

THE SON OF HIS FATHER

BY

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ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

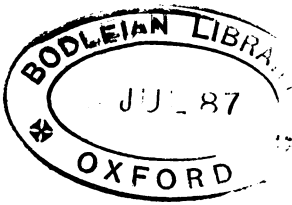
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THE SON OF HIS FATHER.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN HE WAS A CHILD.

‘DON’T say anything before the boy.’

This was one of the first things he remembered. In the confused recollections of that early age, he seemed to have been always hearing it: said between his mother and his sister, afterwards between his grandparents, even by strangers one to another, always, ‘Don’t say anything before the boy.’ What it was, about which nothing was to be said, he had very little idea, and, indeed, grew up to be a man before, in the light of sudden revelations, he began to put these scattered gleams together, and see what they meant. They confused his little

soul from the beginning, throwing strange lights and stranger shadows across his path, keeping around him a sort of unreality, a sense that things were not as they seemed.

His name was John in those days: certainly John—of that there was no doubt: called Johnnie, when people were kind, sometimes Jack—but John he always was. He had a faint sort of notion that it had not always been John Sandford. But this was not clear in his mind. It was all confused with the rest of the broken reminiscences which concerned the time in which everybody was so anxious that nothing should be said before the boy.

In those days his recollection was of a little common-place house—a house in a street—with two parlours, one behind the other, kitchens below, bed-rooms above, the most ordinary little house. There was a little garden behind, in which he played; and in which sometimes he was vaguely conscious of being shut out on purpose to play, and doing so in an abortive, unwilling way which took all the pleasure out of it. Sometimes he only sat down and wondered, not even pretending to amuse himself,

until a butterfly flew past and roused him, or his little spade showed itself temptingly at hand. At seven one is easily beguiled, whatever weight there may be on one's spirit. But now and then he would stop and look up at the windows, and see some one moving indoors, and wonder again what it was that the boy was not intended to know.

At this period of John's career, his father was alive—and he was fond of his father. Sometimes papa would be very late, and would go up to John's little bed, and bring him down in his night-gown only half awake, seeing the candles like stars through a mist of sleep and wonder, till he was roused to the fullest wakefulness by cakes and sweetmeats, and every kind of dainty which papa had brought. John became quite used to all the varying experiences of this midnight incident—the reluctance to be roused up, the glory of going downstairs, the delight of the feast. He sat on his father's knee, with his little bare feet wrapped in a shawl, and his eyes shining as brightly as the candles, munching and chattering. He got quite used to it. He used to feel uncomfortable sometimes in the morning,

and heard it said that something was very bad for him, and that the child's stomach, as well as his morals, would be spoiled. Johnnie knew as little about his stomach as about his morals. And he had a way of being well which greatly interfered with all these prognostications. He was a very sturdy little boy.

He had a consciousness through all these scenes of his mother's face, very pale, without any smile in it, showing serious, like the moon, among those lights. She gave him no cake or oranges, but it was she who wrapped up his feet in the shawl, and took care of him in the morning when his little head sometimes ached. Papa was never visible in the morning. Johnnie was sometimes a little afraid of him, though he was so jolly in these mid-night visits. The boy was frightened when he was being carried downstairs, and clung very close, though he did not say anything about his fears. Papa would lurch sometimes on those occasions, like the steam-boat on which John once had gone to sea. The memory of the lighted table, the father who always made a noise, laughing, talking, sometimes singing, always so fond of his little boy ;

but mamma dreadfully quiet, scarcely saying anything, and the lights of the candles, not at all like the candles we have now-a-days, but big, and shining like stars, never faded from his memory, even when he had grown a man.

In the day-time, it was rather dull. Susie was five years older than he, going on for twelve, and knowing everything. She got to saying, 'Go away, child,' when he asked her to come and play. As he remembered her, she never played, but was always at her needlework or something, almost worse than mamma—and there would be long conversations between those two in the winter's afternoon, while he was playing at coach and horses, made with chairs, in the other room, the back parlour, which was the place where they had their meals. Sometimes when he got tired of the obstinacy of Dobbin, who was the big mahogany arm-chair, and who would have his own way, and jibbed abominably, he would catch a glimpse through the half-opened folding-doors of those two over the fire. They always spoke very low, and sometimes cried—and, if he came a little near, would give each other a frightened look and say, 'Not a word

before the boy.' Johnnie's ears got very quick to those words—he heard them when they were whispered, and sometimes he heard them through his sleep. Could they be talking of anything naughty, or what was it so necessary that he must not know?

There came a time at last when all this confused mystery came to a climax. There were hasty comings and goings, men at the door whose heavy loud knockings filled the house with dismay, stealthy entrances in the dark: for Johnnie a succession of troubled dreams, of figures flitting into his room in the middle of night, but never papa in the old jovial way to carry him down to the parlour with its staring candles. No one thought of such indulgences now. If they were wrong, they were all over. When he awoke he saw, half awake and half dreaming, sometimes his father, though he had been told he was away, sometimes his mother; other strange visitors flitting like ghosts, all confusion and disorder, the night turned into day. He was himself kept in corners in the daylight, or sent into the garden to play, or shut up in the back parlour with his toys. It seemed to

Johnnie that they must think he wanted nothing but those toys, and never could understand that to play without any companions, without any wish for playing, was impossible ; but he was a dutiful child, and tried to do what he was told. It was at this strange and uncomfortable period that he learned how nice it is to have a book, after you have exhausted all your solitary inventions and played at everything you know. The fascination of the books, however, added to the confusion of everything. Johnnie mixed up Robinson Crusoe with the agitating phantasmagoria of his little life. He thought that perhaps it was from the savages his father was hiding,—for he was sure that it was his father he saw in those visions of the night, though every one said he had gone away. Then there came a lull in the agitation, and silence fell upon the house. Mamma and Susie cried a great deal, and were together more than ever, but Johnnie's dreams stopped, and he saw no more in the night through his half-closed eyes the flitting figures and moving lights.

Then there came a strange scene very clearly painted upon his memory, though it was not for

many years after that he was able to piece it in to his life. Johnnie had been left alone in the house with the maid, the only servant the family had, who was a simple-minded country woman, and kind to the child, though not perhaps in a very judicious way. She was kind in the way of giving him sweetmeats and pieces of cake, and the remains of dainty dishes which upstairs were not supposed to be wholesome for Johnnie, 'as if the dear child shouldn't have everything of the best,' Betty said. On this day Betty was full of excitement, not capable of staying still in one place, she herself told him. She gave him his dinner, which he had to eat all by himself, a singular but not on the whole a disagreeable ceremony, since Betty was about all the time, very anxious that he should eat, and amusing him with stories.

'Master Johnnie,' she said, when the meal was over, 'it do be very dull staying in the house, with nothing at all to do. Missus won't be back till late at night. I know she can't, poor dear. It would be more cheerful if you and me went out for a walk.'

'But how could you leave the house, Betty, all alone by itself?' said the little boy.

‘It won’t run away, never fear, nor nobody couldn’t steal the tables and chairs; and there ain’t nothing else left to steal, more’s the pity,’ said Betty. ‘We’ll go afore it’s dark, and it’ll cheer us up a bit: for I can’t sit still, not me, more than if I was one of the family: though you don’t know nothing about that, you poor little darlin’, Lord bless you.’

Betty, it is to be feared, would have told him readily enough, but the child was so used to hearing that he must not be told that he asked no questions. To go out, however, was certainly more cheerful than to pass another wintry afternoon in the back parlour without seeing anyone but Betsy. He allowed himself to be buttoned up in his little thick blue topcoat of pilot cloth, which made him as broad as he was long, and to have his comforter wound round his neck, though he did not much like that; and then they sailed forth, Betsy putting in her pocket the great key of the house door. She did not talk much, being occupied profoundly with interests of her own, of which Johnnie knew nothing, but she led him along past lines of cheerful shops all shining

with Christmas presents : for Christmas was coming on, and there was an unusual traffic in the toy shops and the book shops, and all the places where pleasant things for Christmas were. Johnnie stopped and gazed, dragging at her hand, and wondered if any of the picture-books would fall to his share. His mother did not buy many pleasant things for him ; but if papa came back he never forgot Johnnie ; he thought to himself that surely for Christmas papa would come back — unless indeed the savages had got him. But a certain big policeman strolled by, while this thought passed through the child's mind, and, even at seven years old, one cannot feel that savages are ineffectual creatures where such policemen are. But the thought of papa gave Johnnie a sense of mystery and alarm, since his father had disappeared in the day-time, only to be seen fitfully through half-shut eyes at night.

As the afternoon wore on, and the lights were lighted in all the shop windows, Johnnie thought this better than ever ; but Betty was no longer disposed to let him gaze. She said it was time to go home, and then led him away through

little dark and dingy streets which he did not know, and which tired him both in his little legs and in his mind. At last they came to a row of houses which ran along one side of a street, the other side of which was occupied by a large and lofty building. Here Betty paused a moment pondering.

‘Master Johnnie,’ she said at last, ‘if you’ll be a good boy and don’t say a word to anyone, I’ll take you to see the most wonderful place you ever saw, something which you will never, never forget all your life.’

‘What is it, Betty?’ asked Johnnie.

‘Oh, you would not understand if I was to tell you its name. But it’s something that you will always remember, and be glad you went there. But you must never, never tell; for if you were to tell anyone your mamma would be angry, and it’s not known what she would do to me.’

‘I will never tell,’ said Johnnie, upon which Betty gave him a kiss and called him ‘a poor darlin’, as knew nothing,’ and knocked at the door before which they were standing, and took him up a long, long narrow stair. Johnnie saw nothing of any importance when he was taken

into a little ordinary room at the top, where two women were sitting beside a little fire, where a kettle was boiling and the table set all ready for tea.

‘This is the poor little boy,’ Betty said, after a while: and both the women looked at him, and patted him on the head, and said, ‘Poor little gentleman,’ and that he must have his tea first. He did not mind having his tea, for he was tired with his walk, and the bread and butter they gave him was sprinkled thinly over with little sweetmeats, very little tiny things, red and white, which were quite new to Johnnie. He was used to jam and honey and other things of this kind, but to eat bread and butter sprinkled with sugar-plums was quite a novelty. While he was busy in this agreeable way, one of the women put out the candles and drew up the blind from the window. And then Johnnie saw the wonderful thing which he was never to forget all his life.

Out of the little dark room there was a view into a great hall, lighted up and crammed full of people all sitting round and round in endless lines. Even in church he had never seen so many

people together before. Some were seated in red dresses quite high up where everybody could see them, but the others were quite like people at church. It was very strange to see all that assembly, busy about something, sitting in rows and looking at each other, and not a word to be heard. Johnnie gazed and eat his bread and butter with the sugar-plums, and was not quite sure which was the most wonderful.

‘What are they doing?’ he asked Betty. But Betty only put her arms round him and began to sob and cry.

‘Oh, bless the child, Lord bless the child! Oh listen to him, the little innocent.’

He did not like to be held to Betty’s breast, nor to be wept over in that unpleasant way. He shook himself free, and said to the other women,

‘Will you tell me? What are they doing all staring at each other.’

‘It’s a trial, my poor dear little gentleman. They are trying a man for his life.’

‘No, no, not for his life: though it would have been for his life a little time ago,’ said the other.

Johnnie did not know what it meant to try a

man for his life ; but he accepted the description, as a child often does, without further inquiry, and stood and looked at it wondering. But it did not seem to him the extraordinary thing that Betty had said it was, and presently he began to pull at her skirts, and asked to go home.

That was a very dismal night for Johnnie. They got home, and his things were taken off, and he returned to his toys. To see him playing in his forlorn way, all alone, with his little serious face was too much for Betty. But he got very tired of her caresses and attempts at consolation. The night passed on, and bed-time came, but his mother never came home. He sat and listened for the steps coming along the street, and dozed and woke up again, and felt as if all the world was empty round him, and only he and Betty left. He began to cry, but he felt as if he dared not make a noise, and sat with his little head in his hands trying to keep quiet, though now and then breaking out into sobs. ‘Oh, where was mamma? Why didn’t she come? Where was Susie? What had happened that they did not come home?’ And then the picture-books in the

shop windows, and the great place full of people, who sat all silent under the light in those rows and rows of seats, and the little sugar-plums upon the bread and butter, all circled confusedly in his mind. And in the end he fell asleep, and was carried up to bed by Betty, and undressed without knowing it; but yet even in his sleep seemed to know and feel that there was nobody in the house but Betty and him. Nobody but the servant and the little boy! What a strange, miserable thing in a house that it should be left alone with only the servant and the little boy.

Johnnie woke up suddenly out of his confused and broken sleep. His little bed was in the dressing-room that opened into his mother's bedroom. He woke to hear a sound of crying and miserable voices, low and interrupted with tears. There was a light in his mother's room, and he could see Susie moving about, taking off her outdoor dress, while mamma lay back in the easy-chair before the little fire, as if she had been taken ill. She lay there as if she could not move, till a sudden quick pang sprang up in the little boy's heart, and a coldness as of ice crept over him, even in the warmth of his little

bed. Could mamma, too, be going to die? Mamma *too*? He did not know at all what he meant, and yet he knew that something had happened which was more miserable than anything that ever had been before. He lay still, and gazed out from between the bars of his crib, and listened to the crying. That grown-up people should cry was dreadful to him. He wanted to get up and creep to his mother's knee, and so at least belong to them, rather than be left out in this dreadful solitude: but he knew that if he did this they would immediately stop their talking, and tell each other that nothing must be said before the boy. So all that he could do was to lie still, and cry too, the silent tears dropping upon his little pillow, the sound of the low voices, too low to be intelligible, but not to betray the wretchedness that was in them, coming to him like sounds in a dream. Oh what a different scene from the other awakings, when, half peevish, half frightened out of his sleep, he had opened his eyes to the dazzling of the candle, and seen papa's laughing face bending over his; and then to be carried off, with his little bare feet in papa's hands to keep them warm, even though there

might be a lurching like the steamboat, which frightened yet made him laugh. And then the cakes, the oranges, the sip of papa's wine, and, best of all, papa's laugh, and his merry face. That little vision out of the past got confused by-and-by with the crying and the low talk in the next room, and then with the people sitting in the court, and the sugar-plums on the bread and butter, till Johnnie, in a great bewilderment of images, not knowing which was which, at last out of that chaos once more fell asleep.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN HE WAS A CHILD (CONTINUED).

IT was not very long after this, but how long his memory could not clearly make out, when Johnnie was sent to the country to his grandfather and grandmother, who lived in a village some twenty miles away. He did not recollect being told about it, or at all prepared for his journey, but only that one morning the old people came in, driving in an old-fashioned little light cart, called a shandry in the neighbourhood, and took him away. They were old people who were 'retired,' living in the village in a nice little house of their own, without any particular occupation. The old lady kept poultry, and the old gentleman read the newspapers, and they were very comfortable and happy, with fresh country complexions, and kind country

ways. Grandmamma wore a little brown front with little curls under her cap, which had been the fashion in her day. But her husband looked much handsomer in his own white hair. They were neither of them very like Johnnie's mother, who was tall and quiet and very serious, while the old people were full of cheerfulness and jokes. But there were no jokes on the day when they came to carry off Johnnie. They came in, and kissed their daughter with scarcely a word, and then the old gentleman sat down in a chair by the fire, with a great many curves about his eyes, and wrinkles in his forehead—which had never been seen there before—while his wife dropped down upon the sofa and began to cry, saying,

‘Oh that we should have lived to see this day!’ rocking herself backwards and forwards in dreadful distress.

‘Don't cry, grandmamma,’ said Johnnie, stealing to her side, and stroking with his hands to console her the skirts of her thick silk gown. Susie went to the other side, and put her arm round the old lady, and said the same thing.

‘Don't cry, grandmamma!’ but Susie knew all

about the trouble, whatever it was. She was not like her little brother, only unhappy and perplexed to see the grown-up people cry.

‘Run away, dear, and play,’ his mother said; and the poor little boy obeyed, very forlorn and miserable to be always sent away. But he only went to the back parlour, where his box of bricks was standing on the floor, and where he began to build a house, oh, so seriously, as if it were a matter of life and death. The folding-doors were half open, and he still could see grandmamma crying and the wrinkles on grandpapa’s face, and hear the murmur of the talk, very serious, and broken now and then with a sob. They were in great trouble—that Johnnie could easily make out: and by this time he was as sure, as if some one had told him all about it, that their trouble had something to do with his father—his merry laughing father, who spoilt him so—who was never now to be seen even in the middle of the night through half shut eyes. The conversation that went on was not much. Grandpapa for his part only sat and stared before him, and occasionally shook his head, and drew his brows together, as if it was somebody’s

fault; while grandmamma cried and sometimes exclaimed,

‘Oh, how could he do it? Had he no thought of you or the children, or how dreadfully you would feel it?’

‘If he did not think of himself, mother, how should he think of me,’ said Johnnie’s mother, with a sort of stern smile. ‘He knew better than anyone what the penalty was.’

‘He was a fool, always a fool,’ said grandpapa, hastily.

‘Oh,’ said grandmamma, ‘when he was young, he was very dear! There never was anyone nicer than he was—instead of thinking harm of his mother-in-law, as so many foolish fellows do——’

‘Hush, mother! don’t speak so that the child can understand. I don’t want him to know.’

‘How can you keep it from him? It isn’t possible. Why, everybody knows, even the people at the turnpike. They looked at your father and me so pitifully as we came through.’

‘That for their pity!’ said grandpapa, with an angry snap of his fingers, and the colour mounted up to the very edge of his white hair.

Johnnie, peeping timidly out between the legs of the table, thought his mother, too, was very angry with grandmamma. She was standing in the middle of the room, looking very tall and grand, enough to strike terror into any little shrinking breast, whether it belonged to a child of seven or to a man of seventy.

She said: 'Mother! Pity is what I cannot bear. Let them crush us if they like. Let them think us as bad as—but pity, never! That I cannot bear.'

'Oh, my dear,' said grandmamma, 'try to be softened and not hardened by this great trouble.'

These were things that Johnnie heard partially. Sometimes a few words would get lost as the corner of the table-cover fell down between him and the other parlour, like a curtain in a theatre, which was what happened from time to time: and there would be long pauses in which nothing at all was said, but only a little sob from grandmamma, or the tchick, tchick of inarticulate comment which the old man made, or the mother or Susie moving across the room. There is nothing more terrible than those long pauses in which those who have come to console the

sufferers can find nothing to say, when words are impossible, and the silence of the little company, which cannot be broken save on one subject, becomes more intolerable than if no consolation had been attempted at all.

Then they had a sort of dreary dinner, to prepare for which Johnnie and his bricks had to be removed into a corner. They all sat down round the table, grandpapa still giving a tchick, tchick from time to time and grandmamma stopping in the midst of a mouthful to dry her eyes. Johnnie himself was hungry, but it was difficult to eat when everybody looked so miserable, and when he asked for a little more they all looked at him as if he had said something wrong.

‘Poor child, he had always a good appetite, bless him,’ grandmamma said, laying down her knife and fork with a little sob. ‘What a good thing it is that nothing matters very much at his age.’

Johnnie did not say that it mattered very much indeed—he had no words to use; but his little heart throbbed up into his throat, and he could not eat a morsel of his second help. Oh, if any-

one had known how forlorn that little heart was, groping among the mysteries with which he was surrounded, which he could not understand! All he could do was to gaze at the grown-up people who were so hard upon him, who did not understand him any more than he understood them. Grandpapa, though he went on with his tchick, tchick at intervals, made a tolerable meal, and thought he could taste a bit of cheese after all the rest had done.

‘Meat has no savour to people in trouble,’ he said, ‘but sometimes you can taste a bit of cheese when you can take nothing else.’

All the same, however, he made a very good meal.

Some time after this it was suddenly intimated to Johnnie that he was going ‘back’ with the old people.

‘Grandpapa and grandmamma are going to take you with them,’ Susie said, seeking him out in the back parlour where he had relinquished the bricks and taken to Robinson Crusoe, and began again to wonder whether, in spite of the placid policeman, the savages, after

all, might not have something to do with the disappearance of papa.

‘Oh, what a lucky boy you are, Jack! You are going to drive back between them in the shandry, and stay there for a change—for mamma thinks you are not looking very well. Oh, you lucky little boy!’

Though Susie said this as if she envied him, Johnnie could see that in her mind she thought it was a good thing that he should be going away. And his poor little heart, which was so silent, gave a great throb and cry, ‘Why do you want to send me away?’

‘It is because mamma thinks you are so pale—and that a change will do you good,’ said Susie. She said it as if it were a lesson she had learnt, repeating the same words. ‘You are to make haste and get on your things, and not keep them waiting. You can take your book with you if you like,’ she said. And then Betty came in with the little blue pilot cloth topcoat which was so thick and warm, and the comforter, and a fur cap which papa had bought for Johnnie in old days when he used to take the little boy out for drives. The sight of this was too much for

the child. He rushed out to the front hall where mamma was standing watching her mother mount into the shandry, and caught hold of her by the skirts of her dress.

‘I want papa; I want papa!’ said Johnnie, flinging himself upon his mother. The cry was so piercing that it went out into the street where old Mrs. Sandford was arranging her wraps round her, and making a warm seat between herself and her husband for the child.

‘Tchick tchick!’ said the old gentleman, standing on the pavement before the open door. Mamma caught Johnnie in her arms and gave him a hug which was almost fierce, to solace him as well as to take good-bye of him, and then she lifted him up beside his grandmother and tucked him in.

‘Mind you are a good boy, and don’t trouble granny,’ she said, but took no notice of his crying or of the trouble on his little face. Looking back as they drove away he could see her standing, very pale in her black dress, and Susie by her, who was waving her hand, and calling out good-bye. Betty stood behind them, crying, but neither his mother nor his sister seemed to

be sorry to see him go away. He looked back at them with a dreadful choking in his throat, and for years after saw it all like a picture—the two figures in the doorway and Betty crying behind. Susie smiled and waved her hand, but his mother neither wept nor smiled. She was all black and white, like a woman cut out of marble, as though nothing could move her more. And that was the last that Johnnie saw of them for years.

The house to which he went at first was not the place in which he grew up: for the grandparents, it seemed, were on the eve of a removal. Everything was new in the new house to which they took him, and which was a very neat little red brick house, with green shutters, like a house in a story book. It stood in the village street, with a little garden full of lilac and rose bushes in front, and a large garden with everything in it, from lilies to cabbages, behind. Nothing could exceed the comfort, or the neatness, or the quiet of this little place. There was only one servant, as at home; but probably she was a better servant than Betty: and there was a gardener besides, who did a great many odd

jobs in the house, and now and then took Johnnie out with him upon wonderful expeditions to the moor which lay just outside the last houses of the village. It was the most wonderful moor that ever was seen, sometimes golden with gorse, sometimes purple with heather, with wild little black pools in it, which looked as if they went down into the very heart of the earth, and here and there a little ragged tree, which the wind had blown into corners and elbows, and which stood and struggled for bare life with every storm that raged. The wind blew on the moor so fresh and keen that Johnnie's cheeks got to be two roses, and his little body strengthened and lengthened, and he grew into a strong and likely lad without any fancies or delicacies, or anything at all out of the way about him. The grandparents were more kind than words could say; that is they were not kind, but only loved the child with all their hearts, which is the one thing in the world that is better than kindness. He did nothing but play for a year or two, and then he had lessons from the curate, and learned a great deal, and was trained up in all the duties which

can be required from a boy. There could not have been a happier child. He was the king of the little house, and of the two old people's hearts, and of Sarah the maid, and Benjamin the gardener, and of the donkey and cart. And in the village itself he was quite a considerable person, ranking next after the rector's boys and above the doctor's son, who was delicate and spoilt.

