ravenel," — and the mother spoke with her "dignified" air — "you know enough of my husband's character and opinions to be assured how lightly he would hold such a disparity — if you allude to that supposed to exist between the son of the Earl of Luxmore and the daughter of John Halifax."

The young nobleman coloured, as if with ingenuous shame at what he had been implying. "I am glad of it. Let me assure you there will be no impediments on the side of my family. The earl has long wished me to marry. He knows well enough that I can marry whom I please — and shall marry for love only. Give me your leave to win your little Maud."

A dead silence.

"Again pardon me," Lord Ravenel said with some hauteur; "I cannot have clearly explained myself. Let me repeat, Mr. Halifax, that I ask your permission to win your daughter's affection, and, in due time, her hand."

"I would that you had asked of me anything that it could be less impossible to give you."

"Impossible! What do you mean? — Mrs. Halifax —" He turned instinctively to the woman — the mother.

Ursula's eyes were full of a sad kindness — the kind-
ness any mother must feel towards one who worthily woos her daughter — but she replied distinctly —

"I feel, with my husband, that such a marriage would be impossible."

Lord Ravenel grew scarlet — sat down — rose again, and stood facing them, pale and haughty.

"If I may ask — your reasons?"

"Since you ask — certainly," John replied. "Though, believe me, I give them with the deepest pain. Lord Ravenel, do you not yourself see that our Maud —"

"Wait one moment," he interrupted. "There is not, there cannot be, any previous attachment?"

The supposition made the parents smile. "Indeed, nothing of the kind: she is a mere child."

"You think her too young for marriage, then?" was the eager answer. "Be it so. I will wait though my youth, alas! is slipping from me; but I will wait — two years, three — any time you choose to name."

John needed not to reply. The very sorrow of his decision showed how inevitable and irrevocable it was.

Lord Ravenel's pride rose against it.

"I fear in this my novel position I am somewhat slow of comprehension. Would it be so great a misfortune to your daughter if I made her Viscountess Ravenel, and in course of time Countess of Luxmore?"

"I believe it would. Her mother and I would rather see our little Maud lying beside her sister Muriel, than see her Countess of Luxmore."

These words, hard as they were, John uttered so softly and with such infinite grief and pain, that they struck the young man, not with anger, but with an indefinite awe, as if a ghost from his youth — his wasted
youth — had risen up to point out that truth, and show him that what seemed insult or vengeance was only a bitter necessity.

All he did was to repeat, in a subdued manner — "Your reasons?"

"Ah, Lord Ravenel!" John answered sadly, "do you not see yourself that the distance between us and you is wide as the poles? Not in worldly things, but in things far deeper; — personal things, which strike at the root of love, home — nay, honour."

Lord Ravenel started. "Would you imply that anything in my past life, aimless and useless as it may have been, is unworthy of my honour — the honour of our house?"

Saying this he stopped — recoiled — as if suddenly made aware by the very words himself had uttered, what — contrasted with the unsullied dignity of the tradesman's life, the spotless innocence of the tradesman's daughter — what a foul tattered rag, fit to be torn down by an honest gust, was that flaunting emblazonment, the so-called "honour" of Luxmore!

"I understand you now. 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children,' as your Bible says — your Bible, that I had half begun to believe in. — Be it so. Mr. Halifax, I will detain you no longer."

John intercepted the young man's departure.

"No, you do not understand me. I hold no man accountable for any errors, any shortcomings, except his own."

"I am to conclude, then, that it is to myself you refuse your daughter?"

"It is."
Lord Ravenel once more bowed, with sarcastic emphasis.

"I entreat you not to mistake me," John continued, most earnestly. "I know nothing of you that the world would condemn, much that it would even admire; but your world is not our world, nor your aims our aims. If I gave you my little Maud, it would confer on you no lasting happiness, and it would be thrusting my child, my own flesh and blood, to the brink of that whirlpool where, soon or late, every miserable life must go down."

Lord Ravenel made no answer. His new-born energy, his pride, his sarcasm, had successively vanished; dead, passive melancholy resumed its empire over him. Mr. Halifax regarded him with mournful compassion.

"O that I had foreseen this! I would have placed the breadth of all England between you and my child."

"Would you?"

"Understand me. Not because you do not possess our warm interest, our friendship: both will always be yours. But these are external ties, which may exist through many differences. In marriage there must be perfect unity; — one aim, one faith, one love, or the marriage is incomplete, unholy — a mere civil contract and no more."

Lord Ravenel looked up amazed at this doctrine, then sat awhile, pondering drearily.

"Yes, you may be right," at last he said. "Your Maud is not for me, nor those like me. Between us and you is that 'great gulf fixed;' — what did the old fable say? I forget. — Che sarà sarà! I am but as others: I am but what I was born to be."

"Do you recognize what you were born to be? Not only a nobleman, but a gentleman; not only a gentleman,
but a man — man, made in the image of God. How can you, how dare you, give the lie to your Creator?"

"What has He given me? What have I to thank Him for?"

"First, manhood; the manhood His Son disdained not to wear; worldly gifts, such as rank, riches, influence, things which others have to spend half an existence in earning; life in its best prime, with much of youth yet remaining — with grief endured, wisdom learnt, experience won. Would to Heaven, that by any poor word of mine I could make you feel all that you are — all that you might be!"

A gleam, bright as a boy's hope, wild as a boy's daring, flashed from those listless eyes — then faded.

"You mean, Mr. Halifax, what I might have been. Now, it is too late."

"There is no such word as 'too late,' in the wide world — nay, not in the universe. What! shall we, whose atom of time is but a fragment out of an ever-present eternity — shall we, so long as we live, or even at our life's ending, dare to cry out to the Eternal One, 'It is too late!'"

As John spoke, in much more excitement than was usual to him, a sudden flush or rather spasm of colour flushed his face, then faded away, leaving him pallid to the very lips. He sat down hastily, in his frequent attitude, with the left arm passed across his breast.

"Lord Ravenel." His voice was faint, as though speech was painful to him.

The other looked up, the old look of reverent attention, which I remembered in the boy-lord who came to see us at Norton Bury; in the young "Anselmo," whose
enthusiastic hero-worship had fixed itself, with an almost unreasoning trust, on Muriel's father.

"Lord Ravenel, forgive anything I have said that may have hurt you. It would grieve me inexpressibly if we did not part as friends."

"Part?"

"For a time, we must. I dare not risk further either your happiness or my child's."

"No, not hers. Guard it. I blame you not. The lovely, innocent child! God forbid she should ever have a life like mine!"

He sat silent, his clasped hands listlessly dropping, his countenance dreamy; yet, it seemed to me, less hopelessly sad: then with a sudden effort rose.

"I must go now."

Crossing over to Mrs. Halifax, he thanked her, with much emotion, for all her kindness.

"For your husband, I owe him more than kindness, as perhaps I may prove some day. If not, try to believe the best of me you can. Good-bye."

They both said good-bye, and bade God bless him; with scarcely less tenderness than if things had ended as he desired, and, instead of this farewell, sad and indefinite beyond most farewells, they were giving the parental welcome to a newly-chosen son.

Ere finally quitting us, Lord Ravenel turned back to speak to John once more, hesitatingly and mournfully.

"If she — if the child should ask or wonder about my absence — she likes me in her innocent way you know — you will tell her — What shall you tell her?"

"Nothing. It is best not."

"Ay, it is, it is."
He shook hands with us all three, without saying anything else; then the carriage rolled away, and we saw his face — that pale, gentle, melancholy face — no more.

It was years and years before any one beyond ourselves knew what a near escape our little Maud had had of becoming Viscountess Ravenel — future Countess of Luxmore.
CHAPTER XV.

It was not many weeks after this departure of Lord Ravenel's — the pain of which was almost forgotten in the comfort of Guy's first long home letter, which came about this time — that John one morning, suddenly dropping his newspaper, exclaimed,

"Lord Luxmore is dead."

Yes, he had returned to his dust, this old bad man; so old, that people had begun to think he would never die. He was gone; the man who, if we owned an enemy in the world, had certainly proved himself that enemy. Something peculiar is there in a decease like this — of one whom, living, we have almost felt ourselves justified in condemning, avoiding — perhaps hating. Until Death stepping in between, removes him to another tribunal than this petty justice of ours, and laying a solemn finger on our mouths, forbids us either to think or utter a word of hatred against that which is now — what? — a disembodied spirit — a handful of corrupting clay.

Lord Luxmore was dead. He had gone to his account; it was not ours to judge him. We never knew — I believe no one except his son even ever fully knew — the history of his death-bed.

John sat in silence, the paper before him, long after we had passed the news and discussed it, not without awe, all round the breakfast-table.

Maud stole up — hesitatingly, and asked to see the announcement of the Earl's decease.

"No, my child; but you shall hear it read aloud, if you choose."
I guessed the reason of his refusal; when, looking over him as he read, I saw, after the long list of titles owned by the new Earl of Luxmore, one bitter line; how it must have cut to the heart of him whom we first heard of as "poor William!"

"Had likewise issue, Caroline, married in 17 —, to Richard Brathwood, Esquire, afterwards divorced."

And by a curious coincidence, about twenty lines further down I read among the fashionable marriages — "At the British Embassy, Paris, Sir Gerard Vermilye, Bart., to the youthful and beautiful daughter of — — —" I forget who. I only saw that the name was not her name, of whom the "youthful and beautiful" bride had most likely never heard. He had not married Lady Caroline.

This morning's intelligence brought the Luxmore family so much to our thoughts, that driving out after breakfast, John and I involuntarily recurred to the subject. Nay, talking on, in the solitude of our front seat — for Mrs. Halifax, Miss Halifax, and Mrs. Edwin Halifax, in the carriage behind, were deep in some other subject — we fell upon a topic which by tacit consent had been laid aside, as in our household we held it good to lay aside, any inevitable regret.

"Poor Maud! how eager she was to hear the news to-day. She little thinks how vitally it might have concerned her."

"No," John answered thoughtfully; then asked me with some abruptness: "Why did you say 'poor Maud'?"

I really could not tell; it was a mere accident, the unwitting indication of some crotchets of mine, which had often come into my mind lately. Crotchets, perhaps peculiar to one, who, never having known a certain pos-
session, found himself rather prone to over-rate its value. But it sometimes struck me as hard, considering how little honest and sincere love there is in the world, that Maud should never have known of Lord Ravenel’s.

