'And in the meadows, which before were deep Lakes and drowned Fenns, by excluding the River, he found them fruitful fields, and as good ground as could be wished: Nay, of the very Pitts and Bogs, he thereby made a Garden of Pleasure.'

Dugdale.
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THE DAILYS OF SODDEN FEN.

CHAPTER I.

'SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR.'

GEORGE APERS had made the acquaintance of Aurea Chapel during holidays spent in his old home in Devonshire, where his parents still lived. His own mother and Aurea's aunt were neighbours, if such a vulgar term may be used to describe the relations of two aristocratic ladies in the same set in the county.

At any rate, they lived as near to one
another as the requisite arrangement of gardens and parks would permit, and both mother and aunt would willingly have shaken hands over an alliance which would have harmonized their dearest prejudices. But Aurea did not love to be prompted, and she had chosen Leopold, who was undeniably fast, and who, worse still, came of an unknown set of townspeople with a vulgar name, and a wholesale trade capable of unkind mention by retail designation. In consequence, when George arrived at Glen Combe on the evening before the wedding, he found his own mother eloquent in dispraise of Mr. Stuckley, and in disparagement of Aurea on the ground of her misplaced choice.

Very trying indeed to her son were the pointed remarks which Mrs. Apers felt no obligation to restrain in his presence, and before long, this species of moral irritation growing unbearable, he was driven to take
refuge in the library by the side of his paralyzed father. Mr. Apers was at least, if incapable of adding to the pleasure of others, equally debarred from contributing to their dissatisfaction; and George found a certain quality of rest in the quiet atmosphere which surrounded the honourable old man, whose work upon the earth was done as completely as if he were already laid beneath it. The darkened room and the hush of life around the invalid were particularly welcome to him now, as an exchange from the flutter of society in the drawing-room, and as a relief from his mother's two-edged comments upon the disadvantages of Aurea's prospects as the wife of Leopold Stuckley.

The blinds in the long bay-window were undrawn, two wax candles stood upon the writing-table, lighted only for the show of an illumination, as candles may be lighted by the side of the dead. Outside, upon the
now deserted lawns the soft light of a summer moon cast waving tree-thrown shadows. George sank into an easy-chair, between his father's couch and the window, with a sigh of relief. He had picked up an evening paper which he still held in his hand, but he was not reading; indeed, in the mixture of moonlight and of candle-light he could not well have read. The invalid was asleep, or in that unconscious condition which does duty for sleep in those in whom mere physical existence has survived intellectual activity.

Strong impulses, dismissed as soon as momentarily entertained, prompted George to go out at any cost and seek Aurea Chapel. She was close by, only ten or twelve minutes' walk off at farthest, across those moon-irradiated gardens and dimly lit-up fences. The punishment of his moral cowardice was strongly upon him now—now that it was too late, now that if he
took that short grassy foot-way that he knew of, crossed a country lane that Aurea and he had often trod together, avoided the lodge, and appeared within her aunt's domain, he should find himself a strange guest and an intruder there—one who must send in his card, and must have himself announced, and who even then must confess with many apologies that his visit was ill-timed, and his appearance unwarrantable.

To be so near, and yet so far, whilst her own letter lay in his pocket—that letter in which she had reminded him of the friendship that once was between them! Friendship indeed and something more, on George Apers's side at least; and surely on Aurea's also, or that note had never been written. Perpetually his fingers sought for it: to him it was the embodiment of his happiest past; of all that had given his life its fullest flavour. At the same time it was
nothing but the flimsy remnant of a hope, the shrivelled chrysalis-skin whence the bright-winged life had fled to another abode.

Could George Apers but have seen his way to marrying Aurea Chapel consistently with a circumspect regard to social decorum, instead of leaving her to his unworthy rival, he would have counted upon the flood of joy and happiness to follow with all the rashness characteristic of short-sighted lovers. That an emotion must be long-lived because it is lively—that because a thing is felt strongly, therefore it must be felt enduringly, he would have maintained as stoutly as any other; but then he must have reached Aurea without deviation from the path of ordinary convention or violation of any social canon. He cared for Aurea very much indeed—more than for any other woman in the world; but not, it appeared, more than for himself. The opportunity
having been offered him of saving her from probable future misery at the expense of his own personal taste, he had let it slip.

No hope of ever winning her had remained with him when once her choice had fallen upon his companion; nor had her letter in any sense revived the abandoned day-dream. He saw clearly enough that once having taken the hand she held out to him for deliverance from a mistaken marriage, he could not convert the grasp of a saviour into that of a rival. If he rescued her from Leopold, he must persist in renouncing her for himself, or the action would show a detestable colour.

If, in answer to her childish and almost petulant appeal, he had told her the truth as he knew it concerning the real character and antecedents of the man she had preferred to himself, he must after that have stood aside absolutely. To derive personal
profit from the situation at any day, however distant, would be to convert an act of disinterested friendship into a self-seeking treachery, and would lead to a double affront of public opinion.

There was, of course, just a chance that, even without hearing from George, in a fit of impatience or of mistrust, Aurea Chapel might herself have thrown over her lover, in which case George might conceivably, without in any way committing himself, have reaped the benefit of her renewed freedom; but this slender chance was not the consideration which influenced him when he tore into shreds the letter which he wrote her under the first impulse of feeling excited by hers.

In restraining that responsive impulse, and in abstaining from writing at all when later on he sat down to consider the matter, George Apers had been influenced solely by sensitiveness to the notion of popular
criticism, and by the dread of social condemnation if he took so unusual a course as to appear between the girl who had rejected him and her chosen but unworthy lover. The man's being was so enwrapt in the swaddling-bands of conventionality, that when the poor girl's frightened soul appealed to his for strength and safety, he stifled the echo of that cry in his own heart, set aside the promptings of higher impulse and of self-denying affection, and betrayed her trust in him. She had turned to him, in her childish way, as to the one being whose truth and honour might save her from a dreaded fate, and he had stood aside questioning within himself whether the action would be unbecoming on the part of a gentleman, or derogatory to his reputation as a man of the world. Yet George Apers was an upright man and a true, and one perfectly capable of rightly directing his course through the world without
referring to Society the slavish question, 'Which foot foremost?' But self-love cramped him in thought and in action, converting him from a man into a creature, the slave of words and of social verdicts; and until natures such as his can disen-cumber themselves of their present trappings, salvation there can be from them for none, neither man, nor woman, nor child, whose needs cannot be satisfied with a figure in an account-book, nor with the recognition of a strictly conventional intercourse.

Lost in thoughts for the most part bitter and self-reproachful, George Apers sat, at times almost envying the death-like calm of his unconscious father, at times goaded by an almost irresistible longing to end at once the silence and the inactive endurance by forcing an interview with Aurea. He looked down, and her letter lay on his knee; up, and his imagination
showed him, through the moonlight, the little head with its nimbus of golden hair, the blue frightened eyes and dainty lips—Aurea Chapel’s whole girlish figure standing full in the reflection of the light from the study-windows, against the stem of a tree, just where the wire-fence ended and the meadow laid down in grass began.

The representation was so amazingly real, that he opened the library window and stepped out upon the lawn. The figure turned and fled. Assured now of its actuality, George followed softly; and in the space of a few hundred yards, under the shadow of an old walnut-tree, stood face to face once more with the fugitive object of his day’s thoughts and his night’s dreams.

Her hat was in her hand; but she had no other outdoor gear, and to all appearance must have stolen forth without premeditation, acting, as ever, upon the impulse
of the moment. George took her hand, waiting for her to speak, finding no ready words with which to utter his emotions of surprise and joy.

Aurea, on her part, was agitated with her short run, and words came but slowly. Then, with a touch of characteristic petulance, she asked:

'Why have you followed me? I came out to be cool and to be alone, and you are the last person I wished to see.'

'"The last," Aurea! when to me you are simply the first!'

And she was going to be Leopold's bride the next day! Undoubtedly the man ought not to have said it; but then he loved her now, when he was about to lose her, as he had never loved her before. The very chase which she had given him, showing herself only to endeavour to escape him, had quickened his appreciation of the worth of these fleeting moments, and of her value
to him. When he used to meet her in his mother's drawing-room, knowing well that in all probability she might be his for the asking, he had felt far less inclination to urge his claims upon her; but this solitary pursuit, this apparent attainment, covering as he deeply realized actual impossibility of possession, stirred all his pulses and taught him suddenly, for the first time in his life, what the lover's passion certainly might be. There was solitude, there was silence, there was propinquity, there was the existence of an accepted rival, and above all there was the memory of her appeal to himself. George was in the state of mind in which a man flings the reins on the neck of impulse, without regard to possible consequences, or memory of prudential considerations. At last the stress of circumstances had burst the bonds of his conventional slavery.

'Aurea!' he exclaimed excitedly, 'must
this be — this hideous ceremony which you have got up for to-morrow?'

'Certainly,' she replied, with equal decision. 'I am going to be married to-morrow; and if it is a hideous mistake it will not be my fault: it will be yours—yours all the time—and I hope you will feel it, and I hope you will be utterly miserable and wretched and feel horribly wicked and guilty, because you will be all that!'

'Aurea!' he pleaded; but she went on with gathering vehemence:

'I declare that it will not be my fault one bit, but the fault of those who might have thought for me and didn't take the trouble: of my father, who thinks of me less than of a picture; of my aunt, who is thankful I'm none of her own; of you, who, when I humbled myself to ask a question of you, would not even answer me; of God, who took my mother from me just when I needed
her most. The worst of it is that it is I that shall have to suffer, and that you will all of you be just as comfortable as though nothing bad had been done, and as though no poor unhappy little girl had been left to marry a man that was not fit for her to speak to, because she had thought him different from what he really was when she knew no better; and everybody after that would rather see her die than help her out of it, lest it should bring some trouble on them!

'Aurea! spare me, I entreat you!'

'Why should I spare you, when no one has spared me—you least of all? I asked you to my wedding on purpose. I was determined that you should be there. Yes, you in particular. You that I trusted; you that I actually wrote to. I wish I had broken my finger-bones first! You're faithless, you're revengeful, you're cowardly! You were angry because I told you before
that Leopold was nicer than you, and so you would have nothing more to do with me. Well, you shall have nothing more to do with me—nothing, ever; but to-morrow you shall be there, and I shall turn round and look at you—you alone will know what I mean. There was a girl I knew in Southern Italy who punished some one so, and I will do it too. I hate you, George Apers; and I've come here in hopes of meeting you to tell you so. Now, give me that letter, and let me go before I am missed.'

'What letter?' asked George pleadingly. Crushed by such burning words from lips so loved, he was in no state to understand that wounded pride alone could scarcely have dictated them.

'"What letter?" why, the one I wrote you. Give it to me quick—at once!' she added imperiously. 'I know you have got it about you. Letters such as that, men
always keep—nine times out of ten to punish the writer; but you shall not have me in your power so.'

'Aurea, where did you learn these dreadful thoughts? They were singularly unlike you when I knew you last.'

'When you knew me before, I was silly enough to believe that I could judge of men by myself. I had not then had the honour to know Leopold—Leopold Stuckley—and you. Shall I tell you what I have learnt since that happy time? That bad men are liars, and that good men are cowards, and that there is no more trust to be placed in one than in the other. Leopold Stuckley is a bad man, but he would fight for his love; you are a good man, as people count goodness—you wear a white tie and you preach in a pulpit, but you would stand by and look on and join in the service whilst the girl you've pretended to care for is sacrificed body and soul, because for your
own sake you're afraid to befriend her. You're a coward, I say, and your moral goodness is a weak imitation of virtue.'

George bent his head in speechless acceptance of her condemnation.

'But I want my letter,' she exclaimed afresh; 'my letter—give it me back! It isn't yours. You have no right to keep it. I wrote it to another man—to a man that I stupidly imagined I understood and could reckon upon, at least, as a friend; but I know you better now. Give it me back, or I shall understand that you mean to make some unworthy use of the trust that you never deserved.'

'Take it then, since that is the only proof of love left for me to give you, Aurea,' said George, holding out to her the letter, worn already by the familiarity of precious use.

Aurea seized the paper, glanced at it with an instant's failure of set features,
then tore it into shreds, which fluttered like snowflakes to the grass beneath their feet.

'So perishes my trust!' she said, with an intensity of feeling of which, till now, George would have thought her incapable. 'Now, George Apers, let us say good-bye. I thank you, at least, for renouncing for my sake your vanity. You will now never be able to show that letter to any other man to excite a laugh at the expense of the foolish girl who wrote it; but I have nothing else to thank you for. Good-night.'

How he scarcely knew afterwards, but the next instant George Apers found himself upon the grass at Aurea's wilful feet, nearer sobbing than he had ever been before; with one hand collecting the scattered fragments of the misused letter, with the other entreatling, but not venturing to detain her.
'Try me, Aurea—try me once more,' he prayed, as soon as he could command articulate utterance. 'My love is no longer cowardly. I will save you even yet, and then I will never see you again! What will you allow me to do? That is the question. I will sacrifice everything for you, but it shall not be called by that name; it shall be a gift of joy, my only hope, my only pleasure. Will you come with me straight to my mother? Come with me now.'

'To your mother! Why, you must be mad; as well go to my aunt. What reception, I ask you, would your mother be likely to give me? And next door to my own home, too.'

'Go to my sister, then. She is far enough off. Two hundred miles across England, from west to east. She is at home, alone in the Vicarage; I left her there only this morning.'
'SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR.'

There was a shade less impatience in the reply.

'To Mrs. Smith! and how am I to get to her, and what have I to tell her?'

'Anything, everything—just what you like.'

'But I do not care to confess to your sister if I have made a mistake. Mrs. Apers Smith has always struck me as one of those unapproachable people who make a point of always acting correctly upon right judgments.'

'How little you know her, Aurea; and how little you can know of her history! She did not stop short as you might yet. She turned the mistake of a day into the error of a lifetime. But she has suffered, Aurea, and she is very true and very unconventional. I can trust her; she would receive you as she ought, and as you deserve to be received, with the utmost sympathy and kindness. Go to her, Aurea;
not for my sake—do not misunderstand me for one moment—not for anyone's sake, but solely for your own. There is, or will be, time yet. Will you go, Aurea? That man you are engaged to marry to-morrow is all that may have been suggested to you.'

'Don't tell me what he is now; I do not wish to hear it!' cried the girl passionately.

'When I wrote you that letter I was a child—I was not half serious, I was playing with my life; now I am a woman, and I am desperately in earnest. But you—you do not deserve that I should ever ask your advice again, far less that I should give you the opportunity of helping me to save myself. Yet I am forced to turn to you, because I have no one else.'

George laid his hand upon hers, and this time she did not withdraw it.

'I said I was a woman, just now,' she added, with a little gasp; 'yet I don't think I am quite grown-up after all, since
I can't depend upon myself alone. I am frightened; I don't know where to go, nor what to do. I have stayed on here, and let it get to the very day before, instead of going away at once, as I ought to have done, directly I knew about it all.'

With this, all her assumed air of defiance failed her, and she broke into silent sobs, no longer able to resist the support of her former friend's protecting arm.

'Listen to me, Aurea,' he said—'let me walk with you a little way towards your aunt's house; you are trembling so you have scarcely strength to go alone—listen to me, and forgive me for having been such a cowardly brute as to leave you when you sent me such a touching appeal. You must forgive me, for I have been very wretched ever since—as wretched as you can have been, in a different way.'

'Oh! men are never wretched,' she said, with one last effort at asserting her inde-
pendence; 'directly they feel uncomfortable, they go and make some woman shed tears, and then they feel better.'

'You think you know a great deal about men now, Aurea; but my feeling chiefly is that you have a great deal to unlearn.'

'The man that I have been engaged to says that "every man understands all women," but that "no girl comprehends more than one man;" but it is false, like all the rash things he says, because he does not understand even me. He believes at this moment that I am in my own room pretending to be sulky, but really delighted at the prospect of marrying him to-morrow. I will never marry him! George, George!' she said, stopping short, and clasping both hands together as she faced him, 'tell me what to do, if you have the least feeling about me left! I shall go and drown myself if you don't, and no one shall ever see me again!'
'If I have the least bit of feeling, Aurea! no feeling that I ever had about you before—and I believed it was as strong a love as I was capable of—can compare to that which I feel for you now; have felt, indeed, ever since I have been driven to think of you in the light of a new knowledge. There is but one thing I can tell you to do. Summon up your courage—go back and tell Stuckley that you won't marry him.'

'No, no! You are mocking me. How can you have the cruelty? It is impossible; absolutely and utterly out of the question! Why, everything is ready; even my dress is laid out in my room. What, break it all off now, face to face! It would take the courage of a lion, and I have the heart of a hare—papa always said so.'

'Can you not go and speak to your aunt, then?'
'To my aunt! as well go to your mother. Why, my aunt knows fifty times better than I do, and has known all along, the sort of creature he is,' touching her engagement-ring; the diamonds of which flashed in the moonlight. 'Rather than have a fiasco of that sort occur in her house she would turn me out of doors. It was not she that warned me about him only ten days ago. She and your mother both disapprove of him; but it's on the ground of his birth, and not of his conduct.'

'Then I can but make one other suggestion. I fall back on my sister. Aurea, if you can do nothing else, go to her, I beg you. Four hours will take you to London, and two or three more will bring you to Slumsby. Surely you can make your way thither to-morrow morning? There's a fast train at 7:40. Go to her, I entreat you. You do not know her well; but you are sure of her protection until you have time
to communicate with your father, or to consider what steps to take next. You can write to your aunt, before leaving, your reasons for going; and also to that other—"

'Yes! and have them all say at once that I've gone off with you!'

'On the contrary. I shall remain here. I shall show myself in the morning as if nothing had happened; and I shall stay with my parents, so long as to keep away from you is the only service I can render you.'

'I cannot say—I cannot promise,' she cried impatiently. 'Leave me now; we are getting too near the house. I must go in now. We shall be meeting some one.'

'Am I not to know whether this wretched affair is to take place or not, Aurea? Are you going to leave me all these hours of suspense?'

'How can I tell what I don't know myself? I can only say this, that if I do
go to the station in the morning, and when I get there find you there, I shall turn back, and go right off home again, and shall appear in the sacrificial garments at midday.'

'You may depend upon me. You shall not find me there; but, Aurea, I cannot let you go like this. Say before you go, just that you will always treat me as a friend—at least that you will always turn to me whenever you happen to want me, that you will forgive me for the one time that I failed you; and I will never again be wanting when you need me. Try to say it, Aurea.'

'I think I must have forgiven you before I came here this evening,' she answered gently.

'Aurea, sweet Aurea, why were you not to have been mine!'

'If I had been yours,' she said, with a faint attempt at the mirthfulness of former
days, 'do you not honestly think that in that case by now I might have been tired of you?'

'Then let us part as friends this time, at least, my child—my love that might have been!'

'As friends then, George, in heart and mind. No, you must not touch my lips; they are not free from that man's hateful kiss.'

'Say it shall never be again. Say it, Aurea, and keep it for your own sweet sake.'

'Well, the whole affair will have an ugly sound, Mr. Apers,' she said, drawing herself off to a distance, with a sudden air of defiance. 'Listen to this: "Miss Aurea Chapel ran away upon the morning of her wedding-day; left his diamond ring and a letter for her intended bridegroom on the table, and fled to the house of a former friend, presumably preferred to the man
to whom she was betrothed, and whose wife she was to have been in a few hours.’
That ‘former friend’ and Aurea Chapel will both have pleasant things to hear. Waspish words will pursue them for the rest of their troublesome lives.’

‘If we have both of us made a mistake, we must both abide the consequences,’ said George falteringly.

‘Yes; but he has been much worse than either of us. We made errors of judgment, perhaps: he committed crimes of conduct,’ said the girl, with a renewed outburst of energy and upheaval of wounded self-love; ‘and he will have nothing but pity, and we shall have all the blame.’

George winced. He knew it well, although he had forgotten it in the moment of strong feeling through which he had been passing. Cowardice had prevented his acting before, and now the consequences of action would be ten thousand times
worse. Passion, doubtless, will make the moral coward momentarily brave, or even heroic; but then passion, after all, being only self-love in a subtler form, need expect no higher recognition. For a second, he almost wished that 'Golden Hair' had never come to lure him on beneath the moon; but that, having come, she should wander away from him for ever, because her impulsive feet were too uncertain to stay—that was a thought which his renewed love, even in its weakest moment, was still strong enough to kill.

'Go back now,' said Aurea, authoritatively. 'I have been gone for nearly an hour, and you must not come one step farther. I cannot promise anything, and I am dreadfully frightened; but you have been good—very good to me, and I am not ungrateful. No—no other good-night or good-bye here.'

George watched till from a distance he
saw her re-enter the open hall-door, a slim shade in the stream of light which fell from the lamp above the doorway; then he noiselessly took his way back by the grassy glade they had just trodden together. When he approached his own dwelling, he lit a cigar, to account for his evening rambles; then returned to his mother's drawing-room through one of the long windows. His mother was as he had left her—sitting in an easy-chair in her special corner, in full flow of small-talk with some visitors.

'Well, George,' she said, as he took his stand behind her chair, 'is it going to be fine for to-morrow? Happy the bride, you know, that the sun shines on. I am sure I wish that poor, silly girl nothing but what is quite kind and agreeable; but at the same time, when people will marry out of their own rank, I always feel that they must take the chance of what comes of it. You know I have had occasion to say so before.'
This being Mrs. Apers's only allusion, direct or indirect, to her step-daughter since her son had entered the house, he received it in silence.

'I have heard,' the lady continued, 'that things have not been going quite smoothly there this last week. I've been told that some of Mr. Leopold Stuckley's (such a name!) former proceedings have been coming to light, and that Miss Aurea has been so wanting in self-respect as to take more notice of them than under the circumstances was altogether becoming. But then, poor girl, she has had the great disadvantage of an early introduction into foreign society; and when a young lady who might have done better takes up with an inferior connection like this, you may be sure that there is a flaw somewhere in her nature, though you may not be able to say exactly where it is.
CHAPTER II.

A PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

Her brother being gone, Jessie, in order not to disappoint expectations which she had raised, turned in at the Dailys' cottage. She was not in a mood for ordinary conversation; but having sent Susan Daily a good square of carpet for her living-room floor, the present furnished an excuse for an interview. The said floor being composed of bricks of the dampest, Susan Daily had complained that they never would dry, and Jessie, whilst
entertaining many doubts as to the utility of the gift, had ventured to make it.

Adam was digging in the front garden when Mrs. Smith lifted the latch, and a stranger's voice was audible with Mrs. Daily's in the cottage. Jessie recognised it for that of the young teacher in whose class Adam had come to grief, and by whom he had been dismissed as 'a mere heathen.'

Adam dug on silently and anxiously, scarcely replying to Mrs. Smith's greeting. Would the stranger within doors relate all the circumstances of his outbreak in the school? It was not the maternal reproof which the lad had to fear—his anxiety proceeded from a very different cause; if his mother were told the words that were used about her own father, Adam's grandfather Hoston—if she heard the expressions which had provoked her son's indignation and distress—what significance would they not have in her ears!
She would perceive at once that her secret—the secret of her father's ill-doing—must be Adam's secret also; and there was that in this peasant boy's nature which caused the notion to fill him with unselfish dread. Inspired by this unexplained feeling, he threw down his rake, and leaving his new friend to wonder at his unwonted neglect of her presence, he picked up his jacket and ran round to the back.

'If any of my lads,' Susan Daily was saying, 'have not conducted themselves in school, I'm sorry for it. Daily's very particular about their all learning to write out their names, and about their making allowances for everybody, and so forth.'

'That strikes me, Mrs. Daily, as rather an odd way of putting it,' returned the young gentleman; 'a boy does not come to school to make allowances for his teachers, but to profit by what is taught him. Adam ought to have more instruction.'
'Very likely, sir; but even if I had the means to turn such a big lad into a scholar, I don’t know how it would strike Daily. My husband always looks at things for himself, and he brings them all up to do the same, and to count upon others doing likewise. Then, again, he is not one as ’ll stand being interfered with himself, and he never interferes with others; and if Adam or any of my lads interfered with you or with anyone else, I’m sure I’m sorry for it. Adam, come in and speak for yourself. Here’s a young man you seem to have put about, somehow. Turn it over in your memory, and see if you can certify how it came up.'

Adam stood motionless in the back doorway.

'Just let me repeat the circumstances to you, Mrs. Daily,' said the teacher.

'No, sir,' pleaded Adam, coming forward.

Then, as the new-comer still persisted in
an attempt to give his version of the affair in the school, Adam turned into the back-garden, and the next instant yells from the baby lying out in an osier basket sent Mrs. Daily flying thither. Seeing his mother safely employed, Adam returned into the dwelling, and, shutting the door behind him, faced the teacher and Mrs. Smith, who had entered meanwhile from the front.