This change of life worked a great change in every way in the boy. He was removed altogether from his own childish beginnings and all those scenes which had impressed themselves on his mind in the mists of early recollection. He had become the son of his grandfather and grandmother, who were old, and comfortable, and quiet, and never stepped beyond their routine or did differently to-day from what they had done yesterday. The vision of his father had gone altogether from his life, and his mother was as much or even more lost, for her aspect was completely changed to him. She had ceased to be his mother and become Emily, which was the name by which he always heard her called, a person found fault with sometimes, dis-

cussed and criticised, about whom there were shakings of the head between the grandparents, complaints that she liked her own will, and would have her own way.

By dint of hearing her spoken of like this for years, and hearing very little of her in any other way, John came to have a sort of impression that she was only an elder sister, whom he too might call Emily, who had been very long away from home, and who had departed from all their traditions. In his mind he came to feel himself a sort of little uncle to Susie, which, of course, being grandmamma's son, was what he would naturally be. He fell into all the old people's ways of thinking, feeling sorry in a disapproving way that Emily and her daughter never came to see them, yet feeling this more as a fault in them than as anything that told upon himself. Children and old people are more near to each other than the old and the middle-aged, and Johnnie made a far better child than Emily, who herself was older than her father and mother. He redressed the balance, and by slipping, as it were, a generation, set them right again in their parental place. But

the effect upon him was very confusing.

Emily did not write very often, and scarcely at all to the boy. When she did send him a letter to himself at Christmas, or on his birthday, it was without any appreciation of the fact that Johnnie had grown into John, and was no longer a child: and her letters to the old people were bulletins of life rather than familiar letters. She told them what she was doing, and how Susie was getting on, and what sort of weather it was—hot or cold—and that she was quite well in health, or else had little ailments, of which she hoped soon to be well: but there was nothing in these epistles to interest the boy. As a matter of fact he was much disposed in his heart to the conclusion that Emily was not sympathetic, and was fond of having her own way. His way was that of the elder world, and was quite different from hers: and for years he had ceased to wonder why it was that the letters were addressed to Mrs. Sandford, and that he too bore that name.

He was so little when all these changes happened that he was very hazy in his mind about the circumstances, and very far from clear that he had ever been anything but John Sand-

ford. As a matter of fact he never discussed this matter with himself. One does not naturally enter into discussions about one's self. Even the most strained of circumstances appear to us all quite simple and easy when they concern ourselves. He was quite natural, everything about him was quite natural—he felt no mystery in his own being or surroundings: and—whatever might have been said or felt at the time when he came to his grandfather's—neither did anyone else. Indeed, in the new place where they had settled, nobody knew anything of Mr. Sandford's daughter, nor of their previous history at all.

And yet at the bottom of his heart John had forgotten nothing. Those far distant scenes were to him like a dream, like a play he had seen some time (though he had never been at the theatre in his life), like a story that had been told him, but far more vivid than any story. He recollected those wakings in the middle of the night, and the dazzling of the candle in his eyes, and his father's face—and how he was carried down to the parlour in his night-gown, and the table in all the disorder of supper, with oranges and

cakes, and a little wine out of his father's glass—and of the other face on the other side of the fire which would look on disapproving, and as soon as possible bear him off again into the darkness of bed. The look on that other face was 'quite what he would have expected from Emily, that grown-up uncomfortable child of whom the grandparents disapproved.

The other scenes of the drama came also fitfully to John's mind from time to time—the back parlour where he was sent to play with his bricks, and then Robinson Crusoe, and the trouble in his mind lest the savages should have got papa; and then that strange silent spectacle of the lighted court with the judges sitting (as he knew now) and the little sugar-plums sprinkled upon the bread and butter; and then the old people coming to dinner, and grand-mamma crying and grandfather with his 'tchick, tchick,' and the shandry in which he was carried away, with Betty crying and Susie waving her hand, and mamma neither smiling nor weeping (always so like Emily!) at the open door; and the impression through everything that nothing was to be said before the boy.

All this was as distinct in his mind as it ever had been—which perhaps was not saying much : for all was misty with childhood, imperfect in outline, running into such wildernesses of ignorance on either side ; but yet so very certain, never forgotten, always at the same point. His mind varied upon matters of every day, and he got to see what happened last year in a different light after passing through the experiences of this year. But nothing changed for him those early scenes, they were beyond the action of experience. They were the same to him at sixteen as they had been when they happened—misty, incomprehensible, yet quite certain and true.

He was the son of his grandparents, as has been said. He was like a boy who had never had either father or mother when he set out upon the active way of his life. And how he came to work in that early drama of the beginning, with all the later incidents, and how he was affected by it for good and evil, has now to be shown in the story of John Sandford, who was his father's son, though he knew nothing of him, and did not even bear his name.

CHAPTER III.

HOW HE WAS TO BEGIN LIFE.

THEY were all seated one evening in the parlour round the fire. The house of the Sandfords was like many other old-fashioned middle-class houses. The dining-room was the principal room in it. They would have thought it very pretentious and as if they were setting up for a gentility to which they laid no claim had they called their other sitting-room a drawing-room. The rector might do so who belonged distinctly to the county ; but the Sandfords called their sitting-room the parlour, without even knowing what a pretty old-fashioned word that is, and how it is coming into fashion again. Old Mr. Sandford's armchair stood on one side of the fire, and his wife's on the other. He had a stand for the candle near him, and she had a little table.

Otherwise the room was furnished according to its epoch, with a round table in the centre, and chairs set round the walls. On grand-mamma's little table was her knitting, a basket with some needle-work, and a book. She read all through a book in a conscientious yet leisurely way, doing a bit of needle-work, when the light was good, and knitting when her eyes were tired. In this way she was always occupied and yet never fatigued by being busy too long at one thing. The knitting was done with large pins and thick wool. It was easy work. It resulted in comforters, mufflers, and other little things that were useful at Christmas, and made the school-children and the old people in the village happy—or as nearly happy as anyone is ever made by presents of warm woollen things to keep out the cold.

John sat at the table between the old people. He had the advantage of the lamp and warmest place. They liked to have him there, and he had learned to do all his work in that warm family centre, with their silent society, surrounded by their love. The old people did not talk very much at any time, and, when they

thought it was for the advantage of John and his work, were capable of sitting all the evening in a silent blessedness making little signs to each other across him, but never speaking lest they should disturb him. They said at other times, with secret delight, that their John never wanted to retire into any study, but did his work, bless him, in the parlour, and never found them in his way.

On this particular evening it could scarcely be said that he was at work; his lessons were all prepared, and ready for next day: and John was reading for his own pleasure in that delightful calm of feeling which results from the sense of duty performed. It is not always in later life that one is privileged to enjoy this conscious virtue even when one's work is fully accomplished, but at fifteen the case is different—and, as it happened, among the books on the table, the boy had brought down inadvertently the old copy of Robinson Crusoe which had been so dear to him in his childhood, and which was associated with so many of the confused reminiscences of that long departed past. He had taken it, and was looking at it, before the old people

opened the conversation which for the whole evening had been in their thoughts. John scarcely felt it was necessary to open that book. He knew not only what was in it, but a great many things that were not in it, things which it suggested before it was opened, the strange visions of the time through which papa's image flitted, dim now but still well remembered. He was thinking of all this with a vagueness in which there was no pain. There never indeed had been any pain, only a confused sense of so many things which he could not understand. He might have heard, if he had taken any notice, that the old people were simultaneously clearing their throats, with little coughs and hems—partly of preparation, partly to have him see that they were about to speak, and call his attention. But John did not take any notice, being fully absorbed with his own recollections and interests. Anyone who could have seen them would have been amused to remark how the grandfather and grandmother looked at each other, and made little signs egging each other up to begin, across the unconscious boy who took no notice at all.

It was Mrs. Sandford who spoke the first after all this pantomime. She gave her husband an upbraiding look as much as to say that he always pushed her to the front when anything disagreeable had to be done. Not that it was in reality anything disagreeable, but only exciting and full of new possibilities. She laid down her large pins with the knitting upon her lap, and cleared her throat finally, and said, 'John.'

It had to be repeated a second time in a slightly raised voice, and with a touch of her hand upon his arm before he paid any attention. Then the boy roused up suddenly, gave himself a little shake, pushed his 'Robinson Crusoe' away from him on the table, and turning round, said, briskly, 'Yes, grandmamma,' coming back in a moment out of his dreams.

'We want to speak to you, my dear,' the old lady said. She put her hand on his arm again, and patted it softly. He sat, as a matter of fact, on his grandmother's side, not exactly in the middle; nearer to her than to the old gentleman, who had long observed the circumstance not without a little kind of jealousy, but had never taken any notice.

Mrs. Sandford was conscious of it, and secretly proud ; but you may be sure she took no notice, and would no doubt have shown a little surprise had it been remarked.

‘ We want to speak to you,’ she said. ‘ John, you are growing a great boy.’

‘ Seventeen last birthday,’ said the grandfather. ‘ I had been working for myself a couple of years when I was his age.’

‘ Well, my dear, but it is not John’s fault. You have always said you regretted having so little schooling.’

‘ The question is,’ said old Mr. Sandford, striking his hand against the arm of his chair, ‘ whether the education he has been getting counts like schooling. For, you see, he has never been at school. I had my doubts on that subject all along.’

‘ Oh, yes, oh, yes, my dear,’ said the old lady. ‘ To be taught by a good man that knows a great deal, like our curate, that is better, surely, than being exposed to meet with bad boys and bad influences in a strange place.’

John listened to this conversation, turning his face from one to the other. He was quite used

to be discussed so, and thought it the natural course of affairs—but here it seemed to him that he might intervene in his own person.

‘Grandpapa,’ he said, ‘Mr. Cattley says Elly and I construe much better than Dick and Percy, though they have been so many years at school.’

‘Does he really, John!’ said Mrs. Sandford, and her old eyes got wet directly with pleasure; but grandpapa still shook his head.

‘I don’t know much about construing,’ he said; ‘I never had time to study any outlandish tongues, but you and Dick, as you call him, and Percy are very different; one’s going to the army and one to Oxford, as I hear; but as for you, my Johnny-boy——’ Here Mr. Sandford winked his eyes, too; for, though he had begun with the intention of taking his John down a little, and showing him that he was far from being so fine a gentleman as he thought—when it came to the point, the old grandfather did not himself like the idea, and felt that his John was much more of a gentleman than any other boy he knew.

‘Yes, grandfather,’ said John, tranquilly. ‘I

know I'm not like the others. I've got to make my own way.'

'Yes; and you've got to make it without a family behind you, and friends to push you on as those young Spencers have—though you've more in you than both of them put together,' cried grandpapa, with a little outburst of feeling which John did not at all understand.

John smiled. He was used to hearing that he was a fine fellow, and better than the others, and he took it as a peculiarity of the doting affection these old people had for him, and excused it good-naturedly on that ground: but he knew very well it was not true.

'The only thing that is wanting to Percy and Dick is that they're not your boys, grandfather,' said John—'yours and grandmamma's—you would know then that they are quite as good as me—or better, perhaps,' he added, candidly, feeling that so far as this went there might be reason for a doubt.

'You will never make us see that,' said Mrs. Sandford; 'but I love the boys, bless them, for they've always been like brothers to you. And it is saying a deal for the rector and all of them

that, though we are not just in their position, they have never hindered it nor made any difference, which they might have done; dear me, oh! yes, they might have done it, and nobody blamed them——'

'My dear,' said the old man, in a tone of warning.

'Oh! yes, yes,' cried grandmamma. 'I know; I know——' And she cried a little, and gave a stolen look at John such as he had caught many a day without ever understanding the meaning of it—a look in which there was something like pity, compassion, and indignation as well as love, as if somebody had wronged him deeply, though he did not know it, and she felt that nothing could ever be too good for him, too tender to make up for it—and yet that nothing ever would wipe out that wrong. All this in one glance is, perhaps, too much to believe in; but John saw it all confusedly, wondering, and not knowing what it could mean.

Mr. Sandford cleared his throat again, and then it was he who began.

'John,' he said, 'we think, and so does your

mother think, that it is time to speak to you about what you are going to do——’

‘Yes, grandfather,’ said John. He looked up with a little eagerness, as if he were quite ready and prepared, which, while it made matters much easier, gave the old people a little chill at the same time, as if the boy had been wanting to get away.

‘There is no hurry about it,’ the old gentleman said, closing up a little and drawing back into his seat.

‘But, grandfather,’ said John, ‘I’ve been thinking of it myself. Percy is going to the University after he’s finished at Marlborough: but I can’t do that. I can’t wait till I’m a man before getting to work. I know I’m not like them. Mr. Cattley has taken us—oh, I don’t mean us: me—as far as I have any need to go.’

‘Why shouldn’t you say “us,” John?’

‘Because Elly is a girl. She is more different still. She says her aunt will never let her go on when she comes back. And, it is thought, Mr. Cattley will get a living: so that’s just how it is, grandfather. I’ve been thinking the very same.

As I've got to make my own way, it's far better that I should begin.'

'Especially as the poor lad has no one behind him,' said his grandmother, shaking her head.

'I have you behind me,' said John; 'I'd like to know how a fellow could have anything better. And I've all the village behind me that know you and know me, though I'm not so much. What could I have more? I've only got to say I'm Mr. Sandford's grandson, and, all this side of the county, everybody knows me. The Spencers have got greater relations, perhaps, but what could be better than that?'

He looked round upon them, first to one side, then to the other, with a glow of brightness and happy feeling in his cheerful young face. He was a good-looking boy, perhaps not strictly handsome, with mobile irregular features, honest well-opened eyes, with a laugh always in them, and brown hair that curled a little. He was not particularly tall for his age, neither was he short, but strong and well-knit. And he had the complexion of a girl, white and red, a little more brown perhaps than would have been becoming to a girl. But to John the brown was very

becoming. He looked like a boy who was afraid of nothing, neither work, nor fatigue, nor poverty, nor even trouble, if that should have to be borne—but who was entirely confident that he never need be ashamed to look the world in the face, and that everything known of him, either of himself or those who had gone before him, was of a kind to conciliate friendship and spread goodwill all round.

The two old people looked at him, and then at each other. The grandfather gave his ‘tchick, tchick’ under his breath, as it were, the grandmother under her soft white knitting wrung her old hands. But an awe was upon them of his youth, of his confidence, of his happiness. They withdrew their eyes from him and from each other with a suddenness of alarm, as if they might betray themselves—and for a moment there was silence. They dared not venture to say anything, and he had said what he had to say. After a moment, however, he resumed. He noticed no hesitation, no tragic consultation of looks; for him everything was so simple, so plain.

‘Don’t you agree with me?’ he said.

‘Agree with him! Listen to the young ’un,’ said the old man at last, with a quaver in his voice. ‘But I’m glad you take it like this, my boy. We’re old folks, and we’re growing older every day. We’d like to live just to see you settled for yourself in the world. You’ve advantages, as you say, in the village maybe, and just a little way about, where our name is known, though we have not spent all our lives in this little place. But look you here, John. You mustn’t expect to be able to make your way in the village, nor perhaps near it. You mustn’t expect the old folks will last for ever. When you go out into the world, you’ll find there are very few that ever heard tell of your grandmother and me. You will have to be your own grandfather, so to speak,’ grandpapa said, with an unsteady little laugh.

It was just at this moment that John, looking down on the table with his smiling eyes, with an undimmed boyish satisfaction in grandfather’s little jokes, contented he could scarcely call how, saw the old ‘Robinson Crusoe’ which lay there. It lay among half-a-dozen books, in no way distinguished from the others, but to John it was

not like any of the others. It brought a sudden check, like the rolling up of a cloud over his mind. The light paled somehow on his face, as the sky pales when the cloud rolls up. It was not that he was afraid, or that any shadow of a coming trouble fell upon him. No, not that. He was only recalled to the far back childish life, like a faint vision which lay in the distance, like an island on the other side of the sea, half touching the line of the ocean, half drawn up into the skies. He paused for a moment in the shock of this idea, and said, half to himself,

‘By-the-by: I talk as if I were only your grandson, grandfather: but there’s something that comes between—there’s papa.’

There was a slight faint stir in the room. He did not look up to see what it was, being fully engaged following out the thread of his own thoughts.

‘I remember him quite well,’ he said; ‘sometimes I don’t think of him for ages together, and then in a moment it will all come back. I’ve been away from them a long time, haven’t I, to be the only son? and though you some-

times speak of—mother’—he had nearly said Emily, and reddened a little, half with horror, half with amazement, to think of the slip he had almost made—‘you never say a word about papa.’

John could not employ any other than the childish name to denote his absent father. He could not think of him but as papa. He was silent for a little, following out his own thoughts, and it was not till a minute or two had elapsed that it occurred to him how strange it was that they should be quite silent too, making no response. He looked up hastily, and caught sight of one of those signs which the old people would make to each other across him, he paying no attention. But somehow this time he did pay attention. Mrs. Sandford was bending forward towards the old man. Her hands were clasped as if in entreaty. She was giving him an anxious, almost agonized look, imploring him to do something, to refrain from doing something—which was it?—while the grandfather, drawn back into his chair, seemed to resist, seemed to be making up his mind. They both assumed an air of indifference, of forced ease precipi-

tately, when they saw that John was observing them, and then the old gentleman spoke.

‘I’m—glad you’ve asked, John. It’s been on my mind for a long time to tell you. We ought to have done it years ago: but somehow you were always such a happy lad, and it seemed a pity, it seemed a pity to—disturb your mind——’

‘Oh, John Sandford!’ the old lady said. It was not to the boy she was speaking, but to her husband, once more wringing her hands.

Grandfather gave her a look which was almost fierce, a look of angry severity, imposing silence; and then he resumed—

‘Your mother left it to us, to do what we thought best; and we had that anxiety for you to keep you happy that I said unless you asked—and strange it is you never asked before, though it’s not far off ten years you have been with us. You can’t remember much about him, John.’

‘I do, though—I remember him quite well. How he would come and take me out of bed and carry me downstairs, and how jolly he was. I don’t perhaps think of him much, but when I

do, I remember him perfectly. He was ruddy and big, and had bright merry eyes—I can see him now——’

The old lady gave a little whimpering cry.

‘Poor Robert! poor Robert! You may say what you like, but the boy is like him, not like any of us,’ she said.

‘Hold your tongue!’ said her husband, peremptorily. ‘Merry, yes, he was merry enough in his time; but it doesn’t make other folks merry that kind——’

And there was again a little pause. John’s curiosity was aroused, and his interest: but yet he was not greatly moved—for anything connected with his father was so vague for him and far away.

‘Well, grandfather?’ he said at last.

‘Well,’ said the old man, slowly, ‘there is not very much to say; the short and the long of it is that—hush, woman, I tell you! he is just—dead. That is all there is to say.’

‘Dead!’ John was startled. He repeated the word in an awestruck and troubled tone. He did not know what he had expected. And yet

the moment he thought of it—and thought goes so quick!—he had gone through the whole in a moment like a flash of light, realising the long separation, the utter silence, through which there never came any news. Of course, that was the only thing that was possible. He said, after a time,

‘I ought to have known. It must have been that. Never to hear of him for so many years—’

‘Yes, to be sure,’ grandfather said. ‘He didn’t do well in his business, and he went abroad, and then he died——’

‘I ought to have known—it must have been that,’ said John.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN'S CHOICE.

THIS conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, which was evidently a very welcome sound to the old people, who displayed even more than their usual cordiality when the door of the parlour opened and Mr. Cattley was shown in. Mr. Cattley was the curate. He had held that position in the village of Edgeley-on-the-Moor since John's childhood, having little influence, and no ambition, and finding himself in congenial society, which indisposed him to take any measures for 'bettering himself' or moving, as perhaps he would himself have said, to a wider sphere. As a matter of fact, if Mr. Cattley had ever possessed any friends who would have helped him to that wider sphere, they had forgotten him before now ; and he had forgotten

them, having succeeded in concentrating himself in the little rural parish as few people could have done. Perhaps his pupils had helped to weave that spell which bound him to the little place. He had taken charge of all the young Spencers in their earlier days. He had trained both Dick and Percy for their school, in which they had done him credit, at least, in the beginning of their career: but Elly and John were his favourites: and, as they had remained with him until now, his interest in his work had remained unbroken.

Mr. Cattley was not a very frequent visitor at the house of the Sandfords. He was, to tell the truth, generally so absorbed by another friendship that he had no leisure to pay visits. This was in fact the secret, but it was no secret, of the good curate's life. The rector, Mr. Spencer, was a widower, having been so for many years, and his house was ruled and presided over by a sister, also a widow, to whom *en tout bien et tout honneur*, the curate was devoted. It was such a devotion as from time to time arises without any blame on one side or another in the heart of a young man for a woman who is older

than himself, and whom there is not the least possibility that he can ever marry. Such attachments are perhaps less uncommon than people think, and they are very warm, constant, and absorbing. Sometimes, as everybody knows, they do end in marriage, but that is a disturbance of the ideal, and brings in elements less delicate and exquisite than the tie which is more than friendship, yet a little less than love, and which by its nature can and ought to come to nothing.

Mrs. Egerton was a woman of forty-five, bright-eyed and comely, and full of interest in everything; but without any pretence at youth: and the curate had ten years less of age and no experience whatever of the world, so that the difference between them was rather emphasised than lessened. There was, however, one thing which reduced this difference, which was that Mr. Cattley had a great air of gravity, and took an elderly kind of view in the simplicity of his heart, whereas she was full of vivacity and spirit, and sided always with the young rather than the old. The curate had for this middle-aged woman a sort of quiet worship which was

beyond all reason : all that she said was admirable and excellent to him ; what she did was beyond criticism. Whatever she was occupied in he would have had her to do that ever, like the young lover of poetry : yet hailed every new manifestation of the variety of mind which seemed to him inexhaustible, as if it were a new revelation. He was sometimes foolish in his worship, it may be allowed, and the elderly object of that devotion laughed at it not a little. But in her heart she liked it well enough, as what woman would not do ? Her heart was soft to the man who adored her. But that she should adore him in turn, or that anything should come of their intercourse save peaceful continuance, was not only out of the question, but was altogether beyond the possibility of being taken into question, which is more conclusive still.