Possibly, against my will, my answer implied something of this; for John was a long time silent. Then he began to talk of various matters; telling me of many improvements he was planning and executing, on his property, and among his people. In all his plans, and in the carrying out of them, I noticed one peculiarity, strong in him throughout his life, but latterly grown stronger than ever — namely, that whatever he found to do, he did immediately. Procrastination had never been one of his faults; now, he seemed to have a horror of putting anything off even for a single hour. Nothing that could be done, did he lay aside until it was done, his business affairs were kept in perfect order; each day’s work being completed with the day. And in the thousand-and-one little things that were constantly arising, from his position as magistrate and land-owner, and his general interest in the movements of the time, the same system was invariably pursued. In his relations with the world outside, as in his own little valley, he seemed determined to “work while it was day.” If he could possibly avoid it, no application was ever unattended to; no duty left unfinished; no good unacknowledged; no evil unremedied, or at least unforgiven.

“John,” I said, as to-day this peculiarity of his struck me more than usual; “thou art certainly one of the faithful servants whom the Master when He cometh will find watching.”

“I hope so. It ought to be thus with all men — but especially with me.”
I imagined, from his tone, that he was thinking of his responsibility as father, master, owner of large wealth. How could I know — how could I guess — beyond this!

"Do you think she looks pale, Phineas?" he asked suddenly.

"Who — your wife?"

"No — Maud. My little Maud."

It was but lately that he called her 'his' little Maud; since with that extreme tenacity of attachment which was a part of his nature — refusing to put any one love in another love's place — his second daughter had never been to him like the first. Now, however, I had noticed that he took Maud nearer to his heart, made her more often his companion, watching her with a sedulous tenderness — it was easy to guess why.

"She may have looked a little paler of late, a little more thoughtful. But I am sure she is not unhappy."

"I believe not — thank God!"

"Surely," I said anxiously, "you have never repented what you did about Lord Ravenel?"

"No — not once. It cost me so much, that I know it was right to be done."

"But if things had been otherwise — if you had not been so sure of Maud's feelings —"

He started, painfully; then answered — "I think I should have done it still."

I was silent. The paramount right, the high prerogative of love, which he held as strongly as I did, seemed attacked in its liberty divine. For the moment, it was as if he too had in his middle-age gone over to the cold-blooded ranks of harsh parental prudence, despotic paternal rule; as if Ursula March's lover and
Maud's father were two distinct beings. One finds it so, often enough, with men.

"John," I said, "could you have done it? could you have broken the child's heart?"

"Yes, if it was to save her peace — perhaps her soul, I could have broken my child's heart."

He spoke solemnly, with an accent of inexpressible pain, as if this were not the first time by many that he had pondered over such a possibility.

"I wish, Phineas, to make clear to you, in case of — of any future misconceptions — my mind on this matter. One right alone I hold superior to the right of love, — duty. It is a father's duty, at all risks, at all costs, to save his child from anything which he believes would peril her duty — so long as she is too young to understand fully how beyond the claim of any human being, be it father or lover, is God's claim to herself and her immortal soul. Anything which would endanger that, should be cut off — though it be the right hand — the right eye. But, thank God, it was not thus with my little Maud."

"Nor with him either. He bore his disappointment well."

"Nobly. It may make a true nobleman of him yet. But, being what he is, and for as long as he remains so, he must not be trusted with my little Maud. I must take care of her while I live: afterwards —"

His smile faded, or rather was transmuted into that grave thoughtfulness which I had lately noticed in him, when, as now, he fell into one of his long silences. There was nothing sad about it; rather a serenity which reminded me of that sweet look of his boyhood, which had vanished during the manifold cares of his middle
life. The expression of the mouth, as I saw it in profile — close and calm — almost inclined me to go back to the fanciful follies of our youth, and call him "David."

We drove through Norton Bury, and left Mrs. Edwin there. Then on, along the familiar road, towards the Manor-house: past the white gate, within sight of little Longfield.

"It looks just the same — the tenant takes good care of it." And John's eyes turned fondly to his old home.

"Ay, just the same. Do you know your wife was saying to me this morning, that when Guy comes back, when all the young folk are married, and you retire from business and settle into the otium cum dignitate, the learned leisure you used to plan — she would like to give up Beechwood. She said, she hopes you and she will end your days together at little Longfield."

"Did she? Yes, I know that has been always her dream."

"Scarcely a dream, or one that is not unlikely to be fulfilled. I like to fancy you both two old people, sitting on either side the fire — or on the same side, if you like it best; very cheerful — you will make such a merry old man, John, with all your children round you, and indefinite grand-children about the house continually. Or else you two will sit alone together, just as in your early married days — you and your old wife — the dearest and handsomest old lady that ever was seen."

"Phineas — don't — don't." I was startled by the tone in which he answered the lightness of mine. "I mean — don't be planning out the future. It is foolish
it is almost wrong. God's will is not as our will; and He knows best."

I would have spoken: but just then we reached the Manour-house gate, and plunged at once into present life, and into the hospitable circle of the Oldtowers.

They were all in the excitement of a wonderful piece of gossip: gossip so strange, sudden, and unprecedented, that it absorbed all lesser matters. It burst out before we had been in the house five minutes.

"Have you heard this extraordinary report about the Luxmore family?"

I could see Maud turn with eager attention — fixing her eyes wistfully on Lady Oldtower.

"About the earl's death? Yes, we saw it in the newspaper." And John passed on to some other point of conversation. In vain.

"This news relates to the present earl. I never heard of such a thing — never. In fact, if true, his conduct is something which in its self-denial approaches absolute insanity. Is it possible that, being so great a friend of your family, he has not informed you of the circumstances?"

These circumstances, with some patience, we extracted from the voluble Lady Oldtower. She had learnt them — I forget how: but ill news never wants a tongue to carry it.

It seemed that on the Earl's death it was discovered, what had already been long suspected, that his liabilities, like his extravagances, were enormous. That he was obliged to live abroad, to escape in some degree the clamorous haunting of the hundreds he had ruined: poor tradespeople, who knew that their only chance of pay-
ment was during the old man's lifetime, for his whole property was entailed on the son.

Whether Lord Ravenel had ever been acquainted with this state of things, or whether, being in ignorance of it, his own style of living had in degree imitated his father's, rumour did not say, nor indeed was it of much consequence. The facts subsequently becoming known immediately after Lord Luxmore's death, made all former conjectures unnecessary.

Not a week before he died, the late Earl and his son — chiefly it was believed on the latter's instigation — had cut off the entail, thereby making the whole property saleable, and available for the payment of creditors. Thus by his own act, and — as some one had told somebody that somebody else had heard Lord Ravenel say — "for the honour of the family," the present Earl had succeeded to an empty title, and — beggary.

"Or," Lady Oldtower added, "what to a man of rank will be the same as beggary — a paltry two hundred a-year or so — which he has reserved, they say, just to keep him from destitution. Ah — here comes Mr. Jessop; I thought he would. He can tell us all about it."

Old Mr. Jessop was as much excited as any one present.

"Ay — it's all true — only too true, M. Halifax. He was at my house last night."

"Last night!" I do not think anybody caught the child's exclamation but me; I could not help watching little Maud, noticing what strong emotion, still perfectly child-like and unguarded in its demonstration, was shaking her innocent bosom, and overflowing at her eyes. However, as she sat still in her corner, nobody observed her.

"Yes, he slept at my house — Lord Ravenel, the
Earl of Luxmore I mean. Much good will his title do him! My head clerk is better off than he. He has stripped himself of every penny, except — bless me, I forget; — Mr. Halifax, he gave me a letter for you."

John walked to the window, to read it; but having read it, passed it openly round the circle; as indeed was best.

"My dear Friend,

"You will have heard that my father is no more."

("He used always to say 'the Earl,'" whispered Maud, as she looked over my shoulder.)

"I write this merely to say, what I feel sure you will already have believed — that anything which you may learn concerning his affairs, I was myself unaware of, except in a very slight degree, when I last visited Beechwood.

"Will you likewise believe that in all I have done or intend doing, your interests as my tenant — which I hope you will remain — have been, and shall be, sedulously guarded?

"My grateful remembrance to all your household.

"Faithfully yours, and theirs,

"Luxmore."

"Give me back the letter, Maud my child."

She had been taking possession of it, as in right of being his "pet" she generally did of all Lord Ravenel's letters. But now, without a word of objection, she surrendered it to her father.

"What does he mean, Mr. Jessop, about my interests as his tenant?"

"Bless me — I am so grieved about the matter, that
every thing goes astray in my head. He wished me to explain to you, that he has reserved one portion of the Luxmore property intact — Enderly mills. The rent you pay will, he says, be a sufficient income for him; and then while your lease lasts no other landlord can injure you. Very thoughtful of him — very thoughtful indeed, Mr. Halifax."

John made no answer.

"I never saw a man so altered. He went over some matters with me — private charities, in which I have been his agent, you know — grave, clear-headed, business-like; my clerk himself could not have done better. Afterwards we sat and talked, and I tried — foolishly enough, when the thing was done! — to show him what a frantic act it was both towards himself and his heirs. But he could not see it. He said, cutting off the entail would harm nobody — for that he did not intend ever to marry. Poor fellow!"

"Is he with you still?" John asked, in a low tone.

"No; he left this morning for Paris; his father is to be buried there. Afterwards, he said, his movements were quite uncertain. He bade me good bye — I — I didn’t like it, I can assure you."

And the old man, blowing his nose with his yellow pocket-handkerchief, and twitching his features into all manner of shapes, seemed determined to put aside the melancholy subject, and dilated on the earl and his affairs no more.

Nor did any one. Something in this young nobleman’s noble act — it has since been not without a parallel among our aristocracy — silenced the tongue of gossip itself. The deed was so new — so unlike anything that had been conceived possible, especially in a man.
like Lord Ravenel, who had always borne the character
of a harmless, idle, misanthropic nonentity—that society
was really nonplussed concerning it. Of the many
loquacious visitors who came that morning to pour upon
Lady Oldtower all the curiosity of Coltham—fashion-
able Coltham, famous for all the scandal of *haut ton*—
there was none who did not speak of Lord Luxmore
and his affairs with an uncomfortable, wondering awe.
Some suggested he was going mad—others, raking up
stories current of his early youth, thought he had turned
Catholic again, and was about to enter a monastery.
One or two honest hearts protested that he was a noble
fellow, and it was a pity he had determined to be the
last of the Luxmores.

For ourselves—Mr. and Mrs. Halifax, Maud and
I—we never spoke to one another on the subject all
morning. Not until after luncheon, when John and I had
somehow stolen out of the way of the visitors, and were
walking to and fro in the garden. The sunny fruit
garden—ancient, Dutch, and square—with its barricade
of a high hedge, a stone wall, and between it and the
house a shining fence of great laurel trees.

Maud appeared suddenly before us from among these
laurels, breathless.

"I got away after you, father. I—I wanted to find
some strawberries—and—I wanted to speak to you."

"Speak on, little lady."