'Your own conscience, you see, my lad, tells you you've done wrong, since you're afraid of my speaking to your mother,' said the first visitor.

'No, sir, it do not,' said Adam shortly.

The teacher appealed to Mrs. Smith to get him out of his difficulties, but in vain. In answer to all his further endeavours, Adam remained obstinately silent, until the perplexed visitor—who was a most excellent young man, mistaken only in the assumption that shoots which bore such satisfactory fruit in his own case, were
applicable to be grafted indiscriminately on all other stocks—went his way dejectedly, feeling that his task was harder than it ought to have been. But the moment that he had closed the gate behind him, and his shadow fell upon the dusty road, Adam looked up awkwardly and apologetically in Mrs. Smith’s face, saying:

‘I did it for her sake. I’ll go to school next Sunday and let him take it out of me. It’ll be a sort of comfort to him.’

‘Her’ was his mother, who at that moment re-entered the room, her baby in her arms.

‘What was the odds of it, Adam?’ she asked; then, seeing Mrs. Smith, stopped short and looked down in confusion at the carpet—or rather what had been the carpet, although it was all there.

Cut into pieces! Whereas it had been a good ten-foot square of Kidderminster, now it was a series of little mats, each about
a foot and a half across, no bigger; all turned face downwards on to the bricks, with their edges frayed and meeting unevenly; the dull dirty-looking surface which they presented bore no resemblance whatever to the bright-looking carpet which had entered the cottage but the day before.

‘Daily ripped it,’ said Susan, for the first time speaking almost doubtfully of any action of that immaculate man’s.

‘Well, I dare say he had a reason,’ said Mrs. Smith, pitying the woman’s embarrassment.

‘Oh yes, he had a reason, had Daily. He don’t never act contrary to reason; though I may say, Mrs. Smith, I do feel to pity it. I’m sure I’d gladly have shook it out once a month or so, if that was all; and Adam, he’d have lent me a hand. He gave his father to understand as much. He felt quite a sinking, did Adam, the same as I did myself, when he saw his father tearing away
at it with his breeches-knife. I'm telling you less than the truth, Mrs. Smith, when I own that I slipped right out of the house, and went down as far as the pump, and left the baby behind me, though I'd never set foot in the street without a child in my arms since the day that mother was buried. The neighbours, they had it all down the village that the baby was taken with fits, through seeing me working the handle without it; and I couldn't come back again neither, not till I'd dipped my face in a bucket of water.'

'Was your husband offended?'

'No; that wasn't the reason. He said if you and me were friends, there was no cause in life why you shouldn't make me a present. 'Twasn't that. 'Twas because he wouldn't see me breaking my back over shaking a carpet; and he hadn't the time to spare to beat it himself, nor yet the money to have it done. So he snigged it up into mats, that
I could shake easy out of the doorway; and after all, it is all there. No, it was I turned it face downwards, 'twas such a pity to tread on the colours; but if I had known you was coming, I'd have laid it all upwards for you to see.'

Mrs. Smith did see the pressing economy of labour, and the well-meant carefulness of the arrangement, and did her best to reassure the heart of her simple neighbour. Then turning to Adam, she strove to stir in him a quicker desire for instruction.

'Adam,' she said, 'when that gentleman called you "a mere heathen," he spoke no more than the truth, so far as practical acquirements in the way of learning go.'

Adam's face flushed, but with shame, not resentment. You can write your own name, but that is all you can do, I believe. You had better come to me in the evenings and learn.'

Adam looked doubtful, and answered but slowly. He was evidently shyer than usual.
‘I can read most words if I has ’em to myself; if I have it out with them alone, and there’s nobody standing over to hurry me on, and to accuse me of miscalling ’em, ma’am. I’ve got all them Latin words what is written on the tomb that you talk of. Mr. Apers wrote ’em for me when he came to see the church. You can hear me say them if you like. When I’m grown a man and have fetched my old granny out of the Union, I mean to have them wrote in English, the same as the Game Licenses in the church porch, so that all that comes and goes may read them.’

‘Yes,’ interposed Susan Daily, attending only to what she understood; ‘and father he says he’ll never enter the church so long as them doccyments flies in his face with every flap of the big door. They was there the year we were married in Cutthorpe Church, and Daily hasn’t ever crossed the threshold of it since, nor taken his boys and girls to
be christened; though he's proud enough of his namesake's tombstone, he's never introduced one of 'em to it.'

'He doesn't come to Slumsby Church either, Mrs. Daily; and we've nothing flying on the doorway there excepting some articles about Justices of the Peace.'

'Oh, that's all along of Mr. Smith. He can't kneel, don't you see, ma'am, where Mr. Smith stands master. "Susan," he's often said to me in the days when first we were married, before we got, like the best o' husbands and wives, to have said all our say to each other—"Susan, I'll go to church the day that I'm master of Sodden Fen, and never till then." The day the Almighty gives him his dues he'll go, Mrs. Smith, you may trust upon that—then, and no sooner!'

The pride in the simple wife's face as she spoke, was a striking index of character.

'The old experience,' thought Mrs. Smith
— 'the joyful weight of possession bends the knees, the burden of denial does but bow the back;' but of the village wife who spoke to her she took her leave with a very simple answer.

Behind how many radiant figures, Jessie wondered, bending low on marble pavements with their burden of joy, as Aurea and Leopold would kneel the next day, had some other stood as her brother would stand, erect, dismissing with smiles all evidences of his woe, yet finding the load of his life doubled by the lightening of theirs. Only by allying themselves to the force which seemed to impose these burdens on them, whether they named it Deity or Destiny, might such troubled ones win for themselves a power over circumstance, undreamt of by simply the favoured of fortune. Sole remedy offered by philosophers and moralists alike; rejected perforce as the first, to be accepted as the last and simplest lesson of life.
Whilst the nightingales were inundating the dewy grounds and silent fields with floods of song; whilst far off, Aurea Chapel was holding her former lover captive with the magic of a conversation more entrancing than any poem, Jessie, leaning out of her open window, sole worshipper of harmonious sound in Slumsby, gave herself up with fuller freedom to thoughts born of the day and of the hour. From the marriage of Aurea Chapel and the future of her disappointed brother, her mind escaped to the meeting with her husband's father, returning finally to the prospects, interesting only to herself, of the village lad, Adam Daily.

Jessie was too true to deny her humble relations, whether marriage or mental affinities formed the link of connection. To her, Adam January was a brother, and Churchwarden Smith was a long-looked-for father. She determined to tell him her secret next day. She had a task to get through which
she felt could be best undertaken during her brother's absence. She could see Mr. Smith with less fear of inquiry or of interruption, and it would be easier for them both to face her brother with the intention of divulging their relationship when a new return home made a fresh starting-point in their common life together.

Jessie dreaded the disclosure greatly, whilst she desired it. Forecasts of the decisive interview agitated her. If her husband were to have come back to her the next day, her life could scarcely have been more stirred than it was by the resolution she had taken to make common cause with her husband's father in the hope of together succeeding, where each had failed singly, in bringing back the husband and son. The assurance of another's sympathy in working for the longed-for end inspired her with new confidence in its achievement, and the belief that together they would bring home
their prodigal made her heart beat and her pulse throb, as she sat looking over the purpling plain which marked the line of the peat-lands.

It was early still; down the Devonshire lane Aurea Chapel had not yet picked her way homewards, accompanied by George, when Jessie, wrapped in a soft woollen shawl, passed from the low-ceilinged rooms in the Vicarage, through the garden-walks into the churchyard, and thence by the deserted village roadway towards Sodden Fen. She had a fancy to look at her husband's home lying asleep under the moon. The lights in the village hamlet were out long ago. No one used a candle in these brief nights of summer.

Not a soul did Jessie encounter as she quietly passed by the unpaved village street. Such vice as there was to be found in the hamlet contrived to exist without public exposure; went within doors at early
hours, and got drunk chiefly on Saturday nights. But when she came up to the Dailys' cottage, there—to the surprise of her doubting senses—human life was dimly discernible, for the gaunt figure of James Daily was outlined against the dusky background of the night, bestriding the thatched roof of his own dwelling. Such a lowly dwelling it was, and one so lavishly furnished with footholds in the tufts of fragrant weeds and grass with which it was covered, that Jessie herself could without any great difficulty have followed its owner's queer example.

The eccentric fellow was crouching down upon the roof, one arm twined round the chimney for support; he was apparently intently occupied with some object of interest seen through the broken panes of the skylight, against which his face was pressed. Had the cottage been anyone else's abode but his own, he might well have been
credited with dishonest intentions; as it was, his appearance was sufficiently strange to compel Jessie Smith to stop and observe him. Suddenly, the strange figure drew itself up and sat erect.

'Drop that!' he shouted through the gap in the window, shaking with agitation till he nearly lost his balance; then, pausing an instant, lifted his head and saw Mrs. Smith standing below him. Another glance through the skylight seemed to satisfy him that his command—for whatever cause issued—had been obeyed, and in careless haste he prepared to descend. Involuntarily Jessie Smith turned to escape him, decidedly wishing that she had not come, but on further reflection changed her intention.

She was on the road-side of the unpleasant ditch which served as a moat to the castle of this strange Briton, he on the other; but her friend Susan and the boys
and girls lay sleeping within a few yards of them, and Jessie was not given to mistrustful fears of her fellow-creatures. Neither did she consider uneasiness in James Daily's company to be warranted by the varied considerations that the neighbours gave him a bad name, that he had flung an armful of thatch upon her brother's head, and that he preferred the outside of his roof on a hot night to breathing the stifling atmosphere beneath.

Nevertheless, knowing by repute the morbid sensitiveness of this man, she was somewhat anxious as to how he might meet her, when she thus stood before him unexpectedly—in the guise, too, of an apparent spy upon his actions. Face him she must, however, for he was coming towards her, and to shun the situation by silent retreat would be to lower, inferentially, the motives of both.

James Daily had evidently no intention
of letting her escape him. Since the affair with the pigsties he had carefully avoided further intercourse with the Vicarage, and he had not as yet spoken to the Vicar's sister; but his wife had told him of the lady's visits, and he had drawn his own conclusions accordingly—perversely, as conclusions of his were sure to be come at. She had given his wife a carpet, and she had proposed to instruct his son; but carpets and education appealed to his sympathies quite as little as tea and tracts would have done. Darkness and solitude favoured the utterance of his sentiments, and holding his garden-gate in his hand, he abruptly invited her entrance.

'Well, come in; I shall not hurt you.'

'I am not afraid that you will, Mr. Daily; but I can't come in at this time in the evening, when your wife and family are all asleep in their beds.'

'Yes, they are all abed, and that's why
I’m out of it; but they aren’t all asleep, as they used to be, for there’s that stupid Adam burning a candle-end in the bed over a leaf of print, under a rotten thatch. Those who set him on to it had better pay to the Sun Fire Union, and get us a brass for the house. Sixpence a week in the Burial Club is all I can do for myself, and more than I’d ever have signed for if I’d reckoned on paying for twenty years for those that might just as well have been laid by the parish. When Adam caught my eye upon him and heard me give him my orders, he gave a jump and dropped the light instead of the paper, right there in the bed among the lot of them.’

‘You don’t mean to say that he set anything alight?’

‘Well, no, not exactly; it fell on to Bob’s head and frizzled away in his hair. But Adam shan’t have a second chance, I can tell you. If he wants to go to school o’
nights, he must go to Cutthorpe, to the tile-yard: there's classes there of all sorts for the lads at the factory. I'm the first of my name as ever learnt reading and writing, and I mastered it there. Once he's a rough-moulder they'll stuff all they can into his head, if he'll only grant 'em the chance.'

'Let Adam come to me and work in the garden. I've taken a liking to your boy. We can board him and lodge him somewhere about the premises. I'll undertake to teach him when his work is done at nights.'

'To stand touching his hat, and seasoning his language with "sir" and with "ma'am" every time that he's looked at. Service is slavery, and I've no value for gentleman's places; but Adam may suit himself as long as he keeps clear of Sodden Fen. They wanted him there a while ago; but I took my solemn oath, sixteen years ago, or better now, that no son or daughter o' mine should
ever take service on Sodden Fen, not if it would save them from starving.'

'Mr. Daily,' the lady asked, seeking to turn his attention from a subject which clearly aroused such bitterness of feeling, 'what takes you up upon the roof of your cottage at nights? You don't go there, I suppose, to watch over the boys and girls, even if Adam does read in his bed?'

'I mounts the roof,' he cried, with rising passion, 'nights when the moon's up—what for, do you think? Why, just to look over Sodden Fen, to see it all lying whole and quiet, with Diggory's ditch, where my ancestor was buried, flowing along by the Hards. When the sun shines I've got my work to be done, and I never cast any glances that way; there's the robber's horses and the robber's cattle, the robber's ploughs and the robber's servants trailing over my lands. But by nights when he's gone to his evil dreams—churchwarden though he may
be—I leave my wife and my family sleeping below, and I sit and watch and watch out here under the darkness, and the place is all free—free to the bats, the owls, and to me. Though I never set foot on the Fen, yet I guard it. It’s my acres I’m guarding, not my “pauper’s progeny,” as the old parson’s housekeeper named ’em one day. It’s for that that I mounts the thatch. After that, ask me to let one of my children earn his living in Mr. Smith’s service, or with any one of his family. Pity that the name is so common. I could have wished you a better. Might one ask where is your husband?’

‘My husband, Mr. Daily, has emigrated. He was always very ready to espouse the cause of those whom he held to be trodden down in this country, and he went to look for fresh lands for the agriculturist in another quarter of the globe. He was an agent and land-surveyor for the Trades.’
'And you, didn't you care enough about the people or him to go with him? If my wife went wandering about the world alone the neighbours would sling their tongues at her. No offence—only plain speaking.'

'I had no other object in life, Mr. Daily, than to help him and you all.'

Daily listened in surprised incredulity.

'Well, I don't hold with that emigrating myself,' he said, after a moment of thought; 'it's taking our own bread out of our mouths, and sending us packing to pick up a crust in some one else's country. "Give us our rights here," that is what I says. Here are my rights, where I can clutch 'em with my ten fingers; and here are my lands, where I can see 'em every day and night.'

But after all this, what was Jessie to do about taking Adam into her service? The news of her connection with Mr. Smith, the churchwarden, would shortly be all over Slumsby. If she carried out her intention
of divulging her secret next day, James Daily would indignantly repulse her offer for his son. With all his moroseness there was much which she could not but pity in this unpopular man. His faults were in part, at any rate, the undoubted production of the earlier faults of her class; his forbidding manner was due to his habit of holding no intercourse with others, but of feeding upon his supposed wrongs in secret. Had he met her in the day-time he would not have spoken; but night favours communicativeness on the part of these self-contained natures. There was also in his freedom of speech—unguessed by her—a tribute to his wife Susan’s favourable testimony to her worth.

This effort at conversation was James Daily’s supreme, long-delayed attempt at unburdening his mind. He had felt instinctively that in order to such unburdening he must first of all assert some sort of
equality with the recipient of his confidence.

If Mrs. Smith rejected this assumption of fellowship, if she took offence and placed herself socially or morally in some region above him, then he would be asking advice, not seeking for sympathy. Then she was the wrong helper for him; she might then go her ways and say she had met that fellow James Daily, who had scared her half out of her wits, and he would go into his cottage and would grumble to his wife that he happened on that stuck-up parson's sister, and he didn't care if she came there no more; but Jessie had not rejected him on his own terms, and he was now disposed to be communicative, and, so far as his rugged nature would allow, to be friendly.

'I don't care if you take my lad,' he said, finding that she still remained silent; 'I'll send him up your ways in the morning; he's
only got a job of crow-scareying on the north meadow by the old Manor House, and Bob can do that better nor he. Bob's head 'll be curious enough for a scare-crow come daylight.'

Still Jessie did not conclude the arrangement, and Daily, ever suspicious, was ready to accuse her of desiring to withdraw her offer for Adam. She had asked for the lad, and he consented to send him; she had nothing to do but to say she would take him, and yet, unaccountably to Daily's ears, she now changed the tone of the conversation.

'Mr. Daily,' she said, 'I want to ask you a question. You have asked me several, and I have answered them in so far as I was able. Now I want you to answer me. Did you ever hear your wife's mother, Mrs. Hoston, speak about Mr. Henry Smith, the churchwarden's lost son? She was nurse to his mother, so I have been told.'
'She always named him a ne'er-do-well that took up with the roughest lot in the place.'

'Did you know him yourself?'

'I might have spoken to him scores of times but for his being his father's son, when he was no higher than it might be August, of my little uns; but he cut and run when he came to be the same age as our Adam. I'd been gone then out of Slumsby for some years myself. I was a grown young man of twenty by when it happened. The parish gave my father the burial of a beast, and ordered my widowed mother the House when I was turned of seventeen. Then I walked to Cutthorpe and hired myself to the factory. Off and on I worked there till I had passed my three-and-twenty; then I married my wife and came back to settle in Slumsby. Mr. Smith's young un had then been missing a twelvemonth or more, by what I heard
the old woman tell; and I take it his father had a good riddance of him.'

'Oh! don't say that, Mr. Daily. Should you think you'd a good riddance of Adam, if he happened to turn out ill on your hands?'

'For sure, if he chanced to be such a one.'

'Well, but then you see you'd have a dozen left, and that makes a difference. Don't you suppose that Mr. Smith, for all his riches, is an unhappy old man for the loss of his son?'

'Serve him well right if he is! It's the curse of the Lord, as you pious ones name it, upon him, for withholding me and my sons from our rights. If, when he lies on his deathbed, there's none akin to him to lay his bones in sorrow, serve him nothing but right, is what I, for one, will maintain.'

'It will not benefit you or your sons if he has none of his own to come after him,'
said Jessie decidedly, for the man's persistent bitterness seemed to call for plainer correction.

'How do I know that?' he answered, with a dash of cunning. 'When land changes hands there's many a slip between thumb and fingers.'

'But suppose, now, that Mr. Smith's son were to come back again? Things more unlikely happen every day, even in Slumsby.'

'He'd have to prove it,' the man said, with an eagerness which showed the idea no new one to him. 'His father hasn't set eyes on him since he was the size of our Adam up there; and it isn't to be believed that if Adam was to go away now and never come nigh us for twenty year, I should swear to my son the moment he made it his will to return. No, no; old Smith down at the farm has been raking the hedges for his son's wife these dozen
years. It's been the talk of the neighbours how he's encouraged the lowest lot of women and girls with the dirtiest beggars' brats that goes the round of the fairs and what not; had 'em all hanging about the premises because he fancied to pick out his son's wife and child from among them. "Smith"'s a name easy learnt to lay claim to; but, as my old mother would tell you, the Dailys never yet bought their inheritance, nor raked in the mire for their children!'

'I suppose you would buy Sodden Fen all the same if you had the money to do it?' said Jessie patiently, striving to bring the man to a better mind.

'Never!' shouted the angry Thatcher. 'The price of Sodden Fen was paid in blood, and money will never redeem it. Mr. Smith's an old man; he won't be here long, and then we shall see.'

As he spoke, the rickety gate upon
which he leant shook with the growing violence of his passion.

'I have been patient till now,' he protested, 'and I am patient still; but I tell you this, parson's sister—I mean to have my rights before I die, and no son of old Smith's, nor son's wife nor child, shall keep me waiting one moment after he's laid in his coffin. The day I step over Diggory's Dyke, we'll see who is master of Sodden Fen. You can cut down a dahlia where you can't grub up the thistle. I've seven sons, and not one of them missing; and me and my lads will stick to the land. He's got the lying law, but I've the living lads; and numbers is better than precept.'

He raised his voice as he spoke, and had there been anyone passing, might well have been overheard; but the silence of the night-time was broken only by the croaking of the frogs in Diggory's Dyke: those vociferous Gallic croakers which abound in parts
of the Fens. Some one heard him, however. A silent and undreamt-of auditor had been hidden all the while in the leafy arbour of the porch.

Adam, startled out of his new pursuit of knowledge under difficulties by the sight of his father's haggard face peering through the broken window, and further roused by the necessity of smothering the light out of Bob's smouldering hair, heard with amazement voices in the garden, and distinguished one as that of the lady—'his lady,' as he had lately learnt to call her. Creeping out of bed and into his few articles of clothing, he had descended the ladder without awakening his tired mother, and had screened himself in the narrow porch. Where his lady was, there he must be waiting. What she said must be good for him to hear.

As has been already noticed, in the simple daily life of the cottage, wherein there was
nothing to conceal, overhearing had never been converted by any law into a delinquency; but as circumstances widen, obligations grow, and this night for the first time Adam was aware of a sense of deceit in listening to what was not directly intended for him. It was this growing feeling which sent him creeping out of the darkness of the porch till he came up to the speakers. This motive partly; partly also more personal longings and hopes.

'Father,' he said, breaking in upon James Daily's angry discourse, 'I heard all you've been saying o' Mr. Smith's son; but he mayn't be living, and whether he's a bad un or not, he hasn't done nothing to us. I don't feel as I could lie waiting for him, nor I cannot turn to the tile-yard. Granny, she knows I can't bear the factory, and she promised she'd speak to you for me. I want to garden all day, and get some learning o' nights; and I heard the lady say plain she'd
engage me. I can sleep anywhere—in the wood-house, or along with the fowls; there's very good bedding in the Vicarage stables, lots of straw from the boxes and crates. If Mrs. Smith's ready to hire me, I'd rather go right off at once, and make more room in the attic. Bob can take the day's job down at Dripping Ferry. And I haven't got nothing belonging to me—only the plants that I set in the window, and I'd like to leave 'em to mother; there's a streaky fuchsia as is flowering grandly.'

James Daily demurred, but made no decided objection. He had relieved his mind by his tirade against his supposed enemy, and was feeling lighter of heart for the disburdenment.

'Well,' he said, 'to know his own mind is the sign of a man, and I reckon you'll be one in no time. If the lady likes to take you right back with her now, to feed you and clothe you, and keep you in work and
victuals, I'm not the father to hinder. But it must be done now—now before another night's over. I may change my mind tomorrow, and so may she. We Dailys never go begging for service.'

Adam took an eager step forward, and looked imploringly in the lady's face.

"Take me, ma'am! I can do any sort of outdoor work, I can eat any sort of food, I can lie anywhere, and I'll grow you beautiful roses; only teach me more about Diggory Daily, and all you said in the school.'

His father's eyes suddenly kindled.

"What!' he exclaimed; 'has the parson's sister been learning you that in the school, about Diggory Daily our kinsman and head? That is the right kind of learning, that is better than books; then she may take you and welcome, and mind you stick to her truly. One who has shown respect for the fathers will never put-on the sons. I'm sensible now of the motive that moved
her to pick you out for the place. Go your ways and hers as fast as you please. The day that I want you I shall not have far to fetch you, and that will be when Henry Smith sets foot in the Fen.'

Up till now Jessie had hoped that it might be possible to defer the inevitable communication until after her intended interview with Mr. Smith should have revealed her secret to the parish. For the good of his poor grudging spirit she had encouraged James Daily to speak. The sore heart of the man needed such long-delayed comfort. Now, however, the force of truthful impulse compelled her to declare herself; but her thoughts turned first to the son.

'Adam, dear lad, it has been one of my warmest desires to employ and instruct you; but from some words which your father has spoken I think it is very unlikely that I shall be permitted to do so. But, after all, it is of little consequence
whether I or some other person direct you; or whether the work you are doing, with roses or bricks, takes you into the factory at Cutthorpe, or leaves you in the Vicarage garden. The ideas which govern your life are the things which will make or undo you. Your spirit may be noble if your work is lowly. Your aims may be high if your achievement is humble; but understand this, no aim can really exalt a man which only touches his own advancement. Merely to strive to improve your position by repossessing yourself of the property of your ancestors will no more make you a greater man than standing on tiptoe will increase your stature. Remember this always: not what you have, but what you are, is the thing that is of consequence. Say the words over to yourself until you come to understand them; they will never lose their meaning. And in whatever way and in whatever place you earn your living,
remember this further, that the worth of any man's life in this world is simply the value of his services to others.'

Then, turning to James Daily, not without agitation, she continued: 'I should have rejoiced, Mr. Daily, to take your son into my service, especially if by so doing I could help to make him a worthy successor of the ancestor you are so justly proud of; but I must tell you first that in handing your son over to me, you trust him to one of the family you so unjustly condemn. I am the wife of that old man's lost son. Henry Smith was my husband. He sailed for Australia four years ago, on the errand I told you; and my life is very sad to me since he departed.