Mrs. Egerton was at this moment absent from the rectory, and Mr. Cattley was like a fish out of water. He spent almost all the time he could spare from his pupils and the parish in writing long letters to her : but all his evenings could not be spent in this way, and now and then, sighing for the difference, he would come out of an even-

ing and visit one of the houses in the village. The Sandfords stood very high in the little aristocracy of Edgeley-on-the-Moor. They were not very old residents, having come here only about ten years before, but they had always been very highly thought of. Mr. Cattley was received by them with all the deference which good Church people, to whom his visit is an honour, show to their clergyman. They thought more of his visit than if it had been a common occurrence. And, though he was only the curate, it was he that was most of a clergyman in the parish, for the rector, though he was much liked, was of the class which used to be called Squarson, and was more of a country gentleman than a parish priest. There was yet another reason for their great pleasure at sight of this visitor, and the warm welcome they gave him. The conversation had come to a point which made a break—a new incident very convenient. They were glad to escape at that moment from John. After a little interval it would be more easy to resume their talk in a cool and matter-of-fact tone.

‘You will have a cup of tea, sir,’ said Mrs.

Sandford. 'Oh! dear, yes, we've had our tea a long while ago, but it is just a pleasure and a pride to have some made fresh for you; and though we don't live in that way ourselves I know many that do. We understand the habits of gentlepeople, even though we may not be gentlefolks ourselves.'

'That I am sure you are,' said the curate, 'in the truest sense of the word.'

'Oh! well, sir, it's very good of you to say it, and I hope we're not rude or rough,' said the old lady, and she bustled out of the room to look after the tea, which he did not at all care for, with great satisfaction in being able thus to leave the room for a moment. Her husband plunged into parish talk with Mr. Cattley with not less relief.

'Thank God, that's got over,' he said to himself.

As for John, he was very glad to see his tutor also, but without any of their special thankfulness. He did not take much part in the conversation, which was natural. At his age a boy is expected not to put himself forward. He sat and listened, and through it all would now and

then feel a bitter throb of wonder and pain go through him. Dead! He might have known it all the time. Papa, so kind as he was, would never have left him so long without finding him out, without coming to see him, even if, as he had sometimes fancied, the grandparents did not approve. And so he was dead! gone, never to be seen more. It was so long, so long since there had been any reality in the relationship that the boy could not grieve as he would have done had he lost anyone he knew and loved. It was only a shadow he had lost, and, indeed, he had not lost that, it was with him just the same as before. And, as a matter of fact, he had never thought of any meeting again. The shock he had received was more a kind of awe of dying, a kind of ache at the thought that his fond recollections had been, as it were, vain all this long time. He listened to the conversation, and even would put in a word or two, and smile at what grandfather or Mr. Cattley said. And then the thought, the throb would again dart through him: dead! It was a strange thing to feel that some one belonging to him had actually gone over that bourne from which

no traveller returns. This was so solemn, and John's recollection was so far from solemn; and he knew that the gayest, the most light-hearted had to die all the same, like the gravest. But to think that some one belonging to him had stepped across that dark line of separation, that some one might be thinking about him upon the other side, beyond the grave. This made John's nerves tingle, and a shiver passed under his hair. Dead! it is so strange when one is young to realise, though it is, no doubt, common to all, yet that one individual known to one's self should die.

Mrs. Sandford came up after a little while, followed by the maid with a tray. She had much too good manners to let the guest take this refreshment by himself, accordingly there were two tea-cups with the little teapot. And the old lady's eyes were a little red, if anyone had remarked it. She had been doing more than making tea. She had run up to her own room and cried a little there in the dark over all the confusing troubles of the past, and over the new chapter which was opening. She said to herself,

‘Oh! I don’t approve it—I don’t approve it!’ But what did it matter what she approved, when it was certain that he (which was the only name she ever gave her husband) and Emily would have it their own way?

‘I suppose,’ said the gentle curate, ‘that it is all settled, and that it is I now that am to have holiday. I shall miss the young ones dreadfully. I don’t know what I shall do without them. It will make all the difference in the world to me.’

‘You see, sir,’ said Grandfather Sandford, who had a faint and uncomfortable feeling that it was the want of those little payments which had been made for John which would make the great difference to the curate, ‘as it doesn’t suit us to carry him on for what you may call a learned education, we think it’s better for the boy not to lose more time.’

‘Not meaning that he ever could be losing time with you, Mr. Cattley!’

‘Mr. Cattley knows I don’t mean that: but only that he has to work and make his own way.’

‘I understand perfectly,’ said the curate, ‘and you are quite right. When a boy has to go into

active life it is far better that he should begin early. Don't think I disapprove. John and I have been great friends, and I shall miss him sadly. But he has really got as much from me as I can give him—unless it were a little more Greek: and I'm afraid there is not much practical advantage in Greek.'

'Learning anything,' said old Mr. Sandford, in a respectful sort of apologetic tone, 'is always a practical advantage. If you know how to learn Greek, you'll know how to learn anything. So the time can never be said to be lost.'

Mr. Cattley laughed a little quietly, and made a mental note of this as something to tell Mrs. Egerton. It amused him very much that the old man should patronise learning and explain to himself how Greek could do harm: but still there is no doubt that Mr. Sandford was quite right from his point of view.

'I wish he had taken a little more to figures,' said the old gentleman; 'figures are very useful in every way of life. I would teach more sums than anything else if I were one that was engaged in instructing youth.'

Mr. Cattley laughed again and said he would have to learn them first himself.

‘For that was always my weak point: but John has a very pretty notion of mathematics. And have you come to any decision as to what he is going to do?’

‘We were just beginning to talk of it,’ said the old gentleman. ‘We were going over a few family matters, and then we were coming to the great question.’

‘I am afraid then,’ said the curate, ‘that I came in at an unfortunate moment. You should have told me you were occupied, and I should have gone away.’

‘Dear, dear, I hope you don’t think we are capable of such rudeness,’ cried the old lady, ‘and it was just this very reason, Mr. Cattley, to see you come in was what we wished most.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said her husband, ‘nobody can know like you what the boy’s good for. It will help us more than anything. I was just going to ask him—John, my lad, what do you think you’d like to be?’

And John, though he had received that shock, though he was so serious, still, moved by thrills

of wondering and confused emotion, laughed. He said, 'How can I tell, grandfather, all at once?' with that elasticity of the youthful mind which older people find it so difficult to take into account.

The grandparents looked at each other across John and across Mr. Cattley. What their eyes said was briefly this—'Thank God that's over.' 'And he hasn't a doubt,' said old Sandford's look, with a little brightness of triumph, to which his wife's reply was an almost imperceptible shake of her head. This little pantomime was not at all remarked either by Mr. Cattley, who knew nothing about it, or by John, who made no remark at all. The existence of any mystery never occurred to the boy. How should it? He knew nothing about skeletons in cupboards, and was quite ready to have sworn to it that nothing of the kind belonged, or could belong, to his family at least.

'Well,' said the curate, 'if it is making money you are thinking of, we all know what is the best way and the one way—if you have any opening: and that is business—in a London office now, or in Liverpool or Manchester.'

'Oh, the Lord forbid!' cried Mrs. Sandford, letting her knitting drop and clasping her hands.

Her husband looked at her severely, and breathed a hasty 'Hush!' Then after a little pause,

'Perhaps we're prejudiced. We have had to do with some that have done badly in business, and we don't take a sanguine view. You may make money, I don't deny, but again you may lose it. You may have to part with every penny you've got, and there's a deal of temptation to speculate and all that. And besides we've got no opening that I know,' he added, almost sharply, 'which alters the question.'

There had been no argument nor anything to excite him, and yet he ended up in a belligerent manner, as though he had been violently contesting the views of some antagonist, and then looked at Mr. Cattley with a sort of defiance, as if that mild and innocent clergyman had been pressing upon him some undesirable course.

'Nay, nay, if you don't like it,' said the curate, 'there is nothing more to be said. I am not much moved that way myself. I had a brother once——'

‘Yes?’ cried Mrs. Sandford, putting away her knitting altogether, as if in the importance of this discussion the mere touch of the work irritated her. The old gentleman lifted a finger as if in warning.

‘Don’t you excite yourself, my dear,’ he said.

‘Poor fellow,’ said Mr. Cattley. ‘He was much older than I: but he died young, broken-hearted. He was not the resolute sort of fellow that gets on. He got his accounts into a muddle somehow——’

‘Yes!’ cried Mrs. Sandford again. She was as eager as if this were something pleasant that was being told her; whereas the curate had his eyes fixed, meditatively, on the fire, and spoke slowly and with regret.

‘He was not much more than a boy,’ said Mr. Cattley. ‘It’s a long time ago, when I was a child. I believe it never could be found out how it was—whether he had lost the money or spent it without knowing, or whether some one had taken it. Nobody blamed him, but he never got over it. It broke his heart.’

‘Ah!’ said Mrs. Sandford, with a gasp for breath. But she seemed a little disappointed—

as if she were sorry—though that of course must have been impossible—that the curate's brother was not to blame.

'Things do happen like that,' said the old gentleman, breathing what seemed like a sigh of relief. 'And sometimes it's partly a young fellow's fault, and partly it isn't. But my wife and I, we've seen so much of it, living near Liverpool at one time, which is a great business place, that it's not at all the kind of life we would choose for John.'

'Oh, John would be all right,' said Mr. Cattley, 'but I'm sorry I have been so unfortunate in my first shot. I don't doubt, however, that he has a very fair guess what he wants to be himself.'

'I didn't know,' said John, 'you had any objection to business. I should have liked an office as well as anything, for then one could have been upon one's own hook at once, and got a salary, and not needed to come upon you.'

'Oh, Johnnie, my boy, did we ever grudge you anything that you say that?'

'Nothing, grandmamma! and that's why I should like to do for myself when I begin: but

then I'll do nothing that wouldn't please you. May I speak out quite what I should like? Well, then, Mr. Cattley knows. I'd like to build bridges and lighthouses, especially lighthouses; that's to say, I'd like to be an engineer.'

'An engineer!' They looked at each other again, but not with any secret communications, in simple surprise and mutual consultation. 'Nobody belonging to you ever was that before,' Mrs. Sandford said.

'Yes, that is something quite new,' said the grandfather. 'I thought he'd have favoured farming, or to try for an agency, or, perhaps, the corn-factoring trade. Well, it is none the worse that I know of for being something new.'

'The worst is that it takes a great deal of learning,' said John, doubtfully. 'Mr. Cattley knows, grandfather. You have to serve your time, and to work hard: but I don't mind the work.'

'Yes,' said the curate, 'I know a good deal about it, or at least, I could get you all the information. I have a brother——'

'Not the one,' said Mrs. Sandford, with again a little gasp, 'that broke his heart——'

‘Oh, no,’ said the curate, ‘my father was three times married, and I have a great many brothers. This was one of the first lot. He is quite an old fellow, and he’s done very well for himself; he never had the least idea of breaking his heart. Indeed, I don’t know,’ he added, with a smile—but stopped himself, and left his sentence unfinished. ‘He has a great foundry, and is in a large way of business. By the way, John, I’m afraid he has nothing to do with lighthouses. He is what is called a mechanical engineer.’

‘I suppose they are all connected,’ said Mr. Sandford, as if he knew all about it: and he expressed himself as very grateful to Mr. Cattley, who promised to procure him all necessary information about the further education that John would require to go through: and the evening terminated with a little supper of the simplest kind, which the curate was not too fine to share. It seemed to bring him closer to them, and knit the bond of long association more warmly that he should thus have something to do with John’s future career, and on the other hand it threw a light of respectability upon the

profession John had chosen, that Mr. Cattley's brother should be in it. It was a very dark night, and when the curate left them, John took the lantern to see him home to his own house. When the old people were alone, after accompanying their guest to the door, they came back to the fire, for it was cold; but for a few minutes neither spoke. Then Grandfather Sandford said, with an air of relief,

‘Well, that’s over, thank heaven. It’s been hanging over me, day after day, for years. But I might have saved myself the trouble, for he took it as sweetly as any baby, and never had a doubt.’

‘Oh, John Sandford,’ said the old lady, ‘and doesn’t that make it all the worse to deceive him now? We’ve told him the truth all his days; how could he doubt us? But when he finds it out he will think it’s all a lie everything we’ve ever said.’

To this the old gentleman replied with something like a sob, covering his face with his hand,

‘If you feel you can take it upon you to break that poor lad’s heart, do it; but don’t ask me.’

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE.

THE curate and his pupil trudged along in the dark, guided by the lantern which threw a gleam along the road and showed them the irregularities in it, which indeed they both knew very well, avoiding by instinct the bit of broken causeway before the schoolhouse, and the heap of crates and packages that were always to be found in front of the shop. The darkness of the village was not like the modified darkness to which dwellers in towns are accustomed. It was a blackness which could be felt; without any relief. But then both of these people knew every step of the way. The drawback of the darkness, however, was that one could not see who might be listening, and had, therefore, no guidance to tone one's voice or change the sub-

ject when there were people passing by, to whom one did not care to confess all one's thoughts. This, however, very little affected John and the curate, who knew everybody, and had nothing in the world to conceal.

'I'm very glad, John,' said the curate, as they trudged along, speaking a little louder than usual because of the night; for it was so heavy and depressing that it seemed to require more cheer than usual in the human voices, 'very glad that your grandfather and grandmother take it so well. It's a very fine profession, the best you can have.'

'Yes, that is just what I think,' said John, 'it's not a mere trade to make one's living by. It means more than that.'

'Yes, a great deal; but, all the same, a sure trade to make one's living by is something. You must not be contemptuous——'

'I, sir!' said John. 'I hope I'm not contemptuous of anything; but if you can make your living and do something for your fellow-creatures at the same time—like yourself,' the boy said, lowering his voice, 'though not in such a fine way——'

‘ Ah, my boy,’ said the curate, in a tone which implied that he was shaking his head, ‘ when you’re older even you, perhaps, won’t think so much of my way of serving my fellow-creatures. It is not very much one can do. If I were in the East-End of London, perhaps, or on a mission—but never mind about that. You must remember that building lighthouses is the heroic part, but learning to survey and to calculate, or having to work at machinery, as you would do if you went to my brother——’

‘ I’d like the one for the sake of the other,’ said John.

‘ But you might never, perhaps, get to the other. You may have to grind for years at the mechanical part. You must not form too high expectations. We all have our dreams of lighthouses—and then, perhaps, never get any further than to make a bit of railway or to look after the fall of the water in a lock.’

‘ You always say,’ cried the boy, ‘ that a firm resolution is half the battle.’

‘ Yes, indeed,’ said the curate, and once more there was that in his voice which sounded as if he were shaking his head. ‘ Ah, yes,’ he went on,

with a laugh, 'that's the greatest part of the battle. I never said a wiser thing (if I said it) than that. Solomon himself couldn't teach you anything better. Stick to it with a determination that you are going to succeed, and, unless you are very unfortunate indeed, you will succeed. Ah! what is that! Who is there? The lantern, John.'

They had just passed the village public-house, which was a thorn in the curate's flesh, and had dimly perceived, by the light of the half-open door, dim figures striding out and flitting into the darkness; for the hour of closing was near. Perhaps one of the times Mr. Cattley shook his head, it was at this headquarters of opposition to all he was trying to do. He was not of different clay from other men, and he hated the place, as those who have had to contend against an evil influence, whose headquarters they cannot reach, are apt to do, with more vehemence than perfect justice demands. Some one had addressed him, as he spoke to John, with a hoarse, 'I say, master,' out of the darkness, and there had come along with the voice into the fresh, chill, and wide air round them that overpowering

smell of drink which sickens both the senses and the heart. It must have been a very bold parishioner, indeed, who could have addressed the curate at that stage, and it was with a voice much sterner than usual that he said,

‘The lantern, John!’

John raised the lantern quickly, sharing his master’s indignation, and, the light suddenly shifting, fell upon a figure which, happily, was not that of a village toper. It was a tall man, in rough clothes, with a red spotted handkerchief tied round his neck, and a hat slouched over his eyes. If there had been any possibility of violence in Edgeley, the curate, who was a slim man, and, notwithstanding his height, not very strong, might have shrunk from such a meeting in the dark; but he was in his own kingdom, and there was not one even of the worst characters in the village who did not more or less acknowledge his authority. And Mr. Cattley, besides, was not the sort of man to be afraid. He said, with a voice which changed at once from the friendly softness with which he had been talking to the boy,

‘Who are you? and what do you want?’

His tone, John thought, was enough to strike terror to the most obdurate heart.

‘No offence, master,’ said the man. ‘I was only wishful to ask if you know’d of a Missis May, that I’ve been told lived about here.’

‘No. I know no one of that name,’ said the curate. ‘There is no Mrs. May in this village. You seem to be a stranger here. Wherever you’re lodging, I advise you to go home and go to bed. It’s too late to be asking for anyone at this hour of the night.’

‘You think I’m drunk, and so do a many; but I’m not drunk. I’ve only a drop of beer on board,’ said the man. ‘It’s a long time since I’ve had the chance, and I’m a-making up for lost time.’

‘Where are you lodging?’ said the curate, in his stern voice.

‘They said they’d give me a bed there,’ said the stranger, pointing with a hand towards the public-house; ‘but, now they’ve found out about me, they say they won’t. And it’s drefful hard upon a man as has come out of his way for nothing, as ye may say, but to do a good turn. And that’s the reason as I was asking for

Missis May; for she'll put me up if he won't, a good lady as her husband was my mate, and I'm come to bring her news out of my way.'

'Sir,' said Johnson of the public-house, coming up on the other side, 'he's a man as has let out as he's fresh from Portland, just served out his time; and he's looking for a woman as is the wife of another of 'em. There ain't no such person here. I've told him over and over again. And I've told him to move on, and be off to the station afore the last train goes by. But I can't get him to do neither one thing nor the other. And I can't be expected to put up a fellow like that in my house.'

'Was it in your house he got all the drink he has swallowed?' said the curate. 'If you will not give him a bed to sleep it off in, why did you give him the drink?'

'Oh, that's a different thing. Every man is free to have his glass,' said Johnson, with a growl of insolence. Then he added, 'And it only came out in his drink who he was, and all this bother about his Mrs. May. There's nobody here or hereabout of that name.'

'It's none of you or your miserable holes I

want. It's my mate's wife as I want,' said the man. 'You tell me where she lives, or I'll—I'll break all your windows and pull your old barracks about your ears.'

He said this with an interlarding of many oaths, and, swaying back and forward, finally lost his balance and dropped upon the roadside, where John, changing the level of the lantern, poured a stream of light upon him, as he sat up with tipsy gravity, leaning against a low wall which bordered the path, and looking up at the group before him with blank, lacklustre eyes.

'He can't be left out here in the cold, whatever he is,' the curate said.

'That's all very well for you, Mr. Cattley. Them as hasn't got to do a thing never see any difficulty in it,' said the master of the public-house.

'I can't stand here bandying words,' said the curate; 'if you will not take him in, I must do it. He can't be left to be frozen to death in the public road. Some of those fellows who are skulking away in the dark not to face me—but I see them well enough.' Mr. Cattley

raised his voice, and terror ran through the loiterers who had been lingering to see what would come of this exciting incident. 'Some of them can help me along with him to my house. Come along, and lend a hand, before he goes to sleep.'

'I ain't a-going to sleep,' said the stranger, haranguing from what he evidently felt to be a point of 'vantage. 'I'm as steady as a church, and a deal soberer nor e'er a one of you. I wants Missis May, as 'll take me in and do for me thankful, along of her husband, as was my mate.'

'Come along, men,' said Mr. Cattley, sharply. 'I'm not strong enough to do it myself, and you won't leave the boy to drag him, will you, not the boy——'

'If it's come to that, sir,' said the man of the publichouse, 'I'd rather do it nor trouble you. After all, it's more fit for me to have him than you. Supposing as he can't pay, I take it you'd rather pay for him than have him in your house. Hey, man, get up and get to bed!'

'All I'm wishful for,' said the man, growing more and more solemn, 'is for some one to direct

me where Missis May's living. It's she as will be glad to see me wi' news—news of her man—as was my mate.'

'Thank you, Johnson,' said Mr. Cattley, with a reluctance which he felt to be unjust. 'I will certainly pay, and I'm obliged to you, which is more. Do you want the lantern? Then come along, John, you've had enough of this dismal sight.'

He went along the remainder of the way, which was not long, in silence, and it was only at his own door that he spoke.

'John,' he said, 'that's such a spectacle as the Spartans, don't you remember, gave to their boys.'

'It was awfully cruel, sir,' cried John, 'they made the Helots drink—and then—it wasn't the fault of the poor brutes. I would rather go without the lesson than have it like that.'

'And I'd rather you had gone without this lesson. I'd rather you knew nothing about it. But we can't abstract ourselves from the world, and we can't live in the world without seeing many horrible things. I wonder now whether there was a bit of faithfulness and human feeling

at the bottom of all that? Heaven knows!—or it might be the reverse—an attempt to get something out of some poor decent woman to cover her shame. Did you ever hear the name of May about here?’

‘No,’ said John, ‘never;’ and then he paused for a moment. ‘I seem to know something about the name; but I’m sure there’s no one called May here.’

‘Not down by Feather Lane?’ said the curate, thoughtfully. ‘I must speak to Miss Summers about it. She will know. Now, here we are at my door, and I shouldn’t have let you come so far. Go quickly home, my dear boy.’

John obeyed, yet did not obey, this injunction. He went home without lingering, but he did not go quickly. Why there should be a particular pleasure in lingering out of doors in the dark in a world unseen, where there is nothing to please either mind or eye, it would be difficult to say. But that there is, every imaginative spirit must have felt. The boy strolled along in a meditative way, dangling his lantern at his cold fingers’ end, throwing stray gleams upon the road, which gave him a fantastic half-conscious

amusement but no aid, though, indeed, he did not require that, in seeing his way. The landlord of the 'Green Man' was still outside discoursing upon the hardship of being compelled to take a drunken brute fresh out of prison into his respectable house.

'We'll maybe wake up in the morning all dead corpses,' he said, unconscious of the warrant of Scripture for the words, 'all along of a clergyman as just fancies things.'

'Put him in the barn,' said one of the loungers about, slow spirits excited by the stir of something happening, who had returned and hung about the door discussing it after the curate had passed. 'Put him in the stable, that's good enough for the likes of him.'

'I'll put him in the loft and turn the key upon him, so as he'll do no harm,' said the landlord. The man, as John made out with a gleam of his lantern, was still seated on the edge of the pathway, supported against the wall, his red handkerchief showing in the light. He was muttering on in a long hoarse monologue, in which there was still audible from time to time the name of May.

May! John asked himself, as he went on, how was it that he knew that name? It seemed to be so familiar to him, and yet he could not recall distinctly what the association was. Then he pondered on what the curate had said, whether by any chance there might be what he had called 'a bit of faithfulness and human feeling' at the bottom of the miserable fellow's persistence. Nobody but Mr. Cattley would have thought of that, the boy said to himself; and there rose before his half-dreaming eyes a picture of some poor creature waiting for news, blessing even this wretched man for bringing them to her.