He linked her arm in his, and she paced between us
up and down the broad walk—but without diverging
to the strawberry beds. She was grave, and paler than
ordinary. Her father asked if she were tired?

"No, but my head aches. Those Coltham people do
talk so. Father, I want you to explain to me, for I can't
well understand it, all this that they have been saying about Lord Ravenel."

John explained, as simply and briefly as he could:

"I understand. Then, though he is Earl of Luxmore, he is quite poor — poorer than any of us? And he has made himself poor, in order to pay his own and his father's debts, and keep other people from suffering from any fault of his? Is it so?"

"Yes, my child."

"Is it not a very noble act, father?"

"Very noble."

"I think it is the noblest act I ever heard of. I should like to tell him so. When is he coming to Beechwood?"

Maud spoke quickly, with flushed cheeks, in the impetuous manner she inherited from her mother. Her question not being immediately answered, she repeated it still more eagerly.

Her father replied — "I do not know."

"How very strange! I thought he would come at once — to-night, probably."

I reminded her that Lord Ravenel had left for Paris, bidding good-bye to Mr. Jessop.

"He ought to have come to us instead of to Mr. Jessop. Write and tell him so, father. Tell him how glad we shall be to see him. And perhaps you can help him: you who help everybody. He always said you were his best friend."

"Did he?"

"Ah now, do write, father dear — I am sure you will."

John looked down on the little maid who hung on his arm so persuasively, then looked sorrowfully away.

"My child — I cannot."
"What, not write to him? When he is poor and in trouble? That is not like you, father," and Maud half-loosed her arm.

Her father quietly put the little rebellious hand back again to its place. He was evidently debating within himself whether he should tell her the whole truth, or how much of it. Not that the debate was new, for he must already have foreseen this possible, nay, certain, conjuncture. Especially as all his dealings with his family had hitherto been open as daylight. He held that to prevaricate, or wilfully to give the impression of a falsehood, is almost as mean as a direct lie. When anything occurred that he could not tell his children, he always said plainly, "I cannot tell you," and they asked no more.

I wondered exceedingly how he would deal with Maud.

She walked with him, submissive yet not satisfied, glancing at him from time to time, waiting for him to speak. At last she could wait no longer.

"I am sure there is something wrong. You do not care for Lord Ravenel as much as you used to do."

"More, if possible."

"Then write to him. Say, we want to see him — I want to see him. Ask him to come and stay a long while at Beechwood."

"I cannot, Maud. It would be impossible for him to come. I do not think he is likely to visit Beechwood for some time."

"How long? Six months? A year, perhaps?"

"It may be several years."

"Then, I was right. Something has happened; you
are not friends with him any longer. And he is poor—in trouble—oh, father!"

She snatched her hand away, and flashed upon him reproachful eyes. John took her gently by the arm, and made her sit down upon the wall of a little stone bridge, under which the moat slipped with a quiet murmur. Maud’s tears dropped into it fast and free.

That very outburst, brief and thundery as a child’s passion, gave consolation both to her father and me. When it lessened, John spoke.

"Now has my little Maud ceased to be angry with her father?"

"I did not mean to be angry—only I was so startled—so grieved. Tell me what has happened, please, father?"

"I will tell you—so far as I can. Lord Ravenel and myself had some conversation, of a very painful kind, the last night he was with us. After it, we both considered it advisable he should not visit us again for the present."

"Why not? Had you quarrelled? or if you had, I thought my father was always the first to forgive everybody."

"No, Maud, we had not quarrell ed."

"Then, what was it?"

"My child, you must not ask, for indeed I cannot tell you."

Maud sprang up—the rebellious spirit flashing out again. "Not tell me—me, his pet—me, that cared for him more than any of you did. I think you ought to tell me, father."

"You must allow me to decide that, if you please."
After this answer Maud paused, and said humbly, "Does any one else know?"

"Your mother, and your uncle Phineas, who happened to be present at the time. No one else; and no one else shall know."

John spoke with that slight quivering and blueness of the lips which any mental excitement usually produced in him. He sat down by his daughter's side and took her hand.

"I knew this would grieve you, and I kept it from you as long as I could. Now you must only be patient, and like a good child trust your father."

Something in his manner quieted her. She only sighed and said, "She could not understand it."

"Neither can I — oftentimes, my poor little Maud. There are so many sad things in life that we have to take upon trust, and bear, and be patient with — yet never understand. I suppose we shall some day."

His eyes wandered upward to the wide-arched blue sky, which in its calm beauty makes us fancy that Paradise is there, even though we know that "the kingdom of Heaven is within us," and that the kingdom of spirits may be around us and about us, everywhere.

Maud looked at her father, and crept closer to him — into his arms.

"I did not mean to be naughty. I will try not to mind losing him. But I liked Lord Ravenel so much — and he was so fond of me."

"Child" — and her father himself could not help smiling at the simplicity of her speech — "it is often easiest to lose those we are fond of and who are fond of us, because, in one sense, we never can really lose them."
Nothing in this world, nor, I believe, in any other, can part those who truly and faithfully love."

I think he was hardly aware how much he was implying, at least not in its relation to her, else he would not have said it. And he would surely have noticed, as I did, that the word "love," which had not been mentioned before — it was "liking," "fond of," "care for," or some such round-about, childish phrase — the word "love," made Maud start. She darted from one to the other of us a keen glance of inquiry, and then turned the colour of a July rose.

Her attitude, her blushes, the shy tremble about her mouth, reminded me vividly, too vividly of her mother twenty-eight years ago.

Alarmed, I tried to hasten the end of our conversation, lest, voluntarily or involuntarily, it might produce the very results which, though they might not have altered John's determination, would almost have broken his heart.

So, begging her to "kiss and make friends," which Maud did, timidly, and without attempting further questions, I hurried the father and daughter into the house; deferring for mature consideration, the question whether or not I should trouble John with any too-anxious doubts of mine concerning her.

As we drove back through Norton Bury, I saw that while her mother and Lady Oldtower conversed, Maud sat opposite rather more silent than her wont; but when the ladies dismounted for shopping, she was again the lively independent Miss Halifax,

— "Standing with reluctant feet,
Where womanhood and childhood meet;"
and assuming at once the prerogatives and immunities of both.

Her girlish ladyship at last got tired of silks and ribbons, and stood with me at the shop-door, amusing herself with commenting on the passers-by.

These were not so plentiful as I once remembered, though still the old town wore its old face — appearing fairer than ever, as I myself grew older. The same Coltham coach stopped at the Lamb Inn, and the same group of idle loungers took an interest in its disemboguing of its contents. But railways had done an ill turn to the coach and to poor Norton Bury: where there used to be six inside passengers, to-day was turned out only one.

"What a queer-looking little woman! Uncle Phineas, people shouldn't dress so fine as that when they are old."

Maud's criticism was scarcely just. The light-coloured, flimsy gown, shorter than even Coltham fashionables would have esteemed decent, the fluttering bonnet, the abundance of flaunting curls — no wonder that the stranger attracted considerable notice in quiet Norton Bury. As she tripped mincingly along, in her silk stockings and light shoes, a smothered jeer arose.

"People should not laugh at an old woman, however conceited she may be," said Maud, indignantly.

"Is she old?"

"Just look."

And surely when, as she turned from side to side I caught her full face — what a face it was! withered, thin, sallow almost to deathliness, with a bright rouge-spot on each cheek, a broad smile on the ghastly mouth.
“Is she crazy, Uncle Phineas?”

“Possibly. Do not look at her.” For I was sure this must be the wreck of such a life as womanhood does sometimes sink to—a life, the mere knowledge of which had never yet entered our Maud’s pure world.

She seemed surprised, but obeyed me and went in. I stood at the shop-door, watching the increasing crowd, and pitying, with that pity mixed with shame that every honest man must feel towards a degraded woman, the wretched object of their jeers. Half-frightened, she still kept up that set smile, skitting daintily from side to side of the pavement, darting at and peering into every carriage that passed. Miserable creature as she looked, there was a certain grace and ease in her movements, as if she had fallen from some far higher estate.

At the moment, the Mythe carriage, with Mr. Brithwood in it, dozing his daily drive away, his gouty foot propped up before him—slowly lumbered up the street. The woman made a dart at it, but was held back.

“Canaille! I always hated your Norton Bury! Call my carriage. I will go home.”

Through its coarse discordance, its insane rage, I thought I knew the voice. Especially when, assuming a tone of command, she addressed the old coachman:

“Draw up, Peter; you are very late. People, give way! Don’t you see my carriage?”

There was a roar of laughter, so loud that even Mr. Brithwood opened his dull, drunken eyes and stared about him.

“Canaille!”—and the scream was more of terror than anger, as she almost flung herself under the
horses' heads in her eagerness to escape from the mob. "Let me go! My carriage is waiting. I am Lady Caroline Brithwood!"

The 'squire heard her. For a single instant they gazed at one another — besotted husband, dishonoured, divorced wife — gazed with horror and fear, as two sinners who had been each other's undoing, might meet in the poetic torments of Dante's "Inferno," or the tangible fire and brimstone of many a blind but honest Christian's hell. One single instant, — and then Richard Brithwood made up his mind.

"Coachman, drive on!"

But the man — he was an old man — seemed to hesitate at urging his horses right over "my lady." He even looked down on her with a sort of compassion — I remembered having heard say that she was always kind and affable to her servants.

"Drive on, you fool! Here" — and Mr. Brithwood threw some coin amongst the mob — "Fetch the constable — some of you; take the woman to the watchhouse!"

And the carriage rolled on, leaving her there, crouched on the kerbstone, gazing after it with something between a laugh and a moan.

Nobody touched her. Perhaps some had heard of her; a few might even have seen her — driving through Norton Bury in her pristine state, as the young 'squire's handsome wife — the charming Lady Caroline.

I was so absorbed in the sickening sight, that I did not perceive how John and Ursula, standing behind me, had seen it likewise — evidently seen and understood it all.

"What is to be done?" she whispered to him.
"What ought we to do?"

Here Maud came running out to see what was amiss in the street.

"Go in, child," said Mrs. Halifax sharply. "Stay till I fetch you."

Lady Oldtower also advanced to the door; but catching some notion of what the disturbance was, shocked and scandalized, retired into the shop again.

John looked earnestly at his wife, but for once she did not or would not understand his meaning; she drew back uneasily.

"What must be done? I mean, what do you want me to do?"

"What only a woman can do — a woman like you, and in your position."

"Yes, if it were only myself. But think of the household — think of Maud. People will talk so. It is hard to know how to act."

"Nay; how did One act — how would He act now, if He stood in the street this day? If we take care of aught of His, will He not take care of us and of our children?"

Mrs. Halifax paused, thought a moment, hesitated — yielded.

"John, you are right; you are always right. I will do anything you please."