'I had hoped to have said this to Mr. Smith first, but your bitter words have compelled me to say it to you—not, mind, as a concession to your grievous prejudices, which I must hope you may be
persuaded to try and overcome, but to protect us all from the errors of a false position. To-morrow I shall console Mr. Smith with the knowledge that the daughter he has looked for has come to him at last, and together he and I shall devote our lives to the recovery of his erring son and of my wandering husband.'

She ceased speaking, not because she had told him all that she purposed to touch upon, but because of the alarming effect her words were producing. James Daily, silent at first from slow apprehension, was dumb now from the excess of angry emotion. More given to the use of his limbs than of his tongue, that organ when hastily summoned refused to assist him. Brandishing his arms in the air, he motioned her from him, and but for Adam's quick-sighted interposition might well have converted a gesture into a blow. The garden-gate was between them, and upon it the vigorous
lad instantly threw himself. Adam was but a peasant boy defending his lady from the wrath of a parent drunken with rage, yet no knight-errant in days of chivalry brought to the defence of his lady more heartfelt devotion than he.

Capacity being determined by consciousness, all that he was or might become Adam owed to this woman, who first taught him self-knowledge. Hers had been the first fingers which had called into play the finer chords of his true nature. Since he knew her he had begun to live the double life which admits a man into a new kingdom. Since he knew her he had washed his hands every day, his self-consciousness extending from the inner life to the outer fringe of material actions with which in smaller natures it is apt to begin and end.

But James Daily had mastered his unready tongue. His words assailed her with
the greater force for the resistance they had had to overcome in issuing from his lips.

'You are Smith's son's wife, and you mean to bring him back again to carry on his father's robbery after the old man's dead! You mean to fetch him home again, to keep me out of my own inheritance, and you stand there and tell me so—you, a woman alone! You dare to face me, James Daily, that am driven mad with the wrongs your folk have inflicted; and you would steal away from me my son, with the very words on your lips—to make him a traitor, and such another sneak as yourselves! Why isn't it your husband instead of yourself, that we might prove which is the better man of the two? Send him to me when you've found him; send him to me here, to James Daily. I ain't never away from home; I don't take runs like a parson, nor sail for foreign parts like a farmer's son, and leave my belongings behind me!
Early and late have I worked like a slave; been a good husband, been a good father; schooled my children, and buried myself' (by which he alluded to his Burial Club); 'kept my wife decent and run up no score; stinted my pipe and swallowed my wrongs, getting no credit from high nor low: but I've spoken at last, and I'll stick to my words when I've said 'em. No son o' mine will ever be fed by a Smith o' the wrong sort. And you, now I know you, be off! Come here no more till you've happened to light on your husband; and if he's living, I'll fight him!'

Then, half-mad with rage, the man stooped to pick up a stone. Still Jessie stood her ground. She had more to say to him ere she departed. Filled with shame on his father's account, yet glowing with the pride which stirs the heart of every noble boy when vigorous action first calls him to the front in life, Adam wrenched the
missile from his father's grasp. All the man awoke within the lad's breast in that hour, and his lady was as safe in his keeping as though he had been at least his father's equal in respect of age and power. Having flung the stone to a distance, he passed the little gate which separated them from the lady, despite his father's efforts to thrust him aside, and stood between his friend and his angry parent.

'For shame, father!' he said, 'to put a stone at a woman, and one that has done you nothing but service. She is one of the right sort, let her be who she may. My mother loves her, and so do I.'

This frank avowal more nearly moved Jessie than all Mr. Daily's violence; laying her hand on the boy's shoulder, she spoke calmly and strongly:

'Mr. Daily, I offer no opinion now on your wrongs or your rights; but this much I think it is only right to declare—my
husband will never, with my consent, assume the ownership of the Sodden estate.'

Daily expressed his misinterpretation of her words by a contemptuous gesture; it deepened her colour, but did not arrest her calm and impassive utterance.

'He will come back here again,' she continued, 'as soon as Mr. Smith and I can succeed in communicating with him. But bush-life in Australia is a very solitary thing; my husband will have been camping out in a tent, surveying land, having rough work to accomplish, and difficult country to get through. We cannot expect to know where he is as if he were working in England. Your own life here in Slumsby is certainly smoother than his. Pray God that he may be living to come! When he does come, he may of course choose to make himself master, where his fathers have been before him; but all the power that I
possess, and all the influence that I may have, will be thrown into the opposite scale. Never, so long as I have my way, will Henry Smith, nor shall I as his wife, retain possession of Sodden Fen.'

'You believe in my story, then?' said the trembling man eagerly, claspins both his hands upon the gate, hissing his words out in the intensity of his feeling. Before she could answer, Adam's clear, boyish voice rang out with the triumph of superior understanding.

'Yes, father; she does believe in your story. She knows that Diggory Daily lived and died. She knows that we common folk come of his breeding, she told us so in the school; but she remembers that Diggory gave up the land. She knows that they killed him in Cutthorpe Church, and thrust his body into the Dyke. She knows that his lands were left to the people; 'tisn't for you or for me that she'd
stand up. She'd have 'em thrown open to all.'

'Have 'em thrown open to all! parcel my acres among the parish!' stammered Daily, incredulous of his own ears. 'And you're fool enough to believe such a story! Wait till they've cut up the glebe yonder into allotments.'

'it was Diggory's will,' said Adam gravely.

'Mr. Daily,' said Jessie, once more, 'Sodden Fen belongs by inheritance neither to you nor to Adam. Legally, Mr. Smith has, I believe, a rightful claim—you have none; legally also, Henry his son, and my husband, would inherit the property when his father is dead. Morally, according to my way of thinking, neither you nor I, your son nor my husband, have any just claim to the lands which your namesake in dying bequeathed to the people. Have you forgotten the story? If so, let Adam remind you of it.'
'Forgotten!' said the miserable man, with a groan. 'She asks me if I have "forgotten!" Have I forgotten to be hungry, to be driven with work and hardened with want? Have I forgotten the value of the pasture-land on the Fen, and the worth of Mr. Smith's stock? Have I forgotten the bundles of osiers that they cut last year to the south? Have I forgotten the tons of hay that they carried this week in the north meadow? Forgotten! When Mr. Smith and his son, and his son's wife too, are all rotting in their coffins, maybe I shall have forgotten; till then I remember only too well. I shall remember, too, every deceiving word and every misleading promise you've given this night—you, Mr. Smith's daughter-in-law, Henry Smith's wife, who pretended to befriend me, and to take a kindly interest in my son, and was against me all the time; listened to my tale, and then turned on me. That is like a woman. It would take a

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parson or a woman all the world over to play such a trick. You're a worthy sister to your smooth-faced brother.'

It is an easy thing to go when you're abused; it saves your pride, saves your ears, and bolsters up your dignity. It's a better thing to stay for the abuser's sake, at the expense of personal feeling. Jessie recognised the better course and took it, out of pity for the poor man's wounded hopes.

'My brother, Mr. Daily, knows nothing of this. You must not include him in your condemnation of me; and since you have looked upon me as a friend, and have thought that I should take your part in your grievance, I am the more sorry if this mistake comes between us. I shall hope that some day you may come back to your first impression, which was, I trust, that I was one who was anxious to be counted your friend; but in order to that end I must first speak out plainly. I am not taking
Mr. Smith's part against you, although he is my father-in-law. I am not working for my own gains, nor for my husband's. Never, with my consent, will my husband assert his claims, nor shall I as his wife or his widow; but listen, James Daily—never, any the more, with my consent will you or your son Adam make yourselves masters of Sodden Fen. Your rights are those of the whole village, absolute as far as they go, but common to all as to one. Sodden Fen is for all, not for any one family.'

'The land is mine, and mine only,' shouted Daily, 'as much as the Ferry is Sir Crowsby's, and the people have got as much right to the one as the other.'

'Sir Crowsby Weyland,' said Jessie, 'has a deed down at Dripping Ferry which would tell you all about it. I have seen a copy at the farm. It would be well if you could bring yourself to try and understand it. Try at least to comprehend my
position with regard to yourself. And now, as I will not ask you for Adam, good-night.'

'Adam,' she said, turning once more to the lad, who stood downcast before her, longing to follow yet fearing to stir, casting beseeching looks of entreaty upon his father, yet not daring to give his prayer voice, 'you at least understand me, if your father cannot do me justice or believe in the truth. To you, at any rate, I have not spoken in vain.'

Adam listened with the old lump bigger than ever in his honest throat. The next instant his father, returning to the cottage, had shut him out for the night; and Jessie, making her way back to the Vicarage as fast as her now trembling limbs would carry her, saw the boy following her at a considerable distance, and divined that he meant to guard her from harm until she had reached her own dwelling.
CHAPTER III.

AUREA CHAPEL’S WEDDING-DAY.

It is easy to wake at six o’clock on the morning of your wedding-day. It is difficult to remain asleep. If you are in London, the stir and roll of the great city have sympathetically ushered in the dawn of your new life for you several hours ago. If you are in the country, the still, rural lanes and quiet fields, the neighbouring homesteads and the garden-lawns seem suddenly to have become responsive to the activity of your own
nervous centres. Many a man is reported to have required 'to be called' in order to be hung; but we have yet to hear of one who, being sober, has over-slept himself upon the morning of his wedding-day. If he is going through it for the first time he has to waken early in order to consider what it will be like. If for the second or third time, memory has to recall the past, and to dog the footsteps of Hope as she builds upon the future.

All precautions will have been useless; no receipt short of drugging will have averted the inevitable wakefulness. In vain you will have closed the window-curtains over-night, with the determination that whatever others may have done, you at least will prove superior to the weakness of spending sleepless hours because you've got to play a common part which any fool can master. The light will have been streaming in through every chink and
crevice of the shutters, showing your portmanteau half-packed in a corner, bringing into prominence anything unusual in the arrangement of your wardrobe, falling on the ring-box which lies somewhere on your table.

If the time of year permit, every gardening man or lad about the premises will have been whetting his scythe, or driving his machine, ere dawn, with noisy zeal, inspired by the prospect of a 'good time coming,' later in the day. Every woman in the place will have been afoot two hours earlier than customary, making excess of occupation the excuse for the contagion of excitement. Finally, every bird and beast about the house or yard, having been disturbed in its usual course of conduct, will contribute its own peculiar protest. The dogs, being conservative to a poodle, will bark their disapprobation of changes in the air; the very hens will lay their eggs
before they're wanted, and the cocks will crow congratulations as though the laying of eggs had a special significance for the universe. Hard, upon a wakeful bridegroom, this. But what then about the bride?

Whilst the one party to the impending contract is fretting under the conviction that now at least, if never before, he will figure as a shamefaced fool for one whole morning of his life; whilst he is pondering over the superior matrimonial arrangements of those nations who carry off the women of their choice without public ceremony (a custom which suddenly seems to him in reality more rational, more delightful and more decent), the other one is greeting with thrills of happy vanity the birth of moments which will hail her queen. The more deeply a man is in love, the more strongly will he feel public display a profanation of his passion, the more will he
sicken to have the object of his affections all to himself in some sylvan glade, as if he were the happy savage. But marriage settlements do not agree with sylvan shades; brides have a weakness for white satin; fathers and mothers expect wedding-breakfasts, and sisters love to be bridesmaids. The bridegroom may be finding such moderate consolation as he may in the consideration that the great day will be over at last, as all other days are over, whatever problems of joy or grief may have filled their hours in the interval; but the bride meanwhile is, more likely than not, reckoning the same hours by a rule of inverse proportion. She is too conservative to have reconsidered wedding ceremonies with special application to her own case. Her thoughts have been forbidden to dig beneath the surface to the meaning of the show in which she plays the most important part. It is her hour of triumph;
all brides enjoy it, therefore why not she? Besides, something tells her all the while that it may be short-lived, and will never come again. Even if you are not quite sure that the nature of the man you are about to marry is absolutely adapted to the completion of your own, it is some comfort to have no misgivings whatever as to the perfect fit of the wonderful white satin garment which hangs over a chair. Everybody must risk something when they're going to be married. You always come to a 'Finis' at the end of the first volume; nobody ever can know what is written in the next, and yet the next will go on somehow—will probably get to a third volume, and will end in quite the usual way. It is morally certain that you are not going to make a fiasco in life. Of course you will manage somehow, as everybody else does when married; and many people say that such things turn out better in the long-run if
the couple are not quite so sure of each other at starting. It is all so strange, new and unknown, that it is impossible to say after all that one person will not on the whole do quite as well as another whose virtues may be of a different order.

It has not been particularly nice, not being married. There have been lots of things in a girl's life that have been very disagreeable. Aunts and uncles have not shown a proper sense of their niece's claims, and have squeezed her too much into a corner in the world, in order to leave the more room for themselves. At any rate, now she will certainly occupy more space, and must be more highly thought of, than when she had no man to add to her importance by identifying it with his own. She will lose all these known disagreeables, and really there is no asserting but what they may have been harder to bear than any she has ground for expecting to meet
with in matrimony. Besides, husbands and wives don't always have to live together all their lives—one or other may die young, which is very interesting if sad, and which leaves the surviving party with an amount of experience, enabling a more certain choice to be made next time. Or one may only have to go to the south of France or Italy, and the other may remain in England—such things happen every day, and no one says a word about them. It is as proper as possible if you only keep to well-known places; and nobody can deny the unsoundness of your lungs except a doctor, who is paid to be discreet. No doubt if you were a poor woman going to marry a working man, it would matter much more if you quite liked your husband, because then you would be sure to have to live together in a very tiny place, and you would never be able to have a holiday and go and see your friends; you might be ever so
ill, yet unless you were ordered into a hospital you could not get away for change of air or change of company. You would be quite sure to have lots of children, and your husband would very likely come home drunk and beat you. Besides, you’d have to mend his clothes, and to perform all kinds of menial services for him; to wash for him, and to cook for him, and to be a sort of slave to him all the rest of your life. But for ladies and gentlemen in the selected ranks of society there are modifications of all these troublesome duties, 'providentially arranged, no doubt.'

Such were Aurea Chapel’s thoughts when she awoke at six o’clock on the morning of her wedding-day, if, indeed, a mere succession of childish ideas passing through an excitable and unreasoning brain, with as little attempt to arrest or examine them as if they had been motes in the sunshine, can be called thought. Still, after a fashion,
and this was her fashion, Aurea Chapel thought.

She had not by any means forgotten all the things which she had said to George Apers and which he had said to her on the preceding night; but her dress would not fit anybody else, and so she supposed she was going to wear it. Of course she was going to wear it. People always did keep engagements to parties and things of that kind when they had accepted them, and Aurea would not have dreamt of not wearing a lovely new ball-dress, for instance, on the occasion for which it had been ordered.

And yet all the while it was quite true that she really was not sure that she was not going to run away. It would be just the same as drowning herself, only with the sad certainty of waking up again, when existence seemed least desirable, to the piteous notoriety of being an object on the
bank, a thing that had flung itself away and been picked up again.

Aurea Chapel had been brought up, not in the regulated life of an English country home, but amidst the comparative freedom of her father's artistic circle in Italy. Her conclusions concerning English domesticity had all been arrived at during the last year; yet it was not among the chances of Continental freedom, but among the safeguards of the strictest English home, that Aurea had known a friend drop from her side into the river. She was thinking of that girl now—how she went on just the same, talked and laughed, ate and drank, and nobody had the very least notion that she had any such thought in her mind. Now and then she said a strange word, to be sure, as though she were tired of her portion in life, but they all thought she pretended. She was doing her worsted-work half an hour before, and she ate a
very good dinner; but when they expected her back for her tea she was missing, and she never came home any more. Yet she certainly meant to finish the worsted-work when she went out, only the river flowed unseen beneath all the lighter purposes of her life.

Just so Aurea fully meant to wear her bride's dress when she got up, but she was not at the same time quite sure that she should, because underneath lay another idea—unknown to everyone save to George Apers. An idea only, not a purpose, nor an intention. Natures which are strong enough to purpose and to intend are too strong for these sudden diversions of action. No; it was simply the consciousness of predisposition to take a certain course if any external circumstance gave the necessary impulse. Such an abandonment to casual direction implies great feebleness of character, whence it follows that the people who
do the most reckless things and take the most reckless courses are seldom the most courageous. They are not facing consequences which they have foreseen; they are merely acting upon impulse so shortsighted as to be blind.

'I wonder if it will come,' Aurea Chapel was saying to herself as she brushed up the golden masses of her hair, just as her unhappy friend might have said to herself, 'I wonder if I shall do it.' 'It,' was the something which was to determine whether or not she should really wear the orange-blossom wreath, which without stopping to finish her hair she now began to fasten among it, just to try the effect. Why, it was lovely, that contrast of the shining gold with the creamy whiteness of the flowers, and the pale greens of the buds and leaflets. The right greens, too—they had done just what she told them, and there was not the least dash of blue in the shade.
of any leaf. 'Blue-greens are so dreadful with my kind of hair,' she had explained. Certainly she was going to wear the wreath. What else could be done with it? It wouldn't be any good otherwise to have had it made on purpose. Wax stephanotis-blossoms crack so soon and spoil so quickly if they are kept in a box. There was nobody else who was going to be married, and it would be such a pity to waste it. Would George admire her when he saw her in it? Really the blue-greens would have been good enough for Leopold, but she positively couldn't feel as if she meant to allow Leopold to have anything to do with it, even if she were a bride.

Aurea was quite dressed, all but that white shimmering satin, when a tap came at her door. The clocks were striking seven from the stairs, from the stables, from the village church. She had not forgotten that the fast train from Exeter
to London would pass through at 7.40, and would this morning stop by signal to put down visitors who were coming for the wedding. She had not forgotten anything, but she did not know that it was going to make any difference to her.

The tap at the door, as she surmised, was the maid with tea and offers of service. The delicate wreath by this time had become so entwined in the meshes of Aurea's entangled hair that she was glad to sit down, with what patience she might, and suffer the woman to extricate it. Whilst the maid brushed and combed, and fussed and pulled, she began talking, after the fashion of her class.

It must be remembered that this house had been the home of Aurea's mother in her girlish days. The present owner, Aurea's uncle, was her mother's eldest brother. Accordingly, the maid, no appendage of Miss Chapel's, but of her aunt's, began to
talk of that other wedding which had taken place at the Hall twenty-two years ago, when Mr. Chapel was the bridegroom. Aurea could scarcely fancy that her artistically preoccupied father, the 'Signor Capella,' had ever had thoughts sufficiently at leisure to bestow upon her mother, even as a bride. She had always meant to have much better spirits and to be very much happier than her poor mother had been, during any of the years in which they had travelled together, and amused each other, whilst Mr. Chapel was pursuing his tastes in some distant home of art. But now, perhaps she should do even worse than her mother had done, because Leopold was not so likely to care about art, and was more likely to care about very different pleasures. Still 'it' did not come; and as the moments passed, tears began to fill Aurea's eyes. The maid saw them, but attributed them to awakened memories of the deceased Mrs.
Chapel, and pursued a theme which produced results, to her mind, in harmony with the occasion.

'Isn't it curious that I should be dressing you now, Miss Chapel, when my mother dressed yours on her wedding-day? Mother was living in this house then—it was the year after she was married to father, and he was gone to the Cape. Your mother borrowed a pin of my mother for luck, to fasten on her veil. You know they say you must always borrow something of somebody that they've worn on their wedding-day to wear at yours, else it will be dreadfully unlucky. Such common pins weren't come in then as they use now, and mother's was real silver-gilt. She's got that pin now at home, down in the village. She has kept it ever since; and she's often told me about it, when I've been a little girl come home from school. Well, yesterday do you know she brought it out, and
she said if she thought you'd not be offended she should like you to have it to wear. Mother's quite foolish about that pin. She's set her heart on my telling you of it; but really there were so many important things to be thought of, what with the dresses and one thing and another, that I never gave it a thought till I came to be putting your hair up this morning, and now it's too late. You see, mother had it first to fasten her own bonnet on when she was married, and then your mother had it; and it's so very lucky to borrow a thing that's been used by two brides before. I mean to wear it myself some fine morning.'

'Can't you go and fetch it now, Burrows?'

'Well, I really don't see as I can, Miss Chapel. You see, mother's cottage is nearly all the way to the station, and I shouldn't like people to meet me running off, as though I were out for the day, on
such a morning as this; besides, I've got all the bridesmaids to dress, and no end of things to see after, and I haven't touched a mite of breakfast yet. I never can eat when I'm hungry.'

'Then I shall run down to your mother's myself, and hear all about it. It's only a quarter past seven, and I've nothing to do till eleven, except to put on my dress and veil. Fetch me that old dark-brown dress and the garden-hat I wore last night. Oh, and Burrows, where's my purse? There's such a lot of money in it, I can't leave it lying about. I'd rather carry it in my pocket. Well, why not go myself? Am I to be kept a prisoner because I happen to be a bride? I'm not in the least likely to meet any of the company in the village before the train comes in; and if anyone in the house asks for me, you can say that I've gone to see your mother, because she dressed mine on her wedding-day.
You need not tell them anything about the pin, you know, and the luck, because it sounds silly; but I mean to get it all the same.'

Yes, she did mean to get it. Even now she had not decided that her escape had any other object. Probably she might even have gone into the cottage, but that when she reached it the doors and windows were closed. Indeed, the whole village seemed strangely somnolent; not a creature did she meet except the mowers, who were Irishmen and strangers. They stared at her unconcernedly as she passed, with no speculation in their gaze. The villagers were, in fact, making a Sunday morning of a day which was to partake so much of a sacred nature as to call them to the church at eleven, to provide them with an extra good dinner, and to fill the hours with idleness from noon till night. On Sunday morning what treat can compare with the
luxury of an hour or two in bed for those who enjoy it but seldom?

Aurea's aunt and uncle were thoroughly conservative; they liked to do everything in the accepted style, and they were bent on satisfying all the expectations which custom sanctions in connection with such events. The day was to be a grand one to the village, a day of general glee for the whole population. Already overnight the church had been adorned with flowers, and light-footed Aurea, as she passed along the village roadway that led by it, stepped beneath arches gay with coloured flags and green with leafy branches. The school-children were to strew flowers for the bride's forgetful feet to press. In the evening there was to be a dance upon the lawn, and every man, woman and child belonging to the place was to eat to the utmost, to drink to the full, and to enjoy life for one day if such enjoyment might be possible.
With all this in view, it was pleasant to begin the day by an extra hour in bed. It was half-past seven when Aurea stood in front of the Burrows' cottage. All the fuss and stir had been as yet confined to the Hall. It would never do for the folks to be roused by the bride's calling to borrow a pin. She hesitated for a moment and consulted her watch, as if it could give her advice. The train would be up in ten minutes; she was in the way for the station. She thought she would just go and see what people got in and out. She really had nothing better to do. But she did not mean to court recognition; on the contrary, she would keep well out of sight in the lane behind the station, where, protected by a sufficiently high paling, she might hope to see unseen. It seemed as if a magnet drew her to the spot.

As a rule, only market trains into Exeter or parliamentaries into Bristol stopped at
this unimportant station; but Aurea knew that the fast train, which might be stopped by signal, would be sure to call this morning to bring all the people and things which were expected from Exeter. They would be obliged to come thus early, as there was no other means of their arriving in time. She told herself she was only going to see what happened when the train got in. It was dull in the sleepy village, it was duller in the solitude of her own room at the Hall. She would see what people got in and out, and she would give herself the excitement of learning what it would be like if she had been going. There were only two officials at this little remote station; one gave out the tickets, another put in the people. She kept out of their sight behind the station in the lane, protected by the goods-shed, until the train arrived. She had only three or four minutes to wait. Then the train rushed
up, and to her surprise, from the third-class carriages streamed out quite a crowd of smartly-dressed women and girls on to the platform. As a matter of fact, they came from the neighbouring market-town, and Aurea recognised several shopkeepers and others that she knew, whose curiosity had brought them to see the wedding. First of all came the band, laden with unwieldy musical instruments; then the men with the marquee and the merry-go-round; sundry waiters and an assistant cook from the confectioner’s; a minor canon to add weight to the local vicar; several curates to support the bridesmaids; the butler’s niece and the housekeeper’s married daughter, together with a miscellaneous medley of small folk with whom Aurea had had dealings in the town.

All these people came laden with bunches of flowers, children, babies, and so forth, and in the confusion of their passage across
the platform none noticed Aurea. Rich and poor, all alike were equally intent upon their own disembarkation, uneasy about the lowering aspect of heavy clouds threatening rain, careful of their very best clothing, or concerned for the safety of their bags and bundles.

The minor canon was, indeed, a danger for a moment; he had a trick of seeking recognition of his own consequence in the eyes of others, and on looking round he observed a young lady quietly standing, without an umbrella, in spite of the big drops of rain which already were falling. Her back was towards him, and she was half--leaning against the unclosed gate of the truck-entrance; but just as his attention was centring itself upon her, a smiling curate came up, with a joke made up of the bride and the weather. The joke tickled the Churchman’s fancy; the curate offered to carry his bag; they went off
together, and he forgot the girl for the moment.