John had read 'Les Miserables' (in the original; for Mr. Cattley knew so much! and had taught him French as well as Latin), and a comparison between the incidents rose in his mind. He felt, as one feels at that age, that it was rather grand to be going along in the dark, thinking of Victor Hugo's great book and comparing French and English sentiment, he who was only a country boy; and this feeling mingled with the comparison he was making. Mr. Cattley was not an ideal saint like Monseigneur

Bienvenu, but neither were the English village-folks so hard-hearted as the French ones. They would not have left even a returned convict to perish in the cold. This suggestion of perishing in the cold, which made him shiver, sent John's imagination all abroad upon shipwrecks at sea, and tales of desolate places, the martyrs of the Arctic regions and those in the burning deserts; his fancy flitting from one to another without coherence or any close connection as thoughts do. And then, with a sudden pang, as if an arrow had gone into his heart, he remembered what had been told him only this evening, that his own father, papa, who had been a sort of god to his infancy, was dead. How was it possible that he could forget it as he had done, letting any trifling incident take possession of his mind and banish that great fact from the foreground? He felt more guilty than could be said, and yet, while feeling so, his mind flitted off again in spite of him to a hundred other subjects. The recollection returned with a fluctuating thrill, at intervals, but it would not remain. It linked itself even with this question about Mrs. May. May! what had that to do with the revelation

which had been made to him?—that, a mere vulgar incident seen on the roadside—the other an event which ought to make everything sad to him.

He went on a little quicker, spurred by the thought. His father's death had not made everything sad to him. It was but one incident among many which came back from time to time; but the other incidents—he felt ashamed to think they had interested him quite as much. It had been altogether an exciting evening. First that intimation, and then the talk about what he was going to be, and the consent of his grandparents to his plan. Either of these facts had been quite enough to fill up an evening, or, indeed, many evenings, and now they all came together; and then, as if that were not enough, the startling scene in the darkness of the night, the returned convict just like 'Les Miserables,' but so different, the 'bit of faithfulness,' perhaps, and 'human feeling.' John said to himself that this was a poor little outside affair, not worth to be mentioned beside the others, but yet he could not help wondering whether the poor fellow, though he was so little worthy of interest, would ever find his Mrs. May.

He got home before he expected, in the multiplicity of these thoughts; and when the door was opened to him noiselessly, without anyone appearing, he knew it was grandmamma, who was always on the watch for him. She said, in a whisper,

‘You’ve been a long time, dear. Hush, don’t make any noise, grandfather has gone up to bed.’

‘I was kept by a strange thing,’ said John. ‘Come into the parlour, and I’ll tell you, grandmamma. Why, the fire is nearly out, though it’s so cold!’

‘There’s a fire in your room, my dear. You forget how late it is—near eleven o’clock. And what was the strange thing, Johnnie? There are not many strange things in our village at this hour of the night.’

She was wrapped up in a great white shawl, and the pretty old face smiled over this, her complexion relieved and brightened by it, a picture of an old lady, beaming with tender love and cheerful calm.

‘It was very strange,’ said John, ‘though it seemed at first only a drunken fellow at the door of the “Green Man.”’

‘Mr. Cattley shouldn’t have taken you that way. I don’t like to have you mixed up with drunken men.’

‘How could I be mixed up?’ said John, with a laugh. ‘But the strange thing is that he says he’s a returned convict, and that he was calling out and asking everyone for some woman, a Mrs. May.’

Mrs. Sandford clutched at John with her hand. Her lips fell apart with horror, the colour fled from her face.

‘Oh, good Lord! What is it you are saying?’ she gasped, scarcely able to speak.

‘You don’t mean to say you are frightened, with the doors locked and all the windows fastened! Why, grandmamma,’ said John, laughing, ‘you are as bad as the people in “Les Miserables,” that I read to you, you know——’

‘Oh, yes, I’m frightened!’ she said, leaning upon him, and putting her hand to her heart, as if she had received a blow.

He felt the throbbing which went all through the slight frame as if it had been a machine vibrating with the quickened movement.

‘Why, grandmamma,’ he said again. ‘You to be frightened! He can’t, if he were a demon, do any harm to you. And shall I tell you what Mr. Cattley said? He said it might be a bit of faithfulness and human feeling, his coming to look for this poor woman, to bring her news of her husband.’

‘What had he to do with her husband?’ said the old lady, almost in a whisper, turning away from him her scared and panic-stricken face.

‘Oh, he had been in the same prison with him,’ said John. ‘He said her husband was his mate—that means, you know—but of course you know what it means. And, by-the-by,’ said the boy, ‘can you tell me, grandmamma, how it is that I seem to have some association or other—I can’t tell what it is—with the name of May?’

CHAPTER VI.

GRANDMAMA.

Mrs. SANDFORD got up very early next morning, some time before it was daylight. She had scarcely slept all night. As quiet as a little ghost, not to wake her husband, she had stolen upstairs after dismissing John to bed: and she stole out of her room as softly in the morning, her heart rent with trouble and fear. It was her habit to go out early in the summer mornings to look after the garden, to collect the eggs from the poultry-yard, to gather her posies with the dew upon them, which was an old-fashioned way she had. But in winter the old lady was not so brave, and feared the cold as the least courageous will do. Notwithstanding, it was still dark when she stole out, unseen as she fondly hoped, by Sarah in the kitchen. The

darkness of the night was just beginning to yield to the grey unwilling daylight. The milkman was going his rounds. Some late people, not the labourers, who were off to their work long ago in the darkness, were coming out very cold to their occupations: the shop had still a smoky paraffin-lamp lighted, and there was one of the same description shining through the open door of the 'Green Man.' Except for these points of light, all was grim and grey in the village. The sky widened and cleared minute by minute. It did not grow bright, but slowly cleared. Mrs. Sandford had a thick veil over her face, but everybody knew her. To attempt to hide herself was vain. She had taken a basket in her hand to give herself a countenance. It was a basket which was well known. It carried many a little comfort to sick people and those who were very poor. The sight of the little slim old lady with her fair, fresh face and white hair, her trim black-silk gown, and warm wadded cloak, and the basket in her hand, was very familiar to the people in Edgeley. But she was seldom out so early, and her steps were a little uncertain, not quick and

light as usual. You could generally see, to look at her, that she was very sure where she was going and knew every step of the way. This morning she went up past the 'Green Man,' so that the milkman, who was a great gossip, said to himself,

'I know! She's going to that tramp as was took bad last night in Feather Lane.'

But when he had gone on his round a little further and saw her coming back again, his confidence was shaken.

'It must be old Molly Pidgeon she's looking for—and most like don't know as she's moved.'

But, when Mrs. Sandford crossed the street, this observer was altogether at fault.

'There's nobody as is ill that a-way,' he said to the customer whom he was serving. 'Whatever is Mrs. Sandford doing out with her basket at this time in the morning, and no sickness to speak of about?'

The woman standing at her door with the jug in her hand for the milk leaned out too, and stared.

'There's a deal of children with colds, and old folks,' she said.

And they both stopped to look at the uncertain movements of the little figure. Even curiosity in the country is slow in its operations. They stood half turned away from the milk-pails, which were their real point of meeting, and stared slowly, while the unwonted passenger in still more unwonted uncertainty flickered along. In the meantime there had been a little commotion at the 'Green Man,' such as was very unusual too : for in the morning all was decorous and quiet there, if not always so at night. There was a loud sound of voices, which, though beyond the range of the milkman and his customer, attracted the attention of other people who were about their morning's business. The postman paused while feeling for his letters, and turned his head that way, and the people in the shop came running out to the door.

'It'll be him as made the row last night,' they said, in fond expectation of a second chapter. Their hopes were so far realized that at this moment the folding swinging-doors flew open, and a man burst out more quickly than is the usual custom of retiring guests. And he stopped to shake his fist at the door, where Johnson

appeared after him watching his departure.

‘I promise you I’ll keep an eye on you,’ Johnson cried after him, and the stranger sent back a volley of curses fortunately too hoarse to be very articulate.

Mrs. Sandford crossed the road again just at that moment, and she heard better than the observers far off. A look of horror came over her face.

‘Oh! my good man,’ she cried, lifting up her hand, ‘I am sure you don’t wish all those horrible things. What good can it do you to swear!’

The man looked at her for a moment. Her little dainty figure, her careful dress, her spotless looks made such a contrast to this big ruffian, all disordered, squalid, and foul, with every appearance of having lain among the straw all night, and the traces of last night’s debauch still hanging about him, as no words could express. He stood a moment taken aback by her address; probably he would have shrunk even from appealing to the charity of a being so entirely different and out of his sphere; but to have her stop there and speak to him

took away his breath. His hand stole up to his cap involuntarily.

‘It do a man a deal of good, lady,’ he said; ‘it relieves your mind; but I didn’t ought to,’ he added, beginning to calculate, ‘I know.’

‘You should not, indeed,’ she said; and then added, ‘You seem a stranger. Are you looking for work? or have you any friends about here?’

The postman, the woman at the shop, and everybody within sight admired and wondered to see Mrs. Sandford talking to ‘the man.’ This was the name he had already acquired in Edgeley. They wondered if she could know that he was a man out of prison. But she was known to be very kind.

‘I shouldn’t wonder if that was just why she’s doing of it, because nobody else would touch him with a pair of tongs,’ an acute person said.

He seemed, it must be added, much surprised himself; but he was a man who had been used to prison chaplains and other charitable persons, and he thought he knew how to get over every authority of the kind.

‘Lady,’ he said, ‘that’s just what I want. It’s work, to earn an honest living; but, ’cause I’m

a poor fellow as has been in trouble, nobody won't have me or hear speak of me ; but to have been in trouble oncet, that's not to say ye don't want to do no better. It's only when ye gets there as ye know how bad it is.'

'That may be very true,' said Mrs. Sandford ; 'but a little village like this is not the place to get work, I'm afraid ; for there is nothing to do here.'

'No, lady,' said the man ; 'and it wasn't so much work I was looking for this morning, as to do a good turn to a mate o' mine, as was with me, I needn't say where. Maybe ye may know, lady, as it can be seen you're a charitable lady. Maybe you can tell where I'll find a Missis May——'

Mrs. Sandford's little outline quivered for a moment, but her face did not change. She shook her head.

'There is nobody,' she said, 'of that name in this village. I know all the people, as you say. I think there was a woman called May about here a number of years ago, but she has removed, and where she has gone I can't say.'

'Ah, that's like enough,' said the man ; 'it's

a long time, and maybe she might not want the folks belonging to her to know.'

'Was it news you were bringing her?' Mrs. Sandford said. 'That was very kind of you—but perhaps she would rather you didn't tell her affairs to everybody, and that her husband was——'

'I didn't say nothing about her 'usband,' said the man, quickly.

'Oh! was it her son then, poor creature? for that is still worse,' the old lady said.

He looked at her keenly with the instinct of one who, deceiving himself, has a constant fear of being deceived; but to see the little Lady Bountiful of the village standing there with her basket, her fresh face as fresh as a child's, her limpid eyes looking at him with an air of pity yet disapproval, and to imagine that she was taking him in was impossible even to a soul accustomed to consider falsehood the common-place of existence.

'It was her 'usband,' he said, sullenly, 'and I don't care much if she liked it or not. She oughter like it if she didn't, for it was news of him I was bringing, and I could tell her all

about him—being mates for a matter of seven years, him and me.’

‘Poor woman!’ Mrs. Sandford said. ‘But I can’t tell you where she has gone, only that she’s not here.’

‘You wouldn’t deceive a poor fellow, lady? I’ve ’ad a long tramp, and that beggar there, though it’s nothing but a public he keeps, — him——’

‘Oh,’ said Mrs. Sandford, ‘don’t swear! What good can that do you? Indeed, I am not deceiving you. I’m very sorry for you. I will give you something to pay your fare to the town. You will be better off there than here.’

‘It’s not much of a town as far as I’ve heard,’ he said, ‘and I ain’t ’ad no breakfast. And my ’eart’s set on doing my duty by my mate. I’ll go from door to door but I’ll find that woman, blast her. She’s a proud ’un, I know, and thinks herself a lady. I’ll have it out with her, I will, afore I go.’

‘In that case,’ said Mrs. Sandford, ‘I can’t give you the money which I offered you: and I meant to give you something for your breakfast too—and I must speak to the constable, for

we cannot have you about the village, Mr.— I don't know what your name is. To have you here frightening all the poor people would never do.'

She gave him a lofty nod of her little head, and turned away: but the man, after all, was not willing to relinquish present advantage for problematical good. He made a stride after her, which frightened her very much, and took away all her pretty colour, but not the courage in her heart.

'Lady,' he said, 'if you tell me on your honour that woman ain't here—them folks all said so, but I didn't believe 'em: and if you'll give me—say ten shillin'—over and above the fare, as you promised——'

A gleam of eagerness came into Mrs. Sandford's eyes; but she controlled herself.

'I can assure you,' she said, 'the woman is not here.'

She had grown quite pale, and, though she smiled still, her countenance was drawn with terror, perhaps, or some other feeling.

'You're frightened of me, lady,' the man said, 'but you hain't got no cause. I'm rough enough,

but a lady as speaks kind and don't try to bully a poor fellow—or go talking about the police—and besides I couldn't do nothin' to you. The men would be on me afore we could say Jack— And I'm pretty sure as it's the truth, and May's wife ain't here. She's a proud one, she is. She's maybe gone out of the country, or changed her name, or summat. Gi' me ten shillin' and I'll go away.'

'You had better go to the clergyman,' said Mrs. Sandford.

'Gi' me ten shillin',' said the man.

'Oh, perhaps I am doing what is wrong; perhaps I ought to speak to the constable. I'm not a person with any authority, and why should I interfere?'

'Gi' me ten shillin',' he repeated, coming close to her, holding out his hand.

'Will you go away if I do? Perhaps you had better see the clergyman. I've no right to interpose to send you away. Will you go if I do?'

He nodded, watching her trembling hands as she took out her purse and felt in it, pressing very close to her, rubbing against her silk gown

with his rough dress ; and, as it happened by ill-luck, Mrs. Sandford had but a sovereign in her purse. When he saw it he put his hand upon hers suddenly, and crushed the little fingers together which held the golden coin.

‘ Gi’ me that,’ he said, with his hot breath in her face, ‘ gi’ me that, or afore any o’ them can get to ye I’ll knock you down ; and they can’t do anything as bad to me.’

The little old lady stood enveloped in his big shadow, with his hairy, villainous face close by hers. She did not shrink, nor scream, nor faint, but stood up, deadly pale, with her limpid eyes fixed upon him.

‘ I am not afraid of you,’ she said, with a little gasp. ‘ Will you keep your word and go away ?’

Some sentiment, unknown and inexplicable, came into the ruffian’s heart. He loosed his grip of the delicate little hand that felt like nothing in his grasp, which he could have crushed to a jelly : and indeed he had nearly done so. He said, ‘ I will ; I’ll keep my word,’ in a deep growling bass voice.

It was all that Mrs. Sandford could do to unclasp the fingers he had gripped, and to keep

from crying with the pain. She dropped the sovereign into his hand.

‘Now go,’ she said.

‘You *are* game,’ he cried, with a sort of admiration, looking at her rather than the sovereign, though his hand closed upon that with the eagerness of a famished beast upon a bone. ‘I never saw one as was more game.’

She made a gesture of dismissal with her cramped fingers.

‘Oh, go, go—and God forgive you. And oh! try to get honest work, and live decent—and not fall into trouble again.’

‘Good-bye, lady,’ he said; then coming back a step—‘I’m sorry I hurt you.’

She waved to him to go away. The man still lingered a moment, putting up his hand to his cap, then turned, and, slouching, with his shoulders up to his ears, took the way across the corner of the moor to the railway-station, which was a mile off or more.

Mrs. Sandford turned to go back to her house. She was so pale that when she came near the door of the shop Mrs. Box came running out to her in alarm.

‘Oh, Mrs. Sandford, come in, ma’am; come in and rest a bit. You’ve not a bit of colour on your cheeks—you that have such a fine complexion. You’re just dead with fright, and I don’t wonder at it. How did he dare to speak to you, the villain? and shook your nerves, poor dear, so that I see you can’t speak.’

‘Oh! yes, I can speak,’ said the old lady. Her knees were knocking under her, her whole little person in a tremble. ‘I was glad to speak to him, poor creature. He wanted some one that used to live here by. Perhaps a person like that, who does really wicked things, may not be worse, in the sight of God, than many a man who makes a fair show to the world.’

She said this with many a catch of her breath and pause between the words. She was very much overdone, as anyone could see, but she would not sit down.

‘If you’ll give me a little milk, or some water, to revive me, I’ll be quite right in a minute,’ she said.

‘That may be true,’ said Mrs. Box, ‘for goodness knows the best of folks you can’t see into

their heart ; but a man as has been in prison ain't like any other man. They learn such a deal of harm, even if it's not in them to begin with. I've just made the tea for breakfast, and here's a nice cup—that'll do you more good than anything else—and sit down a moment and get your breath. I said to William, "There's Mrs. Sandford a-talking to that brute ; you go and see that she's all right." But William, he said to me, "If anyone can bring him to his senses it's just Mrs. Sandford will do it." So we stood and we watched. And what did he say to you, ma'am ?—and dear, dear, how it's taken all the nice colour out of your cheeks.'

'Thank you for the tea. It has done me a great deal of good,' said the old lady ; 'and now I must go home, for Mr. Sandford will be wondering what has become of me. Poor man, he was very amenable, after all, when one comes to think of it. I told him Edgeley was no place for the like of him, and that perhaps he might get work in the town : and you see he has gone away. Oh, poor soul ! He was some poor woman's boy once, that perhaps has broken her heart for him, Mrs. Box, and never

thought to see him come to that, any more than you or me.'

'Well, that's true, ma'am,' said Mrs. Box. 'We don't know what they'll come to, as we're so proud of when they're children. Hold up your head, Willie, do! and ask Mrs. Sandford to let you carry her basket, as is always heavy with things for the poor.'

'Not this morning, Mrs. Box. I had but an egg or two in it,' said Mrs. Sandford, opening the lid to show that it was empty. There was a certain suspicion, she thought, in this speech. 'There is no need for troubling Willie; but he is a fine, good-natured boy, and always willing to carry a parcel or run an errand. Good-morning to you all; you are kind folks.'

She thought the tea had saved her as she set out again down the village street. But her limbs still tottered, and she walked slowly, thinking the way twice as long as usual. They all called out how pale she was when she got in.

'It is going out,' she said, 'without a cup of tea or anything, which was all my own fault.'

'And why did you go out so early, without

saying a word,' said her husband. 'Charity, my dear, is a fine thing; but you should not carry it too far. Neither that nor anything else is good when it's carried too far.'

Mrs. Sandford only smiled and said it would be difficult to go too far when there were so many poor people, and pretended to make a very good breakfast behind the tea-urn. After breakfast she lay down a little on the sofa, saying that it was the most ridiculous thing in the world to be so tired for nothing, and that she must have taken something that disagreed with her, for the stomach was at the bottom of everything when one grew old. It was still holiday time with John, and he insisted upon staying with her when grandfather went out for that daily walk which nothing short of death in the house would have made him leave off. John was unusually grave. He came and sat beside the sofa with a very perplexed countenance.

'Grandmamma,' he said, 'I feel all mixed. I am so puzzled with remembering something. Remembering and forgetting. Wasn't I somehow mixed up when I was a little chap with the name of May?'

CHAPTER VII.

COMRADES.

‘So we’ve got to leave off work, Jack. I don’t know how you may feel, but I don’t like it at all.’

This was what Elly Spencer said as she put her books together in Mr. Cattley’s study on a day in January not long before that on which the holidays, if they had been only holidays, would have come to an end. She was sixteen—a little younger than John Sandford, hitherto her constant companion and class-fellow. The relations between them were even more close than this, as the class consisted but of these two. Occasionally there had been a little emulation between them, even by times a keen prick of rivalry, but Mr. Cattley had made it very distinctly understood that, while John was more

accurate in point of grammar and all the scaffolding of study, Elly was the one who caught the poetry or the meaning most quickly, and jumped at the signification of a sentence even when she did not know all the words of which it was composed. This was true to a certain extent, but not perhaps to the full length to which the curate carried it; but it had a very agreeable effect as between the two students, and carried off everything that might have been too sharp in their rivalry.

Thus Elly's part was clearly defined, and so was John's. If by chance the girl remembered a rule of construction before the boy on some exceptional occasion, or the boy perceived the sense of a passage before the girl, it made a laugh instead of any conflict of mutual jealousy.

'Why, here's Jack and Elly changing places,' the curate would say, and no harm was done. The link between the two was, however, a very unusual one to exist between a boy and girl. They were like brother and sister, they were two comrades in the completest sense of the words, and yet they were something more. They were like each other's second self in

different conditions. Elly could not very well imagine what she would do were she Percy or Dick—who had strayed away from the habits of their home, into those of public schoolboys, members of a great corporation bound by other laws; but she thought she could quite imagine what she would do were she John, or Jack, as the young ones called him.

It did not indeed enter into Jack's mind to realise what he should do were he Elly; for that is one inalienable peculiarity of the human constitution that no male creature can put himself in the place of a woman, as almost all female creatures imaginatively place themselves in that of some man. It is the one intimate mark of constitutional superiority which makes the meanest man more self-important than the noblest woman. Elly knew exactly what she would do if she were John. It was like herself going out into the world, planning the future, foreseeing all that was to happen. If it had been possible for her to go out into the world too, and have a profession, which with a sigh of regret she acknowledged was not possible, she would have done it just as he was going to

do it. His enthusiasm about lighthouses had indeed been struck out by Elly, who had read all about the Eddystone 'in a book,' as she said, and who thenceforward had done nothing but talk about it till she became a bore to her brothers, and set John's congenial soul aflame.

John and she talked between themselves about 'the boys' with a great deal of honest kindness, but perhaps just a little contempt—contempt is too hard, too unpleasant a word; but then toleration always implies this more or less. The boys got into scrapes: they thought of nothing but their shooting or their fishing: they were dreadfully bored on wet days, or when, as they said, there was 'nothing to do.'

'Jack and I can always find something to do,' Elly said.

Perhaps it was after hearing one of these speeches that Mrs. Egerton, called at the rectory Aunt Mary, decided that Elly had carried her studies far enough, and had better now devote herself to feminine accomplishments, and carry on the lighter part of her education at home. This decision coincided in point of time with the resolution of Mr. and Mrs. Sandford to

withdraw John from the curate's charge; so that, though it had a certain dolorous character as a break-up, there was none of the painful feeling on either part of being sent away from those studies which another more fortunate was still carrying on.