And then I saw, through the astonished crowd, in face of scores of window-gazers, all of whom knew them, and a great number of whom they also knew, Mr. Halifax and his wife walk up to where the miserable woman lay.

John touched her lightly on the shoulder — she screamed and cowered down.
"Are you the constable? He said he would send the constable."

"Hush! — do not be afraid. Cousin — Cousin Caroline."

God knows how long it was since any woman had spoken to her in that tone. It seemed to startle back her shattered wits. She rose to her feet, smiling airily.

"Madam, you are very kind. I believe I have had the pleasure of seeing you somewhere. Your name is —"

"Ursula Halifax. Do you remember?" — speaking gently, as she would have done to a child.

Lady Caroline bowed — a ghastly mockery of her former sprightly grace. "Not exactly; but I dare say I shall presently — au revoir, madame!"

She was going away, kissing her hand — that yellow wrinkled, old woman's hand,— but John stopped her.

"My wife wants to speak to you, Lady Caroline. She wishes you to come home with us."

"Plaît-il? — oh yes; I understand. I shall be happy — most happy."

John offered her his arm with an air of grave deference; Mrs. Halifax supported her on the other side. Without more ado, they put her in the carriage and drove home, leaving Maud in my charge, and leaving astounded Norton Bury to think and say — exactly what it pleased.
CHAPTER XVI.

For nearly three years Lady Caroline lived in our house — if that miserable existence of hers could be called living — bed-ridden, fallen into second childhood:

"Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw;"

oblivious to both past and present, recognising none of us, and taking no notice of anybody, except now and then of Edwin's little daughter, baby Louise.

We knew that all our neighbours talked us over, making far more than a nine days' wonder of the "very extraordinary conduct" of Mr. and Mrs. Halifax. That even good Lady Oldtower hesitated a little before she suffered her tribe of fair daughters to visit under the same roof where lay, quite out of the way, that poor wreck of womanhood, which would hardly have tainted any woman now. But in process of time the gossip ceased of itself; and when, one summer day, a small decent funeral moved out of our garden gate to Enderly churchyard, all the comment was —

"Oh! is she dead? — What a relief it must be! How very kind of Mr. and Mrs. Halifax!"

Yes, she was dead, and had "made no sign," either of repentance, grief, or gratitude. Unless one could consider as such a moment's lightening before death, which Maud declared she saw in her — Maud, who had tended her with a devotedness which neither father nor mother forbade, believing that a woman cannot too
soon learn womanhood's best "mission" — usefulness, tenderness and charity. Miss Halifax was certain that a few minutes before the last minute, she saw a gleam of sense in the filmy eyes, and stooping down, had caught some feeble murmur about "William — poor William!"

She did not tell me this; she spoke of it to no one but her mother, and to her briefly. So the wretched life once beautiful and loveful, was now ended, or perhaps born into some new sphere to begin again its struggle after the highest beauty, the only perfect love. What are we that we should place limits to the infinite mercy of the Lord and Giver of Life, unto whom all life returns?

We buried her and left her; — poor Lady Caroline!

No one interfered with us, and we appealed to no one. In truth, there was no one unto whom we could appeal. Lord Luxmore, immediately after his father's funeral, had disappeared, whither, no one knew except his solicitor; who treated with and entirely satisfied the host of creditors, and into whose hands the sole debtor, John Halifax, paid his yearly rent. Therewith, he wrote several times to Lord Luxmore; but the letters were simply acknowledged through the lawyer: never answered. Whether in any of them John alluded to Lady Caroline, I do not know; but I rather think not, as it would have served no purpose and only inflicted pain. No doubt, her brother had long since believed her dead, as we and the world had done.

In that same world, one man, even a nobleman, is of little account. Lord Ravenel sank in its wide waste of waters, and they closed over him. Whether he were drowned or saved, was of small moment to any one. He
was soon forgotten, — everywhere except at Beechwood; and sometimes it seemed as if he were even forgotten there. Save that in our family we found it hard to learn this easy, convenient habit, — to forget.

Hard, though seven years had passed since we saw Guy's merry face, to avoid missing it keenly still. The mother, as her years crept on, oftentimes wearied for him with a yearning that could not be told. The father, as Edwin became engrossed in his own affairs, and Walter's undecided temperament kept him a boy long after boyhood, often seemed to look round vaguely for an eldest son's young strength to lean upon; often said anxiously, "I wish Guy were at home."

Yet still there was no hint of his coming; better he never came at all than came against his will, or came to meet the least pain, the shadow of disgrace. And he was contented and prosperous in the western world, leading an active and useful life, earning an honourable name. He had taken a partner, he told us; there was real friendship between them, and they were doing well; perhaps might make, in a few years, one of those rapid fortunes which clever men of business do make in America, and did especially at that time.

He was also eager and earnest upon other and higher cares than mere business; entered warmly into his father's sympathy about many political measures now occupying men's minds. A great number of comparative facts concerning the factory children in England and America; a mass of evidence used by Mr. Fowell Buxton in his arguments for the abolition of slavery; and many other things, originated in the impulsive activity, now settled into mature manly energy, of Mr. Guy Halifax, of Boston, U. S. — "our Guy."
"The lad is making a stir in the world," said his father one day, when we had read his last letter. "I shall not wonder if when he comes home, a deputation from his native Norton Bury were to appear, requesting him to accept the honour of representing them in Parliament. He would suit them — at least, as regards the canvassing and the ladies — a great deal better than his old father — eh, love?"

Mrs. Halifax smiled, rather unwillingly, for her husband referred to a subject which had cost her some pain at the time. After the Reform Bill passed, many of our neighbours, who had long desired that one of John's high character, practical knowledge, and influence in the town, should be its M.P., and were aware that his sole objection to entering the House was the said question of Reform, urged him very earnestly to stand for Norton Bury.

To everybody's surprise, and none more than our own, he refused.

Publicly he assigned no reason for this, except his conviction that he could not discharge as he ought and as he would once have done, duties which he held so sacred and indispensable. His letter, brief and simple, thanking his "good neighbours," and wishing them "a younger and worthier" member, might be found in some old file of the Norton Bury Herald still. Even the Norton Bury Mercury, in reprinting it, commented on its touching honesty and brevity, and — concluding his political career was ended with it, — condescended to bestow on Mr. Halifax the usual obituary line —

"We could have better spared a better man."

When his family, and even his wife, reasoned with him, knowing that to enter parliament had long been his
thought, nay, his desire, and perhaps herself taking a natural pride in the idea of seeing M.P. — M.P. of a new and unbribed House of Commons — after his well-beloved name; — to us and to her he gave no clearer motive for his refusal than to the electors of Norton Bury.

"But you are not old, John," I argued with him one day; "you possess to the full the mens sana in corpore sano. No man can be more fitted than yourself to serve his country, as you used to say it might be served, and you yourself might serve it, after Reform was gained."

He smiled, and jocularly thanked me for my good opinion.

"Nay, such service is almost your duty; you yourself once thought so too. Why have you changed your mind?"

"I have not changed my mind, but circumstances have changed my actions. As for duty — duty begins at home. Believe me, I have thought well over the subject. Brother, we will not refer to it again."

I saw that something in the matter pained him, and obeyed his wish. Even when, a few days after, perhaps as some compensation for the mother's disappointment, he gave this hint of Guy's taking his place and entering Parliament in his room.

For any one — nay, his own son — to take John's place, to stand in John's room, was not a pleasant thought, even in jest; we let it pass by unanswered, and John himself did not recur to it.

Thus time went on, placidly enough; the father and mother changed into grandfather and grandmother, and little Maud into Auntie Maud. She bore her new honours and fulfilled her new duties with great delight and suc-
cess. She had altered much of late years: at twenty, was as old as many a woman of thirty — in all the advantages of age. She was sensible, active, resolute, and wise; sometimes thoughtful, or troubled with fits of what in any less wholesome temperament would have been melancholy; but as it was her humours only betrayed themselves in some slight restlessness or irritability, easily soothed by a few tender words or a rush out to Edwin's, and a peaceful coming back to that happy home, whose principal happiness she knew that she, the only daughter, made.

She more than once had unexceptionable chances of quitting it; for Miss Halifax possessed plenty of attractions, both outwardly and inwardly, to say nothing of her not inconsiderable fortune. But she refused all offers, and to the best of our knowledge was a free-hearted damsel still.

Her father and mother seemed rather glad of this than otherwise. They would not have denied her any happiness she wished for; still it was evidently a relief to them that she was slow in choosing it; slow in quitting their arms of love to risk a love untried. Sometimes, such is the weakness of parental humanity; I verily believe they looked forward with complacency to the possibility of her remaining always Miss Halifax. I remember one day, when Lady Oldtower was suggesting — half jest, half earnest, "better any marriage than no marriage at all;" Maud's father replied, very seriously—

"Better no marriage, than any marriage that is less than the best."

"How do you mean?"

"I believe," he said, smiling, "that somewhere in the world every man has his right wife, every woman
her right husband. If my Maud's comes he shall have her. If not, I shall be well content to see her a happy old maid."

Thus after many storms, came this lull in our lives; a season of busy yet monotonous calm. — I have heard say that peace itself, to be perfect, ought to be monotonous. We had enough of it to satisfy our daily need; we looked forward to more of it in time to come, when Guy should be at home, when we should see safely secured the futures of all the children, and for ourselves a green old age,

"Journeying in long serenity away."

A time of heavenly calm — which as I look back upon it, grows heavenlier still! — Soft summer days and autumn afternoons, spent under the beech-wood, or on the Flat. Quiet winter evenings, all to ourselves — Maud and her mother working, Walter drawing. The father sitting with his back to the lamp — its light making a radiance over his brow and white bald crown, and as it thrilled through the curls behind, restoring somewhat of the youthful colour to his fading hair. Nay, the old youthful ring of his voice I caught at times, when he found something funny in his book and read it out loud to us; or laying it down, sat talking, as he liked to talk, about things, speculative, philosophical, or poetical — things which he had necessarily let slip in the hurry and press of his business life, in the burthen and heat of the day; but which now as the cool shadows of evening were drawing on, assumed a beauty and a nearness, and were again caught up by him — precious as the dreams of his youth.

Happy, happy time — sunshiny summer, peaceful
winter — we marked neither as they passed; but now we hold both — in a sacredness inexpressible — a foretaste of that Land where there is neither summer nor winter, neither days nor years.

The first break in our repose came early in the new year. There had been no Christmas letter from Guy, and he never once in all his wanderings had missed writing home at Christmas time. When the usual monthly mail came in, and no word from him — a second month, and yet nothing, we began to wonder about his omission less openly — to cease scolding him for his carelessness. Though over and over again we still eagerly brought up instances of the latter — "Guy is such a thoughtless boy about his correspondence."