But, indeed, Aurea's safety lay in the prominence of her image in the minds of these people. They were all so sure that they knew where she was, that the testimony even of their own senses would scarcely have sufficed to convince them of the contrary. One and all felt such an unquestioning certainty that the bride was where all brides must be—at the mysterious heart and centre of things in the sanctity of her own chamber—that they would as soon have thought of watching for some sudden reversal of nature's laws, of finding orange-blossoms sprouting from the telegraph-poles, or champagne pouring from the clouds in place of the sudden heavy shower of rain which swept them hastily from the platform.

That instant the impulse came to Aurea! The door of the first-class compartment
forsaken by the canon stood wide open before her. The ticket-collector was occupied with the rush of the eager women at the other end of the platform; the porter was busy with the baskets and bundles. Opportunity, that slave of inclination, favoured Aurea; and just as the train was on the point of departure, through the truck doorway, across the platform, and into the empty carriage, Aurea rushed; then flung the door to, pulled down the blind, and sat for a second in breathless anticipation. The ticket-collector turned his key in the lock, remembering that some one had left the compartment, but did not open the door; blew his whistle, and they were off. Off! and so far as Aurea knew, she was unrecognised by any of the people who had been upon the platform. Not, indeed, that she greatly cared, now that she was once off, whether it were so or not. She was going away, not for
concealment of person, but for announcement of purpose.

She had no ticket. She had not thought of taking one, partly because the man in the office would have known her, more because she had not at the time decided that she was going. The train would not stop for nearly an hour. Pursuit would be impossible until late in the evening, by which time she would be in Slumsby. This was all that she cared for.

Doubtless Aurea Chapel would have been unable to set off in this fashion if the porter and the ticket-collector at this unimportant station had more perfectly interpreted their duties, as dictated by the rules of the Company. But a 'bye-law' is to a porter what the bull's-eye of the target is to the inexpert marksman, a thing which it is meritorious to aim at, but not discreditable never to hit. The complete duty of any such official may indeed be
taken as non-existent, save in print; custom assigns its actual limits by narrower data furnished by precedent. Circumstances never can exhaust possibilities in any given place, and yet until they do so, duties must remain imperfectly defined.

The instant that the train had started, Aurea rushed to the window, with an impulse to return, stronger than that which had driven her away. She would not have cared a bit if anyone had recognised her now. She would not have minded being taken back if it could have been accepted quite as the natural thing that a young lady should run away upon her wedding-day, and if nothing further need ever have been said about the matter; but that being clearly out of the question, no sooner did she realize that the decisive step was irretrievably taken, that retreat was impossible, and that fate had done it, than
she flung herself upon the floor of the carriage in a perfect agony of weeping.

Now that she had by her own action delivered herself from Leopold, he did not appear half so odious to her as he had done an hour before. She even began to be rather sorry for him, because of his prospective disappointment; but much in the same way in which she was sorry for the villagers who had put up all those beautiful arches with green boughs and flowers, which now would never be wanted. She had passed underneath them as she came through the village, but only as runaway Aurea Chapel, not as a smiling bride. She had scarcely taken any notice of the kind intention then, but it seemed very touching to her now. That was because she now felt her own position altogether to be the most touching thing on earth, and the most forsaken. Was there a bride anywhere else all over Europe who was lying on the
floor of a railway carriage crying all alone, and that just at the time when she might have been dressing?

But tears, the course of which can be arrested by the utilitarian consideration that they are producing no effect on anybody, cannot have their source in any very deep fountain. And such were poor childish Aurea's. She picked herself up presently, aware that the strip of carpet was dirty, and sensible that tears falling like dewdrops on its faded flowers were wasted when there was nobody there to pity. 'Crying wasn't any good'—that was how she phrased it; escaping by a cheap philosophy from the difficult lesson of painful experience.

The depths of emotion in some hearts, like fountains welling up from perennial sources in the clustering hills, are eloquent of nature: 'in their wind-stirred waters moves the sound of life from all its sources, far or near;' and in our sympathy and love
there is a silence which is the very worship of the soul. Others, by the limitation of their drought or their repletion, do but suggest those sparkling basins, brooded over by twin doves, which depend upon the agent at the waterworks for turning on the main. Yet Aurea's eyes were wells of feeling, and her hair made a halo for her grief like the aureole of a martyred saint.

If George Apers had been there she certainly would have cried a great deal more. As it was, by the time she had got to Bristol she had grown quite composed, and was sitting up upon the seat like any other travelled young lady. There she was able to account for her lack of a ticket by the explanation that she had very nearly lost her train.

Getting into London a quarter of an hour late, missing the next train to Cutthorpe, and having three hours to wait at the Great Eastern Terminus, did not trouble Aurea
much. She was not afraid of pursuit. She knew that the scanty train service down at Glen Combe would not allow of her being overtaken. She spent the time in writing brief letters to her aunt and to Leopold, and in sending back the diamond ring. She did not tell them where she was going, because, until she had really done a thing, Aurea never could feel quite sure that she should do it at all: it would be time enough to let them know her destination when she reached it. Then she bought a novel, and tried her best to read it; but how fix her thoughts upon the experiences of an imaginary heroine when she herself was writing a truer novel with the lines of her own life? Novel-reading is all very well for the middle-aged, for whom the wine of life has lost its flavour by being kept too long in bottle; or for the immature, for whom as yet it has been too freely watered down; but for the eager lips which are
draining the brimming cup when its flavour is fullest, any other draught becomes insipid. To turn from her own unwritten biography to the story of the girl in the railway novel, was to Aurea like exchanging a sparkling glass of good champagne for a tumblerful of Mrs. Burrows's gooseberry mixture.

She tried to keep her thoughts fixed upon herself. She did not care to let them wander. It was not nice to fancy what was going on far off down in her Devonshire home. It was not pleasant to picture the consternation at Glen Combe; the angry disgust of her uncle and aunt; the sharp sayings of their neighbour, Mrs. Apers; the excitement among all the invited guests; the suppressed jokes of the juvenile contingent. It was not nice to think that those pretty rustic arches would all be wasted, like the sentiments they were meant to express. It was not nice to think that the bandsmen, the
shopkeepers, and the tradespeople's assistants would freely comment on her conduct from their own peculiar point of view; that the bridesmaids, suffering from a sense of personal injury, would no doubt despise her utterly. But Aurea did not care about the bridesmaids. Her own estimate of life and conduct having been enlarged by the steps which had so nearly made her wife and matron, she could not go back and look at things from the point of view of 'those silly girls,' to whose judgment and opinions she now awarded the contempt we so often bestow upon sentiments which were our own till yesterday.

But most unpleasant of all was it to guess for an instant at the feelings of indignation which must be raging in the bosom of the man she had punished, however justly. Aurea did not pity Leopold now, because she felt so sure, even from her partial knowledge of his character, that
all misery at her loss would be swallowed up for him in fury at the personal insult. Scorn and contempt would be the recompense he would mete out to her. He would know what she had done it for. He could not help knowing, whatever he might say; and with his peculiar moral code he would despise her. Aurea knew that he would despise her for a weakly feminine estimate of the relative duties of their situation.

In those kitten-like natures which have neither the seriousness nor the capacity to adopt for themselves some fixed moral ideal by which to measure their actions, the tide of self-esteem perpetually ebbs and flows under the influence of somebody else's judgment. Having glanced at her conduct from Leopold's point of view, Aurea felt so very uncomfortable that, to quiet her conscience, she immediately fell back upon George Apers's more favourable estimate.
There at least was one man who would say that she had acted rightly. The trembling need of human sympathy in this agitated bosom was thus laid to rest for the moment.

In the train, however, on her way down to Slumsby, she began to grow uneasy again; this time about her reception by George Apers's sister. It might be all very well to say that Mrs. Smith would shelter her; no doubt she would take her in, because she was a young lady and was well connected. No doubt she would give her her dinner and a bed; but that was not the sort of protection which Aurea greatly cared for. She had travelled too much to be shy of hotels, and money would buy such attentions as those. If that was all she needed, Aurea felt that she might just as well have stayed in London. Would Mrs. Smith give her the further protection that her shivering soul most
needed? Would she shield her from the wrath of her aunt and uncle? Would she protect her from Leopold's father and mother? Would she save her from a hateful interview with Leopold himself? Would she take Aurea's part with everyone, and help her out at any personal trouble or annoyance? Would Mrs. Smith hide her safely in some sheltered corner from the recoil of all the expectations she had raised? Would she tell her quite pleasantly what she should do next?

Aurea thought that she knew quite well just exactly what she should like to do. She should like George Apers to come home and take care of her whilst she stayed in Slumsby. Whilst Mrs. Smith had all the disagreeable interviews, saw all the angry people, heard all the nasty things that would be said, and gave a
clever woman's contradiction to them all: whilst Mrs. Smith published far and near that Aurea was quite right, that she had done a very brave and noble action on the day she ran away, Aurea would be sitting in the Vicarage garden with George Apers at her feet, tasting the full happiness which Mrs. Smith would soon convince them all that she had earned.

It cannot, however, be said that when Jessie had managed all this, Aurea's day-dreams assigned her any prominent place in her world; on the contrary, Mrs. Smith's happiness and Aurea's were simultaneously to be secured by the opportune reappearance of the enigmatical husband of the former. With tears in her eyes, Mrs. Smith was to entreat Aurea, by taking her place in the Vicarage, to set her free to follow her husband to the Antipodes for the rest of her days. George Apers was to add
his more potent persuasions to his sister's tears, and in recognition of what Mrs. Smith had done for her, Aurea was to consent, with becoming reluctance, to replace her in her brother's affections.
CHAPTER IV.

AN OLD MARKET TOWN.

The market-town of Cutthorpe was the nearest station for Slumsby; from thence it was an easy two-mile walk through the town, by the fields and Dripping Ferry; but a mile farther round to go all the way by the high-road.

The clocks were chiming a quarter to six, when Aurea Chapel was put down on the platform. She and a single commercial traveller were the only passengers who arrived. The railway-station was some
little distance out of the town; from thence you walked or drove in the one-horse omnibus, as fancy took you, up a hill reckoned steep in those parts, until the dusty grass and struggling hedges on both sides of the road gave place to cheap villas with trim garden-patches in front, where on two hundred pounds a year middle-class comfort could be satisfactorily maintained. Turning again, you came upon the Union, standing removed from the road in its own grounds, a seclusion equally reserved for aristocratic wealth or pauper indigence. Sir Crowsby Weyland's family, not caring to play neighbour to anyone, isolated itself in the Manor House by the Ferry; and nobody liking to rub shoulders with the parish fustian, the paupers' abode was as secluded as the gentleman's.

Aurea, preferring her own society to that of the other individual whose professional boxes were loading the omnibus,
stepped out briskly. She had asked her way at the station, and soon stood in front of the iron gates of the Union, through the bars of which might be seen the tiny cottages built for the old married couples, surrounding the formal square of grass. An old pauper stood as guardian of the gate, blinking at the level rays of the evening sun falling upon the brass bell-handle, which he was polishing with a piece of rag. At his feet on the paving-stone lay an ancient dog of a mongrel breed—half drover's dog, half lurcher.

The dog's coat looked almost as much an accidental investiture as did his master's; and further, it was very ragged and matted with dirt. His nose, browned with years, was buried in his paws. He was not asleep, but his whole attitude expressed an utter dejection and a want of purpose in life more absolute than the man's.
‘Union dog’ was written all over his mangey covering, and the opprobrium of the name had rendered the muscles of his tail flaccid, had strangled the bark in his throat, and had changed his growl into the most pathetic canine imitation of a groan. Fancy being the dog of a house where you’re forced, on pain of instant dismissal, to admit the filthiest tramp and the most disreputable casual at all hours of the day without remonstrance; and this without any variety, for no one ever took the dog out for a walk! Who goes for walks in workhouse boots, unless it is to walk off with them? and this dog had not even the spirit to discharge himself. His independence and self-respect were fatally broken.

The man’s history and the dog’s were very similar; but the man had ceased to suffer, and the dog had not.

Step by step both had descended, owing
to ill-breeding, bad habits, and questionable company, until now, time having frozen the sources of vice in each, both alike were equally tolerated, for the semblance of protection they gave to the gate. But the dog's fate was worse than the man's; the man still had an object of interest left in the friction of that solitary knob. If any visitor attempted to pull it, he immediately hurried up to forestall the intention; but he was not afraid of Aurea, because he had his treasure safely enveloped in his own pocket-handkerchief.

The brilliancy of that brass knob, which outshone every other knob in Cutthorpe, cheered the evening of the human life; but the dog felt himself as useless to the world as the world was to him. The man's intellect was weakened, but he still had a theory of the universe left, although it was all comprised in a brass bell-handle; but the dog's spirit was broken.
Aurea Chapel was fond of dogs, and she gave this one a kind word, as she stopped to ask his master which was the nearest road to Slumsby; but neither man nor dog appeared to hear. She repeated the question, when the decrepit porter jerked his thumb over his shoulder, by the action referring her to an old woman in the workhouse dress who was hastening back to the house as fast as rheumatic bones would carry her.

'The way to Slumsby? Why, it's easy enough there; it's another matter to get back when you're turned of eighty-one, and must say yer prayers on gruel before you go to bed on a bag o' chaff. Look 'ere—come and stand alongside o' me; follow my finger, by the church o' which you see the spire, through the market-place, and along the street. As you come by the factory-gates you turn and keep right alongside the left-hand lane till you see
a breadth o' water, running even with a middle-sized fence—that's "Diggory's Dyke." Then you'll see a house with farm-buildings and peat-stacks, standing a way off across the fields—that's Sodden Farm. "Sodom," my poor old man always named it, out of the Book, for "a city of the plain" it is, and its doom may well be the same. Keep right on through the village, and there you are.'

Much of all this was unintelligible to Aurea; but she did not turn away. Since she had been living down in Devonshire she had grown used to the loquacity of simple country people. Moreover, there was a brightness in this old woman's eye, a healthful ruddiness in her complexion, and, in spite of her fourscore years, an alacrity and force in her speech and gesture which made it pleasant to hear her talk. Aurea felt very lonely also, and unhappy, and speech with anyone was some comfort.
'Whereabouts in Slumsby shall I find the Vicarage? I want to see Mrs. Smith, the Vicar's sister.'

'Oh, you're going to the Vicarage, are you? As lady's-maid, maybe. You are a stranger in these parts, then? Where's your box? On the 'bus, I reckon. You should ha' gone with it. What's the use o' walking when you can be paid to ride? Well, would you be so kind as to give a message to Mrs. Smith for me? Says you: "Ma'am, I met Mrs. Daily in the road—Grandmother Daily you may say, and welcome—and she's wishful for you to know as her daughter-in-law, her son James's wife, has got a girl this morning."'

'Yes, I'll tell her. Good-afternoon,' said Aurea indifferently.

'But, miss, that's the pudding without the plums; stop a minute, if you'd be so good. Mrs. Smith takes a deal of interest in Adam—that's my biggest grandson, you
know—and if you’d please to let her know as his father shut Adam out o’ doors last night, and turned him over to the tile-yard at six o’clock this morning; and I saw the poor lad in his dinner-hour all torn and bruised, leaning against the railings o’ the church as if he hadn’t a friend in life. They’ve served the poor lad shameful among ’em. They’re the roughest lot of men and boys in there as could be found in the kingdom. You say this to Mrs. Smith: “Ma’am, they’ll be the death o’ the poor fellow, unless he’s taken out of that—Grandmother Daily says so, and she ought to know; and she prays you on her bended knees to save him!”

The old woman’s eager appeal scarcely diverted Aurea’s thoughts for a moment from the anxious uncertainties of her own trying position. She couldn’t care about the fate of this unknown boy; but the habit of courteous response covered her real impatience.
‘Why didn’t you tell his father?’ she asked.

‘My dear young lady, come you get to my time o’ day, with the father o’ thirteen to your son, you’ll happen maybe find, as I did, that by the bed of birth or by the bed of death you may speak till you’re shamed o’ the sound o’ your own voice, but a man’s will ’ill speak louder. It’s my son’s will as Adam should go in the tile-yard, and so it was forced to be; but Adam’s beginning too late. There’s eighty men and lads down in that yard, and every one o’ them’ll be bound to have the reason out of him why he didn’t come before; and when he’s given ’em that, they’ll follow it up by “Why’s he come now?” There’s been a grudge between Cutthorpe and Slumsby lads this many a year; they’ll never take kindly down there to one that’s been baked in another kiln. Adam’ll take his own part with the best of his age, but
eighty to one is just murder. I shan't close my eyes o' nights for fear about the lad; and him a nice well-grown fellow, with legs and arms well drawed out; and none o' your slouching hod-bearing shoulders, but holds hisself like a soldier; and his eyes is as blue as if they were a babby's, and they looks you as straight in the face. Adam's a lad as 'ud be a consolation to any mother, be she low or lady; and as nice a head o' hair as your own, only neater-like, and a bit more natural in colour. Mrs. Smith, she feels with me on Adam as he's the pick o' the Daily lot; and I do beg and implore you, my dear young lady, give her a word o' warning before that devil's gang down there have cowed his spirit and broken his heart, and maybe sent him home to his mother bleeding and bruised on a shutter. For my coffin the wood's dry; but for his, it ought to be green.'
'It would be much better for you to come with me yourself to the lady. I must be going on now, and you might show me the way.'

'Ah! my dear, you're young and free. Once I was the same; now I'm baffled and driven as I would not be by others. It may be for the best; they served St. Peter so. They ring us all in at six o'clock. There's the bell; it's swinging now for supper. They send us all to bed at seven, as if we were the fowls, to lie blinking in the broad daylight for the sun in our eyes, and not for sleep. It's to save feeding us over again. Yes! I'm coming. Good-night. You won't forget?'

'Young women with that dazzling shade o' hair mostly ha' memories no better nor cullenders,' she sighed to herself as she turned in; and Aurea walked on, naturally thinking more of the directions for her road than of the peculiarities of this old
woman, who evidently regarded a chance encounter with a stranger as an opportunity specially arranged for the ventilation of her own family grievances. The type was not uncommon.

Neither had Aurea eyes to perceive the strange picturesqueness of the main street of Cutthorpe. It could not matter to her just now that the houses and shops straggled irregularly on either side of a roadway so broad that, as the older inhabitants boasted, eight coaches could drive abreast down the centre of the town, although to enter or to leave it at either end each must go singly; for the church at the one end and the factory at the other divided the broad street into two narrow ones. At the Weyland Arms, as many of the townspeople could tell—for Cutthorpe had only had a railway station for twenty years—it was fine to see the magnificent circles which the width of
street tempted the coachmen to make before wheeling round at the inn door. To take as wide a circuit as possible, and yet to pull up with the fore-hoofs of the leaders in a line with the central point of union of the semicircular flight of stone steps leading up to the inn-door—this was a feat without which no coachman would have been held to have earned his liquor. But all that was changed now.

As Aurea passed the Weyland Arms the solitary 'bus was setting down its commercial passenger, and both driver and ostler stared curiously at the girlish figure arriving by the train they had met, yet requiring no assistance from them, bringing no box for them to carry, and not obviously bound for any shopkeeper's or gentleman's house in the place.

On one side of the street, after crossing the market-place, the pavement was roofed over by colonnades projecting from the
lower stories of the houses; these served to shelter at once the shopkeepers' wares and their customers from sun and rain, and the cover was gladly welcomed by Aurea. The houses themselves were irregular and old-fashioned, various in height, in design, and in date, but all more or less telling of bygone years. Some had windows with peaked gables and leaded frameworks; most had sloping roofs tiled in dull red-brick octagonals, such as were baked in the local furnaces two hundred years before. These furnished nesting-places for the swifts which careered in dizzy circles, keeping up for endless generations a cheerful clamour over the heads of the people, as they were born and married and died in the solid houses beneath. And the broken lines of human life insensibly seemed drawn out into fuller and completer lengths when spun beneath the exuberant life which showed above them no pauses
for change or for renewing. There is this advantage in living in an old place over a new one: the new suggests the perpetual change and shift of circumstances; the torn and ravelled threads of life float in view of all comers; men and women become lodgers rather than inhabitants, live their scrap of time out beneath the new slates, and go, few know why nor whither. But in these old country towns, through which the stream of life flows with the tranquil current of a river, changes come indeed, but come insensibly, with no appearance of disruption, no shock to the sense of continuity. The course of human existence is pursued below; the swifts whirl and cry above. Curious eyes, no doubt, prying into the mysteries of the kingdom on the roofs, might detect changes in the individuals there, just as the parents have yielded their places to the children in the street. So obvious a fact needs no stating.
But to a wider survey the life is the same above and below, just as the river is the same whatever drops flow into or are discharged from it. Men and women, children and birds, all seem to float on together upon the mighty current, which may fall, indeed, over weirs, and yet not break.

There was no plate-glass in Cutthorpe. The size of the panes in the shop-fronts differed, but was what it always had been. You painted the outside of your shop once in three years if you lived in Cutthorpe; but never with paint of staring colours, because it would have been held a vulgar way of trying to prove your goods superior to your neighbour's, when red and blue paint were not in themselves dearer than dull grey or yellow. The doctor was the only man who had refaced his house in modern style; but having no goods inside to speak for themselves, it was universally felt he might be pardoned for taking this
mode of advertising, inferentially, the freshness of his opinions. His house was nearly the last in the street, and when Aurea had passed it she came to the factory.

The factory was one for working in porcelain, for making encaustic tiles, tesselated pavements and so forth; the clays being obtained from the valuable beds which extended for miles around Cutthorpe, and which had been famous for centuries. In the chalky district surrounding, admixtures of clay were many and various; fossil remains were frequently found, and the curiosity of the geologist and the cupidity of the worker were equally excited by striated stones picked out of the 'creachy clay' or boulder, by fragments of wood or impressions of leaves from forests anciently buried, by fresh-water shells and other toys which Mother Earth hides for her children.

Inside the factory beautiful slabs and inlaid pottery were turned out by the aid of
powerful engines and the hands of clever workmen; but a few hundred yards farther on, in the tile-yard, the roughest work was still done upon the wet clay as it was freshly dug from the beds. Here it was still moulded by hand as in primitive times, or at best with the aid of the simplest machinery. It was here that the lads of the district served their apprenticeship to the roughest work, and it was only after their powers had been severely tested that they ever found themselves promoted to the skilled labour of the factory. Many never rose from their laborious employment of digging and weathering clay, of ripening and slinging it, and kneading it by hand, to the very different and far more delicate operations which went on in the factory. Yet, for a lad who hoped to rise, there was endless scope for ambition in this Lincolnshire tile-yard; beginning as Adam Daily that morning had begun, with the roughest
and most elementary treatment of mere lumps of clay, which stuck to his hands and skinned his fingers, they might gradually advance by all the successive stages of a steep incline until their day's work became at once dainty, skilled, and highly artistic, in the finishing-rooms where porcelains, beautiful as pictures, and lovely as works of art, went out to the London houses which had supplied the designs.

But such ambition had never fired Adam's soul. His family were a family of agriculturists. His passion was for the land. The commercial instinct had never been planted in him, his own father had never risen above the handling of rough red tiles, and had been but a few years in the factory. That flowers and sunsets were beautiful, that they seemed to say something to him which no human voice had ever said, Adam knew well; that when he could lie face downwards in the grass gaining new insight
into the mysterious harmonies of colour by the altered lines of vision, whilst the shadows played hide-and-seek with each other and the wind kissed his cheek, he forgot that he was often hungry and always of no particular consequence—that Adam had learnt. But that Trade, laying a grimy, soil-stained finger in the sweet fair palm of Art, might equally be guided by that dainty handmaiden into the kingdom where he worshipped untaught—that was for Adam an open secret unguessed at, hidden as yet. That all ways might lead into the same glorious temple, that all works might blend with the same inner worship of the soul, how indeed should Adam know, who as yet knew so little, had as yet thought so little, of his own life or the lives of others?

The story which he had heard of noble endurance and of courageous self-sacrifice had seemed to Adam part of the beautiful
things of the material world; the very words which the lady had spoken rang in his ears with the song of the birds in the school-house garden and with the chime of the bells from the church belfry. History, poetry, and romance were all embodied for him in the story of Diggory Daily; but, as beautiful ideas, might have remained for ever enclosed in his own mind, instead of springing aloft as bright-winged ideals compelling him to follow, without the painful experiences of his first day in the tile-yard. In the aching pulses of his own heart, amidst brutal jests and well-aimed blows, Adam felt the death-pangs of his martyred kinsman more keenly than his imagination could ever have taught him to realize them. Thus pain furnished the motive-force of aspiration.