John and Elly had come together by one impulse to remove their books. The room in which they had worked was Mr. Cattley's study, the front parlour of the house in which he lodged; for the curate being only, as it were, in the position of a temporary inhabitant (notwithstanding that no known inducement would have been enough to carry him away from Edgeley) had no house of his own, but lodged where all the curates had lodged within the memory of man, in Mrs. Sibley's, whose house stood obliquely at the end of the village street, commanding a beautiful view of the street itself, and everything that went on there. The street was broad, and almost all the houses had little gardens, which made it a very pretty view in summer. Within a stone's throw, at the right-hand, was the 'Green Man,' which was a drawback, especially on Saturday nights, when the

guests were a little noisy, and when Mr. Cattley was busy with his sermon. But it had this advantage, that the curate secured from his window a great deal of information as to the habits of the more careless portion of his parishioners, and now and then was able to come down upon them accordingly, with very crushing effect. Beyond the 'Green Man,' at a little distance, was the shop, and then the row of houses ran on, sloping a little to the right hand, so that the gable of Mr. Sandford's house in the distance, which was old, and of a fine, mellow, red brick, closed up the view. The church and rectory were withdrawn among trees to the left hand, behind the line of the village street, which had nothing at all remarkable about it, but was homely, and pleasant to the eyes which had known it all their lives and knew everybody in it. To be sure, John Sandford was seven when he came to Edgeley—but that at seventeen does not tell for much. Feather Lane, the low part of Edgeley, was quite unseen from Mr. Cattley's, being a narrow street which sloped down to the river, well hidden by intervening houses. Mrs. Sibley's was rather a modern house—at least, it

had additions which were of very recent date. The window was a wide, bow-window, roomy enough to hold the curate's writing-table, and seat his two pupils, one at each side. The other part of the room was quite square, and not very lovely. It had a table in the centre—a black horse-hair sofa and chairs, and a red and green carpet with a very bold pattern. The want of beauty in these articles, however, had not struck any one. The furniture was all so familiar, associated with so many tranquil, pleasant days, so many little jokes and youthful laughter. It was 'a dear old room,' Elly said. She looked round, as she gathered up her books, with affectionate regard. 'Dear old place! To think one will never come here again, except to ask for Mr. Cattley, or bring him a message from Aunt Mary!' The regret was quite genuine, but there was a little laugh in it too.

'I sha'n't be able even to do that,' said John.
'I shall be away.'

'Ah, but then you'll write,' said Elly. 'Writing brings you back to a place more than merely coming with a message. If you don't write regularly to me, I shall come to Mr. Cattley, and

ask him, "Mr. Cattley, have you heard from Jack?" And then he'll take it out, and read it to me; and so we'll all three be together again.'

'Oh, I'll write fast enough,' said John, lightly, without any sense of the privilege it was to be permitted to write as often as he liked to Elly. 'I shall have nothing else to do.'

Elly was not at all offended by this easy statement. She said,

'Not at first; but after, when you come to know people, then you'll drop off, I'm sure. Everybody does. I have heard Aunt Mary say so often, "Oh, wait till they get among their own friends." But keep it up as long as you can be troubled, Jack; for I am not going among new friends, you know. Look here, Mr. Cattley has papa and Aunt Mary on his mantelpiece. He has hung papa only to keep Aunt Mary company, I'm sure. Now, let you and me leave him our photographs, one on each side. He'll like it, and it will be a little surprise for him when he comes in.'

'He will like yours, I daresay,' said Jack, 'but mine? I am sure he can't want mine: and I've not got one, that I know of.'

‘Yes, you have,’ said Elly. ‘This is my own : I brought it with me on purpose ; and, of course, Mrs. Sandford must have another copy, and she’ll give it me. Look here,’ said the girl, taking out two photographs, which she had placed together in an envelope. They were not very noble works of art. They were the production of a travelling photographer who had been in the village for a week, and in that time had ‘done’ everybody, both gentle and simple, in Edgeley. They represented two young, round faces, very staring as to likeness, but without other advantage : however, neither Elly nor John knew any better. And there was enough in that juxtaposition to have made the heart of a youth beat ; but John’s heart remained perfectly at ease. It seemed to him, as to Elly, the most natural thing in the world that they should balance each other. Nor was he at all offended that she should give ‘my one,’ as she called it, to the curate, with the intention of getting another from his grandmother to fill the vacant place in her room when he was aware he had been placed beside ‘the other boys.’ There was no feeling about the matter that was not

quite simple and straightforward. Elly took them out of their envelope, and attached them over the curate's mantelpiece with two big pins.

'I thought at one time,' she said, 'of giving him the frames, too, but then I thought it was better to pin them up—for if he cares for them very much he can get frames for them, and if he doesn't it's no great matter. All the same it will be you and me.'

Elly stood up against the fire, reaching up with her arms to fasten the photographs, in her dark winter frock, which made her slim, girlish figure more slim than ever. Her hair still hung down upon her shoulders in half curling locks, not very long, but very thick and shining, and full of the wavy, long undulation of natural curls, which have never been put in paper, or touched with curling-irons. John, though it had never occurred to him to admire Elly, did think her hair very pretty, falling upon her shoulders in that easy way. It was reddish-brown, but more brown than red on ordinary occasions; only now and then, when there was no occasion for such vanities, the red would come out.

‘You’ve got very pretty hair, Elly,’ he said, quite simply. ‘I think I never saw anyone with such pretty hair.’

‘Oh, Jack, papa says it’s too red, and Aunt Mary says it’s not red enough; it’s neither one thing nor another. How can one help the colour of one’s hair, or anything else for the matter of that; and yet people speak as if it was your fault! Will that do, do you think? I’ve put you on Aunt Mary’s side and myself on papa’s, because a lady and a gentleman should always come alternately, as people sit at dinner, don’t you know. It looks very nice, quite complete. If Mr. Cattley has any brothers or sisters, or anything of that sort, there is no room for them now, that is clear.’

‘Or fathers and mothers,’ said John.

‘Well, he has had a long time to put them up in, if he wanted to. We must not trouble ourselves about them. Everybody has got fathers and mothers, of course. But I don’t remember mamma a bit; and you don’t either, do you, Jack?’

‘Oh! yes, I think I do; but there is one thing, Elly,’ said Jack, ‘I remember papa; I re-

member him as distinctly as if it had been yesterday. He used to come and take me out of bed, I should think in the middle of the night, and take me downstairs to supper, and I had oranges and cakes and all sorts of things sitting on his knee.'

'Oh, how bad for you,' said Elly, with a woman's instinctive consciousness of maternal responsibility. 'He must have been very thoughtless to do that.'

'Thoughtless? well, perhaps: I never thought of it in that light—but it seems very nice as I look back. Can you believe it, Elly,' said John, coming close and speaking low, 'it was only two or three days since, when we were talking it all over, that I heard for the first time that my father was dead.'

'Dear, dear!' said Elly, looking very grave; but then she added, 'I've known it a long time, Jack. I've always heard papa say that you were an orphan boy.'

'I am not an orphan boy, my mother is living,' said John, hurriedly. For the first time it occurred to him that to have a mother living whom he had not seen for ten years was strange.

It had never struck him in this light before. 'But papa,' he added, in a softer tone, 'died many years ago. I don't know why I never understood it. One doesn't think of things when there is nothing to lead one's mind to them.'

'I know,' said Elly. 'It is just now that I am trying to remember a little about mamma. You know, I was only a baby when she died, and for years and years I never even thought—'

'That was like me: it all seemed so natural, one made no inquiry.'

'We are very like each other, Jack,' said Elly, 'now some people would have been always inquiring: at least that is how they do in books. You and I just took it for granted. Has your mother, then, a large family that she has given you quite up to old Mr. and Mrs. Sandford? I suppose your father was their son, as you are Sandford too.'

This puzzled John extremely. It was a question he had not asked himself. Though he knew that his mother was Emily, and that she was the daughter of the old people, it had not occurred to him to wonder why he should be called John Sandford. It sent off his mind at an entirely

different angle of wonder and inquiry. John—he had always been called Johnnie in those old days. John—what? It seemed to him a dozen times that he was just on the eve of catching the name, and then it went from him again; besides, he had not time to think of it now with Elly looking in his face with her brown eyes, all round and big with the inquiry. He replied to her question,

‘I don’t think I know, Elly. It really is very funny how little one thinks. I don’t believe there were many of us. I have a sister Susie—but whether there are any more—Oh, no, I don’t think there are any more. My mother never comes to see us because—I am sure I don’t know why. I never asked. Some time or other I must think it all out, and ask grandmamma. It is absurd, isn’t it, to know so little about one’s own people.’

‘Oh, no,’ said Elly, ‘not when you have not heard people talking of them. See how well we look, over Mr. Cattley’s mantelpiece. I wonder what he will say when he comes in. He will say, “That’s Elly,” I am sure. He will never give you the credit of it.’

‘And of course he will be quite right,’ said John. ‘I should never have thought of such a thing. Well, dear old place, good-bye. I shall think of it often when I am away and working. We have been just the same for a long time, but we are going to be very different, Elly. Perhaps next time we meet you won’t have anything to say to me.’

‘Why?’ she asked, opening wide again her great soft brown eyes.

‘Because, of course, you will always be a lady, and I shall perhaps be a rough kind of working man.’ John laughed in spite of himself at the idea, which did not frighten him at all. ‘Mr. Cattley says one has to go and work at the foundry like any working man.’

‘Likely that I shouldn’t have anything to say to you! Why, that is what I should enjoy,’ said Elly. ‘Have you got all your books? Well, then, we’ll say good-bye in concert. Good-bye, dear old place! Of course I shall come back to you often, but Jack most likely will not come back for a very long time. I hope when he does he’ll be a good engineer, and be building a new Eddystone, or something of that

kind: and I hope he will never be such a fool as to think that people will have nothing to say to him. We two schoolfellows will always be friends whatever happens, and wherever we go. You shall always tell everything to me, Jack, just as you always did in Mr. Cattley's dear old study. Now, that is a promise, mind.'

'Yes, Elly,' said John, 'but you ought to promise the same, that you will tell everything to me.'

'Oh, girls are different,' said Elly. 'They walked out, carrying with them their burdens of books. It did not occur to John that he should offer to carry hers for her, or treat her otherwise than on the footing of perfect equality which they had hitherto occupied. Nor did she think of it. They stood upon no ceremony with each other. Elly's instinct told her that to promise entire confidence was not on her side so simple, as on his: but she was ready to promise 'faithfully,' on her part, always a ready ear for his confidences, and her best attention to any problem he might present for her consideration. John accepted this without further question. He knew vaguely that girls were different.

Elly would go back to the drawing-room at the rectory, while he went out to work at his profession. He felt that the girls had the worst of it, poor things.

And they walked out through the little garden and down the side street which led to the rectory with a little sentiment in their young bosoms, but none that touched upon the relations between themselves. They felt a little sad at leaving school. They felt that one chapter of their lives was over, and that it was a pity, yet delightful. They were sad to leave Mr. Cattley and their books, yet enchanted to be on the threshold of life. John walked to the rectory gate with his school-fellow, for company, and then they parted, but without any tender adieu, without even shaking hands; for after all, until John actually left Edgeley, they would certainly see each other every day.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CALL FOR EMILY.

MRS. SANDFORD had not been well ever since that morning expedition of hers. There was nothing the matter with her, she said, oh, nothing. She was only a little tired ; perhaps she had done too much at Christmas, what with the flannel-petticoats and all the rest. The clothing club had been a little trying that year. There had been more people to satisfy, a greater number of pence to reckon up, and garments to choose. And Mrs. Egerton had been absent on a visit, so that the great part of the work fell to Mrs. Sandford's share. All these she set forth, smiling, as reasons why she should be tired. And then there was the reason that underlay all these, which gave force to them—that she was growing old. Of that there could be no

question—every birthday made it more and more certain. She was no longer at a time of life when people can make light of fatigue. She was growing older every year. This smiling plea was received by grandfather with his tchick, tchick, and by John with a troubled but nevertheless unquestioning acquiescence: for there could be no doubt that it was true. He thought her even older than she thought herself, and felt that her days were over, before she had realised that fact in her own person. She grew older not only every year but every day as the weeks of January went on. At first she went out a little in the middle of the day when the sun shone. But soon this little exercise was given up. It did a delicate person no good, really no good, the doctor said, to go out in that wintry weather. It was wiser and better to stay indoors; and then it came to be considered wiser that she should rise late, and lie on the sofa when she came downstairs. She lay there always smiling, declaring that nothing ailed her, but as a matter of fact fading and failing day by day.

The last time she went out with John she had

kept looking about with a little nervous glance by all the side roads. They went as far as the common and paused a little, looking across by the path which led to the railway-station.

‘Have you ever heard anything more of that man?’ she said.

‘What man, grandmamma?’

‘The man you once told me of, you know, who had been a convict. The man who was asking for somebody’s poor wife——’

‘Oh! yes, I remember. No. I am sure he has never come back again. Perhaps he did not mean all he said. He had been drinking——’

‘Drink is a terrible thing, John. Almost everything begins with drinking. I have known it poison more lives than anything else in the world. If I had to choose, I think I would rather that a child of mine should murder some one outright than take to drink, for in that case there is no telling how many he might murder—all that loved him—and himself as well as the rest.’

‘You need not tell me, grandmamma; no one can hate it more than I.’

‘I hope so. I hope so, dear! You have never seen anything all your life that could incline you in any such way, have you, John? But remember you have never been in any temptation—and till one is in temptation one can never tell what may happen. I think, my dear, we will go home.’

They had many little conversations of this kind. The old lady would begin upon any subject, it did not matter what, and then by degrees she would come to this :

‘I have seen so much in my life. I have seen many young people grow up everything that could be wished, as you have done, John; and then, as soon as they came into temptation, they have gone astray. Nobody knows till he has been tried: and it is not the disagreeable ones, the ones that you would dislike, that go: sometimes the very nicest, John—those that are the kindest, the tenderest. That is a great mystery. None of us can fathom it.’

‘It does seem very strange,’ said the attentive boy, listening at once out of respect and out of the cheerful curiosity of his age, often with a sense that he knew better, but far too consider-

ate and kind, as well as conscious of the fitness of things, to let her see this. She had seen so much : and yet to one who had begun to know a little philosophy and a number of books, how little it seemed that grandmamma could know.

‘ Oh ! it’s very strange,’ she said. ‘ I’ve lain in bed for hours thinking of it, and I’ve gone about the house for days thinking of it, and yet I never come any nearer. Do you remember what it says in the Bible, about the potter making one vessel to dishonour and another to honour ? Oh ! but, John, it seems sometimes more than that ! It seems as if He took the vessels that had been made for honour, and dashed them down on the ground and let them all break into shreds and miserable fragments. You can’t think what it is to stand and look on at that, and be able to do nothing, nothing !’

John was sitting by the side of her sofa : for they had come in : and he saw with wonder, yet great respect, that the tears had come to her eyes.

‘ But, surely, grandmamma,’ he said, seriously, ‘ it must be their own fault.’

‘ Oh ! yes, my dear, no doubt it must be their own fault,’ she said, and put up her handkerchief

to her eyes, and for a moment could not speak. The boy sat by her side, greatly touched by her emotion and wondering who it might be of whom she was thinking: for he felt that it could not be only the general question that went so much to the old lady's heart. But he felt inclined to speak to her seriously, and reason with her, and say to her that no one could be forced to go wrong, that the people who did so must do it because they liked it, because they had no self-control, or wanted something in their constitutions: and that it was wrong to blame Providence or even human nature for what was their own individual fault. He only did not say this because he was so respectful and kind, and the sight of her silent crying—although, indeed, at her age, an old lady is easily moved to tears—went to his heart.

‘But no one can ever tell whether they can resist or not, till they have been tempted,’ she said. ‘We think nothing would ever make us do it, and then the next thing is that we find ourselves doing it, some in small things and some in great.’

To this, which was abstract, John did not

know how to make any reply; and there was a silence of a minute or two, after which Mrs. Sandford said, suddenly,

‘John, I am thinking of sending for Emily. It is a long, long time since I saw her, and at my age, you know, one can’t go on living for ever.’

‘You don’t feel any worse, grandmamma?’

‘Oh, worse!’ she said, with her pretty old smile, ‘not even ill—there is nothing at all the matter with me. Still, I’ve been keeping quieter than usual, and lying on the sofa so much makes one feel weak. And I’ve been thinking that it’s a long, long time since she has been here. It is not quite natural that a daughter should be so long without coming to see her parents, is it?—and she our only child. But you must not suppose I blame Emily—oh, no! There were many reasons which seemed to make it better that she should not come—family matters which we should have to explain to people that know nothing about them. And in some respects, John, though you will think it strange, it might be a painful meeting. Still, I think that she should come.’

John did not feel able to make any reply. It seemed to have escaped Mrs. Sandford's mind that this was his mother of whom she was speaking, and that, if it was strange that a daughter should not come to see her parents, it was still more strange that a mother should not come to see her child. The thought of her coming brought a great sense of disturbance into his mind. He did not feel that he had any wish to see her. His mother had got confused and lost in this Emily of whom he had heard so much. They were, he supposed, the same person, but he had a reluctance to identify them. It was not to her but to his grandparents that he belonged. He had no desire to have this little world disturbed, where all was so harmonious, by an alien presence. The wonder which had arisen in his mind when he talked with Elly, rose up again more painfully. How little she must care for him never to have wished to see him again. Perhaps she was one of those people who do not care much for anyone. Altogether it would be better that the family should remain as they had always been, without the disturbing influence of one who was so near to

them all, and yet was a stranger. An uneasy sense that harm would come of it and that pain would be in it filled his thoughts.

‘Yes,’ said the old lady, in her soft voice, ‘whatever happens, it would be well that she should come. Her father would like her to be here. Even if he did not wish it at the time, he would be glad of it afterwards; for how could he settle everything, he that has never had any trouble about the house, by himself? John, we have a nice quiet time just now. It’s raining, and nobody is likely to call, and your grandfather has gone over to Sailsfield to ask about those new strawberries. Bring your little writing-case—that Mr. Cattley gave you on your birthday. You can put it here on my table. I’m too tired to write myself. Just say what I tell you. Are you ready, dear? Then, you may begin. “Dear Emily——”’

‘But, grandmamma,’ said John, ‘how can I say “dear Emily,” when it is my mother? I can’t write to my mother so.’

‘Dear, dear me!’ said Mrs. Sandford, ‘how was it I never thought of that? Oh, my poor boy. It is just a confusion altogether,’ she cried, once

more, with tears ready to drop, 'just a confusion, everything turned upside down, and all as unnatural——! I felt it from the first, but they thought they knew better than me. Then you must say, "dear mamma," John. I am glad you reminded me of that, for I get confused too. Now go on, my dear. "It is a long time since you have been here, and I think it is time that you should pay us a visit. We are getting old people, and your dear father, though he never complains, is not such a walker as he used to be, and I have got a little stupid, and can't keep him as cheerful as I could wish." Do you think I shouldn't say as much as that? or what do you object to, my dear?'

'Dear grandmamma,' said John, 'I had better put "Emily" at the beginning of the letter: for I could not say that about getting old, and about her dear father, could I—when I am only her—son?'

Mrs. Sandford said tchick, tchick as her husband did; half coughing, half crying.

'How very silly I am. Of course, you can't put all that in if you begin "dear mamma." This is what you must say, John, just "My

dear." That is neither one thing nor another. Put all the rest that I have told you, and "My dear," to begin with. "My dear," will do for anybody. Tell her that I've been thinking of late of a great many things I should like to say to her : but that it tires me very much to write, and that the only way I can think is if she would come. Of course it will interfere with her time and she might not be able to get leave ; but I hope she won't grudge that once in a way to her mother : and tell her, John—it is just a little matter between us ; it is nothing you will understand—tell her that the people here are very ignorant, good sort of souls that never know anything. They don't even read the newspapers, and never have done so. She will know what I mean.'

John put down all this in the best way he could ; but it seemed sadly out of character to him to write with his firm young handwriting, and with all the sense of incongruity that was in his mind, such sentences as these to his mother. He wrote to her very seldom ; only on great occasions, at Christmas and other anniversaries, and very formally, as a boy writes

when he is at school. He had done this for a long time, as a matter of course, and never thought any more of it. But now his eyes were opened to the strangeness of everything, to all that was out of nature in the constitution of his family, and it did not seem possible to him to continue any longer in that way which till now he had accepted without question. There was something even in the erasures with which this paper began—the ‘dear Emily’ which gave him a little shiver, the ‘dear mamma’ which was still more incongruous—which seemed to stir up all the smouldering questions which he was not aware were in his mind. He had not known anything about them, and yet, apparently, they were all there, waiting only this touch to bring them to light. Why was it she never came? Why was it she had abandoned him, her child, and then her parents? What was it in her life that kept her so far apart, so unknown, in a strange world, from which nobody ever came—nobody who could say ‘I have seen her’—to give them fuller satisfaction than letters could afford, letters which John was now aware told

nothing but the merest surface of existence, that all was well, that he was getting on with his lessons, that the weather was very fine, or the season a cold one? What are such facts as these in comparison with the intercourse that ought to exist between people who were each other's nearest relations? It gave him a great shock as he wrote that about 'your dear father.' Was grandpapa, indeed, her dear father? and did she think so little of him that she never came to see with her own eyes whether he was growing old or not? And what was he, John himself, her son? Oh, but other women were not so with their sons. All this must have been in his mind, though he had never thought of it before. He wrote down all that his grandmother had told him, and then he paused in his new development of feeling. It seemed to him that he would like to take this paper and tear it into a dozen pieces in the exasperation of his soul.

'Grandmamma,' he said, with a little quiver in his voice, 'don't you think it would be better for me to write from myself, and tell her this in my own way? I will say just what you want

to have said, but it shall be from myself. It would be more natural. After all she is my—mother, I suppose.’

‘John!’ said the old lady. ‘You suppose! What should she be but your mother? Who should be your mother but she? Oh, my dear, I hope you will not take things into your head that are not true. We have enough of trouble, enough of trouble, in our family. Don’t you begin and imagine things that are not true.’

‘I don’t imagine anything,’ said the boy, ‘but if you will consider, grandmamma, this is my mother. And I know nothing about her. For a long time it seemed all simple. I never minded. But, now I’m getting older and see how other people are, it is all so strange. Let me have my own way this time—let me just write to her as it would be natural if I were really her son.’

‘Oh, my John, that you are, indeed, indeed; her son and nothing else. Whose son should you be but hers? Don’t take any wrong notions into your head. My poor Emily! Oh, if you knew how many things she has had to bear! And what would she do at the end of all if her

own boy's heart was cold to her? You are her son and no one's else—hers, my dear, and hers alone.'

John looked with his clear young eyes, severe yet gentle, in her face.

'Isn't that too much to say, grandmamma? Am I not the son of my father, too?'

The old lady looked at him with a strange, low cry. She caught hold of both his hands for a moment, with a grasp in which there seemed something like terror. And then she dropped back upon her pillow and covered her face with her hands.

'I always said it. I always said it,' she cried.

Just then, in the pause that followed, a heavy, familiar step, slow and steady, came along the road, audible for some time in the quiet of the afternoon and the house. Mrs. Sandford dried her eyes hastily and raised herself up again.