Gradually, as his mother's cheek grew paler, and his father more anxious-eyed, more compulsorily cheerful, we gave up discussing publicly the many excellent reasons why no letters should come from Guy. We had written as usual, by every mail. By the last — by the March mail, I saw that in addition to the usual packet for Mr. Guy Halifax — his father, taking another precautionary measure, had written in business form to "Messrs. Guy Halifax and Co." Guy had always, "just like his carelessness!" omitted to give the name of his partner; but addressed thus, in case of any sudden journey or illness of Guy's, the partner, whoever he was, would be sure to write.

In May — nay, it was on May-day, I remember, for we were down in the mill-meadows with Louise, and her little ones, going a-maying — there came in the American mail.

It brought a large packet — all our letters of this year sent back again, directed in a strange hand, to
"John Halifax, Esquire, Beechwood," with the annotation, "By Mr. Guy Halifax's desire."

Among the rest — though the sickening sight of them had blinded even his mother at first, so that her eye did not catch it, was one that explained — most satisfactorily explained, we said — the reason they were thus returned. It was a few lines from Guy himself, stating that unexpected good fortune had made him determine to come home at once. If circumstances thwarted this intention, he would write without fail; otherwise he should most likely sail by an American merchantman — the Stars-and-Stripes.

"Then he is coming home. On his way home!"

And the mother, as with one shaking hand she held fast the letter, with the other steadied herself by the rail of John's desk — I guessed now why he had ordered all the letters to be brought first to his counting-house. "When do you think we shall see — Guy?"

At thought of that happy sight, her bravery broke down. She wept heartily and long.

John sat still, leaning over the front of his desk. By his sigh, deep and glad, one could tell what a load was lifted off the father's heart, at prospect of his son's return.

"The liners are only a month in sailing; but this is a barque most likely, which takes longer time. Love, show me the date of the boy's letter."

She looked for it herself. It was in January!

The sudden fall from certainty to uncertainty — the wild clutch at that which hardly seemed a real joy until seen fading down to a mere hope, a chance, a possibility — who has not known all this?

I remember how we all stood — mute and panic-
struck, in the dark little counting-house. I remember seeing Louise, with her children in the door-way, trying to hush their laughing, and whispering to them something about "poor Uncle Guy."

John was the first to grasp the unspoken dread, and show that it was less than at first appeared.

"We ought to have had this letter two months ago; this shows how often delays occur — we ought not to be surprised or uneasy at anything. Guy does not say when the ship was to sail — she may be on her voyage still. If he had but given the name of her owners! But I can write to Lloyd's, and find out everything. Cheer up, mother. — Please God, you shall have that wandering, heedless boy of yours back before long."

He replaced the letters in their enclosure — held a general consultation, into which he threw a passing gleam of faint gaiety, as to whether being ours, we had a right to burn them, or whether having passed through the post-office they were not the writer's but the owner's property, and Guy could claim them with all their useless news, on his arrival in England. This was finally decided, and the mother, with a faint smile, declared that nobody should touch them; she would put them under lock and key "till Guy came home."

Then she took her husband's arm; and the rest of us followed them, as they walked slowly up the hill to Beechwood.

But after that day Mrs. Halifax's strength decayed. Not suddenly, scarcely perceptibly; not with any outward complaint, except what she jested over as "the natural weakness of old age;" but there was an evident change. Week by week, her long walks shortened; she gave up her village school to me; and though she went about the
house still and insisted on keeping the keys, gradually, "just for the sake of practice," the domestic surveillance fell into the hands of Maud.

An answer arrived from Lloyd's: the Stars-and-Stripes was an American vessel, probably of small tonnage and importance, for the under-writers knew nothing of it.

More delay — more suspense. The summer days came — but not Guy. No news of him — not a word — not a line.

His father wrote to America — pursuing enquiries in all directions. At last, some tangible clue was caught. The Stars-and-Stripes had sailed, had been spoken with about the Windward Isles — and never heard of afterwards.

Still, there was a hope — John told the hope first, before he ventured to speak of the missing ship, and even then had to break the news gently, for the mother had grown frail and weak, and could not bear things as she used to do. She clung as if they had been words of life or death, to the ship-owner's postscript — "that they had no recollection of the name of Halifax; there might have been such a gentleman on board — they could not say. But it was not probable; for the Stars-and-Stripes was a trading vessel, and had not good accommodation for passengers."

Then came week after week — I knew not how they went by — one never does, afterwards. At the time, they were frightfully vivid, hour by hour; we rose each morning, sure that some hope would come in the course of the day; we went to bed at night, heavily, as if there were no such thing as hope in the world. Gradually, and I think that was the worst consciousness of all — our life of suspense became perfectly natural; and every-
thing in and about the house went on as usual, just as though we knew quite well — what the Almighty Father alone knew! — where our poor lad was, and what had become of him. Or rather, as if we had settled in the certainty which perhaps the end of our own lives alone would bring us, that he had slipped out of life altogether, and there was no such being as Guy Halifax under this pitiless sun.

The mother's heart was breaking. She made no moan, but we saw it in her face. One morning — it was the morning after John's birth-day, which we had made a feint of keeping, with Grace Oldtower, the two little grand-children, Edwin and Louise — she was absent at breakfast and dinner; she had not slept well, and was too tired to rise. Many days following it happened the same; with the same faint excuse, or with no excuse at all. How we missed her about the house! — ay, changed as she had been. How her husband wandered about, ghost-like, from room to room! — could not rest anywhere, or do anything. Finally, he left our company altogether, and during the hours that he was at home rarely quitted for more than a few minutes the quiet bedchamber, where, every time his foot entered it, the poor pale face looked up and smiled.

Ay, smiled; for I noticed, as many another may have done in similar cases, that when her physical health definitely gave way, her mental health returned. The heavy burthen was lighter; she grew more cheerful, more patient; seemed to submit herself to the Almighty will, whatever it might be; as she lay on her sofa in the study, where one or two evenings John carried her down, almost as easily as he used to carry little Muriel, his wife would rest content with her hand in his, listening
to his reading, or quietly looking at him, as though her
lost son's face which a few weeks since she said haunted
her continually, were now forgotten in his father's. Per-
haps she thought the one she should soon see — while
the other —

"Phineas," she whispered one day, when I was
putting a shawl over her feet, or doing some other trifle
that she thanked me for — "Phineas, — if anything
happens to me, you will comfort John?"

Then first I began seriously to contemplate a possi-
bility, hitherto as impossible and undreamed of as that
the moon should drop out of the height of heaven —
What would the house be without the mother?

Her children never suspected this, I saw: but they
were young — for her husband —

I could not understand John. He, so quick-sighted;
he who meeting any sorrow looked steadily up at the
Hand that smote him, knowing neither the coward's dread,
nor the unbeliever's disguise of pain — surely he must
see what was impending. Yet he was as calm as if he
saw it not. Calm, as no man could be, contemplating
the supreme parting between two who nearly all their
lives had been not two, but one flesh.

Yet I had once heard him say that a great love, and
only that, makes parting easy. Could it be that this love
of his, which had clasped his wife so firmly, faithfully,
and long, fearlessly clasped her still, by its own perfect-
ness assured of its immortality?

But all the while his human love clung about her,
showing itself in a thousand forms of watchful tenderness.
And hers clung to him, closely, dependently; she let
herself be taken care of, ruled and guided, as if with him
she found helplessness restful and submission sweet.
Many a little outward fondness, that when people have been long married naturally drops into disuse, was revived again; he would bring her flowers out of the garden, or new books from the town; and many a time, when no one noticed, I have seen him stoop and press his lips upon the faded hand, where the wedding-ring hung so loosely; — his own for so many years, his own till the dust claimed it, that well-beloved hand!

Ay, he was right. Loss, affliction, death itself, are powerless in the presence of such a love as theirs.

It was already the middle of July. From January to July — six months! Our neighbours without — and there were many who felt for us — never asked now, "Is there any news of Mr. Guy?" Even pretty Grace Oldtower — pretty still, but youthful no longer — only lifted her eyes enquiringly as she crossed our doorway, and dropped them again with a hopeless sigh. She had loved us all, faithfully and well, for a great many years.

One night, when Miss Oldtower had just gone home after staying with us the whole day — Maud and I sat, in the study by ourselves, where we generally sat now. The father spent all his evenings up stairs. We could hear his step overhead as he crossed the room or opened the window, then drew his chair back to its constant place by his wife's bed-side. Sometimes there was a faint murmur of reading or talk; then long silence.

Maud and I sat in silence too. She had her own thoughts — I mine. Perhaps they were often one and the same: perhaps — for youth is youth after all — they may have diverged widely. Hers were deep, absorbed thoughts, at any rate, travelling fast — fast as her needle travelled; for she had imperceptibly fallen into her mother's ways and her mother's work.
We had the lamp lit, but the windows were wide open; and through the sultry summer night we could hear the trickle of the stream and the rustle of the leaves in the beechwood. We sat very still, waiting for nothing, expecting nothing; in the dull patience which always fell upon us about this hour — the hour before bed-time, when nothing more was to be looked for but how best to meet another dreary day.

"Maud, was that the click of the front gate swinging?"

"No, I told Walter to lock it before he went to bed. Last night it disturbed my mother."

Again silence. So deep that the maid's opening the door made us both start.

"Miss Halifax — there's a gentleman wanting to see Miss Halifax."

Maud sprung up in her chair, breathless.

"Any one you know, is it?"

"No, Miss."

"Show the gentleman in."

He stood already in the doorway, — tall, brown, bearded. Maud just glanced at him, then rose, bending stiffly, after the manner of Miss Halifax of Beechwood.

"Will you be seated? My father —"

"Maud, don't you know me? Where's my mother? I am Guy."
CHAPTER XVII.

Guy and his mother were together. She lay on a sofa in her dressing-room; he sat on a stool beside her, so that her arm could rest on his neck and she could now and then turn his face towards her and look at it; — oh, what a look!

She had had him with her for two whole days — two days to be set against eight years! Yet the eight years seemed already to have collapsed into a span of time, and the two days to have risen up a great mountain of happiness, making a barrier complete against the woful past, as happiness can do — thanks to the All-merciful for His mercies. Most especially for that mercy — true as His truth to the experience of all pure hearts, — that one bright, brief season of joy can outweigh, in reality and even in remembrance, whole years of apparently interminable pain.