All the morning he had been employed in slinging clay—that is, in cutting it into slices with a string, in order that the stones,
of which it is here especially full, may fall out before it is passed on to the moulder; but this operation is by no means so easy a one as it sounds. The stones are deeply embedded in the masses of damp, half-kneaded clay, the string often fails to catch them, and they have to be probed for with careful fingers. On the other hand, the string is sure to cut through the flesh of any untrained manipulator during his first painful hour. Then with lacerated hands, with fingers bleeding and nails raw to the quick, the stones must be felt for and dug out of the close-compacted, unyielding lumps.

Hands early accustomed to this painful usage soon harden and adapt themselves to their task; for this purpose Adam should have been put to it sooner. But he could bear pain as well as another, and that a man should show the scars of work or war or thought is matter for no maudlin
sympathy. Victories won in the kingdom of mind or of matter bend the back of the student or of the peasant. The bodily injuries of the mechanic, no less than the prouder wounds of the soldier, bear equal testimony to the fact that the man's body has been his slave and not his master. Mere pain, as such, is too small a thing for pity: rather let a man suffer if by such a baptism he may escape from the thraldom of 'miserable aims which end in self;' rather let him grow old with suffering endured or maimed with services performed, than by excluding himself from the common risks or dangerous chances of life, treasure in a silken skin the making of a selfish fop, or guard in a rounded circumference the material of a sensual citizen.

Adam was no coward nor shirker. He had shrunk from the tile-yard; but once he was there, he would do his best. Hurtful things must be undertaken, laborious tasks
must be accomplished; and why not by him as well as by another? There is this advantage in being brought up to feel yourself of no particular consequence, that if in the inevitable conscription of life you find yourself to have drawn a bad number, you seek to purchase no substitute—find it difficult, indeed, to conceive that exemption marches with self-respect, or decent regard to the common weal.

Circumstances may crush the framework of us all, men and fish may be over-matched; but a man as well as a stickleback may measure himself against an obstacle, and to the man at least it is given to prefer the death of the victor to the existence of the deserter. Adam had the making of such a hero in him; but he was no more free than many a wiser man from the delusion that the exercise of choice, as to the direction of duty, may still leave scope for its discipline.
THE DAILYs OF SODDEN FEN.

He did not shrink from the chances of cold, fatigue, hunger, and labour; but then he would endure all these things outside the limits of the tile-yard. He would accept them all—yes, certainly—but under well-known conditions; with the scent of green fields in his nostrils, with the strife of rushes and the ripple of waters in his ears, with the soft loveliness of Fen landscape in his eyes, with the turf beneath his feet, and solitude around him. His limbs might ache—oh yes—but it must be with digging in the loamy earth; his back might break, but it must be with carrying loads of peat or thatch; his fingers might bleed, but it must be with thorns, the thorns of the roses he had budded, not with stones bedded in damp masses of adhesive clay. Love lightens labour, and for Adam hitherto love and duty had gone hand in hand. Now he must assign to them a wider signification. Hitherto Duty had shown herself to him in
a form easy to accept; now he must cleave to her inner loveliness hidden beneath repulsive conditions.

The lesson found him ready. He stood to his task bravely. Bullied and abused, a mark for brutal jests and for oaths of the coarsest, he strove with the sodden masses of clay; did his best with them and handed them on, over and over again to have them rejected, wilfully, unnecessarily, and cruelly flung back at him, simply to get him into trouble with the foreman, simply because he was Slumsby-bred, and because the decent honesty of his speech and manners offended the depraved taste of this savage democracy. He had no chance of getting on with his work, no prospect of really improving, of acquiring greater smoothness and dexterity of manipulation. Every obstacle that malicious ingenuity could devise was put in his way, every discouragement given him; on every side big boys and lads, with
less fellow-feeling than brutes, tormented and hindered the new comer.

Before he had entered the tile-yard Adam's dawning worship of the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice, as illustrated by the conduct of his ancestor, had warred with the more Jewish morality of his practice. Not to hit a fellow again when he hit him, might be to be a Christian, but certainly was to be a coward. What, then, was the explanation of Diggory's conduct? And how far would Adam be justified in letting it govern his own? Action, however, as in most other cases, summarily dealt with his doubts.

All the morning Adam had carefully mastered himself; overt acts of injustice he had let pass unheeded; mean persecuting tricks he had seemed not to feel; cruel pastimes which made him their victim he had not resented—such an initiation he knew every stranger must undergo who
AN OLD MARKET TOWN.

came fresh to the tile-yard. At mid-day he escaped for an hour, but he was too troubled and heart-sick to eat. He wandered off alone, thankful to be quit of his brutal companions. His feet, following his thoughts, led him to the entrance of Cutthorpe Church. The heavy wooden doors were flung back, as it was summer; but through the inner grating his eyes rested with a sense of repose upon the dim outlines of the chancel. It was there that his grandmother passed him, and was shocked by his altered appearance, as she went on her way to visit his mother; but Adam, absorbed in his own reflections, did not even see her go by. His aching head was pressed against the iron bars, his weary figure almost clinging to the railings for support. Once again, and this time more vividly than before, the tragedy of two hundred years ago was being reacted before him. Once more the church was
filled with people—once more the victim stood upon the pavement—once more the brutal crowd pressed round, and one man, powerless against numbers, fell; only this time, instead of a rebel in armour, the shouts of the furious Fen-men, and the clashing of the horse's hoofs, Adam saw the forms and faces of the brick-makers, and shuddered at the oaths which mingled with the groanings of the pug-mill.

He returned to the yard in the afternoon spiritless and dejected, not caring to strive any longer, in a state of physical depression from fatigue and hunger, out of which he could be roused only by fresh stimulus; he had not long to wait for it. He was stooping in a slow mechanical fashion to pick up a lump of clay which had just been flung back at him by the moulder with a curse, when suddenly the fellow at the mill aimed a huge unshapely mass of boulder full at his head. It struck him,
and he fell, stunned for the moment, cutting his face severely upon the heap of sharp stones. His tormentors gathered round, half in curiosity to see the result, half in mischief to bully him now he was down. For a second after he rose to his feet, Adam staggered, uncertain where he was; or what had happened; the next he had surprised them all by hitting out vigorously to right and to left, in a defence as quick and instinctive as it was useless. On they came by the dozen, assaulting him in a bullying back-handed manner, and still Adam fought recklessly, beating off his assailants as though they had been a swarm of wasps.

Down at last, overpowered by numbers, streaming with blood, his clothing torn, Adam lay conquered but triumphant. Protected by an unprincipled foreman, who interfered only in time to save his own character in the event of possible conse-
quences, Adam was left under cover of one of the sheds to come to himself if he could. Then he again remembered his chosen hero. For a short time he had nothing to do but to think. 'Why did not Diggory also fight? It was no good to think about numbers—eighty to one or eight hundred—when the impulse of self-defence is strong it is also blind; it was no use saying it was because he was in a church—good places do not glorify mean deeds. What then? Why, that the man's heart was broken in that he suffered at the hands of his friends, of those who had been to him as his own flesh and blood, for whom he had already given more than bodily life, the services of his mind, the purposes of his soul. But these ill-conditioned men and lads were not Adam's friends, and his sturdy heart was not broken; and if he hit them back bravely they might serve Robert and Noah better if ever they came
to this evil pass. They might even learn to respect the name of a Daily, and to think twice before they stirred up the pluck of 'a Slumsby slodger.'

Thus Adam rose to a larger comprehension of sacrifice as expressed by the spirit, rather than followed in the letter; and with the same courage in his heart which had taught his ancestor to die, rose up to live, to gather himself together with fresh spirit for renewed efforts, for further contempt of pain, for steadier efforts of endurance, until the trying day was done and the big bell rang, between six and seven in the evening, to release the factory-hands from their work.
CHAPTER V.

A FURTHER CATASTROPHE.

THERE were few stragglers about the town as Aurea passed through it on the quiet summer evening. Such as there were glanced at her and passed on; some just noticed the colour of her hair, but decided nothing about her, since golden hair leads to no definite conclusions, and can no more be relied upon as a sample of hidden value than can those bright streaks in foreign streams which often serve to gild a prospectus and to
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delude the seekers after gold into vainly digging for the precious ore.

A big waggon-load of rye-grass was being driven on to the town weighing-stand in front of the factory-gates; the horses, objecting to the grating of the wheels on the iron tables, were plunging violently. Not understanding the proceeding, they might at least, one would think, have fallen back upon the time-honoured consideration that the thing was done because 'it always had been;' a form of reasoning which, being a daily comfort to hundreds of human beings, might surely have sufficed to allay the anxieties of a couple of cart-horses.

Aurea stood and watched them for a moment; not because she was at all interested in the progress of agriculture as represented by the weight of rye-grass carried from the lands of Sodden Farm,
and recorded by that ancient index, the town weighing-tables; not because she cared to watch the heavy awkward plunges of the horses and the equally awkward movements of Mr. Smith's waggoners, but because of the flocks of pigeons which strutted round, always ready to pick up the grains perpetually dropped in this quarter from waggon-loads of corn, and from horses' nose-bags. Aurea adored doves and doted upon pigeons. At her aunt's house down in Devonshire she not infrequently walked about with two mild-eyed creatures of the sort nestling against her hair. They were soft and warm to caress, their colouring made a pleasing contrast to her own, and admiration bestowed upon their silver plumage was apt to glance at her shining charms.

These common pigeons therefore carried her thoughts back to the home which she had so lately left. What an odd thought it
was that here she was standing all alone in Cutthorpe, where she was not of the slightest consequence to anyone, where nobody even knew her name; and all the while three hundred miles away it was her wedding-day, and the flowers on all those arches could not have faded yet! There her name was in every mouth, her disappearance the one absorbing topic of debate. Here she knew not a creature, and it was very dull; there she knew everybody, and it was very dreadful. Had they sent the school-children home, she wondered; and what were her uncle and aunt saying? Had their neighbour, Mrs. Apers, been very spiteful about her; and if so, had George taken her part? Had he told them where she was gone, or did he keep his own counsel?

In any case, what was to become of her now? Aurea felt that she could not live long in this country town, watching the pigeons and listening to the swifts. Such
an existence would soon become intolerable. In her partial judgment Cutthorpe was a sleepy place. She did not know, and would not have cared to learn, that the apparent monotony of life there was due, not to the stagnation, but to the strength and regularity of the tide of commercial interest which set that way. The inhabitants of Cutthorpe were in the full stream of steady old-fashioned prosperity. It was all very well for outsiders, who found themselves floating like corks on occasional eddies, to lob up and down and look active; these solid tradesmen and farmers were borne along above eddies and currents full in mid channel, with an onward motion so regular that it might look like being becalmed until tested by methods of comparison which proved it to be advance of the strongest and surest kind. From the back parlour of his shop, as from the helm of a vessel, every man of these comfortable
traders directed the conduct of his ship; slept a good deal, but with one eye open, and never, as the French have it, lay upon both ears at once; appeared to make no further effort than to order his subordinates to set the sails to catch the breeze, and yet the progress of the most frantic sculler could not compare with his.

The factory was greatly to bless for this satisfactory state of things, and therefore, to dig for deeper reasons, the local disposition of the earth's surface which provided the inhabitants with the right kind of subsoil. But although they always taught their children to say grace before the gift of slaughtered sheep, yet thanks were never known to be given for the clay from any nursery-table in Cutthorpe. So inconsistent are the customs about which we never think at all, lest we should be making too free with intelligence. Thought, like a well-broken horse, wore blinkers in Cut
Thorpe, and expression followed after, muzzled like an unsafe dog; these restraints having, by inherited usage, come to be regarded as inseparable insignia of respectability.

Aurea herself, standing with her back to the factory-gates, formed no exception to the general rule by which mental effort of any unusual kind was declined in Cutthorpe, upon the ground that it was 'no good thinking.' A facile excuse for irrelevant action made up in her case three parts of indisposition and one part of incapacity. Into all the intricacies of her situation Aurea did not attempt to penetrate. She was not capable of taking a wide survey of either past action or present consequence, but she was just calculating that the train which was to have carried her to London as a bride with her husband beside her was getting into the Great Western Station, when suddenly all collected thought was
driven from her mind by an instantaneous flinging back of the great gates behind her, accompanied by the deafening clangour of a monstrous bell pealing somewhere up above her head. In the huge brick barracks they called the Factory the agitation of the big bell was immense. An alarm of fire or war could not have been more startling. The pigeons whirled up in the air. Aurea was less fortunate. In an instant she was swept on one side, hurried, jostled, and nearly thrown down by an 'outpouring stream of young men and lads, boys and girls, flooding the pavements and overflowing into the road, with noisy jests and uproarious elbowings and laughter. They came and came. There seemed to be no end to them. In reality there were three hundred, and Aurea was like a little stick in a stream, torn and twisted and caught in the reeds, unable to get herself free or to see any end to her struggles.
This same noisy bell for dismissal found poor weary Adam in no particular hurry to go. He waited until the last of his companions had put on his coat and quitted the brick-field, anxious only to escape association in the street with those who had rendered his work a warfare all day. He had to seek for a lodging for himself, as he knew that his place was already filled in the cottage, and he determined to seek it in Cutthorpe; for he would not shock his mother by reappearing in Slumsby with two black eyes and a cut face, hands as raw as beef, and clothing soiled and torn.

Appearances were against him, and Adam was not the first conqueror who has had reason to fear being mistaken for a criminal. His victory had been moral, his defeat had been physical. His mother would be miserable if she saw him in his present plight, and his father would say something characteristic, but certainly not encouraging
—probably that 'eighty to one was fools' odds.' So it was to his grandmother that his thoughts immediately turned. She had an understanding as good as his father's, together with sympathies as active as his mother's. This evening he could not see her, because by order of the Guardians she would be sent to bed at seven; but he would go and find a lodging for himself as near to her as possible.

He had scarcely got into the main street, with this intention directing his steps, when he saw a thick knot of factory-hands swaying backwards and forwards in front of the great gates. The crowd was composed of those that worked in the building, skirted by Adam's foes from the yard, and all together appeared to be jostling and pressing some object invisible in their midst.

But that he heard the cry of a woman, Adam would have avoided the fray, and
indeed he took it for granted at first that they were merely larking with some rough girl of their own set, whose outcries were part of the fun; but the cry was repeated, with entreaties for help, in tones shrill with unaffected terror. Adam pressed nearer, and saw in the midst a girl of very different make to the coarse factory-hands—a maiden with wide-opened, frightened eyes and a mass of golden hair. Her hat had been knocked off, and her dress was soiled with dust as though she had fallen on the pavement. The lads were trying to keep her a prisoner, amused at her terror and at her frantic endeavours to escape. Boyhood is unfeeling, and they were treating her as badly, but no worse, than they would have treated a half-drowned kitten, or a draggled puppy that had lost its master, and with him its self-respect. The girls, who were encouraging the cruel sport with laughter, had probably a very good notion that the
young lady was in genuine earnest dreadfully scared; but the big lads themselves were cruel in jest rather than in intention, more than half thinking, probably, that the young lady had her share in the fun. Rough horseplay and teasing were their usual method of making things lively for the factory-girls when they met in the road, and they acted herein but after their kind.

Aurea might have passed through the town unmolested any day in the year when the factory-hands were dismissed from their work, in company with any companion or even alone, had there been nothing forsaken about her appearance. Not one of the lads would have thrown a stone at a dog who was brisk and fresh and out with his master, or even at a dog that was out upon his own account if he looked as though he had paid the tax and knew his business, whilst not one of the crowd would have refrained from
chucking a stone at his tail if he looked homeless, draggled or scared. 'Hit him hard, he's got no friends,' is a generally applicable principle, covering alike the pelting of a mangey cur and the terrifying of a nervous girl if she has anything abnormal about her appearance.

All might have been well if only Aurea could have stood her ground and kept her self-possession; but unfortunately the unexpected rush took her off her feet; she caught her dress in the hinges of the gate, and was held fast by it. When she tried to get free, the crowd flowing past her knocked her down. Everyone knows how difficult it is to get up again if once you are down in a squeeze; hustled and jostled on every side, covered with dust, her skirt purposely held in the hinges of the gate by a mischievous lad, her frantic struggles to rise only attracted fresh tormentors, and her growing terror heightened the sport. Her cries for
help seemed at the first only to make matters worse by teaching the rough lads their power. Soon, however, they procured her a friend in the big sturdy lad with rough clay-stained clothing and hands raw from the day's unwonted task, who was fighting his vigorous way to her side. All the provocation that Adam had received that day went to strengthen his arm anew when he struck out to free a passage for the unfortunate young lady. The surprise of the mischievous cluster aided him in the first few moments; the boy who held Aurea's dress in his grasp was utterly unprepared for the blow which sent him sprawling over the threshold of the gateway, and the others, who had better opportunities for thought, decided that this must be a friend of the girl's and a fellow-stranger. He was unknown to the centre of the group, but those that fringed the crowd knew him for their late companion. Anyway, a girl that had
got some one to strike out for her like that was disqualified from affording any more fun. A joke was a joke, but hard hitting spoilt the sport and changed the spirit of the scene.

'Run, miss, run!' Adam cried eagerly. 'You can get through 'em where I came in.'

And Aurea ran, this time successfully. She rather wondered that she was neither hindered nor pursued; but when, out of breath with flight, she ventured to look back, she saw that the crowd was no longer concerning itself with her existence. Its attention was intently and eagerly absorbed, and the nucleus of energy was in the centre, round which a swaying mass grew compacter every moment. Something was going forward there around her rescuer which she could not see, and to say truly did not care to see. Nothing had distinguished the lad who delivered her from the group of her persecutors. She took it for
granted that he was a trifle more tender of heart than the rest, although, if anything, rather more disreputable in appearance. Moreover, the poor girl was shaken and tired, sick with excitement and fear; her scared mind possessed only with the notion of hurrying on to find George Apers's sister, to be sheltered, and dusted, and fed, and cared for; to tell all her story, and to have it sweetened with sympathy. No further obstacles lay in her path; she paused but once to ask her way, and in less than half an hour found herself standing in the ivy-covered porch of Slumsby Vicarage, and ringing at the open doorway with the determination of one who would not wait to enter; could not wait, indeed, for the rising agitation that possessed her, that made her heart beat and her limbs tremble, and shook her so that she could scarcely speak.
CHAPTER VI.

PARENT AND CHILD.

MR. SMITH had found his daughter-in-law, and he was quite miserable. The attempted fusion of two saddened lives had not brought the new joy that Jessie had fondly hoped.

She had gone down to the farm about ten o'clock in the morning to carry her news to Mr. Smith. He was out, down at the bottom of the Fifty-acre, superintending the carting of rye-grass. The housekeeper had shown her into the dreary parlour, and
had sent a boy to fetch the master. Meanwhile, being inquisitive as to the motive of the lady's visit, she had pulled up the blinds as an excuse for conversation; her own, chiefly. Mr. Smith arrived, damp with labour and haste, looking shrunken and shabby in his working-clothes. By no possibility could anyone, critically eyeing him as as he stood before Jessie, have flattered the farmer with the courteous prefix of gentleman; that title could only belong to the churchwarden in his Sunday clothes and in his tall hat—hitherto worn in Mrs. Smith's presence. In his week-day clothing, so his housekeeper felt, Mr. Smith was not even up to the standard of his own parlour, let alone to the level of any lady's company. Mr. Smith himself was painfully conscious of the same fact; but Jessie saw nothing of all this. She could not get outside their mutual relations, and so judge him as any vulgar spectator
might have done. Her imagination clung to the tender, pitiful heart of the man, to the lonely soul of the old father, forsaken in age and pining in solitude. She had come there fancying that, as parent and child, they might weep together tears of sorrow melting into joy; that, meeting together, they might tell over from the beginning each to each the story of their absent dear one, and so, from two separate but kindred memories, might win some speaking semblance of his cherished personality. Each had so fondly loved, and each had so fully pardoned. It had not occurred to Jessie to reflect that for this sort of sympathetic intercourse the freedom of unquestioned intellectual equality was needed—that to secure such converse as she had longed for, activity of imagination, sensitiveness of feeling, and educated subtlety of expression must all combine, whilst the secret consciousness of mental
inferiority on either side would be fatal to its spontaneity; but Mr. Smith felt this, although he could not have expressed it. He sat on an awkward chair straight before her. All the simple dignity and natural freedom of his earlier manner in her society had entirely vanished. Then he knew who and what each was. He was the churchwarden, she was the Vicar's sister. Now he was the farmer, and this lady said she was his daughter-in-law. She told him so, and he did not doubt it. He had no prompting to disbelieve her. Genuine conviction easily followed words so earnest, so touching in their half-entreaty. Yet never till now had Jessie dreamed how hard the truth would be to tell.

'Surely he must have understood her when they walked together by the decoy? She had called him then by the name of "father."' Surely he could not have
been altogether surprised at this?' she pleaded.

'Yes, he was utterly and completely surprised.'

He had looked for his daughter-in-law in the gipsies' camp; he had found her in the Vicarage, and he was dumb. Mr. Smith was at once too humble and too proud to accept the changed aspect of affairs with ease. He would gladly have found a daughter beneath him in station; sadly he met her in one whom he held to be above him. Mr. Smith was old-fashioned enough to recognise both spiritual and temporal masters. His beliefs might have been summed up in a simple descending scale. First, as a man, he believed in God; secondly, as a subject, in the Queen; thirdly, as a Conservative elector, in Sir Crowsby Weyland; fourthly, as a churchwarden, in the Bishop of the diocese; fifthly, as a parishioner, in the Vicar of Slumsby. In
this particular instance, also, the Vicar's sister had trodden closely on her brother's heels in the region of his respect.

It was not, however, humility alone, but also pride which kept Mr. Smith unwillingly silent when Jessie anxiously waited for a fatherly welcome. It had been the habit of his humble life to distinguish between ladies and women—he would have classed his own daughter and the Vicar's sister differently; but he could conceive of no comfort at home for a man if the women of his family had any other standard of mind or manners than that furnished by the example of the master of the house. He, who so willingly rendered the service of respect where he felt it to be due in his outside relations, was accustomed to demand the like tribute from those by whom he was more immediately surrounded. The notion of the poor daughter-in-law picked like a blackberry
from the hedgerow had all the attractiveness of familiarity to him, and he was too loyal to kiss the lips of a new-born hope before he had closed the eyes of the old one which had kept him company for years.

By his fireside he had pictured a comfortable, homely woman; something of a cook on Monday, not quite a lady on Sunday, but just so much of a lady as a good black silk gown and his own position might make her. Gratitude and love for his protection might, he had believed, have trained the gipsy girl into no bad imitation of the thing that he had dreamt of; but as well try to make an apple-dumpling out of a pineapple, he thought, as to provide him with such a daughter in the person of this new daughter-in-law. He did not relish the notion of a superior lady, who had been born and reared in such a different station of life to his own, coming to live with him
in his home. He wanted a daughter who would look up to him just as he was, with all the simple habits of years and with all the shortcomings of his education, with something of the unquestioning faith and honest pride of that gentle, kindly wife whom, long ago, he had laid in Slumsby churchyard.

Then, too, Mrs. Smith had no children, and whenever he dreamt of his son's wife, it had always been as bringing her babe. On the day on which she claimed him as father, she was to place his son's child on his knees. Finally, how could he make any suitable response to the lady's appeal, when he knew that his dreaded housekeeper was eagerly waiting for his reply on the wrong side of the parlour-door?

'I'm sure, ma'am, I'm deeply sensible of the honour,' he stammered—felt it was all wrong, and got on no further.
'He doubts my story,' thought Jessie. 'I ought to have foreseen that. I must confine myself to facts where I had trusted to elicit feelings.'

'Will you come up to the Vicarage this afternoon, Mr. Smith, and let me show you such proof as I have to give? Not much, certainly, but such as may serve to convince you. There is a Prayer-book with your own handwriting in it, your own gift to your boy on his birthday. I should have brought it with me had I judged better. There are a few torn lesson-books, with his name scrawled in schoolboy fashion; a hymn-book that must have been in use in Slumsby Church; a prize from Cutthorpe Grammar School, and so forth.'

'My dear lady, I do not doubt you. What motive but one that was noble and true could impel you to lay claim to so humble a family?'

'Why, your money o' course, you simple-
ton!' said his housekeeper, almost audibly, from the wrong side of the door.

'I have been too sudden, then,' said Jessie; 'you want time to think it over. I should have been more careful in breaking ground if I had known you to be so absolutely unprepared.'