'There is your grandfather,' she said. 'Oh, my dear, take that away, and write as you please: but don't say anything about it, for I have not spoken to him. And it is not as if I were sending for her, John. I am only saying

that I should like to see her. Of course I should like to see her, every mother wishes that, to see her child. Write out of your own head; but don't say anything about it, and quick, quick, take all that away!

CHAPTER IX,

JOHN'S LETTER.

JOHN was allowed to sit in the parlour now that he was almost a man, after the old people had gone to bed. His own room was small, and it had been agreed upon as a reasonable thing that he should have a place in which he could sit and read, or write—till eleven o'clock, at least. Mr. Sandford retired to his room at ten exactly, every night, and, since she had been so ill—no, not ill, tired—his wife had preceded him, going upstairs very early, in that unaccountable but quite gentle fatigue which had come over her. All the afternoon and evening John had been very silent, thinking—chiefly what he was to say in his letter to his mother—but also about all the circumstances, the strangeness of the household life altogether, the extraordinary separation which,

now that conveyance was so easy, now that everybody travelled, when even little Joe Hodge, who was apprenticed in London, came home every Christmas to see his mother, a poor widow in the alms-houses—was more wonderful than ever. In old times it might have been understood, when there were no railways, in the days which the old people remembered—but now! It perplexed him beyond description, when his thoughts were fully directed to the subject. And it became clear to him all at once, as when a landscape suddenly becomes apparent to us on turning a corner or coming to the top of a hill, that some other reason must exist for this than the simple fact that his mother lived in London and his grandparents at Edgeley. That was no reason; his enlightened mind rejected it. All the afternoon he kept turning over and over in his mind what he was to say. He had never in his life written an important letter, scarcely ever written one at all which was not suggested, partly dictated even, by the old people, who would say to him, ‘You must write to Susie,’ or, ‘Don’t you think, John, that you ought to write to your mother?’ This was how his correspondence

had generally been conducted. He had written a few schoolboy epistles to Dick and Percy, but they did not count. He thought a great deal of the importance of the letter. Phrases for it, sentences which he polished and reconstructed, and which he felt, with a little satisfaction, would come very well, kept passing through his mind in a sort of procession. Sometimes he felt that he had put a thing very strongly indeed, that his mother must feel herself entirely in the wrong, and change her procedure altogether. He was not aware that people do not like to find themselves in the wrong, and are far from candid in acknowledging that fact, even when it is most apparent in the accuser's eyes.

He got out the little writing-case, of which he was proud, as soon as his grandfather had gone upstairs. He got out some paper, carefully inspecting it to see that there was no infinitesimal soil on its glossy purity; and then he began to write, taking a new pen, and every precaution against blotting. All these were signs and symbols of the importance of the act he was about to accomplish. He lingered over the preparations with a hope that they would inspire

him. But when all was done he did not find it so easy to put down what he wanted to say. He did not go to bed at eleven that night. He sat up for two hours later, trying to shape an epistle which should be like that of a son to his mother, yet at the same time that of a young man coming into full possession of his reason to a woman who was not obeying the dictates of that fundamental principle. He did not want to be instructive or dictatorial, but yet he wanted to show her that he was aware she was failing in her duty; and withal it was his intention to be perfectly respectful and filial. To combine these things was to an unaccustomed letter-writer very difficult. His beautiful sheet of paper which he had chosen so carefully was all scored and interlined, and had become a mere scrawl long before he was done. And he himself grew hot and excited in the process: far more than if Mr. Cattley had cut to pieces his Latin poem, and he had been trying to do a new composition. As a matter of fact, he had made two or three compositions of this letter before he settled on one that would do.

This was what he decided on sending at the last :

‘Dear Mother’—(He had always heretofore said Mamma, keeping the baby name, which was the only one under which he had any real knowledge of her. That, and Emily, he understood : but Mother seemed a new person, some one with whom he had no real acquaintance, whom he must learn to know). ‘Dear Mother,’—He did not add any more for half an hour, and then he began to write quickly for ten minutes, and put down the most of what is copied here, though with corrections and interlining past counting. This was nothing but the mere draft.

‘I think I am old enough to write to you from myself, being no longer a child : for it seems so very hard not to know you, or to understand why it is that I have not seen you for such a long, long time. People change very much in such a time ; it is said that even your body changes, and, still more, your mind, which is always undergoing developments, and learning more and having more experiences. Dear mother, I am not now a little boy. I have finish-

ed my education. Mr. Cattley thinks I have gone as far as I need try to do, as I am not to proceed seriously with my studies, and now it has been settled that I am to begin to learn the profession of an engineer. I had my choice between that and going into an office, and I chose that. I hope you will be interested in hearing all this. Mothers are generally so, and it *is* hard upon me—Please do think so!—not to know whether you care, or if you will be pleased. Mother, I am writing now to ask you something—something that is very much in my mind. I do want you to come here. Consider that I don't know you at all. It is not natural. I feel almost as if it were wrong not to know my mother. But it is not my fault; and there are poor grandfather and grandmamma whom you have given up too. They are your parents just as you are mine, and it is dreadful that we should never meet. Mother, please don't think I am saying more than I ought to say; but do come—oh, do come. I do not feel that I can go on longer as I have gone on all these years, knowing nothing about myself, or about you. You must see, if you will think, that it is very, very

hard upon me, especially now when I am old enough to think for myself.

‘ I am, dear mother,

‘ Your affectionate son,

‘ JOHN SANDFORD.’

He had worked himself up to a very high pitch of feeling before he came to the end. It need scarcely be added that it was not in the least what he intended to say. He meant to have pointed out the hardship of his own case incidentally, and put the force of his prayer into his grandmother's wishes. But John found out, like other people, that his pen ran away with him—his thoughts ran away with him. The stream of his eloquence all poured in one direction, while his intentions took the other way—curious conflict of that dual nature which nobody understands though so many people talk of it. It is more often in doing than in saying that we contradict our own purpose. But John was more near to the truth in what he said, being carried away by the fever of writing, and the natural impulse which seized upon his pen, than if he had discharged his commission more ex-

actly. It was only when he read his letter over, still labouring with the emotion it had called forth, and which gradually rose higher and higher by the stimulus of his own eloquence, that it occurred to him that he had altogether left out his grandmother's message. He added, as so many people do, in the manner which is called feminine, the real object of his writing in a postscript. It was very brief, and delivered with a much decreased earnestness.

‘Grandmamma is not very well. She can't do nearly so much as she did a little while ago. It was she who first said I might write to beg you to come, and to say that she would like to see you. There are many things she would like to say to you, for the people here are very ignorant, and don't understand.’

John had no doubt that he had thus given everything that was of the least importance in his grandmother's message. He made a fair copy—a very fair copy of the document which was the most important he had ever had to do with. He would not trust himself to the opportunities of the morning, when, perhaps, Mr. Sandford might want him to do some-

thing, or Mr. Cattley might send for him, or anything might happen. The fire had gone out by this time, and the boy was very cold and cramped, and the stillness of the dead of night pressed upon his spirits. He took off his shoes before he stole up the creaking stairs to bed, with the fumes of his great intellectual effort in his head, and all his feelings roused. A sense of temerity, yet of pride, in the independent step he had taken was strong within him. Whatever might happen, at least he had made it apparent that he was now able to act and judge for himself.

When Mrs. Sandford came downstairs a little later than usual next day—it was always now a little later, so that it was hard upon any principle of averages to say what the ‘usual’ was—she asked John about his letter, with a look and a grasp of his hand, which showed how much in earnest she was, and which gave him a momentary compunction at the thought of how little important her share in the invitation had been made.

‘Did you send it away?’ she said to him, as he kissed her.

‘Yes, grandmamma, this morning.’

‘Thank you, my dear,’ she said; ‘did you say how much I wanted her, and how I hoped she would come soon?’

‘Ye-es,’ said John, with a less assured affirmative; then he added, ‘I said everything I could think of. I implored her to come.’

She pressed his hand in hers with a tender clasp.

‘Dear boy,’ she said, ‘you know I would never wish you to keep a secret from your grandfather. But unless he asks you—unless he says something—you will not take any notice, John?’

John drew himself apart a little, squaring his young shoulders.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘grandmamma, that I am old enough to write to my mother on my own responsibility, without thinking what even grandfather might say.’

‘Oh! yes,’ she said, looking up at him with a woman’s admiration for masculine independence, ‘that is quite true.’

‘And he would be the last to think otherwise. He would see that it was only natural and right.’

‘Yes,’ she answered, more doubtfully; ‘but he might think he ought to be consulted before you took any step. And that would only be just. What I hope is that Emily, who is so sensible, will take it into her own hands and write that she is coming—without saying anything about an invitation—that would certainly be the best way.’

‘I think,’ said John, ‘that, whether there were an invitation at all or not, she ought to have come long ago to see——’

He paused with a curious sense of the involved situation. Mrs. Sandford echoed his words with a soft, little sigh.

‘Oh! yes, whatever might have happened, she should have come to see her mother, John.’

But that was not what John intended to say.

Mr. Sandford came in shortly after, full of an interview he had just had with Mr. Cattley, who had been corresponding with his brother, the engineer, about John’s plans.

‘It appears that Mr. Cattley’s brother is an engineer who has to do with machinery,’ grandfather said. ‘I don’t know if that is the same thing as a lighthouse man. You will have to

go to the foundry and learn how everything is made. It is not surveying and that sort of thing, so far as I can hear. You will have to put your shoulder to the wheel, they tell me, and work with your own hands: but I suppose you will not mind that, John.'

'And where is the foundry?' asked grand-mamma, from the sofa. 'I hope it is not too far away.'

'Well, it is not perhaps the place I should have chosen; but what does it matter? one place is very like another. Anything that could harm him would be just as likely to come to him in any other place. It's in Liverpool, my dear.'

'In Liverpool——' Mrs. Sandford raised herself so quickly and energetically for her weak condition that she looked as if she were about to spring from the sofa. 'John Sandford,' she said, 'you will never let the boy go there.'

'It is not what I should have wished,' said the old gentleman; 'in short, it is the last place I should have chosen. But I did not think of that soon enough, and, after Mr. Cattley has been so kind as to make all the in-

quiries—— What can it matter, after all? That or any other place. It will be just the same. I can't think that there is any more danger there than anywhere else. And, things have gone so far, I don't see how we can draw back.'

'Oh, John Sandford!' cried his wife, 'it is not possible. I can never, never consent. What! After all we have suffered, and all the sacrifices we have made, to send him back there!'

'I know, I know,' said the old gentleman, with a deprecatory wave of his hands. 'It is all true; but still, what can we do? A long time has passed, and he is going back without any—— No, I know very well what you would say: but if you will look at it reasonably——'

'How can I look at it reasonably? And do you think Emily will be reasonable? She will never consent, and neither will I.'

'But, my dear, my dear!' he said, 'it is all settled, and how can I go back?'

John had listened to this conversation with a surprise which gradually grew into something like indignation.

‘Grandmamma,’ he said, coming forward to the sofa, ‘I don’t want to seem wiser than you, or as if I knew better; but why should you be so afraid to trust me? I have never done anything to make you afraid. I don’t think I want pleasure or anything that is wrong. I will try to do my duty either at Liverpool or anywhere else. Don’t, please, think that I shall forget everything you have taught me, and all that I have been brought up to, the moment I go away.’

Both the old people had their eyes fixed on him as he spoke, and then they looked at each other across him, with one of those looks which he had so often caught in the passing, looks which it had always been hard to understand. Whatever it was, their eyes spoke to each other, not to him, with a sort of troubled commentary between them on what he said. Grandfather shook his head slightly in answer to his wife’s look, and he cleared his throat as if for something he wanted, but did not know how, to say—but in the end it was she who spoke.

‘Oh, John, it is not that, my dear. We do trust you, both grandfather and I. It isn’t

that. I'm always of a tremble when I see an innocent boy go out into the world. Oh, yes, I allow I am, John: and for you, because you're so precious, most of all; but it's not that—oh, no, it's not that.'

'What is it, then? What is there so dreadful about Liverpool?'

That look passed between them again—but this time there was a warning in the husband's eyes. He turned round in his chair towards where John stood.

'Grandmamma was always one of the nervous ones,' he said, with a faint little laugh, 'and the particular thing about Liverpool is that we once lived near it, and knew a great deal of what went on there. And there were some dreadful things happened—one above all. Oh, you need not be afraid, my dear. I'm not going to disturb the boy's mind with any tales. But that's how it is, John. We've seen such things happen under our very eyes.'

'That is no reason, grandfather,' said John, very gravely, 'that anything bad should happen to me.'

'Have I not been saying so? The best thing

is to shut your ears to all idle tales. Don't believe half you hear, and never go inquiring into trouble that is past. If you make up your mind to it, and never forget your duty, and keep steady—why, Liverpool is just the same as any other place.'

'Not to us—not to anyone connected with us,' Mrs. Sandford said.

It was all very strange to John. He could not think why they should distrust him, why they should have so little faith. Keep steady! That was a very low level of duty; he said to himself that he hoped he would do better than that. Any poor workman, or poor fellow without education or advantage of training, disgraced himself if he did not keep steady. How much more was required of one like himself! He had not time, however, to express these sentiments, for that was the night on which Mrs. Sandford had one of her attacks. She had never been in the way of having attacks as so many people have. But on that evening she was very ill, and John had to run for the doctor, and for medicines, and was kept perpetually in movement, not to say that he was in

deep anxiety, altogether discouraged by the sight of her suffering, and jumping at once, as is usual to inexperience, to the awful idea of death. He did not know how hard that is of coming, and how many lingering preliminaries there are to go through. He thought that the dread presence might push through all human defences at once, as he does sometimes, and do his work in a moment. And he was awe-stricken, overwhelmed with terrible suspense. She was very ill all night, but in the morning began to get better.

‘We shall pull her through,’ the doctor said, ‘but you must see she is not worried or put out about anything—for that in her present state she could not bear.’

‘We are to see she is not worried. But who except God can do that?’ said grandfather, still up in the cold, blue dawn of the morning, leaning upon John’s shoulder. ‘As long as she lives she will never cease to worry: and what can I do?—Perhaps if Emily were here—’

CHAPTER X.

THE REPLY.

WHEN John heard his grandfather breathe that sigh of helplessness which resolved itself into a desire for Emily—if the purposeless exclamation ‘if Emily were here!’ could be construed into a wish—he considered it best to tell him what he had done. He had felt it so strange never to see her, to know nothing of her, that he had written to beg his mother to come. For the first instant the old gentleman had shown displeasure and something like alarm.

‘Who gave you authority to invite her here? What is she going to do here? Don’t you know, sir, don’t you know, sir, that I—that she—that she—that everything depends—’ Mr. Sandford stammered forth in wrath. And then he stopped himself in considerable agitation, and walked

about the parlour a little, to calm himself down. 'To be sure she's the boy's mother, after all,' he said to himself, in a sort of whisper. 'And then her mother's bad—my poor old dear—she's very bad.' There seemed a process of reasoning going on in his mind of which those murmurs marked the stages. Finally he put his hand on John's shoulder not untenderly. 'You've done it,' he said, 'out of your own head. I would not have let you do it had I known. But now that it's done it's done, and it may turn out for the best.'

'Do you think she will come, grandfather?' John asked, eagerly.

'God knows. She would, like a shot, if it was anyone but Emily. But how can I tell what she will do? She was always too many for me.'

And with a sigh the old man hurried upstairs again 'to see how She was going on.' His old wife had done everything for him all the long lifetime they had spent together. But his alarm and awkward anxiety were touching. He would fain have done everything for her with his clumsy, old, trembling hands and slow compre-

hension of invalid needs. How should an old man who had been used to have everything done for him learn in a moment the arts of a sick-room—the recollection of everything, the softened touch, the subdued sounds? Love itself is not enough to teach all these. And old Mr. Sandford had been less used to help himself than any duke. To have your wife there to do everything for you, as is the habit of the class to which he belonged, involves a far closer service than any valet would give. The poor old gentleman, with the best will in the world, was quite incapable. He required her to tell him what to do. ‘My dear!’ the appeal of fifty years, which had always been met on her part by the instant response of a service which was far more than duty, came to his lips every moment almost with a touch of indignation: for if she would not tell him how could he be expected to know? But he could not keep away from her. He wanted to see with his own eyes every moment that she was getting a little better. She had never been ill, and he did not believe in her being ill; but still if she should be ill what would become of him and everything?

His very heart seemed to stop beating at the thought.

These two had come to that point of age and long continuance when it is scarcely possible to believe in an end at all. Everything went on with such a steady, gentle routine, one day following another, each the same as the other, a steady succession of hours and habits, and invariable ways. They were so accustomed to it all: they were past the age of change: they were so easily satisfied, wanting nothing more than the warmth of the fireside, and their mutual talks, and their sober, moderate meals, and to see John growing up such a fine fellow! That was the one quicker, keener throb of happiness in the midst of their well-being. That he should go away would indeed be a wrench. But then there was no reason to suppose that his going away would be for anything but his good, and it was inevitable, a thing they had always known. And then they would have his letters, and his visits now and then, and always themselves to fall back upon, the inseparable pair, the two who were one. It is true that everybody knows that everybody else must die, but there seemed no

reason in the world why this life should not go on for ever, so peaceful, so uneventful, doing no harm to anybody, doing good, demanding so little, and in itself so contented, without further desire or expectation. Mr. Sandford had long got over that other human sentiment which fears its own well-being, and feels that, the more comfortable you are, the more likely it is that fate will come down and crush you. Fate had nothing to do with this old pair: they were good, religious people, who had suffered much in this life, but to whom God had given a peace which was very sweet. And why should it be broken by any startling change? Why should it be disturbed? It was not an idea to be entertained for a moment. Did not all experience prove that that which hath been is the thing which shall be? He went upstairs, trying to make no noise with his heavy tread, to convince himself that every moment she was getting a little better, and that no change was possible, except for good.

The answer to John's letter could not come till the second day; as a matter of fact, it did not come till the fourth. All these three morn-

ings he came down early, and was at the door to meet the postman as he went his rounds, which did not mean that John doubted his mother's coming, but only that he was very anxious, and eager to know what she would say. Not only her answer, but what she would say. Was it possible that her reply would be in the old, formal tone, as to a little boy who knew no better? or would she now perceive that he was at least an independent human creature, capable of feeling, capable of knowing, and address him as such? John was almost more anxious to resolve this question than to know whether she was coming. Of course she must be coming. Who could resist the appeal, that was at once from her mother and from her son? He had forgotten by this time how very little had been her mother's part in it, and believed sincerely that he had said everything that had been suggested to him. In the first pang of astonished disappointment with which he found that there was no letter the first day, all his calculations were confounded, for he had never for a moment supposed that she would not answer, and answer at once. But then his hopes sprang up, and he

said to himself that she must be thinking it over, and arranging how to come, and that she did not wish to write till she could tell him exactly the hour she would arrive. On the third day, grandmamma was downstairs again, looking paler, but still smiling. She took his face between her two thin hands (how thin they had grown, and all the veins showing), and whispered in his ear, as he stooped over her :

‘What does Emily say?’

Always Emily. He could not get rid of Emily.

‘There is no letter yet, grandmamma.’

‘Ah! she will be waiting till she can settle exactly which train she is to come by,’ said the old lady, and gave him a kiss, and lay smiling, thinking, no doubt, of her daughter, who was coming. She could not talk much, for she was still very weak.

On the fourth morning the letter arrived.

‘It is for you, Mr. John,’ said the postman.

‘Yes, yes,’ cried the boy; ‘I know it is for me.’

He hurried in, and shut the parlour-door, that no one might disturb him in reading it. At all

events, it was a letter, he could see in a moment, and not the usual little formal note about his health and her health, which had been enough for him when he was a child. John's heart beat very high as he began to read, but gradually calmed down, and became quite still, scarcely moving at all in his breast. For his mother's letter was not the kind of letter to encourage the beatings of any heart.

‘MY DEAR JOHN,

‘I have received your letter, partly with pleasure, seeing that you write in a much more intelligent and independent way than usual, which I am glad to see—for at nearly seventeen you are on the eve of manhood, and very different things may be expected from you from those which all your friends were content with when you were a child. But I also read it with pain, for there seems to me an idea in it that, if you insist very much, you are sure to get your own way, a sort of thing which perhaps is natural, seeing how you have been brought up, and that no doubt my father and mother have indulged you very much : but which is not good for you,

and will expose you to disappointment even greater than we are doomed to by nature. How can you know that it would be a good thing if I were to come? You ought rather to understand that, as I have not come all these years, it is because your grandparents and I, who know all the circumstances, have decided that it is better I should not come. This I probably could not explain to your satisfaction, but it was settled to theirs and to mine long ago—and you cannot expect that I should depart from a resolution which I did not make without pain—because you, a boy who knows nothing about it, have been taken with a fancy that you would like to see your mother. It is quite natural, no doubt, that you should wish it, though I cannot suppose that it would make any particular difference to you whether your wish was granted or not. You are at an age when a mother is not of much consequence, and, if you had been brought up with me, you would probably be very impatient of me, and prefer to get out of my way, like most boys of your age. And I am sorry to say that I don't think you would like me much if you saw me. Your ideal of

course is my mother, and I am not at all like my mother. If anything should happen that would make it necessary for us to be together, necessity will help us to get on with each other ; but for the present, so long as there is no necessity, it is best to go on as we are doing. There are reasons, quite needless to enter into, which make it out of the question, unless it were a matter of life and death, that I should go to Edgeley. I am sorry to disappoint you, but it is much better you should know.

‘I shall always be glad to hear how you are getting on. I am glad to know that something has been done towards deciding what you are to do for your living. Of course my father and mother, who have brought you up, are the right persons to settle that, and I approve in general, though I should like to know what they are doing most particularly, and to give my advice, though I should not interfere. For yourself, pray write to me whenever you feel disposed, and I will answer to the best of my ability, though I cannot always promise you to do what you desire.

‘ Your affectionate mother,

‘ EMILY SANDFORD.

‘P.S.—I am sorry to hear that my mother is not so strong as usual. Let us hope she will recover her old spirits as the spring comes on. I daresay she was a little low when she thought it would do her good to have a talk with me. Tell her, if she thinks a little, she will remember that it is very doubtful whether we should either of us like it, and, as for the people being ignorant, the more ignorant the better, it seems to me.’

John had been palpitating with expectation and hope when he opened this letter. He came gradually down, down, as he read it. All through, he felt that it was Emily who was writing to him, a woman whom he knew a great deal about (and yet nothing), and whom he did not like very much—not his mother.

It seemed likely that he had no mother. The loss of all that he had been expecting and looking forward to, and the strangest sense of whirling down, down, as if everything was giving way under him, made him sick and cold. When he had read it to the last word, he folded it up carefully, with a very grave face, and

put it into his pocket. He was far too serious for the angry impulse of throwing it into the fire. He was not angry so much as crushed and overawed. He felt himself altogether put down from the position which he had taken. She had acknowledged that he was no longer a child, and yet she treated him as if he knew nothing, understood nothing. The injury to his pride, to his heart, to all that was individual in him, was more than words could say.