Two days only since the night Guy came home, and yet it seemed months ago! Already we had grown familiar to the tall bearded figure; the strange step and voice about the house; all except Maud, who was rather shy and reserved still. We had ceased the endeavour to reconcile this our Guy — this tall, grave man of nearly thirty, looking thirty-five and more — with Guy, the boy that left us, the boy that in all our lives we never should find again. Nevertheless, we took him, just as he was, to our hearts, rejoicing in him one and all with inexpressible joy.
He was much altered, certainly. It was natural, nay, right, that he should be. He had suffered much; a great deal more than he ever told us — at least, not till long after; had gone through poverty, labour, sickness, shipwreck. He had written home by the Stars-and-Stripes — sailed a fortnight later by another vessel — been cast away — picked up by an outward bound ship, — and finally landed in England, he and his partner, as penniless as they left it.

"Was your partner an Englishman then?" said Maud, who sat at the foot of the sofa, listening. "You have not told us anything about him yet."

Guy half-smiled. "I will, by-and-by. It's a long story. Just now I don't want to think of anybody or anything except my mother."

He turned, as he did twenty times a-day, to press his rough cheek upon her hand and look up into her thin face, his eyes overflowing with love.

"You must get well now, mother. Promise!"

Her smile promised — and even began the fulfilment of the same.

"I think she looks stronger already; — does she, Maud? You know her looks better than I; I don't ever remember her being ill in old times. Oh, mother, I will never leave you again — never!"

"No, my boy."

"No, Guy, no." — John came in, and stood watching them both contentedly. "No, my son, you must never leave your mother."

"I will not leave either of you, father," said Guy, with a reverent affection that must have gladdened the
mother's heart to the very core. Resigning his place by her, Guy took Maud's, facing them; and father and son began to talk of various matters concerning their home and business arrangements; taking counsel together, as father and son ought to do. These eight years of separation seemed to have brought them nearer together; the difference between them — in age, far less than between most fathers and sons, had narrowed into a meeting point. Never in all his life had Guy been so deferent, so loving to his father. And with a peculiar trust and tenderness, John's heart turned to his eldest son, the heir of his name, his successor at Enderly Mills. For, in order that Guy might at once take his natural place and feel no longer a waif and stray upon the world, already a plan had been started, that the firm of Halifax and Sons should become Halifax Brothers. Perhaps, ere very long — only the mother said privately, rather anxiously too, that she did not wish this part of the scheme to be mentioned to Guy just now — perhaps, ere long it would be "Guy Halifax, Esquire, of Beechwood;" and "the old people" at happy little Longfield.

As yet, Guy had seen nobody but ourselves, and nobody had seen Guy. Though his mother gave various good reasons why he should not make his public appearance as a "shipwrecked mariner" — costume and all, yet it was easy to perceive that she looked forward not without apprehension to some meetings which must necessarily soon occur, but to which Guy made not the smallest allusion. He had asked, cursorily and generally, after "all my brothers and sisters," and been answered in the same tone; but neither he nor we had as yet mentioned the names of Edwin or Louise.
They knew he was come home; but how and where
the first momentous meeting should take place, we left
totally to chance, or, more rightly speaking, to Pro-
vidence.

So it happened thus. Guy was sitting quietly on the
sofa at his mother's feet, and his father and he were
planning together in what way could best be celebrated,
by our school-children, tenants, and work-people, an event
which we took a great interest in, though not greater
than in this year was taken by all classes throughout the
kingdom — the day fixed for the abolition of Negro
Slavery in our Colonies — the 1st of August, 1834. He
sat in an attitude that reminded me of his boyish loun-
ging ways; the picture of content; though a stream of
sunshine pouring in upon his head through the closed
Venetian blind, showed many a deep line of care on his
forehead, and more than one silver thread among his
brown hair.

In a pause — during which no one exactly liked to
ask what we were all thinking about — there came a
little tap at the door, and a little voice outside.

"Please, me want to come in."

Maud jumped up, to refuse admission; but Mr. Halifax
forbade her, and himself went and opened the door.
A little child stood there — a little girl of three years
old.

Apparently guessing who she was, Guy rose up
hastily, and sat down in his place again.

"Come in, little maid," said the father; "come in, and
tell us what you want."
"Me want to see Grannie and Uncle Guy."

Guy started, but still he kept his seat. The mother took her grandchild in her feeble arms, and kissed her, saying softly,

"There — that is Uncle Guy. Go and speak to him."

And then, touching his knees, Guy felt the tiny, fearless hand. He turned round, and looked at the little thing, reluctantly, inquisitively. Still he did not speak to or touch her.

"Are you Uncle Guy?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you kiss me? Everybody kisses me," said everybody's pet; neither frightened nor shy; never dreaming of a repulse.

Nor did she find it. Her little fingers were suffered to cling round the tightly-closed hand.

"What is your name, my dear?"

"Louise — mamma's little Louise."

Guy put back the curls, and gazed long and wistfully into the childish face, where the inherited beauty was repeated line for line. But softened, spiritualized, as, years after its burial, some ghost of a man's old sorrows may rise up and meet him, the very spirit of peace shining out of its celestial eyes.

"Little Louise, you are very like —"

He stopped — and bending down, kissed her. In that kiss vanished for ever the last shadow of his boyhood's love. Not that he forgot it — God forbid that
any good man should ever either forget or be ashamed of his first love! But it and all its pain fled far away, back into the sacred eternities of dream-land.

When, looking up at last, he saw a large, fair, matronly lady sitting by his mother’s sofa, Guy neither started nor turned pale. It was another and not his lost Louise. He rose and offered her his hand.

“You see, your little daughter has made friends with me already. She is very like you; only she has Edwin’s hair. Where is my brother Edwin?”

“Here, old fellow. Welcome home.”

The two brothers met warmly, nay, affectionately. Edwin was not given to demonstration; but I saw how his features twitched, and how he busied himself over the knots in his little girl’s pinafore for a minute or more. When he spoke again, it was as if nothing had happened and Guy had never been away.

For the mother, she lay with her arms folded, looking from one to the other mutely, or closing her eyes with a faint stirring of the lips, like prayer. It seemed as if she dared only thus to meet her exceeding joy.

Soon, Edwin and Louise left us for an hour or two, and Guy went on with the history of his life in America and his partner who had come home with him, and, like himself, had lost his all.

“Harder for him than for me; he is older than I am. He knew nothing whatever of business when he offered himself as my clerk; since then he has worked like a slave. In a fever I had, he nursed me; he has been to me these three years the best, truest friend. He is the noblest fellow. Father, if you only knew —”
"Well, my son, let me know him. Invite the gentleman to Beechwood; or shall I write and ask him? Maud, fetch me your mother's desk. Now then, Guy — you are a very forgetful fellow still; you have never yet told us your friend’s name."

Guy looked steadily at his father, in his own straightforward way; hesitated — then apparently made up his mind.

"I did not tell you, because he wished me not; not till you understood him as well as I do. You knew him yourself once — but he has wisely dropped his title. Since he came over to me in America, he has been only Mr. William Ravenel."

This discovery — natural enough when one began to think over it, but incredible at first, astounded us all. For Maud — well was it that the little Louise seated in her lap hid and controlled in some measure the violent agitation of poor Auntie Maud.

Ay — Maud loved him. Perhaps she had guessed the secret cause of his departure, and love creates love, oftentimes. Then his brave renunciation of rank, fortune, even of herself — women glory in a moral hero — one who has strength to lose even love, and bear its loss, for the sake of duty or of honour. His absence, too, might have done much: — absence which smothers into decay a rootless fancy, but often nourishes the least seed of a true affection into fullflowering love. Ay — Maud loved him. How, or why, or when, at first, no one could tell — perhaps not even herself; but so it was, and her parents saw it.

Both were deeply moved — her brother likewise.
"Father," he whispered, "have I done wrong? I did not know — how could I guess?"

"No, no — my son. It is very strange — all things just now seem so strange. Maud, my child," — and John roused himself out of a long silence into which he was falling, — "go, and take Louise to her mother."

The girl rose, eager to get away. As she crossed the room — the little creature clinging round her neck, and she clasping it close, in the sweet motherliness of character which had come to her so early — I thought — I hoped —

"Maud!" said John, catching her hand as she passed him by — "Maud is not afraid of her father?"

"No," — in troubled uncertainty — then with a passionate decision, as if ashamed of herself —

"No!"

She leaned over his chair-back and kissed him — then went out.

"Now — Guy."

Guy told, in his own frank way, all the history of himself and William Ravenel; how the latter had come to America, determined to throw his lot for good or ill, to sink or swim, with Maud's brother — chiefly, as Guy had slowly discovered, because he was Maud's brother. At last — in the open boat, on the Atlantic, with death the great Revealer of all things staring them in the face — the whole secret came out. It made them better than friends — brothers.

This was Guy's story, told with a certain spice of
determination too, as if — let his father's will be what it might, his own, which had now also settled into the strong "family" will, was resolute on his friend's behalf. Yet when he saw how grave, nay sad, the father sat, he became humble again, and ended his tale even as he had begun, with the entreaty — "Father, if you only knew —"

"My knowing and my judging seem to have been of little value, my son. Be it so. There is One wiser than I — One in whose hands are the issues of all things."

The sort of contrition with which he spoke — thus retracting, as it costs most men so much to retract, a decision given however justly at the time, but which fate has afterwards pronounced unjust, affected his son deeply.

"Father, your decision was right, — William says it was. He says also, that it could not have been otherwise; that whatever he has become since, he owes it all to you, and to what passed that day. Though he loves her still, will never love any one else; yet he declares his loss of her has proved his salvation."

"He is right," said Mrs. Halifax. "Love is worth nothing that will not stand trial — a fiery trial, if needs be. And as I have heard John say many and many a time — as he said that very night — in this world there is not, ought not to be, any such words as 'too late.'"

John made no answer. He sat, his chin propped on his right hand, the other pressed against his bosom —
his favourite attitude. Once or twice, with a deep-drawn, painful breath, he sighed.

Guy’s eagerness could not rest. “Father, I told him I would either write to or see him to-day.”

“Where is he?”

“At Norton Bury. Nothing would induce him to come here, unless certain that you desired it.”

“I do desire it.”

Guy started up with great joy. “Shall I write then?”

“I will write myself.”

But John’s hand shook so much, that instead of his customary free bold writing, he left only blots upon the page. He leant back in his chair, and said faintly:

“I am getting an old man, I see. Guy, it was high time you came home.”

Mrs. Halifax thought he was tired and made a place for his head on her pillow, where he rested some minutes, “just to please her,” he said. Then he rose, and declared he would himself drive over to Norton Bury for our old friend.

“Nay, let me write, father. To-morrow will do just as well.”

The father shook his head. “No — it must be to-day.”

Bidding good-bye to his wife — he never by any chance quitted her for an hour without a special tender leave-taking — John went away.

Guy was, he avouched, “as happy as a king.” His old liveliness returned; he declared that in this matter,
which had long weighed heavily on his mind, he had acted like a great diplomatist, or like the gods themselves, whom some unexacting, humble youth calls upon to

"Annihilate both time and space,
And make two lovers happy!"