'Yes, that is it,' said Mr. Smith, relieved at having words supplied. 'I was absolutely unprepared. I am an old man, unused to changes. Life is very simple and very monotonous on Sodden Farm. Since my boy went away, nothing new has ever happened to me, and the only changes, except in the crops, have been in the housekeepers. But I'll come round to the Vicarage if you'll allow me. I shall be better able to express myself then. But it will not be till after six, if convenient. I want to get off a load of grass that I'm sending down to the Ferry. Sir Crowsby Weyland came home yesterday.'
'My brother will return this evening, but come all the same; the sooner he knows this the better. I've shrunk from telling him hitherto until I had spoken to you. When I came to live here with him, I knew that my husband's home was somewhere in the neighbourhood, but I did not know that I should find it so near as this, nor yet that I should find my husband's father in my brother's churchwarden. You cannot tell how I have thought about you all these last years. How I have longed that we should meet together and comfort each other, and speak to each other about our wanderer! But you'll come as you are this afternoon, won't you? And you'll not dress for me, now I'm your daughter?'

This she said hesitantly, but the attempt at reassuring him only increased his embarrassment by heightening his self-consciousness. To divert his attention, Jessie continued to talk of her husband.
She pictured him to the agitated old man as she had known him at first, bright and clever and upright, the chosen companion of her brother, the able representative of her invalid father, respected by all, trusted as an intelligent agent even by Mrs. Apers herself, until, driven to an old vice to cure a new despair, he disappeared, sinking from sight like a stone in the river; 'since which,' she added with a trembling voice, 'I have been always quite alone. I have had no one near me who would hear his name with sympathy; and it has been such torture to be always, night and day, facing the same blank, aching for the same loss, pining for the same presence. Now we shall comfort each other. Together we may even find him alive still, and persuade him to come back to us. Part of him seems to have returned to me already, now that I have found you. Do you know, there are tones in your voice that make my
eyes fill with tears? I seem to hear him speaking in them.'

A few moments more, and she had gone, and Mr. Smith stood alone in the room, with these living, loving words ringing in his ears. He was shaken with emotion, yet never had his son seemed so far from him as now. He had scarcely taken her hand at parting, for which he was filled with self-reproach, and she had gone away slowly, as one who drags a bitter pain or faints at heart. Yet why had every touching word she uttered only seemed to tear his son from him?

Ever since he had met her, Mr. Smith had admired and respected Jessie. She had impressed him as the most sensible lady he had ever known. She seemed to have at least as many opinions as her brother, and to express them quite as fluently; but it is one thing to admire the tones of the church organ, quite another thing to contemplate
its erection in your own parlour—there you may surely be permitted to feel that a cottage piano will better supply your private domestic harmony. And yet it seemed that it was true that his son, his own son Henry, of whom he thought so little when he went away, had touched this perfect instrument with a master's hand—the vibration of its keys still witnessed to his power; and since with a passionate and despairing crash he had abandoned his dominance of its harmony, there had been notes within its compass which had been dumb beneath the touch of any other fingers, or which responded only by discordant sound.

In a fit of self-reproach Mr. Smith went to his desk, carefully wrote in Jessie's name as that of his son's wife, in the blank space left in his unsigned will; called in his housekeeper and an intelligent waggoner to witness his signature of the jealously-
folded paper; and replacing it, breathed a sigh of relief. Sodden Fen was all hers now in the event of the proven death of his son. The will was all right too, for he had had it drawn up at the office of the safest lawyer in Cutthorpe, with only a blank left for the name—the name of the daughter he was always seeking. His housekeeper turned round and gave him notice in words strangled with rage, but he scarcely heeded her, for he had found a daughter from whom his heart might be withheld, but to whom he could give his land. The woman lingered still, challenging his attention to her view of the situation; Mr. Smith dismissed her with unflattering indifference, and she left him, to comfort herself as best she might with a sense of superiority to circumstances—the only thing, perhaps, which permanently consoles us all, when we can cajole ourselves into the belief of it.

Mr. Smith did dress, in spite of Jessie's
well-meant entreaty. It had been his chief intention in postponing the interview. He counted greatly upon the moral support to be gained from his best Sunday clothing; and between six and seven he presented himself at the Vicarage. He found Jessie Smith seated alone in the long low-windowed room which was the Vicarage drawing-room, anxiously awaiting his appearance. Nothing in that room resembled the conventional drawing-room, nor did anything announce Jessie's individual tastes. The house was her brother's, and the room was his, rather than hers. She never forgot that she was in reality merely a passing guest. Some day, when that bride came whose advent Jessie was fond of predicting, the Vicarage parlour would be transformed, and would take the impress of a woman's presence; till then it was merely a nondescript sitting-room, filled with the comfortable dingy fittings
of George Apers's rooms in college. Its arrangement was carried out upon no particular plan, and illustrated no special development of taste. To be at ease or to be of use was all that was required of animate or inanimate objects there. You trod upon a respectable Brussels carpet of the best bedroom type, but you were not expected to think of it, even upon the muddiest day; it simply was what it was laid down for, a thing to cover the boards, and it never aspired to becoming an idea. It left that to the pictures, and even they forbore to strain the feeblest imagination. A couple of dogs, loved and lost, hung in water-colours on the right of the side window; Cutthorpe Church tower and a view of Glen Combe, on the left. Over the bookcase which ran along the end of the room, two oil-paintings which had been dreams of fair women to the undergraduate; one of them, a shepherdess with
golden hair falling over her bare neck, with a crook and a lamb at her feet, had been unkindly confronted—by the same man as Vicar—with the Bishop of the diocese lithographed in full canonicals, with a crozier in the foreground. Beneath this queer jumble of representation you sat upon an easy old couch, or lolled in some one of a series of lounging-chairs. George Apers was fond of boasting that his chairs provided slopes to suit a dozen different lengths of spine. This being so, it was your own fault when you sat down in Slumsby Vicarage if you did not feel yourself at ease. There was one thing, however, which you would have to do without—such a thing as a footstool was not to be seen. If you were a short man or a short woman you might put your feet upon the rung of an upright chair; if a lady, and a young one, Mr. Apers would fetch you a couple of bound volumes of Punch from the lower shelves of his book-
case, and you might set your toes tenderly upon these treasures; but such a thing as a distinctly feminine ottoman worked with flowers or beads you might save yourself the trouble of looking for, for it was a mistake you would not find there. An ivory-headed walking-stick with a small skull for a knob, a lead-pencil as thick as a rolling-pin and a yard long, and a paper-knife to match, hung over the mantel-shelf, on which stood sundry jars and vases equally useless and decidedly more ornamental than the gaudy presentation-clock which had been the gift of the ladies' Bible-class to their favourite curate. This time-piece, in obedience to some hidden necessity, still persisted in pointing out the hour; but in so doing, it accomplished no duty towards its possessor, since what it marked was too artistic to be read.

It is a serious matter for reflection how often all the vulgarity of a room seems to
enter it with the presence of a woman; all the meretricious efforts at decoration, all the vain results of ill-spent cash, all the suggestions of wasted time seldom disfigure any room, until at some period or other of its career it and its owner have been given up to the control of some well-loved feminine creature.

Such a change had never come over the room in which Jessie was sitting to await Mr. Smith's appearance. In it, failing the presence of beauty, she delighted in the absence of show. In her lap lay the relics of the boyhood that had cost the lonely visitor so dear.

Mr. Smith sat down beside her, this time less stiffly, and lifted the dog's-eared books and the torn scraps of schoolboy writing tenderly, with a hand that shook; but he laid them down again with a sigh: he could not yet open his heart to the anxious woman who was kneeling.
beside him, placing one cherished memento after another before him.

'See,' she said; 'these are all Henry's books. Not many, after all. Would you not like to keep them? Shall I show you now the books and papers that represent his later years—the years he was with me?'

'Presently,' he said; but he put the things aside. The barrier of his reserve was shaken, but it was scarcely broken down as yet. With an effort he spoke:

'Forgive me, my dear lady, but I must explain myself straightforwardly as best I can. All this only seems to take my son away from me. At once mine and yours, how can it be? I cannot see how it all came about. In my own place I know where I am; but understand me, I cannot come here and accept a doubtful position as your father-in-law, and be thankful to be acknowledged as such.'

'But it isn't that at all, dear Mr. Smith.
It is I who come to you, and beg for a place as your daughter—for nothing else. It is I who should be thankful to be acknowledged by you. What position have I, forsaken by my husband, an apparent widow in the eyes of the world? Do let us set aside all these secondary considerations—they are not worthy of either of us; it is your love and your sympathy that I long for. I feel that it is I who have everything to ask—you who have all to give. Will you not receive me for your son's sake, and let him be a link between us?' 

'You forget how he went away, Mrs. Smith; and instead of coming back to me, as I have long been ready to receive him, like the prodigal son in the parable, he prospers and grows up rich and respected, turns out a well-educated man of the world and a gentleman, so you seem to say—a better gentleman than his father, any way; marries a sweet and pleasant lady like yourself, and through
it all, and with it all, never breathes one word nor sends one message to break the lonely misery of his forsaken and offended father. No, I cannot see it. If, as you say, it was shame and not all pride that hindered him, I was ready to meet him half-way long ago. God knows I have not spared myself my own share of the blame; but I am not ready to accept the favour of a recognition where I was prepared to grant the boon of forgiveness.'

'I could not force him to your feet; I can only kneel here myself and beg you to accept me as his substitute, dear and justly offended father.'

Tears were in the sweet woman's eyes as she spoke, whilst she who had never slighted any human rights knelt as a suppliant on behalf of the absent man whose sin against herself had been far deeper than that against his father; but a woman's love pardons, whilst a man's reasons.
‘It is I who beg for recognition in my husband’s name,’ she continued, ‘and in his place for pardon. Let my attitude express for me the spirit in which I have approached you; but see, if poor Henry’s name fails, I have something else to speak for me here—some little things—I have kept them till the last, because to show them to you is to show you a piece of my heart that bleeds at the least light touch. No hands but mine have ever held them, no eyes but mine have ever seen them since they were laid aside. Look! it is only a baby’s short frock—our baby’s, Henry’s and mine; and just one tiny pair of shoes—the first and last he ever wore. To lay them in your lap is like digging up my dead. Here I have nothing else to show you; no cherished spot of ground where we might kneel together and plant the flowers which would be watered by my tears. His father never wept with me. I
bore my double loss alone. Husband and child both gone in one night.'

Mr. Smith, gently bending over the grief-stricken figure, laid a tender caressing hand upon her head. She felt the altered touch, but her sorrow, finding long-delayed expression in passionate speech, could not again be immediately controlled.

'Oh! my child, my love, my life!' she cried, burying her face in the little garments, but jealous lest the tears should touch them, 'that God should make us mothers, and then leave us childless, is the bitterest, most inexplicable suffering upon earth! You do not know what it is like; no one has ever known it yet, but those that have endured it. Shall I tell you? It is to hear your sorrow wake and cry in the voice of every stranger's child. It is to kiss the lips of a dead hope upon the sweet mouth of every living child. It is to assist starving at a feast of realiza-
tions; to be tied to a torture which feeds upon your very life, drinks its springs dry and only grows the stronger. It is to have your own heart for a grave, to carry death in your own soul, and with it all to smile and smile, and cover with your pride the wounds that will not bear a touch.'

She was not weeping alone now; Mr. Smith, leaning over her, raised her with trembling hands, and kissed her on the forehead.

'Jessie,' he said, 'will you do something for me? Will you give me something that you value very much? You have offered me my son's books back again, will you give me in their place one of these little shoes. You do not know how I have dreamt of my grandchild by night and by day; how I have prayed for the moment when I might hold him in my arms. It has often come to me in the silence of the night that my son might
be dead and resting in his grave; but never that when the end of my suspense was reached at length, all that would be left me of the little one would be one tiny shoe.'

He took the simple memento when she quickly gave it him, seemed to read in it for a moment some sweet brief story of the past, then hid it in his bosom. For a time both were silent, but the silence now covered the joy of new union as well as the bitterness of past loss. Jessie knew at last that she had found a father in the proudly dif-fident old man; he recognised the daughter's spirit in this nobly humble woman.

'Have you no comfort to bring me? Is that all you have to tell me?' he presently said.

'No, that is not all,' she answered, rais-ing her head with an air almost of triumph; 'that is not all. I have more to say—listen. I will tell you something that I have often
thought of late. One who has learnt this lesson, who has learnt to live her life smilingly, above such buried joys, such hidden anguish, has an inner force and strength of soul, a power of conscious victory over circumstance that has been won with bitter tears, which in her weakest moments she would never change for a houseful of living treasures. You have found me weak and prostrate, have heard me speak as if I were simply a grief-distracted creature. This was the inevitable outcome of showing all my loss to you; but shall I tell you something that I have often thought of late? It is one thing, one great thing, to have your life hidden in no love that living dies, or may die yet; I laid my fair white lily in the earth, but my life has sunk to rest in the very soul of love itself, where it is growing every day. Nothing that is left can hurt me now, death least of all.'

Mr. Smith's agitation became painful,
greater even than his daughter-in-law's. A fountain that has been closed for years cannot break forth without convulsive upheaval, which will not immediately subside. Jessie, to soothe him, began talking quietly and cheerfully. She told the old man stories of her husband's life; took him with her in imagination to her own home at Glen Combe; spoke as friends speak who tell the tale of years to hearts that listen; brought him gently, by degrees, down to the present time, and led him to dwell upon schemes for the recovery of their absent wanderer.

They were sitting together, their backs to the low window which opened on to the garden-path. Mr. Smith had nearly forgotten that he was not at home in the comfortably shabby armchair of daily use; Jessie, from her low seat, nestled against him, her hand resting in his, his arm around her neck. The old man's attitude expressed
a mixture of respectful sympathy and of fatherly affection. The consideration that they were in full view of any passer by the window did not trouble them: in this quiet country vicarage so few callers came. Suddenly they were aware of footsteps on the gravel, followed by a ring at the front door. Each, with an uneasy start, took up a more conventional position.

'Ve can scarcely be George,' said Jessie. 'He could not be here so soon, and then he would not ring. We have all this to tell him. We had better not let anyone else into our secret until we have seen him, although I'm sorry to say that I was obliged to admit our relationship to that very strange being, James Daily, last night. In consequence, he refused to allow Adam to enter my service, and he nearly assaulted me. The poor man really seems as though he were off his head at times.'

'He owes me a deeply-rooted grudge,'
said Mr. Smith; 'he is a man of a morose and morbid nature.'

'With a tendency towards occasional outbursts of violence, evidently,' said Jessie; then, hearing the entrance of some one into the hall, she hastily gathered up her treasures, and carried them out of the room, promising to return directly. Thus forsaken, Mr. Smith stood where he was, and received with much confusion, not George Apers, but Sir Crowsby Weyland.
CHAPTER VII.

A STRIKING INTRODUCTION.

Sir Crowsby Weyland was a fashionable, good-looking man of possibly forty. He was supposed to have suffered at one time or another a great deal of annoyance from poor relations and from political opponents; this, however, left no impress on his pleasant features. The owner of the factory in Cutthorpe had opposed him at the last election in the Radical interest, and though he had saved his seat by a narrow majority, yet that was but a moderate consolation to
a man who found himself inconveniently bled to retain as a privilege that which he had looked upon as a right. It may perhaps have been partly due to the educating influence of this and similar pieces of discipline that Sir Crowsby's manner betrayed no sign of surprise at what he had just witnessed. He had seen a man, who was on the same footing as his own tenant-farmers, sitting in affectionate intercourse with the new Vicar's sister, and paternally caressing her, as though they had been acquainted all their days. He had only two seconds to get over this shock before he was shown into the presence of the gentleman, the lady having evidently taken flight before his name was announced.

But if he was far too self-contained to betray the strange discovery, none the less was Sir Crowsby pondering the situation with painful effort. No glimmer of light fell upon the mysterious page from any
A STRIKING INTRODUCTION.

direction that he mentally explored. Some clue might be gained from conversation; and if not, he did not mean to let the matter rest. It was quite too queer a thing.

'Good-evening, Mr. Smith,' he said, with the manner of a man who is used to be first in his company. 'I've seen some of your waggons going down my way. Is the Vicar at home? I called to pay my respects.'

Mr. Smith hastened to explain that Mr. Apers was absent, but might be expected back at any moment.

'And Mrs. Apers Smith—is she absent also? I have not had the pleasure of making her acquaintance as yet. Mr. Apers I met the other day on his way to the Workhouse in Cutthorpe. By the way, can you tell me is the lady a widow? The Vicar simply informed me that he had a sister coming to live with him, but the name Mrs. Apers Smith seemed to imply
that a husband had voluntarily or involun-
tarily relinquished his claims.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Smith, in his misery
becoming monosyllabic.

'One of those widows whose hearts
"sing for joy," perhaps?' suggested Sir
Crowsby.

'Not at all, sir; and if you will excuse
me, I think I had better take my leave.
Mrs. Smith will be back directly.'

Sir Crowsby allowed the nervous old
man to get as far as the door. There he
stopped him as a cat stops a mouse with
a pat of her paw. He did not choose to let
Mr. Smith depart before he had seen him
confronted with the lady. The farmer's
discomfiture was evident.

'Why, Mr. Smith, you're not looking
well. You must take care of yourself,' said Sir Crowsby cheerfully. 'To see so
steady a supporter with so bad a cold is
distressing to me.'
Mr. Smith became inarticulate, and at that moment Jessie happily came to his relief. Sir Crowsby gazed from the face of the bright young woman of eight-and-twenty to that of the pale and agitated man of seventy with increasing curiosity. Nothing in the lady's manner supplied the clue to the riddle. She greeted Sir Crowsby Weyland himself and she restored Mr. Smith to his armchair as if nothing unusual had happened. Women can do these little pieces of acting better than men; so Sir Crowsby reflected. The lady was evidently mistress of the position, in her own estimation at least. The novelty of the situation stirred his interest and quickened his determination to master the underlying mystery, at once if possible, by a civil war of words or of wits. He made his first initiatory move cautiously and courteously, as became a wary gentleman.
'I trust that I'm not to miss Mr. Apers?'

Jessie hastened to explain that he was absent at a friend's wedding, but was to return by that evening's train, then due.

'I am the more anxious,' said Sir Crowsby, 'immediately to improve my acquaintance with your brother, since I've been privately warned that he means to allude to the souls of my ancestors next Commination Day, to excavate their bones for the benefit of the British Association, and to excommunicate myself in revenge for those rotten acres we're supposed to have filched from the fist of some thieving old abbot. Do you and Mr. Smith intend to array yourselves on the side of the enemy? If so, I shall have to meet the crusade by enlisting my widowed sister and her five sons the next time they come to pay me a visit down at the Ferry.'
‘Suppose we begin with a conference,’ said Jessie. ‘That is an indispensable preliminary to a mobilization of troops.’

‘And will suit me uncommonly well at the moment,’ said he, ‘since all my recruits are down with the mumps, and my sister is in consequence a maternal martyr, to whose sufferings the blessed St. Dolorosa’s straits were bliss. Personally, I am deeply grateful for the afflicting dispensation, since it prevents them spending the vacation with me, and permits me to hope that Mr. Smith’s stubble will not be disfigured this season at least by the corpses of my hopeful nephews, who have stolen a gun from the keeper. My nephews always get into trouble down here, Mrs. Smith. They go larking about with what our grandfathers would have called “the hinds and the yokels.” There’s a tribe down your way they much affect, Mr. Smith—the Yearlies, or Dailies, or some such name.’
‘If they consort with my friend Adam Daily, in my judgment they show their good taste,’ said Mrs. Smith decisively.

‘Possibly, as you show yours in consorting with a farmer,’ thought Sir Crowsby; but he only said, ‘Ah, a favourite in the Sunday-school, I presume. I wonder if you’ll declare war upon me at once, Mrs. Smith, if I venture to hint that that is no indication of what a lad is out in the fields. I am quite aware that ladies are fond of taking up these big boys, much as they patronize a blundering hound or an awkward colley; but a suspicion that they know but little about them has often crossed my mind. The ease with which my own nephews befool their anxious mother, who none the less esteems them perfect, is startling.’

‘I’ve been sitting with Mrs. Daily all the afternoon, Sir Crowsby, and I can assure you that that peculiarity is not con-
fined to aristocratic parents, whilst the lack of concealment necessitated by poverty encourages me at least to attach greater importance to the fact.'

'You had the courage to go there again,' said Mr. Smith timidly, 'after the scene you were telling me you had last night with James Daily?'

Then he bethought him that he had said too much, and paused in deep embarrassment.

'Just so. Noah March was sent for me this afternoon by his mother. I found the poor woman in great distress; Adam had been locked out all night, and had been turned over to the tile-yard at daybreak by his father. She seemed to look upon his loss of a quarter of a bed in the cottage garret as an expulsion from Paradise, and by a queer association of ideas had named her new baby Eve. She seemed to consider the child in some sense accountable for her
brother's ejection, since Daily had vowed that he'd not keep more than twelve in the cottage.'

'Then we may take that to be his notion of a small and handy family:' observed Sir Crowsby. 'Influential proprietors like yourself, Mr. Smith, really should persuade the labourers to keep their lads to the land; that factory is a hot-bed of Radicalism and Rascality.'

'For that association of ideas we must hope that the fatal facility of those two Rs is accountable, Sir Crowsby. You see I am following your lead,' said Jessie.

'The value of alliterative speech as a contribution to the science of swaying the masses has of late years been fully recognised, Mrs. Smith.'

'Since no easier way of teaching the people a lie can be met with than that of marrying a noble idea to an ignoble, or of converting two separably true notions into
one false one, by the link of alliterative sound,' flashed out Jessie.

Sir Crowsby smiled, and the smile irritated her; it was the smile of a man who seemed to say that all her little objections had already been entertained and dismissed by himself at some very early period of his own mental history.

'Originally the perquisite of the poet, then the cast-off implement of the man of letters, the art has now been picked up by the popular leader, and is comparable as a weapon to the jawbone of Samson's ass!' she continued, under the sense of this exasperation.

'And a mighty serviceable weapon Samson found the jawbone, and a rare lot of execution he did with it. Your illustration is unfortunate, Mrs. Smith,' said Sir Crowsby; whereon they both laughed, and peace was restored.

To all this Mr. Smith listened in puzzled
silence. Unused to the give and take of educated intercourse, he was wondering if it was by talk as clever as this seemed to him to be, that his son Henry first attracted the attention of the lady. Meanwhile, Mrs. Smith perceived with annoyance that Sir Crowsby Weyland was paying her the compliment of a reserved seat at his conversazione, whilst Mr. Smith, as a shilling hearer, was left out in the cold. To get rid of the visitor she expressed an impatient wish for her brother's return.

'Mr. Apers must be chaperoning the bride and bridegroom on their wedding tour. The train must have been in three quarters of an hour,' said Sir Crowsby, rising. 'I fear that I must deny myself the pleasure of waiting for your brother, Mrs. Smith. Poor fellow, I pity him; if there's one instance of self-sacrifice on earth more admirable than another, it is to see a man going through that ordeal to back up a
friend; and when he consents to be immolated at the altar as a groom's-man, self-sacrifice rises to the height of sublimity. May one without indiscretion inquire the names of the inconsiderate couple who have been victimizing their friends and neighbours to-day?'

'A college acquaintance of my brother's, Mr. Leopold Stuckley, and a young lady, Miss Aurea Chapel, who has been a neighbour of ours at Glen Combe, my father's place in Devonshire.'

'Ah! poor things! Well, Mr. Smith, if you're coming my way I shall be glad to have a word with you about that rye-grass.'

'About this lady,' being mentally substituted; the mystery being yet unsolved, and the gentleman's curiosity considerably increased by what he saw of Jessie.

Mr. Smith sought his daughter-in-law's eye doubtfully. He longed to ask her for
instructions, but from the force of habit he followed the important gentleman to the door. He was like some very raw lover, uncertain how to take leave of his mistress in the presence of a third person; consequently there was an awkward pause, and whilst for a moment all three stood together, the door-bell rang violently. Before it could be answered it rang again, and almost before they were well aware of it, into their midst rushed a girl under the influence of excitement so strong that for the moment they all held her mad. When she found herself confronted by three astonished people, she stopped, then staggered a few yards farther, groping her way apparently half blindly towards Jessie, to whom she wildly appealed to 'save her,' to 'protect her,' 'not to let anyone come near her.' With the ready response of maternal instinct, Jessie wound her arms round the excited creature, but
her amazement was more strongly expressed in the simple—'Aurea—Aurea Chapel! The bride! You here!' than it would have been by voluble exclamations.