Mrs. Sandford looked at him wistfully when she came downstairs (always a little later). She caught his hand when he came and stood by her sofa looking down at her, thinking how bright and liquid her eyes were. How large and deep the sockets seemed, as if they had widened out, and what a pallor had come upon her face—her little face! She was a small woman, but now her face was like the face of a child, all but the widened circle about her eyes. She put her hand upon his, the touch felt like a feather, and looked up at him wistfully, but without speaking. He had gone out immediately after breakfast, half stupefied, and taken a long walk, his chief object being not to see her, not to give her any in-

formation. But he was obliged to answer the question in her eyes.

‘I have had a letter, grandmamma. She says she can’t come.’

‘Can’t come, John!’ The old lady kept looking up at him, till suddenly her eyes grew dim with two great tears. She clasped her hands together with a low cry. He could see the disappointment, which was so unexpected, go over her like a flood. She could not say any more. Her lips quivered—it was all she could do in her weakness not to break down altogether, and whimper and moan like a child. ‘Can’t come!’ she repeated, after a time, with little broken sobs.

‘Grandmamma, don’t take it like that, and break my heart. It is my fault. I began to write as if it was me only, and I felt it a good deal and went on and on from myself, not from you. She thinks it was only my letter, only I that wanted her. She seems to have thought that it was rather impudent of me to ask.’

‘She could not have done that. She could not have done that,’ said the old lady. She was so used to mastering herself that she had by this

time succeeded in doing so, though her lip trembled and she kept softly drying her eyes: for at her age the eyes only get full with a dew of pain, they do not pour forth easy floods of tears like those that are young. John felt that she was, like himself, cast down from a height of expectation. She began to smile after a time very pathetically with her quivering lips. 'We mustn't forget,' she said, 'that it's just Emily's way.'

'Oh, grandmamma,' cried John, 'can't you understand that I don't want to think any more of her as Emily. She is not Emily to me.'

'We must not judge her hardly, my dear. She has always had a way of her own. She was one that never could bear the idea of disgrace or—anything of that kind. She would bear a great deal, but, if anyone brought discredit on the family, that she could not bear. She was more like a man than a woman in that way. A woman has to put up with everything, John.'

'I don't see why she should, any more than a man.'

'I can't tell you the rights of it. I never was

a clever woman like Emily. From her childhood she learned everything a great deal better than I could ever do. She could learn anything when she was a girl, she was so bright and clever, and I can't tell you how proud we were of her, John; oh! so proud. There seemed nothing she couldn't do. Especially her father—he *was* proud of her. He and she used to talk, and quite go beyond me. But anything that was a discredit she couldn't bear. I don't say but what it's unjust to expect it of us; but I do think it's best when a woman just puts up with everything, as I was always taught it was my duty to do.'

'You speak as if there was something she would not put up with,' he said.

Here Mrs. Sandford looked at him anxiously.

'Oh, my dear,' she cried. 'Some day or other everything is found out in this world. I never put any confidence in secrets for my part. Though they may be ever so carefully kept, they always come out in the end.'

'Is there a secret, grandmamma? I had been beginning to fear something of the kind. And they think, perhaps,' said John, with indignation, 'that I am a child, and cannot be trusted—that

whatever it is I must not know it. But I have always felt there was something. Whatever it is, if it affects us, surely I ought to be told it now.'

Mrs. Sandford had been thoroughly recalled to herself by his words. She cast a glance of terror round her, lest, perhaps, some one might be within hearing.

'Secret!' she said. 'Oh, John, what has put that into your head? Yes, yes; there have been things in the family which were very unpleasant—but they are all past and over, and what is the use of going back upon them? If there was anything you ought to know, you may be sure Emily and her father would have told you. As for me, I am not the one—I am not——'

'Grandmamma, you are ill again.'

'Oh, no, I'm not ill—not anything to mind. Never take any notice if I cry. I just can't help it, John. I'm ill, you know, and not very strong. I cry for nothing, because I can't help it, because I'm old. I have grown a great deal older, don't you think so, in the last three weeks? and that was why I wanted Emily, partly. There were things I wanted to tell her. I want-

ed to tell her about that—don't you remember, that—— What am I saying? The like of him could have nothing to do with us, nothing at all. Emily! Oh, I want her, I want to tell her something—I want——'

John had no more than time to ring the bell hurriedly, to hold her in his arms lest she should fall from the sofa, when another of her attacks came on. He had not seen it before, and he was very much frightened and distressed. It began with a sort of faint, followed by violent spasms of pain; it was dreadful to see her, so fragile and soft as she was, thus fighting for her life, and the scene made John's heart bleed. But he was pushed out of the room by-and-by, when his grandfather, looking, oh! so haggard and anxious, and the doctor, in his brisk, professional way, came in. They bade him stay outside that he might be ready to run for anything that was wanted, which the boy understood well enough was only to get him out of the way. Presently the struggles grew less; the attack went off as the others had done. And he was allowed to help to carry her to her bed. She gave him a faint little smile as he laid down her head upon

the pillow, and made a slight movement as if to put up her face to kiss him. Then she spoke confusedly, as if her brain were not quite clear :

‘Emily, Emily,’ she cried, as if to some one at a distance. ‘Oh, Emily, tell the boy: if it should be my last word; Emily! tell the boy.’

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

MRS. SANDFORD did not rise from her bed again. She disappeared into that mystery of the death-chamber, in which the fits of suffering that mark the different steps of progress towards the end, alternate with long intervals of calm, intervals which seem so long because there is no incident in them, and in which another series of habits springs up as if that state also might last for ever. The hours for medicine, the hours for food, the little toilet so painfully accomplished, after which the patient feels weary but refreshed, and is said to have 'a better colour,' a more hopeful aspect—all those laws and rules, a perfect routine of subdued being, were set up, and the alarm of the household was calmed.

When John was admitted now and then to sit by her for a little while, and hold her transparent hand, he felt a great consolation in that established routine of affairs. It seemed to afford a solid framework out of which she could not slip. She might not get better, perhaps; but still she would remain there, which was much. John sat down by the bedside at first with awe and anxiety, but, soon getting accustomed to it, lost his fears.

‘You are better to-day,’ he would say, wistfully.

‘Oh, almost well,’ said the old lady; and he believed it, though with a silent doubt down at the bottom of his heart; a doubt which was so painful and unpleasant that he would not listen to it, nor give any heed.

One night, about a week after the receipt of his mother’s letter, he was allowed to watch her for part of one night, the nurse having occasion for rest, and the grandfather, too, being exhausted with much watching. It was the middle of the night when John’s watch began, and she was very quiet, asleep, and likely to want nothing, the nurse had said.

‘If you’ll sit quite still here behind the curtain, with the light shaded, most likely she’ll never stir at all: but, if she does, you must call me; now mind you do call me, whether it’s anything of consequence or not.’

John promised, and sat down motionless within the shadow of the curtain. He had never in his life been up at such an hour, and the profound silence of the night, and the solemnity of the occasion, at once overawed and excited the boy. He felt as if this fading life was in his hands. If she woke, if she wanted anything, his action, perhaps, might save her—who could tell? He felt, as the inexperienced are so apt to feel, that an accident or miracle was always possible, and that some little matter might at any time arrest the progress of dying, and bring a sufferer back from the verge of the grave. But she did not stir. She was very quiet, as the nurse had said she would be. And then he got frightened of the stillness, and thought that she might have died.

This oppression of quietness grew upon him so that he moved the curtain slightly to look at

her; and then John was more startled still, driven almost into a panic by the sight of her open eyes, which turned to him when he moved though she did not move her head. She was lying back upon her pillow like a child, so small, her little face encircled by her cap, her eyes turned to him, two lamps of light amid the stillness and the dimness. There was nothing dim or still in them, they shone with all the brightness of a life which was inexhaustible, perhaps even with humour in them, but certainly with a clearness and vigour more remarkable, John thought, than he had ever seen in them before. He faltered 'Grandmamma!' in his alarm, though he knew that he ought to have taken no notice, that he ought to have kept perfectly still in order that she might go to sleep again, and not be disturbed.

She did not say anything for a moment, but gave him a soft reply with her eyes, then feebly put out her hand. She smiled when she felt the touch of his hands clasping it, but for some time did not attempt to speak. Then, after awhile, she called him faintly.

‘John——!’ It took some time to form her words. ‘I’m glad you’re there. I wanted to speak to you—my boy.’

‘Yes, grandmamma.’ He had knelt down at the bedside, where his head was on a level with hers as it lay on the pillow. She moved her other hand, as if to give him a caress.

‘You’ve been a good boy. Whatever may happen afterwards, you’ve been a good, good boy to me. Always remember that, whatever happens. John, it’s about—Emily; I want to speak to you.’

She lay still a little and rested, and then resumed,

‘Emily is not—like me. She’s one that is—more difficult to get on with. She thinks you’re like *him*, and you are—like him. I see it, too. But never mind—there was good in him—plenty of good. You mustn’t—be discouraged—my boy.’

She put her left hand upon his shoulder—it was a great effort for her—and faintly patted him with her fingers. So faintly: like the touch of a bird.

‘And she seems—harder than she is. It’s her

—principle. She has more—love in her—than she knows. If you wait long enough, it will come out. John—remember that. She will not let—her heart speak. It's her—principle. She has—always done that. She has never—let her heart speak.' The old lady stirred a little in her bed. Her voice strengthened for a moment. 'Except once,' she said. 'And you know how that—turned out. She blames me, for I—was always fond of him—John.'

Her voice was so faint he could scarcely hear it, though every word was so precious to him, and though it was so hard to understand.

'Poor dear,' she resumed, 'poor dear—if ever you should see him—you can tell him—I—always—prayed for him—to—the—end.'

'Who is it, grandmamma? Oh, one word—tell me—who is it?'

The light in her eyes flickered a little. Perhaps she did not hear him. They wandered, fixed on his face for a moment, then strayed uncertain to other things.

'It's about Emily,' she said, 'Emily—don't you know, Emily? You will think—she is hard—but, no—that's her principle. Where—where

is she? I thought—just now—she was here. Emily!’ She raised her voice a little, to call. And then a smile came over her face. Her hand dropped from John’s shoulder. ‘Yes,’ she said; ‘you are right, Emily—you always are right. I’ll talk—no more. I’ll go to sleep.’

John remained on his knees, he did not know how long. He was still there when the nurse came in from her sleep.

‘I hope you have not been talking to her, or crying, to excite her.’

‘She spoke to me a little; it was not my fault. I found her with her eyes wide open, and, when she saw me, she spoke.’

‘You ought not to have let her. This is always the way when one of the relations interferes. How is one to do one’s nursing, when relations interfere? There should have been another to take the night duty, and no amateurs here.’

‘May I stay?’ said John, who was shivering with cold and excitement.

‘No—get away, please, and leave me my sick person to myself; relations is just the destruction of everything. Oh, get away, please.’

John went downstairs to the fire, which had

been kept up all night, and over which he crouched to warm himself. He was overwhelmed with wonder and sorrow. Death had come to the house, he felt it chill and cold, chilling him to his very heart. And what did these wandering words mean? Who was it for whom she had prayed to the end? He had his knees almost in the fire, and yet he shivered with cold, and with wondering and trying to understand. He must have dozed a little, for the voice of his grandfather, calling him, came to him through some sort of miserable dream, in which he seemed to be seeking some one and unable to find them—searching through wild distances and open wastes. He heard the call repeated two or three times, repeated through his dream, before he woke, with the trembling hand of the old man on his shoulder.

‘John! John! run for the doctor. John!’

‘Yes, grandfather,’ he cried, starting to his feet, still in his dream. Then he saw the cold, grey dawn of the morning about him, and the fire, and the well-known walls, and, with a shock and terrible sense of reality, came to himself. ‘Is she worse?’ he cried.

‘Run, run! Tell him he is to come directly,’ the old man cried, with a wave of his hand.

After the doctor had come and gone again, there was another errand for John. He had heard for himself what the doctor said. It had been said before them both, and they had received it in silence, saying nothing. Mr. Sandford was standing up, leaning against the mantelpiece, covering his eyes with his hand. He said, in a low voice, it might have been to himself,

‘We must send for Emily, now; she must come. She must come—now.’

‘Shall I telegraph, grandfather?’

‘Yes; say the time has come. Say her mother—her mother—’

And then there rose, in full wintry splendour, the day. It seemed to burst into sunshine all at once, as John came back from the telegraph office. It had been grey and misty before. But, suddenly, in a moment, the sun burst out over the top of the dark trees, in a flush and glow of triumph, and the village street blazed from end to end. It had rained the day before, and the road was wet and glistening, giving back a

reflection from every broken edge and bit of pavement. It seemed to arrest and take hold of John in his cloud of trouble and unaccustomed misery, and flash him all over with light and warmth. He was astonished by it, as if it had been some great mysterious comet, and the suddenness of the illumination came into his mind and memory with an aching contrast to everything else about. It seemed to summon him to life and all its exertions, to hope and prosperity and activity; above all, it moved in his young soul an eager desire to do something, to fling himself into work, whatever it was; to begin in earnest. Alas, all that he had to do was to go back to the silent house, to meet and go through that awful day of waiting—that day in which nothing can be begun or done—in which all is waiting, in which every hour seems a whole day, although one would give one's life to prolong that which this endless steady slow succession of flying moments is carrying away. The two watchers sat down sombre to meal after meal, at which each made a pretence of eating for the sake of the other, or rather that Mr. Sandford

made a pretence of eating, for John, poor John, restless and unhappy, with nothing else to do, eat almost more than usual, ashamed of himself, yet feeling the relief of the dinner which was the only thing he had to do, the only break to those monotonous, endless hours.

‘Emily will arrive by the seven o’clock train. You must get the cab at Johnson’s, and go over to meet her, John.’

‘Yes, grandfather.’

‘And tell her her mother is if anything a little better. She may rally still. You will lose no time, John.’

‘No, grandfather.’

This was all the conversation that passed between them. It was repeated in about the same words three or four times during the day. For what was there else to say? All was either too trifling or too solemn. How could they talk of *her*, lying upstairs upon the edge of the eternal world? And how, she being there, could anything else be spoken of? The day went on like a century. Grandfather went up and down stairs, trying to walk softly, stealing into the room above on tiptoe, coming out again

after a while shaking his head. John downstairs sat still and listened, sometimes dozing, in the long strain of that expectancy, waiting, almost wishing, for the news that would break his heart to hear. At last the evening came, and it was time to see after the cab at Johnson's, and to set out to meet his mother. To meet his mother ! How strange the words sounded ! and yet he did not think much of them now. He drove to the station across the edge of the common, watching all the lights in the cottage windows staring out into the night.

There were several people arriving by the train, as John stood half stupified on the platform, still vaguely gazing, looking at the dark figures undistinguishable, which flitted to and fro against the background of the lights : the flicker of the lamps in the wind, the movement, the noise, the little crowd, confused him, even if he had not been confused before by all the effects of the domestic tragedy. He looked helplessly at the moving figures, wondering should he know her whom he sought, wondering if she had come, wondering which could be her ? He felt now, at this moment for which he

believed himself to have wished, that if she had not come it would be a relief, then he could go back all the easier, more peacefully if he went back alone. Even as the thought passed through his mind, one of the figures which he had been following with his eyes, that of a tall woman, detached itself quickly from the group of the others, and came towards him.

‘You are John?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ he answered, with a gasp.

‘Have you a cab? This is all I have brought. Let us lose no time.’

She had put her hand in his as she had come up to him. She gave him no other salutation, no kiss; but followed, as the boy, once more with the sensation of falling down, down, from he knew not what height, led the way to where the cab was standing. She put in her bag, stepped in hastily, motioned him to her side, and in another moment they were driving away together, seated there, this mother and son who had not met for years. John felt timid, altogether stupid, unable to say a word, his heart one moment giving a great throb, the next like a lump of lead in his breast.

‘How is my mother?’ she asked, ‘is she still alive?’

It was like a stab to John to have this question put to him in so many words, though he knew that it was a question of how long she might survive.

‘I was told,’ he said, ‘to tell you that your mother was a little better and might rally.’

‘Might rally?’ she said, thoughtfully, ‘I should scarcely think it likely.’ She was quite calm. John seated so that he felt her breath upon him, could scarcely help shivering with a nervous chill which seemed to come from her. She remarked this at once.

‘You are cold,’ she said. ‘Put up the window at your side; no doubt it is your nerves: you have been kept on the strain all day, or perhaps for some days. It is not a good thing for you at your age: put up the window, I will keep mine open; I like the air. Have they let you be with her?’

‘A little last night—not before.’

‘I am glad they had so much sense as that. She would talk to you, no doubt, and you would be very much affected. Poor boy!’

There seemed a momentary wavering in her, as if she might have turned to him with something like tenderness. Her arm seemed to him to move. He thought she was going to put it round him, and his heart filled with a sudden rush of warmth and softness. His mother! But either she had never meant it, or she changed her mind. She altered her position only enough to change from one hand to another the little bag she carried. And yet he could not help feeling that she meant more than that.

‘Did she say anything to you?—I mean anything beyond what she would naturally say?’

‘She spoke to me about you, mother.’

Once more the dark figure at his side moved. A sort of thrill seemed to run through her. She took a little time apparently to compose and command herself.

‘What did she say to you of me?’

‘I did not understand it,’ said John.

She turned, and seemed to look at him as if asking herself whether this simplicity was as-

sumed or not. Then, with a touch of divination, put her hand upon his arm for a moment, and repeated,

‘Poor boy! I can see you are half-dazed with trouble and fatigue,’ she said.

‘Mother!’ said John, ‘mother——’

Again there was that faint thrill and moving in the profile that showed against the dim night of the further window. There was a soft suffusion of whiteness in the air from an unseen moon, and he could see the outline of her face and figure against it. But, if she had been moved by any impulse of love, she restrained it once more.

‘I would rather,’ she said, quickly, ‘that you used that name as little as possible while I am here. I am your mother, certainly; but we’ve been separated for a long time, and I have my reasons, chiefly for your own sake, for preferring not to be talked about among your village people, or discussed who I am. I mean no unkindness,’ she added, after a little pause.

‘Must I not call you mother?’ asked the boy.

He was so tired, so dazed, as she said, so broken down with weariness and wonder and grieving that the sharp tone in his voice was more the petulance of a child than the indignation which began faintly to rise among the other emotions that were too much for him.

‘Not except when we are alone,’ she said.
‘Is this the village? are we near?’

The carriage stopped with a sudden creaking and jar. John had not observed where they were. He stumbled out now to his feet and held the door for her to get out. The door of the house was open, and his grandfather stood in the opening. The old man came down through the little garden slowly, shuffling with his heavy feet. There seemed to John’s feverish eyes some change, he scarcely knew what, in the house, as if the expectation, the waiting, had come to an end.

‘Emily,’ said old Mr. Sandford, ‘you are too late. Your mother is dead.’

‘Dead?’ she said, standing still at the gate.

‘Half-an-hour ago.’

The two, father and daughter, stood facing

each other, with John behind not able to convince himself that there was anything real in it, that it was not all a dream.

‘Do you mean me to go back again, straight,’ she said, ‘from your door?’

CHAPTER XII.

EMILY.

SHE came into the parlour first, where she sat down close to the fire. She shivered as she looked round, Mr. Sandford and John both standing behind looking at her. There was indeed already upon the house that air of revolution, the cold strangeness of a place which is no longer the centre of domestic life, but fit only for an ante-chamber and waiting-room for those who cannot be at the point of deepest interest. There was an unusual chill in this place which had always been so warm.

John could see now for the first time what his mother was like. She did not resemble either of her parents. Her features were marked and high; her complexion of an ivory paleness; her hair quite black in original

colour, with a thread or two of grey—altogether a tragic woman whom nobody could pass without a certain interest. She showed no emotion, nothing beyond the seriousness of aspect which was evidently habitual to her. For a little time even she said nothing, but held with a shiver her hands to the fire. Her father stood beside her leaning upon the mantel-piece, looking down upon the hearth, and for some time there was not a word spoken.

‘Half-an-hour ago,’ she repeated at length, in a low voice. ‘Did she know I was on the way?’

‘For twenty hours she has scarcely taken any notice. The last was——’

‘The last must have been what she said to the boy,’—his mother spoke of him as if he were a thing and not a person—‘and that was, he says, about me, something he did not understand. I hope there was no talk about——affairs.’

‘Emily, you are not softened, even by death.’

‘It is not in me, I suppose,’ she said, with a sigh. Then she turned round to John. ‘Why did you not tell me that she was ill? You

wrote from yourself. You said nothing about her—or nothing to speak of. If you had told me she was ill, I might have been in time.'

They both turned and looked at him, his grand-father with heavy eyes and a blank aspect of exhaustion and helplessness, but, with so much expression as was left in him, reproachful too.

And all power of self-defence, of anything but submission and acquiescence, seemed taken from John.

'I did not think of it,' he said, giving himself up, as he was dimly conscious, to total misconstruction, but what did it matter? Nothing seemed to be of any consequence in the subtle misery which had invaded the house. John did not feel even that he was aware of the cause of it. He scarcely thought of his grandmother, dead. He knew only that where all had been so happy and full of tenderness there was nothing but a chill misery and desolation, with a fault of his somehow involved, he could not tell how.

'Of course I should have come at once,' she repeated, turning round again to the fire, with

her hands held over it. 'We did not always understand each other. We were not like each other. How can one help it if that is so?'

'Children are not always like their parents,' Mr. Sandford said.

'Some are not.' She half turned towards John again with a movement of her hand as if directing her father's attention to him. 'There are likenesses—that take away one's breath.'

'Ah—yes—it may be so,' the old man said. Then, as if waking up, 'Will you take anything? The house is upset—there is nobody to give any orders. Still,' he said, looking round at the table where a cloth was laid, 'there are meals all the same.'

She looked up at him with a momentary softening in her face, and put her hand on his arm.

'Poor father,' she said.

'Yes—I'll be poor, poor enough by myself. To begin—that sort of thing at my time of life—after nearly fifty years——'

'Be thankful that you have had fifty years—without any trouble,' she said. And then, 'I should like to see her. No doubt she is changed,

much changed, since I saw her last. Don't stir, father—sit down and rest—you are ready to drop with fatigue. The boy will show me the way.'

'I hope you won't think it strange. I—I couldn't go with you, Emily.'

'No. I understand it all. Sit down there in your own chair.'

The old man seated himself with a sudden burst of sobbing.

'It's not mine, it's her chair. I like it so. I like it so! For fifty years! and she will never sit here more.'

'Poor father!' she said again. Her face softened more and more as she looked at him; she stooped down and kissed his forehead. 'Now, come,' she said to John. To him there was no softening. She gave him a fixed look as she signed to him to lead the way—a look of recognition, of stern investigation, which stirred the boy's being. It seemed to call his faculties together, and awake him from the torpor of consternation and grief. He forgot almost where he was going, and what he was to see.