"And I'm sure I shall be happy too, in seeing them. They shall be married immediately. And we'll take William into partnership — that was a whim of his, mother — we call one another 'Guy' and 'William,' just like brothers. Heigho! I'm very glad. Are not you?"

The mother smiled.

"You will soon have nobody left but me. No matter. I shall have you all to myself, and be at once a spoiled child and an uncommonly merry old bachelor."

Again the mother smiled, without reply. She too, doubtless thought herself a great diplomatist.

William Ravenel — he was henceforward never anything to us but William — came home with Mr. Halifax. First, the mother saw him; then I heard the father go to the maiden bower where Maud had shut herself up all day — poor child! — and fetch his daughter down. Lastly, I watched the two — Mr. Ravenel and Miss Halifax — walk together down the garden and into the beech-wood, where the leaves were whispering and the stock-doves cooing; and where, I suppose, they told and listened to the old tale — old as Adam — yet for ever beautiful and new.

That day was a wonderful day. That night we gathered, as we never thought we should gather again in
this world, round the family table — Guy, Edwin, Walter, Maud, Louise, and William Ravenel — all changed, yet not one lost. A true love-feast it was: a renewed celebration of the family bond, which had lasted through so much sorrow, now knitted up once more, never to be broken.

When we came quietly to examine one another and fall into one another's old ways, there was less than one might have expected even of outward change. The table appeared the same; all took instinctively their old places, except that the mother lay on her sofa, and Maud presided at the urn.

It did one's heart good to look at Maud, as she busied herself about, in her capacity as _vice-reine _of the household; perhaps, with a natural feeling, liking to show some one present how mature and sedate she was — not so very young after all. You could see she felt deeply how much he loved her — how her love was to him like the restoring of his youth. The responsibility, sweet as it was, made her womanly, made her grave. She would be to him at once wife and child, plaything and comforter, sustainer and sustained. Ay, love levels all things. They were not ill-matched, in spite of those twenty years.

And so I left them, and went and sat with John and Ursula — we, the generation passing away, or ready to pass, in heaven's good time, to make room for these. We talked but little, our hearts were too full. Early, before anybody thought of moving, John carried his wife upstairs again, saying that, well as she looked, she must be compelled to economise both her good looks and her happiness.
When he came down again, he stood talking for some time with Mr. Ravenel. While he talked, I thought he looked wearied — pallid even to exhaustion; a minute or two afterwards he silently left the room.

I followed him, and found him leaning against the chimney-piece in his study.

"Who's that?" He spoke feebly; he looked — ghastly! I called him by his name.

"Come in. Fetch no one. Shut the door."

The words were hoarse and abrupt, and I obeyed.

"Phineas," he said, again holding out a hand, as if he thought he had grieved me; "don't mind. I shall be better presently. I know quite well what it is — oh, my God — my God!"

Sharp, horrible pain — such as human nature shrinks from — such as makes poor mortal flesh cry out in its agony to its Maker, as if, for the time being, life itself were worthless at such a price. I know now what it must have been; I know now what he must have endured.

He held me fast, half unconscious as he was, lest I should summon help; and when a step was heard in the passage, as once before — the day Edwin was married — how, on a sudden, I remembered all! — he tottered forward and locked, double-locked the door.

After a few minutes the worst suffering apparently abated, and he sat down again in his chair. I got some water; he drank, and let me bathe his face with it — his face, grey and death-like — John's face!

But I am telling the bare facts — nothing more.
A few heavy sighs, gasped as it were for life, and he was himself again.

"Thank God, it is over now! Phineas, you must try and forget all you have seen. I wish you had not come to the door."

He said this, not in any tone that could wound me, but tenderly, as if he were very sorry for me.

"What is it?"

"There is no need for alarm; — no more than that day — you recollect? — in this room. I had an attack once before then — a few times since. It is horrible pain while it lasts, you see; I can hardly bear it. But it goes away again, as you also see. It would be a pity to tell my wife, or anybody; in fact, I had rather not. You understand?"

He spoke thus in a matter-of-fact way, as if he thought the explanation would satisfy me and prevent my asking further. He was mistaken.

"John, what is it?"

"What is it? Why something like what I had then; but it comes rarely, and I am well again directly. I had much rather not talk about it. Pray, forget it."

But I could not; nor, I thought, could he. He took up a book and sat still; though oftentimes I caught his eyes fixed on my face with a peculiar earnestness, as if he would fain test my strength — fain find out how much I loved him; and loving, how much I could bear.

"You are not reading, John; you are thinking — what about?"
He paused a little, as if undetermined whether or not to tell me; then said: "About your father. Do you remember him?"

I looked surprised at the question.

"I mean, do you remember how he died?"

Somehow — though, God knows, not at that dear and sacred remembrance — I shuddered. "Yes; but why should we talk of it now?"

"Why not? I have often thought what a happy death it was — painless, instantaneous, without any wasting sickness beforehand — his sudden passing from life present to life eternal. Phineas, your father's was the happiest death I ever knew."

"It may be — I am not sure, — John," for again something in his look and manner struck me — "why do you say this to me?"

"I scarcely know. — Yes, I do know."

"Tell me, then."

He looked at me across the table — steadily, eye to eye, as if he would fain impart to my spirit the calmness that was in his own. "I believe, Phineas, that when I die, my death will be not unlike your father's."

Something came wildly to my lips about "impossibility," the utter impossibility, of any man's thus settling the manner of his death, or the time.

"I know that. I know that I may live ten or twenty years, and die of another disease after all."

"Disease!"

"Nay — it is nothing to be afraid of. You see I am not afraid. I have guessed it for many years."
I have known it for a certainty ever since I was in Paris."

"Were you ill in Paris? — You never said so."

"No — because — Phineas, do you think you could bear the truth? You know it makes no real difference. I shall not die an hour sooner for being aware of it."

"Aware of — what? Say quickly."

"Dr. K— told me — I was determined to be told — that I had the disease I suspected; beyond medical power to cure. It is not immediately fatal; he said I might live many years, even to old age; and I might die, suddenly, at any moment, just as your father died."

He said this gently and quietly — more quietly than I am writing the words down now; and I listened — I listened.

"Phineas!"

I felt the pressure of his warm hand on my shoulder — the hand which had led me like a brother's all my life.

"Phineas, we have known one another these forty years. Is our love, our faith, so small, that either of us, for himself or his brother, need be afraid of death? —"

"Phineas!" — and the second time he spoke there was some faint reproach in the tone; "no one knows this but you. I see I was right to hesitate; I almost wish I had not told you at all."

Then — I rose. * * * * * *
At my urgent request, he explained to me fully and clearly the whole truth. It was, as most truths are, less terrible when wholly known. It had involved little suffering as yet, the paroxysms being few and rare. They had always occurred when he was alone, or when feeling them coming on, he could go away and bear them in solitude.

"I have always been able to do so until to-night. She has not the least idea — my wife, I mean."

His voice failed.

"It has been terrible to me at times, the thought of my wife. Perhaps I ought to have told her. Often I resolved I would, and then changed my mind. Latterly, since she has been ill, I have believed, almost hoped, that she would not need to be told at all."

"Would you rather, then, that she —"

John calmly took up the word I shrank from uttering. "Yes; I would rather of the two that she went away first. She would suffer less, and it would be such a short parting."

He spoke as one would speak of a new abode, an impending journey. To him the great change, the last terror of humanity, was a thought — solemn indeed, but long familiar and altogether without fear. And, as we sat there, something of his spirit passed into mine: I felt how narrow is the span between the life mortal and the life immortal — how, in truth, both are one with God.

"Ay," he said, "that is exactly what I mean. To me there is always something impious in the ‘preparing for
death' that people talk about; as if we were not continually, whether in the flesh or out of it, living in the Father's presence; as if, come when He will, the Master should not find all of us watching. Do you remember saying so to me, one day?"

Ah, that day!

"Does it pain you, my talking thus? Because if so, we will cease."

"No — go on."

"That is right. I thought, this attack having been somewhat worse than my last, some one ought to be told. It has been a comfort to me to tell you — a great comfort, Phineas. Always remember that."

I have remembered it.

"Now, one thing more, and my mind is at ease. You see, though I may have years of life — I hope I shall — many busy years — I am never sure of a day, and I have to take many precautions. At home I shall be quite safe now." He smiled again, with evident relief. "And I rarely go anywhere without having one of my boys with me. Still, for fear — look here."

He showed me his pocket-book; on a card bearing his name and address, was written in his own legible hand, "Home, and tell my wife carefully."

I returned the book. As I did so, there dropped out a little note — all yellow and faded — his wife's only "loveletter," — signed, "Yours sincerely, Ursula March."

John picked it up, looked at it, and put it back in its place.
"Poor darling! poor darling!" He sighed, and was silent for awhile. "I am very glad Guy has come home; very glad that my little Maud is so happily settled — Hark! how those children are laughing!"

For the moment a natural shade of regret crossed the father's face, the father to whom all the delights of home had been so dear. But it soon vanished.

"How merry they are! — how strangely things have come about for us and ours! As Ursula was saying to-night, at this moment we have not a single care."

I grasped at that, for Dr. K— had declared that if John had a quiet life, — a life without any anxieties, — he might, humanly speaking, attain a good old age.

"Ay, your father did. Who knows? we may both be old men yet, Phineas."

And as he rose, he looked strong in body and mind, full of health and cheer — scarcely even on the verge of that old age of which he spoke. And I was older than he.

"Now, will you come with me to say good night to the children?"

At first I thought I could not — then, I could. After the rest had merrily dispersed, John and I stood for a long time in the empty parlour, his hand on my shoulder, as he used to stand when we were boys, talking.

What we said I shall not write, but I remember
it, every word. And he — I know he remembers it still.

Then we clasped hands.

"Good night, Phineas."

"Good night, John."

CHAPTER XVII.
CHAPTER XVIII.

Friday, the first of August, 1834.

Many may remember that day; what a soft, grey, summer morning it was, and how it broke out into brightness; how everywhere bells were ringing, club fraternities walking with bands and banners, school children having feasts and work-people holidays; how, in town and country, there was spread abroad a general sense of benevolent rejoicing — because honest old England had lifted up her generous voice, nay, had paid down cheerfully her twenty millions, and in all her colonies the negro was free.

Many may still find, in some forgotten drawer, the medal — bought by thousands and tens of thousands, of all classes, in copper, silver, or gold — distributed in charity-schools, and given by old people to their grandchildren. I saw Mrs. Halifax tying one with a piece of blue ribbon round little Louise's neck, in remembrance of this day. The pretty medal, with the slave standing upright, stretching out to heaven free hands, from which the fetters are dropping — as I overheard John say to his wife, he could fancy the freeman Paul would stand in the Roman prison, when he answered to those that loved him, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith."
Now, with my quickened ears, I often heard John talking quietly to his wife on this wise.