'Aurea! Explain!' she said, as the girl loosened her hold upon her; but Aurea's only answer was to sink fainting into the arms of Sir Crowsby Weyland, who caught her cleverly ere she fell. Sir Crowsby never acknowledged himself outwitted by circumstances. His prejudices disposed him to regard the whole thing as a neat bit of acting, got up for some incomprehensible feminine reason. He laid the slight form none the less tenderly down upon George Apers's comfortable old-fashioned sofa; but when, quickly recovering, Aurea began to roll her bright head with an incoherent outburst of complaint upon the sofa-cushions, Sir Crowsby comforted himself by the reflection that a girl's griefs, even when genuine, were like the bubbles on a glass
of sparkling wine, quickly come, quickly gone; quickly changing, giving zest to the draught, but not to be deeply investigated as they rippled over the tongue. He was quite unmoved in the sense in which poor Mr. Smith was moved by the startling nature of the incident. Just where he was when the storm fell upon them, rooted to the spot by a bewildering sense of pain, the old man stood; equally unable to render any assistance, or to get himself out of the room; in such evident perturbation of spirit and discomfiture of judgment that Jessie, moved by her love and pity for him to the neglect of Sir Crowsby’s presence, gave him a word of comfort, prefaced by the name of ‘father.’ Sir Crowsby’s attention was immediately on the alert, pursuing with well-concealed eagerness now the clue of the former mystery, now the thread of the present catastrophe; failing to find either, and baffled in his search, taking
refuge in the common incredulity of self-centred souls, to whom their own world is all the world there is, and their own conviction the measure of the credible. It would be hard upon Sir Crowsby Weyland to condemn him for this, too; for after all he only spoke as he had been accustomed to think, when he said to Mr. Smith the moment that they stepped outside the door:

'Well, we shall have to look to Mr. Apers, I suppose, for a full, true, and particular relation of the slip between the hymeneal cup and the lip of that golden-haired damsel. No doubt he is in the secret, and will follow by the next express.'

This remark was due to Mrs. Smith's first exclamation upon seeing Aurea, also to the absence of the wedding-ring, which Sir Crowsby's sharp eyes had not failed to detect when Jessie drew off the fainting girl's gloves. But Mr. Smith was silent; this was not the sort of talk
he cared to answer, even from the lips of Sir Crowsby Weyland. But the next remark compelled reply. They were walking home together, Sir Crowsby having drawn his companion away at the earliest opportunity, to leave Mrs. Smith undisturbed in her care of the young lady, when suddenly the younger confronted the elder man with this significant observation:

'I'm afraid I disturbed you, Mr. Smith, in the enjoyment of a considerable amount of the older lady's confidence by my visit. Clearly I must look to you for the explanation of these Vicarage pastorals.'

Mr. Smith stood a good deal in awe of the gentleman who thus addressed him; but there were limits to his subservience, the sooner reached to-day, in that he had heard that which had given a considerable lift to his self-esteem. He had meant to keep his own and his daughter-in-law's secret, but Sir Crowsby Weyland had
evidently seen and heard too much not to hear all. He therefore answered stiffly:

"The lady in question, Sir Crowsby, did my family the honour to ally herself with it six years ago, by marrying my son Henry. She is my daughter-in-law. I find in the fact, which I have but just learnt, as much cause for surprise as you yourself can feel. It fills me with new and higher conceptions of my son, that she should have sought in his society, and should in any measure have found, satisfaction for the requirements of a noble nature and a mind above the common; but then I never really knew my son, since he was little more than a lad of the same age and of the same sort of wild disposition as those young gentlemen, your nephews, of whom you were speaking."

"No disrespect to your son, Mr. Smith—for all I've heard to the contrary I dare say he was a fine fellow enough; but permit
me to remark that there's no knowing what a woman will find in a man. Those characteristics which chiefly distinguish him in the eyes of mankind, take my word for it, she will never see; but she will invest him with a shining row of perfections which he doesn't even know the names of. The surest way not to know what a man is, is to take a woman's account of him. Why don't you plaster the Antipodes with advertisements to your son's "advantage," bribe him home, and judge for yourself? That's what I should do if I were unlucky enough to be an anxious father with an absent son, instead of a bachelor uncle with five ever-present nephews. I have had some experience of colonists and their ways in my wanderings, and I should be delighted to give you the benefit of my opinion if you've any lurking doubts about him.'

Mr. Smith, effectually silenced by this turn of the conversation, hastily took his
leave; but Sir Crowsby beckoned him back.

'Excuse me, Mr. Smith—wait one moment. As an old friend, permit me to give you a word of warning: you've been known to be beating the bushes for a daughter-in-law—take care, now that one has come forward. What do you know of the lady beyond the fact that she is Mr. Apers's sister? Only a half-sister, I have been told. Have you made any further inquiries? No doubt she is a very attractive woman; but, my dear sir, Sodden Fen is an attractive bribe. You've been angling for stickleback with bait for a salmon; you've caught one, to your own surprise, but not to mine, necessarily. Pray be warned, and be careful. Well, good-evening. I shall look in there again later on to inquire for that interesting damsel; and if I can serve you in any way by having a little further conversation, which...
may help to draw the elder lady out, and to throw any clearer light upon this claim of hers, I shall be quite prepared to undertake it.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Smith, 'I thank you for your interest in me and my affairs. I may doubt myself, but not that lady. Good-evening.'

Sir Crowsby smiled a smile of pity and compassionate contempt, and took his way back to the Ferry.
CHAPTER VIII.

'THE LAD'S LIFE.'

GRANDMOTHER DAILY had got well into her first sleep on the evening of the day on which she met Aurea Chapel at the Workhouse-gates, when she was awakened by the matron, who, passing between the two rows of beds in the long narrow dormitory like an angel of death, stopped at the foot of Mrs. Daily's iron trestle.

'Mrs. Daily, wake! you're wanted. There's been an accident brought into the out-ward. It's your grandson, Adam Daily,
and he's very bad. Now don't give way and disturb the whole infirmary! Make haste and get up!

'I knew it,' said Grandmother Daily, sitting up in her bed, then, half stupefied with sleep and fear, stumbling out on to the bare boards in the eight o'clock light of a summer evening. 'I knew it,' she said, as she fumbled for her clothes. 'There was a spider on the ward-window when I lay my grey head on the flocks, and I says to old Sally, "There's a sorrow for you or for me," for it was a-weaving its web between her head and mine. "For you, then," says Sally; "sorrow and joy is all one to me now. Like my victuals, the savour's gone out o' them; there's nothing left me to choose between 'em."

Then thank the Lord you can taste 'em still,' suddenly cried out, from the neighbouring bed, the old woman alluded to.

'And so I do,' retorted Mrs. Daily, 'but
not out o' season; didn't I fall out on the new parson one day in the room, because he threw cold water on my nephey's drowning—said he'd not gone down in his own name, wasn't his own mother's son, or what not? But he might drown this 'ere sorrow for good and all, as if it was a new-born kitten, and then I'd say my "Praise the Lord."

'Now, Mrs. Daily,' said the matron impatiently, 'will you make haste dressing and not stir up the whole house? What's the use of so much talking? It won't heal your feelings, nor mend your grandson's bones.'

'A little talking in due time 'ud have done both,' replied the old woman. 'As I was a-coming in this evening I met a girl down by the dog at the gates, asking her way to Slumsby of old Jones the porter, and I sent a message by her to a lady as favours my lad, that she should protect him
from harm, for he was like to be killed i' the brick-yard; but no doubt she forgot it, doing her hair. What's life, or death either, to a girl with golden locks? Nothing! I knew it! Lead on, mistress—lead on! My Union apron's full o' tears a'ready; but it'll hold more salt water nor a lady's bit o' muslin.'

The matron, in despair of stopping this passionate stream of talk, led the way silently down narrow passages and up steep stone stairs to the distant outbuilding where Adam lay, and Mrs. Daily followed, loquacious with grief and fear.

'I've been dreaming o' Adam ever since I lay me down. They say as the first bird as leaves the nest's sure to come to the ground. To get rid o' one mouth to fill another'll never bring you a blessing, and so I said to my son when I was tending his wife; but words are withes when a will's your master. What a mercy they didn't
carry the lad back to his mother; and she with her thirteenth!"

To this practical observation the matron condescended to reply:

'He thought of that himself, Mrs. Daily; and so they brought him here by his own desire. He asked for you; but he hasn't spoken since, and won't again, unless I am very much mistaken.'

'Oh, mistress, don't say he isn't likely to recover! Don't say it o' my dear lad Adam! Picked up in the street, did ye say, in front of the factory-gates? and him to be served so in that ill-managed tile-yard, as never had done nothing amiss to a soul!'

'Well, I don't know about nothing amiss, Mrs. Daily: he's been fighting—that's what he's been, and he ought to be ashamed of himself; and so I'd tell him if he was likely to live to profit by it, which I shouldn't say he was. He's got two ribs broken, and the right shoulder dislocated,
and he's a mass of bruises from head to foot.'

At hearing this dismal recital Mrs. Daily burst into uncontrollable sobs.

'They've no one to blame in that yard but themselves, and so I happen to know,' the matron went on, 'my own brother being the foreman; and most annoying these circumstances are to him. When they get quarrelling outside the premises, like a lot of savages, in the road, it stands to reason that it isn't his business, nor any other responsible man's, to control them. They're subjects for the law, that's what they are—and your grandson among them. If he had his dues he'd find himself in prison; and he's got no one to thank but himself, unless it's the police for not rescuing him sooner.'

'Oh aye,' said Grandmother Daily, raising her voice with bitter passion, as she stumbled after the angry matron
through the covered passage which con-
nected the outdoor infirmary with the
Union main buildings. 'When the poor
are struck down they are always to blame!
If Sir Crowsby Weyland was to light on
his head the next time he's jumping, in the
face o' the Lord, at the tail o' the hunts-
man, it 'ud be a shocking judgment; but
when the honestest, inoffensive, hard-work-
ingest lad in the country's kicked on to a
stretcher by a lot o' blackguards as is
governed by a coward, he gets blame for
pity, and scorn for fellow-feeling! Oh
aye—I know!'

'You don't know who you're speaking
to, Mrs. Daily—or you've forgotten, at any-
rate; but if you've forgotten, I shall not
forget who it is that is speaking to me.
You've been making yourself too much at
home in the House of late, as I shall think
it my duty to name to the Board, and so
I give you fair warning. What are you
Dailys, I should like to know, that you're such a radical lot? Why, you've all died and been buried by us for the last fifty years; and at the rate you are coming on at in Slumsby, you're likely to be a considerable expense to the parish for many a year to come. I'd have you to remember that those who will not learn their places in this world will be taught them in the next.'

She spoke harshly, disregarding the fact that they had already entered the square white-washed room where lay poor Adam's bruised and mangled body upon its parish bed. But love silenced the ever-ready retort upon Grandmother Daily's lips. With arms outstretched she rushed to her boy's bedside, and threw herself on her knees, weeping by his pillow.

'Granny,' he whispered feebly, 'I heard her. Pray God I may live to take you out o' this. I think Diggory Daily had better
have lived, for the sake of his wife and his son; it's a poor thing to give in and die.'

How long ago it seemed now since, in unconscious bodily ease, Adam had flung his sound limbs at random amongst those of his three bed-fellows, wondering vaguely why he alone had a lump in his throat, and why Bob should be unsympathetic. Life's lessons had been crowded upon him since that night when he first spelt out confusedly the first letters of the initiatory alphabet of suffering.

In excuse for the matron it must be said that she was generally a good-natured woman enough, as she had shown herself when talking to George Apers on the day that he visited the House. She commonly offered a very fair resistance to the hardening influences of her vocation; but there were special reasons for her present annoyance. Her brother, who lacked her firm-
ness of purpose, had of late been getting into trouble with his master, Mr. Rout, the tile-merchant, for the scenes of disorder which disgraced his government of the work-people; and his chances of remaining at his post were, she suspected, endangered with Adam's chances of life. Further, she resented her enforced superintendence of this supernumerary ward, with its disagreeable consequences of being disturbed at night for the convenience of accidents, drunkards, and fits—a species of work which she bitterly complained was not represented by her hardly earned salary.

As Mr. Smith had observed, when explaining to Jessie his benevolent notions with regard to the disposition of his property, Cutthorpe was very badly off in respect of accommodation for its sick people. The town had no hospital, and the Workhouse infirmary was but a pitiful substitute. As a bid for popular favour at the
time of the last election, Mr. Rout, the tile-merchant, had indeed announced, with a flourish of trumpets, his intention of providing a model building, in the shape of an infirmary, for the benefit of his own workpeople, their wives and families. This wonderful building was to be put up by the hands of his own workpeople, with bricks of local clay, baked in his own kilns; and for the advantage of wounds and infectious cases, it was all to be lined, in the latest sanitary style, with tiles of china clay drawn from his own ovens. This infirmary was to join the factory-buildings, and as the local Radical organs did not fail to assert, henceforth it was to be 'quite a privilege to lose a limb in the service of so public-spirited an employer.' But when 'this munificent merchant,' as the same paper called him, failed in his candidature, on one pretext or another the workmen were dismissed, the hospital stood still, and
its unfinished walls grew into a warehouse.

Mr. Rout had counted the cost of his promises, and if he got in he meant to perform them. Sir Crowsby Weyland, with a fine contempt for such commercial calculations, promised everything to everyone, got in, and paid nothing. Meanwhile, a smallpox scare broke out in Cutthorpe, and the Poor Law Guardians, to stop the mouths of local newspaper editors and of Whitehall authorities, ran up a temporary shelter in the immediate neighbourhood of the Workhouse for the infectious folk who never came. It was only a small, square building, with a wash-house on the basement; and above, two white-washed rooms capable of holding four beds each for the reception severally of male and female patients. Having got this shelter on their hands, when the crisis passed they ran out a covered passage, connected it with the main buildings and
converted it into a sort of asylum for accidents, factory and street casualties. One member of the Board, who chanced to be a chemist and a Conservative, was indeed accused by the other side of having received two guineas for the disinfecting of this ward, although it had never been used. In answer to which accusation it was urged, that even if it were so, it was a politic measure calculated to restore public confidence. To such a point of enlightenment had local politics arrived in the intelligent town of Cutthorpe.

Into this white-washed tenement then, disinfected the year before from the fear of small-pox, had Adam been carried groaning, upon an old door which the police considerately kept for the use of drunkards. The public protectors had been in time to save his life, but not his limbs, from the brutal crowd of roughs by which he was surrounded; and their intervention alone, in
all probability, prevented his prosecuting to the fatal end his chivalrous attack upon Aurea Chapel's assailants. On this particular evening, Adam fortunately chanced to be the sole candidate for the accommodation of the infirmary. The parish doctor came, and did his best. The matron sent in a candle, a drop of spirits, and the few other requisites that the doctor ordered; and then Adam was left alone with his grandmother to succour him as best she might.

'Tell your old granny all about it, Adam,' she said, leaning over him; 'it'll ease yer mind to have it out.'

Very likely, but it would not ease his broken ribs to talk when every breath was an exhaustion; this, however, the hale old woman could not know. She was not capable of understanding a state of things wherein speech would be felt as an aggravation rather than as an alleviation of suffering. The uneducated imagination requires
actual realization of pain before it can comprehend this condition, being, as a rule, unable to grasp it sympathetically.

'Fancy the brutes setting on you and murdering you like this, for nothing!' she exclaimed. 'I wish I had 'em within arm's-length o' me, and I'd soon score their ugly faces, and let that slinking foreman know what an old mother thinks o' him.'

'They were chaffing a young lady,' gasped Adam, 'and I took her part.'

'There now! you stood up for her! Well, I hope she may live to hear it; for be she who she may, I'll be bound she wasn't worth it.'

'I wish I knew she got away,' whispered Adam, between a sigh and a groan. 'Granny, do find out.'

'Well, what like was she, did ye notice? Was she a stranger? There was a yellow-haired girl standing by the gates as I was turning in at six o'clock (ah me! I might
ha' been fearing the worst then, but I wasn't tasting it as I am now). She was slight-built and fanciful-looking, set a good deal o' store by her appearance, and held her head rather high as she went, and did not seem to notice the pavements; do you think it was she?'

'Yes,' breathed Adam.

'Well, then she'll be safe enough with Mrs. Smith at Slumsby Vicarage by now; and if her thoughts isn't too much occupied with her own affairs, no doubt she'll have told the lady how it was with you. I made a point of it in speaking to her that she should name my fears for you. It's a queer world, and always has been since I've known it. I sent that very girl on to be the means of saving you out o' danger, and she went straight and shoved you in.'

Adam said no more; but when his pain allowed him a moment's respite, his thoughts followed that stranger maiden
arriving at the Vicarage and telling his friend there, as he had no doubt that she would tell, how he had risked his life in her service; and the friend, whilst she listened, would feel that his action had proved his comprehension of the teaching she had given him, and the sympathy and encouragement he so much needed would be his. It comforted him to think that Mrs. Smith would hear; it lifted the load of his suffering to believe that she would come to share it; it exalted him to know that she would approve his conduct.

Love such as this, wherein, freed from self, the soul adores some human embodiment of the highest perfection it has learnt to conceive, finds no task hard, no service bitter, if only its effort may be accepted, its toil laid upon the altar of service. Like a little child it raises imploring arms, that by the humility of its attitude it may be received into closer fellowship with the
object of its admiration. Worship such as this cannot degrade its object, since any idol with the false feet made of clay will surely totter and descend from its pedestal beneath the clinging embrace which it betrays. Nor does youth alone show these enthusiasms; they survive in some quick natures until tranquil years—freed from the eccentricities and excitabilities, from the unreasoning demands and the grotesque evidences of immaturity, by which they chiefly fix our earlier attention, showing then passion in its purest form, in its noblest development, as the calm upward tendency of the soul, aspiring by means of that which has shown itself to its gaze as the most humanly divine, towards the divinely human.

Thus it was that while Adam lay exhausted upon his workhouse bed, with no visible horizon beyond the dark one which hemmed in his present suffering, the
thought that the lady who was the object of his respect and devotion would hear of his conduct, and would come to him to share its bitter consequences, was the one gleam of comfort that played around him in the darkness. His anxious ear even began to listen for her footsteps on the stair, and all his senses, sharpened by pain, were attentive for the music of her voice; but the long moments grew into what seemed to be tedious hours, and still there was no sound but the oppressed breathing of his grandmother in the chair by his side, the chiming of the quarters from the church clock, and the occasional howling of the porter's melancholy dog. Suddenly the idea occurred to him that she would not come, because of his father's violence towards her when he discovered her connection with the Sodden Farm family; or worse still, as his father had, he knew, been sent for, he might even meet her and attack her in the
narrow lanes between Slumsby and Cut-thorpe. Instinctively, Adam credited his father's violent prejudices with undefined possibilities of swift mischievous outburst. What if he had met her, and wounded her, perhaps! The road was lonely between the village and the town. She, knowing him too little to have learnt to fear him, might have irritated the morbid man by some reference to the disputed subject; she might have cried for help, and there might have been none near; and even now she might be lying by the roadside bleeding and wounded, as Adam himself had lain. She might be dead perhaps, and Adam's own father a murderer. She dead! if it were so, the light had gone out of this world for Adam. He might as well abandon himself to be mastered by his misery, if this one strong hope were to be quenched in obscurity. His fancies were not very reasonable, perhaps; but then reason
scarcely waits upon fever; fearful imaginations are quickened by wounded nerves, and the details of Adam’s recent experience might well have suggested these particular shapes of dread. Exaggerated images of terror and mischief fed the fever that burnt in his wounds, and hurried the pulses throbbing in his veins until the only expression of feeling possible to him was summed up in the simple statement:

‘Granny, the railway-train is running through my head. If you cannot stop it I shall shout out.’

Then he began to talk about his garden. Honeysuckles grew around his bed—white-flowering convolvulus twined climbing up his pillow—peonies dazzled his aching eyes—sunflowers stood and nodded at him, turning, as he gazed, into strange girl-faces, with scared wild eyes and golden hair; and he was left alone to rescue them from the poles of the Fen-men, who thrust them down as
they thrust down Diggory Daily, and laid them low in the earth.

'Don't 'ee, Adam—don't 'ee wander so! Light o' my old eyes, hope o' my widowed heart! Let them girls and plants alone,' wailed the old grandmother. 'Them as raves o' flowers, th' Almighty's rooting with 'em in the earth.'

'Will she come?' said Adam with an effort, recalled by her voice.

Mrs. Daily, believing that his thoughts were still following the stranger maiden, answered:

'When thy father comes, we'll send him for her,' and was perplexed by the vehemence with which he answered:

'No!'

Then in his mind a new fear arose. He was dying, and others would not suffer his best friend to judge him truly. The stranger would not tell her how and why he fought. The matron would receive her
when she came to ask for him, his eyes being closed for ever, and she would speak over the stiff, sad outline on the bed just as she had spoken over the bruised and aching body—would say that he had no one but himself to blame, and that he had deserved it all—would say it all the more when he was gone, and his deaf ears and his dumb lips could no longer give the lie to any tale. This was agony! This was worse than the thought of any living harm—this dull, dead immortality of slander, which yet none might have power to kill! And she, who had been his guide, would stand by and hear it all so sadly, and would go away back to her life again with a sore doubt at heart because of her blighted hopes in him. Something of all this, in his despair, he tried to pour into the sympathetic but dulled ear of his grandmother beside him; but his weak words wandered, and the sense was hard to catch, and she,
mistaking him, laid a wrinkled hand upon his lips.

'Hush, laddie! live for the lassies, and not die for them. They ain't o' much account in heaven, where they're skinny things and mostly run to wings. Come another year or two, young love'll make you prize yer life. You don't know what it is yet, and it's easy leaving what ye haven't learnt. Trust your old granny, laddie. Lie you still and husband yer breath. Would to God I could give you all there's left o' mine!'

But Adam made no answer, and as the moments grew into half-hours, and the half-hours lengthened into hours, and he seemed no more to see or hear her, the throbblings of her own heart fell upon the old woman's ear like the pulsations of silence, and in the dread of his death she cried aloud in the simple pathos of her class and creed:
‘God A’mighty, if ye’d only take the old life to mend the young one! Will nought but our strength suffice Thee? Here am I, an old pauper; but I can do a day’s work yet. It’s poor work, O Lord, but I’d do it willingly; and I shall never want to rest nor to enjoy myself. I’m not one as cares for songs nor shows, but I’d serve Thee faithfully. The lad’s life is all before him, and by the pattern o’ the past he might be a leader in the future; but the taste of the mould’s in my mouth already, and I ain’t got no home but this, where they say I make too free. O Lord, take me!"

So praying, she threw her blue-checked apron over her head, and rocking herself backwards and forwards, spent her tears in the flickering light of the tallow candle which dimly lit up the empty beds—beds whose smooth, flat surface, beside the one full one, seemed to emphasize the presence of life as a merely temporary accident.
All this time, whilst Aurea Chapel’s misadventure was prompting Adam’s excited imagination, she herself was lying in a sweet infantine slumber in a quiet chamber at Slumsby Vicarage. No pain either of mind or body vexed her dreams. She had received all the care and attention she desired. She had told her story, in her own way, not untruthfully at all; but reproducing, as we all must do, only so much truth as she had been capable of perceiving in relation to her own conduct and motives and to that of others. It was all true so far as it went, which is all that can be said of the most veracious statements of the best of us; but then if Jessie had been telling it, it would have been so very much truer, because it would have gone so very much farther. The skirts of truth have a very varying amplitude: sometimes they cover a space no bigger than a mushroom, at others they extend to a whole plain.
Jessie had listened attentively to all that she had been told by the agitated girl, and had arrived at the rest of the story pretty accurately by a rapid process of deduction; and Aurea—who commonly lived in a state of perpetual surprise that there could be two opinions in the world, and who set her conscience as she set her watch, by the views entertained on the subject of morals as of time, by the persons under whose influence or in whose society she happened to find herself—went to bed with the happy conviction that her course of conduct must be all right, because George Apers had indicated it, and because his sister had received her kindly. Whilst Jessie was soothingly brushing her hair for her she dried her tears, and resolutely made up her mind not to think any more that night about this strange ending to what should have been her wedding-day; because she really was so very tired, and because it
really was worse than useless to lie awake and think. Feelings may be spices adding pungency to life, but a little commonplace philosophy is wholesome; like table-salt, it goes further, and is more generally applicable. So Aurea Chapel laid down all the urgent difficulties of her tangled life, with her shining head upon the pillow, and did not think about the morrow; slept a childlike slumber, undisturbed equally by considerations of the feelings of the man whose wife she was to have become that day, and by perplexities as to her future reception of the love she had encouraged that other man to tell, in whose house she had found a safely chosen refuge. It need not be added that the startling circumstances which marked her walk through the town of Cutthorpe—the old woman's message to Mrs. Smith, the treatment she received from the factory-hands, and the intervention of one of their number on her
behalf—found no fixity among the shifting shadows which distracted her giddy brain, and engaged her preoccupied attention.

Jessie sat beside her unexpected visitor whilst she slept, fearful lest any sense of trouble from the strangeness of her surroundings should disturb her. Aurea looked very pretty as she lay, and very young. To go to sleep in the midst of difficulties, to leave other people to think for her, and to arrive at some desirable solution of the perplexities about which she did not even dream, seemed to her quite the natural thing, and was quite in keeping with those innocent unlined features. So Jessie did the thinking, and there was plenty of it to be got through. In the first place, there was Leopold Stuckley: well, he probably deserved his desertion. In the next place, George: what of him? He could not be so easily dismissed; in fact he might probably be
expected to return home that night. That might be awkward, undeniably. But would he come? Surely he would have the sense to postpone a return that might have the air of a pursuit of the fugitive bride. Aurea's relations and friends? well, she had a father, and he was only in Rome, and Rome is very near England, measured by the metal rods of modern railway lines. She would counsel Aurea to return to Italy. She could do nothing better than immediately to place herself under the natural protection of her father's name. It would be better than any other. Aurea must again retire beneath the nominal protection of the parental wing, and must reappear at some future time, taking a new departure with a steadied step upon the high-road of life. At that problematically distant period when reason might be expected to rule even Aurea Chapel's conduct, Jessie might even endure to contemplate the revival of George's former devotion. There is something
alluring to a true woman's fancy in that kind of devotion to an object which deepens as its value in the sight of others declines. Aurea admired, Aurea flirting capriciously and coquetishly, Aurea queen ing it wherever she went, had seemed to Jessie but a mad choice for George. But Aurea sobered, steadied, reproached by many, possibly even a little repentant for the scrapes which she had risked by her folly, seemed to Jessie a far more possible and hopeful bride for her brother. Then she laid her head back, and let her fancies wander further: dismissed George, dismissed Aurea, bade even Mr. Smith retire to Sodden Farm, replaced them all by a vision of the husband she had not seen for years. To go to Australia, and to make inquiries in all directions, until by means of such inquiries, and of such agencies as she could set in motion, she had obtained some clue to his whereabouts, or, at any rate, to his
later history, was a prompting which was
daily assuming in her mind the shape of
an intention. Fears, unspoken but not
unadmitted, by which she had been with-
held at first, were all paling now before
the rush of quick desires which this day's
revival of association had created. She
must go, and she would find her husband,
and would bring him back to kneel with
her at his father's feet, and to restore late
joy to Sodden Farm.

Then once more the scene shifted, and
not her husband's brown hair and strong
features, but a round boyish face, blue
wondering eyes, and fair hair, seemed to
face her; and Adam, with hands outstretched
as his ancestor's had been when he fell, en-
treated on behalf of the people against this
transmission of Sodden Fen. 'You, who
have taught us your faiths, who have fired
me with your aspirations, give us our lands
for the people's good; save us from the
mastery of your ill-chosen husband. Give us the blessing you bade us look for; withhold the curse that you offer in its stead.'

'Was it for this,' she asked herself, 'that she had spoken in the school? Was it for this that her longing had seemed to touch its fulfilment, that by her own action she might henceforth render its accomplishment impossible?' And Adam? Would the lad learn to question the lie which her life would seem to give to her teaching? That was the sorest doubt of all. Not for her own sake, but for his; not for the pitiful matter of loss in his estimation, but from the unspeakable dread that in learning to doubt her, he might learn to doubt all. These lines of thought thus reasoned out might seem indeed far too strained to touch as yet the peasant lad; but in simple practice, as the thinker knew, she would shortly find him well within their limits. Interchange of notions on the subject might
indeed be never possible; but lives can clash where intellects may never meet. She knew herself to be but working out mentally the problem they both must solve practically at no very distant day. She summed up in a few idle seconds the difficulties which he and she, she foresaw, must encounter in detail in the slow years to come; arriving thus at once in thought where the future must presently bring them both. Already she saw the trust in Adam's eyes turned to vague wonder and reproach, to doubt and questioning, and then rejection. Could she hope that the faiths she might give him would survive the failure, if it must fail, of his early trust in her? Would his enthusiasm outlast the downfall of his zeal for her? She ventured to think that it might, as a fire kindled survives the match that has ignited it; and to that end she would seek to shape him quickly into that which she would see him, ere the shock came.
CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT IN THE VICARAGE.

WHilst the clocks were striking ten, the door-bell of Slumsby Vicarage rang, and Jessie Smith was recalled from her watch by Aurea’s bedside to the consideration of matters below. Her brother sent her a telegram, stating that he should not return that night; in it he further desired to be informed of Miss Chapel’s arrival and of her welfare.

Whilst Mrs. Smith was composing the difficult and somewhat delicate answer, the
telegraph boy from Cutthorpe, waiting in the hall, was thrilling the parlour-maid with an account of how a young lady had nearly been killed by the factory lads that afternoon in the town, and how one of their number from Slumsby village had interfered to protect her, and had received such dreadful injuries that he had been taken up for dead and had been carried to the Workhouse infirmary. All this Jessie unavoidably overheard, to the immediate reviving of her bitter fears on Adam's account. She knew that his father had that day sent him off to the tile-yard, and the telegraph boy, when carefully questioned, declared that the victim, whose name he had not heard, was a fresh hand from the village. In the midst of this recital, Sir Crowsby reappeared. He had called again to inquire for the young lady who had that evening tumbled so helplessly into his hands.

Sir Crowsby Weyland faced the lady,
against whom he had so recently warned
Mr. Smith, with no visible change of de-
meanour, although his interest and his
curiosity were both keenly heightened by
what he had since heard. Something in
the lady's presence made it impossible to
him to change in any degree the attitude
with which he had naturally met her when
first introduced to her as simply the Vicar's
sister. It might have been because she had
that assured but unassuming consciousness
of acceptance which belongs to those who,
not having had to conquer their own social
position, dispute that of no one else. To
Sir Crowsby's judgment it seemed strange
that this special self-possession should
characterize Mr. Smith's daughter-in-law,
if such indeed she were.

Even whilst he was politely offering to
go off into Cutthorpe at once and ascertain
what had really happened in connection
with Miss Chapel's accident, he found him-
self wishing that it were possible candidly to put a question or two to the lady before him, which might lead her to explain her present position. Since she had lowered herself by her marriage with Mr. Smith's son, was it—he would like to have known—a certain consciousness of mental superiority which had kept her socially unsubmerged, as he undoubtedly found her? Was it, in a word, well-preserved family pride or vigorous personal conceit which led this lady to urge her relationship with Mr. Smith, and yet to assume an unchanged position, morally and socially, with a certainty which proffered no unnecessary claim? In Sir Crowsby Weyland's judgment it must be either the family pride or the personal conceit, or both united; and yet in point of fact it was in the very absence of any such forms of self-remembrance that Jessie's force lay. It was in her capacity for self-forgetting devotion to ends which
were noble, in her generous enthusiasms for her faiths and her friends, in her vivid pursuits of ideal aims to the neglect or exclusion of narrow realizations. These were the inspiring elements in a character which was raised thus, and thus alone, above the dull stagnation of surrounding levels of existence.

Sir Crowsby Weyland was by no means unwilling to take a moonlight walk into Cutthorpe to ascertain what had really happened in the recent affray, and he was not ill-pleased at this opportunity of bringing home to his political opponent, Mr. Rout, his sense of the ungovernableness of the Radical faction as represented by the lawless hands at the factory. But before he set out he was anxious once more to see the young lady who had been the heroine of the adventure; to that end he manoeuvred himself into the drawing-room. He had pictured her standing there once more
before him, telling her story with pretty, eager gestures; pathetic, appealing, tearful, but not on this second occasion losing her self-control so far as to permit her attitude to decline from the interesting into the embarrassing. In memory and imagination only did he again desire to hold her in his arms; such an experience being perhaps, like foreign travel, better appreciated in a poetic past than in a sternly realized present. It was an episode to remember and to live over again in fancy, just as often as circumstances or caprice dictated; but to be repeated only in a dreamland peopled with imponderable visionary maidens. Sir Crowsby Weyland stepped uninvited into the drawing-room, and cast his eyes upon the tumbled sofa-cushions where the fair bright head had lain. It was gone, and the place looked very bare; the room appeared the worse for the desertion of the evening; the blinds were up,
the lamp had burnt down and was smoking, and the disorder of Aurea's distress yet seemed to linger when the interest of her presence had fled.

'You are right,' said Jessie, observing the direction but mistaking the nature of his thoughts. 'It would be better to consult Miss Chapel; she may be able to give us some information about the lad who is said to have interfered on her behalf. She was asleep when I came down; but it will be better to awaken her, in case there should be any truth in this dreadful story. She is calmer now, and may be able to recollect what happened. You know the Dailys, Sir Crowsby; they are old tenants of yours. I am really anxious about the lad Adam—it was his first day in the tile-yard. I have been sitting with his mother the whole afternoon in that tiny thatched cottage down by the fen, and she was very anxious about her son Adam. His father had sent
him to Cutthorpe against his will, and they're such a rough set, I'm informed, in that tilery.'

'You have no proof that it's Daily's lad.'

'Only a woman's proof—the proof of my fears, Sir Crowsby; but Miss Chapel may know. I will ask her.'

'Poor little fugitive bride!' thought Sir Crowsby; 'it's a pity that she should not be left to sleep in peace. The child will dream that the enemies she has but just escaped from are knocking at her door; but women have no consideration for one another.'

Mrs. Smith, had she heard these thoughts, could have told Sir Crowsby that the men who utter such sentiments are responsible for the experiences from which they have learned them.

'Aurea,' said Jessie, entering gently.

Aurea started and sat up, shaded her
eyes from the light, and for a moment was lost in surprise; the next, surprise changed into irritation as she realized that she had been recalled from a land of desirable forgetfulness to one of perplexed remembrance. But anger in its turn was instantly subdued by the instinct of good-breeding, which instinct, carelessly inherited or painstakingly acquired, is curiously strong—strong enough not only to subdue such temporary annoyances, but even to master the tragic presentments of disease, bereavement and death. So Aurea sat up in bed, drew her hands across her eyes, and pleasantly asked what Mrs. Smith wanted to know.

‘I am very sorry to disturb you, dear, but there is a report that a lad has been seriously injured by the roughs who molested you, in endeavouring to cover your escape; did you see anything of such an occurrence?’
'They seemed all to be fighting together,' said Aurea, 'when I ran away. Oh yes; I fancy one big fellow did tell me to run: but I was so frightened I really did not take any notice of what they were saying, and I thought it was best not to seem to attend.'

'What was he like? Did you happen to see?'

'Oh, the most disreputable-looking creature; quite the worst of them all; covered with clay and mud, his clothes torn, and looking as if he had come from the butcher's yard! It perfectly makes me shudder to think of him!'

'Then that could not have been my friend Adam Daily.'

'Adam Daily? is that the name of the boy you want? I seem to have heard it somewhere. Oh yes; it was the old woman. Dear me, she quite went out of my poor distracted head until this very minute! Mrs. Smith,
there was an old pauper-woman standing near the Workhouse gates when I was passing by, and I stopped to ask her my way. She seemed a queer garrulous old thing, as those poor women generally are. She was very anxious, too, about where I was going; and when she had settled it to her own satisfaction, she wanted to give me a message to you—about her grandson, I think she said it was. I was to be sure and tell you he would be murdered, or some such nonsense as that. I suspected, you know, that she had been out to see her friends, and that she had made the most of her opportunities, so that she really did not know what she was saying; and I did not take much notice; in fact, I was glad to be rid of her company. In a general way, I make it a rule never to ask my way of anything but a man; a woman is sure to say always either too little or too much. If she isn't stupid, and ignorant that such a
place as you ask for exists at all, she is inquisitive, and wants to know; not only where you are going, but what you are going to do when you get there. I like men always much better than women—don't you, Mrs. Smith?

'Especially if I have a message that I want safely carried, Aurea, and that may make all the difference between life and death for some one that I care for very much!'

'Now, Mrs. Smith, that is too bad! How could I be expected to remember when I'd got all manner of troubles on my own mind, and when I was quite a stranger, and it ought to have been my wedding-day, only I felt it couldn't?'

Jessie said nothing, simply because she was considering the message which she had just received; but Aurea, mistaking the silence for rebuke, added with a quick escape of temper:
This is positively too much! If that boy or any other did get hurt in my service, of course I shall make it up to him to-morrow; but it really is not my fault if the people in Cutthorpe are accustomed to murdering each other. It seems to me that the people here are a most disgraceful set of roughs. It is the first time I ever was, in any town in England or out of it, where a lady could not walk through the streets in broad daylight without being insulted. This is the result of trade, I suppose, upon the manners of the people. I have always heard that in manufacturing towns they are all roughs and Radicals.'

'Then if I were you,' said Mrs. Smith, smiling, 'I'd be content without getting to the root of the matter to-night. Lie down and go to sleep. You shall not be disturbed any more.'

Jessie descended to consult with Sir
Crowsby, and the result of their conversation was, that that gentleman immediately started for Cutthorpe, and went straight to the infirmary.
CHAPTER X.

A NIGHT IN THE INFIRMARY.

AN ancient story of the Fenlands tells how in the eleventh year of the reign of King Edward III., a painstaking inquirer, by name Robert of Rotheram, being anxious to obtain incontestable proof of the actual existence of those evil spirits by which these watery wastes were said to be haunted, made an agreement with a native of those parts, one John of Ithen, that he should duly deliver over to him within four days, bound with a stout rope, one substantial
devil ('unum diabolum'), in proper person; and as earnest-money of this bargain, paid him the sum of three pence. That the contract was not fulfilled, and that action at law before the court of the neighbouring manor was thereupon taken by the devil-seeker against the devil-monger, is matter of subsequent record; further, it is told how the court got out of its difficulties by the prudent decision that 'no such plea could lie between Christians,' and how it thereupon adjourned the case to more suitable regions ('usque in Infernam') where both parties no doubt would find judgment, contenting itself only with the decent hope that 'the Lord might have mercy on their souls.'

Sir Crowsby Weyland happened to possess the interesting folio of King Charles II.'s time, in which this translation is duly recorded, and he had also made himself sufficiently acquainted with the treat-
ment which the blessed St. Guthlac was said to have received at the claws of the diabolic denizens of these lands; and St. Guthlac's experiences were forcibly recalled to his memory now, when he stood at the foot of the infirmary stairs. What dire deed was being done? Involuntarily Sir Crowsby Weyland paused. Shriek followed upon shriek; heart-rending cries filled the air, whilst old Jones the porter, who had acted as his guide, hobbled off, muttering curses between his toothless jaws. Having learnt that Adam Daily had been carried in alive, from him—Sir Crowsby Weyland feared—must proceed the agonized outcries which came from above.

'Good heavens! are they torturing the wretch?' he exclaimed, as he hesitated in the doorway. 'Is it possible that the parsimony of the parish extends to anaesthetics? They must be taking off the lad's limbs without chloroform.'
The narrow passage was in darkness save for the glimmer of the moonlight which Jones had admitted by opening the outer door; but above, a flickering tallow-candle spluttered upon the landing, and in a pause of sound the murmur of men's voices might be heard in consultation; then came renewed shrieks, mingled with wailings and sobs of anguish. Inaction becoming unendurable, Sir Crowsby Weyland took the stone steps three by three, and reached the narrow landing. There, as he paused before the doors of the divided rooms above, uncertain which doorway to enter, the cries once more died down, and these unexpected words, audibly breathed with long, anguished groans, fell upon his astonished ears—'Hic expiravit pro populo mortuus. Pro populo mortuus expiravit.' Aided by their direction, Sir Crowsby pushed open the first of two doors that fronted him, and found himself in the
centre of a bare room, along whose white-washed walls his own shadow glided with a ghostly motion. Three empty beds, a table, a chair, an old woman swaying herself backwards and forwards in helpless, inarticulate grief; and on the fourth bed, by which she knelt, a shapeless outline which agitated the meagre coverings, and in now almost inarticulate language bewailed its fate in words strangely at variance with its condition and its surroundings. As Sir Crowsby approached the bed, vague wandering sounds succeeded. The sufferer seemed to be agitated by the delirious imagination of some violent death-scene. At one instant he was excitedly disputing, at the next passively yielding his life in a deadly contest with some visionary assailant. Now a combatant, now a martyr, he alternately disputed his ground inch by inch in defence of some weaker combatant, and breathed out his
soul in the weird phrase which Sir Crowsby suddenly remembered to have read on the tombstone of the local hero in the chancel of the parish church of St. Stephen's.

'This won't do,' said the visitor, with the robust cheerfulness which characterizes the benevolent spectator. 'Why, this must be the lad of whom I've heard my nephews speak so often. Your grandson, no doubt. Come, Mrs. Daily—for that is your name, I suppose—try and pull yourself together, and go and find the doctor. Where is he?'

'In the next room.'

'Well, then, go and tell him Sir Crowsby Weyland has come to see his patient, and finds him in a high state of fever.'

But the old woman shook her head, and refused to stir.

'He is passing, Sir Crowsby; he is passing. It is the enemy of us all that
is wrestling with him in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It is what we must all come to. He has been a good lad, and the eldest of thirteen. But being born a child of wrath, not the lord of the manor, nor yet the Lord of Heaven Himself, can’t deliver him now. No, nor yet the doctor neither. The devil is bound to have his day with every one of us, first or last.’

‘Is it possible that the popular imagination in the reign of Queen Victoria, as in the eleventh year of the reign of King Edward III., is still thus devil-bound?’ thought Sir Crowsby.

Before, however, he could oppose common sense to religious prejudice, piercing and shrill, from the other side of the canvas partition which divided the ward into two separate rooms, rose the cries he had heard on his first entry. These proceeded, as Sir Crowsby now ascertained, from a misguided
young woman who had been picked up in the street in a fit.

The unfortunate Adam, recalled for a moment to his senses by the nerve-torturing sound, entreated:

‘Oh, take me out into the open, into the dark still night! Sir—granny, if you love me, lay me down in the damp, cool grass by Diggory’s Dyke, and let me die in peace!’

‘Hark to him!’ cried the old woman, with a sudden change of mental attitude, recognising at once the momentary amelioration of his condition. ‘Why, my boy, it costs a lot to die in peace. ’Tisn’t for such as you and me. The poor must learn to live and die in heaps. They pack us close even below the sods. Why, sir,’ she cried, rising to her feet, spreading her hands, and facing Sir Crowsby in a tragic attitude which art might imitate, but which strong feeling alone could initiate—‘sir, listen to
me! When that lad's grandfather, my own lawful man, was laid by the parish in the graveyard down below, there were five coffins piled in the narrow path. Five rough deal coffins, three o' one side and two o' the other, no better planed nor joined than the grocers' boxes that crosses the sea with Portugal onions and Spanish oranges bursting out o' their split sides; and the church parson, he stood in the midst and read the words once for a paying funeral that was resting handy on a decent trestle covered with a velvet pall, and made it do for the lot; and though the young woman as was laid on the top was not two feet below the moulds, yet my old man, that died o' the rheumatics, was soddened in the stagnant water that filled the bottom of the pit! That's how they always do it if they get the chance; they put us in when the chaplain's on for a regular undertaker's job, and asks the relations o' the paying
corpse to be so good as to excuse the liberty. And if you don’t believe an old pauper’s tale, ask my son James, the father of this lad here. He was a strong young man then; but he come over so with what he saw o’ the way the parish put the job through, that he entered himself in a Burial Club from that very night at sixpence a week, and he’s there now. But he’s been too poor to put in his family, and this one hasn’t a chance to lie, as he should, decent against the judgment-day.’

Sir Crowsby Weyland, alarmed for the effect of this doleful prognostication upon Adam’s returning senses, and anxious to cut the dialogue short, turned to summon the doctor from the next room, and by so doing silenced the outcries of the hysteric patient therein; but Adam appeared indifferent to, or unconscious of, what had been said. Soon the master and the matron also re-appeared by Adam’s bedside, and in
due course Jones, the porter, ascended the stone stairs laden with all the comforts which the doctor's present attention could suggest, and Sir Crowsby's benevolent intentions supply. To Jones succeeded James Daily, in obedience to a message which Jessie had sent to him.

The thatcher approached his son in a slow and awkward manner, and then tried to shake him by the hand. For James Daily this was the highest expression of feeling; it was in itself a recognition of his son having become an independent individual—a man, in short, and one he was proud of. But unfortunately his attempt was made upon the wounded side, and both the doctor and the matron rushed forward to prevent his intention, which had the unlucky effect of making him shamefaced, and consequently angry. Glancing defiantly at the innocent alleviations which Sir Crowsby had provided,
as though that gentleman had taken a liberty in caring for the comfort of his son, he said:

'Ah well, I must leave him to you. I hope you know what to do with him among you, for I don't. I'd have had him home, but they lie so thick in our place there's no room for broken bones. You would have thought now,' he continued, 'that a great lad like that might have kept himself off the parish for one day, when I've kept myself and all of 'em off for thirty-five years and more.'

Sir Crowsby raised a warning hand, for this time the sufferer moved uneasily; his father's words had clearly reached him.

'Well, I'll look in to-morrow in my dinner-hour,' added James Daily. 'I'll leave him to you, mother: I take it they'll let you see to him.'

'How indifferent the fellow is!' thought Sir Crowsby, who lingered yet, in the
vain hope of extracting from the master or the matron further particulars as to the details of the assault upon the young lady in whose defence Adam was said to have suffered; but James Daily was not indifferent: it was simply that sober men of his class have not the language of feeling at command. He stood, turning his shapeless workman's hat round and round in his hands, whilst the doctor was giving his instructions and final encouragement to the desponding grandmother; then, seeing Sir Crowsby Weyland about to follow the workhouse authorities and the doctor down the stairs, he went up to him awkwardly and stopped him, just by the door, abruptly, saying:

'Excuse the liberty, sir, but might I make so bold as to ask the favour of a loan?'

'Begging, actually,' thought Sir Crowsby;
these fellows positively have no affections, and are without the decency which simulates them. Why I have just covered the lad's table with comforts.'

'No, sir,' said the man thus misjudged; offended, and quick to guess the thought from the manner. 'No, sir, it's nothing of that; and if you'll let me know what those things costs, I'll pay you something down, and the rest as I can. It's only the loan of a document, sir, that you've got in your family box at the Ferry, so I'm informed. That lady at the Vicarage—Mr. Smith's daughter-in-law, so she gives out—advised me to read it. It's the writing o' the tenancy of Sodden Farm.'

'And pray what have you or that lady to do with my family papers?'

'What has she got to do with it? Well, sir, it's this way; she passed my place a night ago, wandering down by the Fen, and as I was drawing my pipe up aloft,
she got into conversation with me about my son there, wanting to take him into her service. But then she let out as she reckoned herself son's wife to old Mr. Smith, and as such, had her eye on the farm by the Fen, which isn't neither hers nor his, nor yet his son's, if he's unburied, which isn't likely, but mine; mine and my son's lying there, if everyone had their lawful rights. Well, when I heard that, I just told her my mind, and refused her the service of my flesh and blood. She answered me back out of a document that she said you'd got in your keeping, and of which Mr. Smith must have told her, for she hasn't been long enough in the place to find it out for herself."

'Come down to the Ferry to-morrow, and if I can find it, I will read it to you,' said Sir Crowsby. 'I never spare valuable papers out of my own possession, and with-
out any disrespect to your education, Mr. Daily, I think you might find the writing hard to decipher; but mind, I'm not going to aid and abet you in any of your fancies about my friend Mr. Smith. If he has found his daughter-in-law, I am very glad of it for his sake.'

'Was there any doubt but he'd find her,' retorted James Daily grimly, 'when his will had been known to be kept waiting for her since my lad there was ten years old?'

At this moment Adam, revived by the administration of remedies, and by the noise of voices, spoke feebly:

'I want her; I want Mrs. Smith.'

James Daily scowled; but Sir Crowsby answered:

'By all means, my boy; she begged me to inquire after you, and to let her know how you are.'

'Father, I want her to come,' pleaded
Adam, with the feeble insistence of suffering, yet mindful of the former prohibition.

'And so she shall come,' said Grandmother Daily, 'if you will only lie still now and go to sleep;' and even James Daily did not venture to say no. He was overawed by the presence of suffering which he did not understand; by the presence of Sir Crowsby Weyland, with whom he wished to keep upon terms for the sake of hearing the contents of that document; by the presence of his determined old mother, whose will was the only one that had ever controlled his own.

As Sir Crowsby Weyland returned to the Ferry that night, he promised himself that Mr. Rout should be made to feel his responsibility for a standard of conduct amongst his workpeople which rendered it possible that a well-bred young lady passing through the town in the broad light of day should
become the unwilling heroine in a fray between the factory-hands, and should owe an unpoetic and embarrassing deliverance to the sturdy arm of a thatcher’s son. It is to be feared that in his prejudiced judgment the rancorous estimate of class-injury obscured the recollection of class-indebtedness.