He remained by her side the whole forenoon — wheeling her about in her garden chair; taking her to see her school-children in their glory on our lawn — to hear the shouts rising up from the people at the mill-yard below. For all Enderly, following the master's example, took an interest, hearty even among hearty hard-working England, in the Emancipation of the Slaves.

We had our own young people round us, and the day was a glorious day, they declared one and all.

John was happy too — infinitely happy. After dinner, he carried his wife to her chair beside the weeping ash, where she could smell the late hay in the meadow, and hear the ripple of the stream in the beech-wood — faint, for it was almost dried up now, but pleasant still. Her husband sat on the grass, making her laugh with his quaint sayings — admiring her in her new bonnet, and in the lovely white shawl — Guy's shawl — which Mr. Guy himself had really no time for admiring. He had gone off to the school tea-drinking, escorting his sister and sister-in-law, and another lady, whose eyes brightened with most "sisterly" joy whenever she glanced at her old playfellow. Guy's "sister" she nevertheless was not, nor was ever likely to be — and I questioned whether, in his secret heart, he had not begun already to feel particularly thankful for that circumstance.

"Ah, mother," cried the father, smiling, "you'll see how it will end: all our young birds will soon be flown — there will be nobody left but you and me."
“Never mind, John;” and stooping over him, she gave him one of her quiet, soft kisses, precious now she was an old woman as they had been in the days of her bloom. “Never mind. Once there were only our two selves — now there will be only our two selves again. We shall be very happy. We only need one another.”

“Only one another, my darling.”

This last word, and the manner of his saying it I can hear if I listen in silence, clear as if yet I heard its sound. This last sight — of them sitting under the ash-tree, the sun making still whiter Ursula’s white shawl, brightening the marriage ring on her bare hand, and throwing, instead of silver, some of their boyish gold-colour into the edges of John’s curls — this picture I see with my shut eyes, vivid as yesterday.

I sat for some time in my room — then John came to fetch me for our customary walk along his favourite “terrace” on the Flat. He rarely liked to miss it; — he said the day hardly seemed complete or perfect unless one had seen the sun set. Thus, almost every evening, we used to spend an hour or more, pacing up and down, or sitting in that little hollow under the bow of the Flat, where as from the topmost seat of a natural amphitheatre, one could see Rose Cottage and the old well-head where the cattle drank; our own green garden-gate, the dark mass of the beech-wood, and far away beyond that, Nunneley Hill, where the sun went down.

There, having walked somewhat less time than usual, for the evening was warm and it had been a fatiguing
JOHN HALIFAX.

day, John and I sat down together. We talked a little, ramblingly — chiefly of Longfield: — how I was to have my old room again — and how a new nursery was to be planned for the grandchildren.

"We can't get out of the way of children, I see clearly," he said, laughing. "We shall have Longfield just as full as ever it was, all summer time. But in winter we'll be quiet, and sit by the chimney-corner, and plunge into my dusty desert of books — eh, Phineas? You shall help me to make notes for those lectures I have intended giving at Norton Bury, these ten years past. And we'll rub up our old Latin, and dip into modern poetry — great rubbish, I fear! Nobody like our old friend Will of Avon, or even your namesake, worthy Phineas Fletcher."

I reminded him of the "Shepherd's life and fate," which he always liked so much, and used to say was his ideal of peaceful happiness.

"Well, and I think so still. 'Keep true to the dreams of thy youth,' saith the old German; I have not been false to mine. I have had a happy life, thank God; ay, and what few men can say, it has been the very sort of happiness I myself would have chosen. I think most lives, if, while faithfully doing our little best, day by day, we were content to leave their thread in wiser hands than ours, would thus weave themselves out; until, looked back upon as a whole, they would seem as bright a web as mine."

He sat, talking thus, resting his chin on his hands — his eyes, calm and sweet, looking out westward — where the sun was about an hour from the horizon.
“Do you remember how we used to lie on the grass in your father's garden, and how we never could catch the sunset except in fragments between the abbey trees? I wonder if they keep the yew hedge clipped as round as ever.”

I told him, Edwin had said to-day that some strange tenants were going to make an inn of the old house, and turn the lawn into a bowling-green.

“What a shame! I wish I could prevent it. And yet, perhaps not,” he added, after a silence. “Ought we not rather to recognise and submit to the universal law of change? how each in his place is fulfilling his day, and passing away, just as that sun is passing. Only we know not whither he passes; while whither we go we know, and the Way we know — the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

Almost before he had done speaking — (God grant that in the Kingdom I may hear that voice, not a tone altered — I would not wish it altered even there) — a whole troop of our young people came out of Mrs. Tod's cottage, and nodded to us from below.

There was Mrs. Edwin, standing talking to the good old soul, who admired her baby-boy very much, but wouldn’t allow there could be any children like Mrs. Halifax’s children.

There was Edwin, deep in converse with his brother Guy, while beside them — prettier and younger-looking than ever — Grace Oldtower was making a posy for little Louise.

Further down the slope, walking slowly, side by side,
evidently seeing nobody but one another, were another couple.

"I think, sometimes, John, that those two, William and Maud, will be the happiest of all the children."

He smiled, looked after them for a minute, and then laid himself quietly down on his back along the slope, his eyes still directed towards the sunset. When brightening as it descended, the sun shone level upon the place where we were sitting, I saw John pull his broad straw hat over his face, and compose himself with both hands clasped upon his breast, in the attitude of sleep.

I knew he was very tired, so I spoke no more, but threw my cloak over him. He looked up, thanked me silently, with his old familiar smile. — One day — one day I shall know him by that smile! I sat for half an hour or more watching the sun, which sank steadily, slowly, round, and red, without a single cloud. Beautiful, as I had never before seen it; so clear, that one could note the very instant its disc touched the horizon's grey.

Maud and Mr. Ravenel were coming up the slope. I beckoned them to come softly, not to disturb the father. They and I sat in silence, facing the west. The sun journeyed down to his setting — lower — lower; there was a crescent, a line, a dim sparkle of light; then — he was gone. And still we sat — grave, but not sad — looking into the brightness he had left behind; believing, yea, knowing, we should see his glorious face again to-morrow.

"How cold it has grown," said Maud. "I think we ought to wake my father."
She went up to him, laid her hand upon his, that were folded together over the cloak — drew back startled — alarmed.

"Father!"

I put the child aside. It was I who moved the hat from John's face — the face — for John himself was far, far away. Gone from us unto Him whose faithful servant he was. While he was sleeping thus, the Master had called him.

His two sons carried him down the slope. They laid him in the upper room in Mrs. Tod's cottage. Then I went home to tell his wife.

* * * * * * *

She was at last composed, as we thought, lying on her bed, death-like almost, but calm. It was ten o'clock at night. I left her with all her children watching round her.

I went out, up to Rose Cottage, to sit an hour by myself alone, looking at him whom I should not see again for — as he had said — "a little while."

"A little while — a little while." I comforted myself with those words. I fancied I could almost hear John saying them, standing near me, with his hand on my shoulder. — John himself, quite distinct from that which lay so still before me; beautiful as nothing but death can be, younger much than he had looked this very morning — younger by twenty years.
Farewell, John! Farewell, my more than brother! It is but for a little while.

As I sat, thinking how peacefully the hands lay, clasped together still, how sweet was the expression of the close mouth, and what a strange shadowy likeness the whole face bore to Muriel's little face, which I had seen resting in the same deep rest on the same pillow; some one touched me. It was Mrs. Halilfax.

How she came, I do not know; nor how she had managed to steal out from among her children. Nor how she, who had not walked for weeks, had found her way up hither, in the dark, all alone. Nor what strength, almost more than mortal, helped her to stand there, as she did stand, upright and calm — gazing — gazing as I had done.

"It is very like him; don't you think so, Phineas?" The voice low and soft, unbroken by any sob. "He once told me, in case of — this, he would rather I did not come and look at him; but I can, you see."

I gave her my place, and she sat down by the bed. It might have been ten minutes or more that she and I remained thus, without exchanging a word.

"I think I hear some one at the door. Brother, will you call in the children?"

Guy, altogether overcome, knelt down beside his mother, and besought her to let him take her home.

"Presently — presently, my son. You are very good to me; but — your father. Children, come in and look at your father."
They all gathered round her — weeping; but she spoke without a single tear.

"I was a girl, younger than any of you, when first I met your father. Next month, we shall have been married thirty-three years. Thirty-three years."

Her eyes grew dreamy, as if fancy had led her back all that space of time; her fingers moved to and fro, mechanically, over her wedding-ring.

"Children, we were so happy, you cannot tell. He was so good; he loved me so. Better than that, he made me good; that was why I loved him. Oh, what his love was to me from the first! strength, hope, peace; comfort and help in trouble, sweetness in prosperity. How my life became happy and complete — how I grew worthier to myself because he had taken me for his own! And what he was — Children, no one but me ever knew all his goodness, no one but himself ever knew how dearly I loved your father. We were more precious each to each than anything on earth; except His service, who gave us to one another."

Her voice dropped all but inaudible; but she roused herself, and made it once more clear and firm, the mother's natural voice.

"Guy, Edwin, all of you, must never forget your father. You must do as he wishes, and live as he lived — in all ways. You must love him, and love one another. Children, you will never do anything that need make you ashamed to meet your father."

As they hung round her, she kissed them all — her three sons and her daughter, one by one; then, her mind
being perhaps led astray by the room we were in, looked feebly round for one more child — remembered — smiled —

"How glad her father will be to have her again — his own little Muriel."

"Mother! mother darling! come home," whispered Guy, almost in a sob.

His mother stooped over him, gave him one kiss more — him her favourite of all her children — and repeated the old phrase,

"Presently, presently! Now go away all of you; I want to be left for a little, alone with my husband."

As we went out, I saw her turn toward the bed — "John, John!" — The same tone: almost the same words with which she had crept up to him years before, the day they were betrothed. Just a low, low murmur, like a tired child creeping to fond protecting arms. "John, John!"

We closed the door. We all sat on the stairs outside; it might have been for minutes, it might have been for hours. Within or without — no one spoke — nothing stirred.

At last Guy softly went in.

She was still in the same place by the bed-side, but half lying on the bed, as I had seen her turn when I was shutting the door. Her arm was round her husband's neck; her face, pressed inwards to the pillow, was nestled close to his hair. They might have been asleep — both of them.
One of her children called her, but she neither answered nor stirred.

Guy lifted her up, very tenderly; his mother, who had no stay left but him — his mother — a widow — No, thank God! she was not a widow now.

THE END.
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