They went together into the room, already all

in order, in the chill and rigid decorum of a chamber of death. All was white and cold. The curtains laid back, the white coverlet folded, a fine embroidered handkerchief covering the spot scarcely indented in the pillow where the head lay. John went in with his light in his hand, though there were candles on the table, in a tumult of personal feeling, which for the moment swept away all the natural emotion which that scene was calculated to call forth. He did not think of what lay there, but of the stranger so near him and yet so distant, so coldly serious, without any grief, only the subdued regret of a spectator, and with that keen observation of himself underneath, like a spectator too, but a spectator almost hostile. He had never known in all his life before what it was to be judged coldly, weighed in the balances and found wanting. His very soul seemed penetrated by the look, which fixed on something, he knew not what, that was hostile in him. Her eyes, as she followed him, searched into him, and he felt nothing but those keen looks going through and through his soul.

But when he came face to face with that little waxen image which lay upon the bed, a flood of other feelings poured through the boy's mind. For the first time he saw that which was Something awful and solemn, yet Nothing. Sometimes the dead retain the looks of life, and lie and smile upon us as if they slept; but sometimes the effect is very different, and, after a long illness, the worn-out body loses all the characteristics of identity. His mother went up to the bed, passing him by, and, without a word, lifted the handkerchief. When John saw what was underneath, he gave a great cry, a cry almost of horror; his limbs trembled under him.

‘They’ve taken her away,’ he said, hoarsely, ‘they’ve taken her away.’

The other spectator said not a word. She knew better. Death was to her no wonder. She had lived long enough to see it in all its aspects. She stood looking down upon the little body, the little, little body shrunken out of all semblance of life; the worn-out garment of long living, never big enough for the soul that had inhabited it, and cast it off as if it had never been hers.

‘No,’ she said at last; ‘they have not taken her away. This is all she has left.’

She took the candle out of John’s trembling hand, and held it so that the light fell on the small head surrounded by the white cap, and the face in which no expression lingered. The room was very strange. The white bed laid out in rigid lines, the small and solemn thing laid therein, the black, tall figure standing by throwing the light down from her hand. She was not like a woman by her mother’s bed-side, but like a solemn spectator expounding the mysteries of life and death.

‘People are as different,’ she said, ‘in their dying as in their living. She has taken everything with her she could take. She wouldn’t leave even a look for me, as if she thought I could have come, and did not.’ But I’ll not excuse myself here. Mother’—she stooped down, and kissed the waxen forehead—‘good-bye. You would have been a good mother to one more like yourself; she has been a good mother to you——’

John said no word in reply. He had fallen down by the bedside, with a sickening sense of

loss which was more than grief. He could not speak, or even think. His young soul seemed to go out in a gasp towards the nothingness that seemed before him. He had thought she would be dear and beautiful still in her death—as people said—more dear, more beautiful than in life. But this was not as people said. His heart sank into depths unspeakable. Only last night what words she had spoken to him from that bed. And now, and now——!

‘Poor boy!’ said his mother, with her hand on his shoulder, ‘you have never seen death before! Come away; she would not like you to stay here; never come again. And forget *that*. For once she has not thought of other people. She has taken all she could away with her; her own look, as well as all the rest. Rise up, and come away.’

John obeyed her, scarcely knowing what he did. And so presently did all the house. She took the command of everything instantly, as if it was her right to do so. There was not much conversation, as may be supposed. She sat down by the fire, after the meal at which she eat moderately without any look of reluctance,

and talked a little, in the same grave tone, to her father. But there were no tears, no words of sorrow. The old man gave a broken sort of account of his wife's illness, subdued into a narrative of facts by the influence of that serious, but quite conventional, figure opposite to him; while John sat at the table behind, with a book before him, which he did not read, listening in a miserable way to every word, feeling a wretchedness which was beyond description, but which could not get vent in the ordinary way, because of the atmosphere about him, which was full of the new presence. He had been hungry, poor boy, but could not eat, feeling that to be able to eat at such a moment was more horrible than words can say. And his brain was giddy for want of sleep. Body and soul were in the same condition of exhaustion and misery. But still the slow exchange of those subdued voices over the fire held him like a spell.

The next days passed slowly and yet swiftly, every moment with leaden feet, yet, when they were gone, looking like a dream. And everything was done without trouble, it seemed; in perfect order and quiet, the whole house per-

vaded by the strong, still presence of this stranger. If there had been a confusion before between his mother and the daughter of the old people, the Emily whom he knew so well, there was no confusion now. John's mother had disappeared into the mists from amid which her idea had never clearly developed itself. She had been swept out of his horizon altogether. He saw still very clearly in that far distant background, the father who was dead—but not her any more. And this was Emily, who had come to set everything right. It was almost a difficulty for him not to call her by that name. She was a very useful and very powerful personality in the house; but, as a matter of fact, no one knew what to call her. Her name was Sandford, like her father's. It was on her travelling-bag and her linen, and the book or two she carried with her. E. Sandford; no more. To the servants it was a great problem how to address her. Mrs. Sandford it did not seem possible she should be; and Miss Sandford—there was something in her which seemed to contradict that title. Something of youth is associated with it, a possibility of dependence, and a secondary place. But no such

ideas were compatible with the presence of this new-comer, of whom no one out of the house had ever heard before. The curate even, who was the only visitor, looked at her with a sort of diffident curiosity, and said 'your daughter,' when he spoke of her to the old man. She went to the funeral, supporting her father on her arm, while John walked with Mr. Cattley behind. A great many people, indeed, it might be said the whole parish, attended the funeral; and there were many tears among the crowd. But Emily shed no tear. She kept her father's arm in hers, and encouraged and supported him. The old gentleman, who had been so strong and hale, had sunk all at once into helplessness; his heavy foot, that had been so steady, became shuffling and uncertain; sometimes he would sob feebly, like the voluntary crying of a child, without tears.

And more and more to John was this melancholy period like a dream. It all fitted in, one event with another—the meeting at the station, the pause at the door, when he thought for a moment that Emily would have turned back, and gone away without entering the house; and

then that scene upstairs, the tall figure all in black, her bonnet still on, a veil drooping over her face, holding up the light over the snow-cold whiteness of the bed and the dead face on the pillow. He shuddered when he thought of that scene. It was all a dream—a dream from which he might perhaps awake to see all these sombre circumstances disappear, and the old, sweet life which was real—the only real life he could think of, with the two old faces, full of love, beaming on him—would come back. But that, John knew very well, it would never do. And what was it that lay before him?—new work, a strange place, his old grandfather left alone and desolate, his mother of whom he had once dreamed disappeared into thin air, and nothing certain in the world but Emily, who was and was not Emily, but—— But now the dream within dreams had gone. He did not believe that she was his mother. He began to think, in all seriousness, that his mother must have been a younger sister, one, perhaps, about whom there was a mystery, who had perished along with his father, who—but that seemed very confusing and wonderful to think of—might

have been the subject of that secret of which his grandmother had spoken. It was all so strange, so little clear, that this solution of the matter took stronger form in John's thoughts.

On the evening after the funeral they were all seated together once more like the old arrangement, two on different sides of the fire, the boy in the middle with his book, but, ah! so different. No kind looks exchanged across him, all meaning love to him; no interest in what he was doing; no consciousness on his part that he was the principal figure, the centre of their thoughts. John was of no importance now, and felt it. He was in the background, an insignificant unit in the group. His grandfather sat, saying nothing, limp in his chair, a little irritable, ready to watch any movement, while Emily (he could not call her anything but Emily) sat between the fire and the table with her work. Presently John awoke to the consciousness that she was talking of himself.

‘I should like you to tell me what you have arranged about the boy?’

‘The boy’ was what she called him almost always. And the words were never uttered

without rousing a sense of injury in John's heart.

'How can I tell you,' said Mr. Sandford, 'about John or anything? Do you think I'm able to be troubled about that?'

'You must,' she said, in her steady, serious tone, 'for in a day or two I shall have to go back, and all business should be settled before I go.'

'Must!' said the old man, with unwonted fire; and then he fell again into the half-whimpering tone of complaint. 'I have never had that said to me. I've been master in my own house, and no one to lift their hand against me, near upon fifty years.'

'Father, you will recognise, if you think, that I have a right to hear about the boy. You had settled to send him to an engineer? So much I know; but who is it, and where? It is far more easy to tell me than to quarrel with me about my right to ask.'

Mr. Sandford had already forgotten his moment of wrath, or perhaps the good sense of her argument had an effect upon him.

'He has had all his schooling from the curate,

Mr. Cattley. You saw him, Emily. Now, Mr. Cattley has a brother—in Liverpool.’

Her work fell from her lap.

‘In Liverpool—in *Liverpool*. I must be dreaming. You don’t mean that, father?’

‘I remember now,’ said the old gentleman, ‘*she* thought you would object. She objected herself, poor dear. But what does it matter, one place or another? It is the curate’s brother—a kind man that would look after him. He will be better there than anywhere. Mr. Cattley’s brother—’

‘He shall not go there,’ she said; her pale face coloured over a little, very little, and yet enough to make a great difference. And she looked her father steadily in the face as she spoke.

‘Shall not! Is it you or me that is the master? She tried to persuade me, as a woman may, but you, you, with your “shall not,” your “shall not!” . . .’ He rose up and began in his wrath to walk about the room, recovering something of his old force. ‘I have never allowed anyone to speak to me so.’

‘Not since I left home, father. You must

hear it again, for it is necessary you should. He shall not go there. No, if there was no other place for him in the world. There he shall not go.'

What further development the quarrel might have taken it is needless to speculate, for at this moment John, who had been turning aimlessly over a number of children's books, which had been brought out of his grandfather's room, here uttered a strange cry. What he said was, 'Johnny May, Johnny May,' with a mixture of trouble and satisfaction.

'I knew that I had something to do with that name,' he said.

The discussion stopped at once. Mr. Sandford went back tremulous to his easy chair, and Emily turned to the boy.

'With that name—with your own name,' she said.

'Is it my name?—but my name is Sandford.'

'May Sandford,' she answered, fixing him with her steady eyes.

'More than that, more than that,' said John, 'now I remember! Papa was Mr. May. I am Mr. May's little boy. He taught me to say that.'

Now I remember everything. And my mother would be Mrs. May, not Mrs. Sandford. Now I know. You are not my mother. I felt sure of it from the first,' said the boy.

Emily paled so that every shade of colour went out of her face. It had been pale before, but now it was like a stormy evening sky, of the blankest whiteness. She looked at John for a moment, with something like a quiver on her steady lip. Then she turned to her father with a singular smile and asked,

' Will you send him to Liverpool now ?'

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE PARISH THOUGHT.

‘I WANT to know who this woman is,’ said Mrs. Egerton. ‘She seems to take the control of everything. They tell me that poor Mr. Sandford does not venture to call his soul his own, and John goes about as if all the life was cowed out of him. Who is she, Mr. Cattley? don’t *you* know?’

The curate was seated in the drawing-room of the rectory, which was to him the place most near to Paradise. It was twilight of the wintry day, and almost dark, the blaze from the fire dancing upon the walls and making glad Mr. Cattley’s heart. He loved, above everything in the world, to sit and talk by that uncertain light. Elly, who at sixteen was old enough to have been the object of his devo-

tion, was sitting close against the great window of the room, which looked upon the lawn and waving trees, with a book in her arms. She was making use of the very last rays of the daylight, which were not strong enough for older eyes, and was altogether enrapt in the book, and unconscious of what was going on behind her, though now and then a word would come to her and she would return across the short distance of several centuries to reply; for she was deep in the 'Morte d'Arthur,' and inattentive to everything else, except, as we have said, when something which interested her, something upon which she was ready with a word, came uppermost and flashed across the keen young faculties which found it no matter of difficulty to be in two places at a time.

'I suppose I ought to know,' said the curate, 'for I have spoken to her three or four times. Whoever she is, she looks a lady and talks—with great sense at least; but more than that I know nothing, not even her name.'

'What relation is she to John? I am glad to hear she is a lady. Our dear little Mrs. Sandford, whom we all loved—yes, yes, she was

a true gentlewoman in her heart—but they were what you would call *bourgeois*, don't you think? No, you must not shake your head at my French word. There is no English word that expresses what I mean.'

'Middle-class,' the curate said.

'Middle-class is such a big word, and it does not mean the same thing. When I was young it meant gentry, too, all who did not belong to the very highest. Oh, yes, we are all as good gentlemen as the King; but I feel quite middle-class myself, not living with duchesses, nor wishing to do so.'

'For that matter,' said Mr. Cattley, hotly, 'there are very few duchesses who are worthy to——'

'Tie my shoe,' said the lady, with a laugh. 'Let us take that for granted; but middle-class is not what I mean exactly. And this Mrs.——what is her name——'

'I can't tell, indeed. He said "my daughter,". The servants called her Sandford, but whether Mrs. or Miss——'

'Oh, not Miss, at all events. That woman has gone through everything which is in life. I feel

sure of it. It is a handsome face, but a great deal of trouble in it.'

'Must one be married to have that?' asked the curate, with a little sigh.

'Yes,' she replied, laughing again, for his little sentimentalities amused her, though she did not dislike them. 'One must have been married to have a face with so much in it. You young ones have your own vexations, no doubt, but not of that kind.'

'We young ones: does that mean Elly,' said Mr. Cattley, 'and me?'

'You are as great innocents the one as the other,' said Mrs. Egerton.

She was seated by the side of the fire, with a little screen before her which shielded her face, an ample figure in a black satin dress which gave back a faint glimmer of reflection. The tea-table beside her, half in light and half in shadow, gave brighter dancing gleams, and the curate, stooping forward with a certain tender eagerness, saw a gigantic uncouth shadow of himself moving with the movements of the light upon the further wall. Behind Mrs. Egerton was the great window, full of the fading twilight, fading quick-

ly into night, against which came the shadow silhouette of Elly with her big book clasped in her arms.

‘But this is abandoning our subject,’ said Mrs. Egerton. ‘The best thing is for me to call.’

‘Far the best—you will make it all clear if anyone can.’

‘I have not so much confidence in myself as all that, but still I can try. It is curious to find a sort of mystery about people one seemed to know so well—or rather to find out how very little we did know after all. And whose son is John? It never seemed necessary to inquire. But this—lady: well, I will call her so if you like it—seems to confuse everything. There may be other daughters—or sons—half-a-dozen, for anything we know.’

She spoke in the aggrieved tone natural to a lady in the country, a semi-clerical lady, entitled through her brother to know everybody, and finding that here was somebody whom she did not know.

‘John—must be the son of a son—for otherwise how could he be Sandford?’

‘John has got a mother,’ said Elly, nodding from the window. ‘He has not seen her for ten years.’

‘Can this, then, be John’s mother?’ cried Mrs. Egerton.

‘Oh, no,’ said the curate, and ‘Oh no,’ cried Elly, jumping up. ‘I’ve seen them together, and she looked at him as if she were not the least fond of him ; so that couldn’t be.’

‘She can’t be very fond of him if she has never come to see him for ten years.’

‘No,’ said the curate, ‘old Sandford was very particular to say his daughter ; therefore she must be John’s aunt, I suppose. And aunts are not always, not necessarily, fond of their——’

‘Do you hear that, Aunt Mary?’ cried Elly, placing herself in the full light of the fire with the indifference of her age to scorched cheeks and strained eyes.

‘Few people,’ said Mr. Cattley, with subdued enthusiasm, ‘are so happy, Elly, as the boys and you.’

‘My dear, it is quite true that I am not at all necessarily fond of you—(you *will* make digressions from our subject). Get up this moment,

and put aside your book till Joseph brings the lamp. Now, Elly, do what I tell you. You will ruin your eyes, and as for your complexion——'

'Mr. Cattley, you are always flattering Aunt Mary. She is a tyrant. She is as cruel as Nero. She does not care for us at all.'

'Hush—don't blaspheme,' Mr. Cattley said.

'I wish I had been here,' Mrs. Egerton resumed, making an end of the interruption, 'to see the dear little woman herself before the end came. How sad it is that one cannot be away for two or three weeks without the chance of finding some familiar face gone before one comes back. No doubt she would have told me—indeed one would naturally have asked if there was anyone she would like to have sent for, or wanted to see. And the daughter did not arrive till she was gone? How sad it all is. I will go there to-morrow. Mr. Sandford, of course, knew I was away.'

'Everyone knows when you are away. It makes a difference in the very atmosphere,' the curate said.

Mrs. Egerton passed over this compliment with a slight wave of her hand; a smile would

have been enough, had it been possible to see it. 'I shall go to-morrow,' she said. 'I should have done so anyhow. And John—is anything settled with your brother about him? Is he going to begin his work? Poor boy; he will go with an aching heart. But he is so young.'

'Do you think people don't feel when they are young, Aunt Mary? I think it is then they feel most.'

'Yes, Elly—and no: you feel, my dear, no one more keenly; but then you forget. Your heart will be breaking, and then there will come a bright day, a burst of sunshine, and it will spring up like a bird in spite of you. Thank God for it. That is the good of being young.'

'There seems to be some hesitation now about my brother,' said Mr. Cattley. 'This aunt, if she is the aunt, seems to have interfered. I don't know what is to come of it, except that the boy is evidently unhappy.'

'It is very clear,' said Mrs. Egerton, half smiling, half serious, 'that I have been too long away, and that I must try what I can make of it at once.'

'Oh, do! No one ever understands like

you,' said the curate, with a sigh of relief. And then the fireside talk floated off to other things.

Mrs. Egerton set out next morning according to her engagement. She was a comely woman of forty-five, bright-eyed, grey-haired, ample, as became her age, and making no pretensions to be a day younger than she was. She had been long a widow, so long that the recollection of her married life was not much more than a dream ; but her brother's household and children had kept her from relapsing into any narrowness of a celibate state, and conferred upon her that larger and softer development of motherhood which was not hers in fact. She was a woman in whom a great many people had much confidence, and who had, to tell the truth, a good deal of confidence in herself. But she did not take herself altogether seriously, as Mr. Cattley did. She half laughed at the influence with which she was credited, and laughed altogether at the magic powers with which that one worshipper endowed her. But still the worship had a certain effect. Perhaps but for that she would not have thought herself capable of unwinding

the tangled skein which had suddenly been brought under her notice. A sense of half-fantastic annoyance to find that the family she knew so well was in reality not known to her at all, which in Edgeley parish was a breach of all custom and decorum; and at the same time a half satisfaction that these perplexing circumstances had come to light while she was out of the way, so that it was quite possible that everything might be set right when she, the legitimate confidential adviser of the parish, had returned—was, in her mind, not unmixed with a certain self-ridicule on the surface, and amusement with herself for this certainty of setting all right.

‘How do I know they will tell me any more than the others?’ she said to herself: but as a matter-of-fact she had no doubt whatever that they would tell her more than the others. She had been away for nearly a month, and found a great many things to remark as she walked down the village street. Perhaps she was, as Elly had said, something of a despot—as the benevolent head of a community, wishing the greatest possible happiness of all, not only of

the greatest number, usually is. Her despotism was of the benignant kind, but still here and there it was resented by a too independent spirit. That she should pause to put the baby in a comfortable position in its perambulator, and to give the young nurse a lesson as to carefulness in driving it, was no doubt quite legitimate; but when she stopped to say to Mrs. Box at the shop—‘I would not, if I were you, send out the child with such a very young girl; she can’t have sense enough to take proper care,’ Mrs. Box tossed her head a little, and said she hoped she was as careful of her children as most folks.

‘So you are, I don’t doubt, yourself; but that girl is too young, you should have some one with more sense. I am sure you are able to afford it,’ the rector’s sister said.

Mrs. Box from that day was unsettled in her principles, and, though in the interests of trade she made no reply, it became very clear to her that clergy and clergy’s belongings who interfered with what they had nothing to do with, were extremely troublesome. Mrs. Egerton, however, walked on with a conviction that she had

said no more than was her duty, and a serene unconsciousness of having fostered the first flying seeds of Dissent.

She was disconcerted when, on being shown into Mr. Sandford's parlour by Sarah—who paused in the doorway to sniff and put her apron to her eyes, and secure a word of sympathy in respect to 'poor missis'—she found the old man alone. The visit was by way of being one of condolence to him ; but when Mrs. Egerton looked round the familiar little room, and saw no trace of the presence of any stranger, she was, there could be no doubt, disappointed. Her eye and mind took in this fact even while she advanced to the old gentleman with her hands stretched out, and a perfectly genuine pang of regret and pity in her heart. She herself missed the pretty, old, kind face that always brightened at the sight of her. Her eyes filled with natural and most genuine tears as she took Mr. Sandford's hand ; for a moment something rose in her throat which hindered her speech : and yet she was able to feel that her visit would be a failure if this were all. She recovered her voice after a moment, and

sat down beside the old gentleman's chair.

'I hope, at least,' she said, faltering a little, 'that there was not much suffering. She was so sweet and patient. It is so dreadful to come back and find her gone--without a word.'

'She was always fond of you,' he said, with that little, broken sob in his voice which was his way of giving vent to his sorrow.

'And I was very fond of her,' cried the visitor. 'It was a comfort always, whatever was troubling me, to come and see her pretty, kind face. But, though it is our loss, it is her gain. We must not forget that. How happy she must be now!'

'So they say,' said the old gentleman; 'but I can't very well understand for my part how she can be so happy in a strange place. For it will be a strange place to her without me.'

'Oh, my dear old friend, we must not think of things in that way, as if this world were the model of everything. It must be such a very different life.'

'Yes, I suppose it must be very different,' he said, musing, leaning with his hand upon his

knee, 'but she was old to begin in a new way.'

'But she is not old now,' said the comforter. 'We may be sure of that. With such a new beginning everything must be renewed too.'

'I suppose you must be right, Mrs. Egerton; but we were so used to our old ways. A little rheumatism, a bit of a cold now and then was all we had to disturb us. I should have been very well pleased to put up with it. And she too——'

'But we can't go on living for ever, Mr. Sandford.'

'No, I suppose not,' he said, though without any conviction; but it was perhaps injudicious of her to add, though with the best intentions,

'There is one great consolation on your side, that it cannot be for very long: that must soften every parting. At an advanced age——'

Mr. Sandford sat very upright in his chair.

'I don't see the certainty of that,' he said, with some briskness. 'It may be or it may not be, no one can say for certain either at seventy or at forty. Many a younger man may die before me——'

‘That is quite true,’ Mrs. Egerton said, and the strain of her condolence and consolatory remarks was stemmed. She was silent for a moment, and then added, ‘But you are not left quite solitary in your trouble. You have a daughter with you, I hear.’

‘Yes, there’s Emily,’ he said.

‘She has not come to see you since you’ve been here. I was not sure you had any children—alive.’

‘Oh! yes, there’s Emily,’ repeated the old man.

‘And I hope she will be able to remain with you and take care of you.’

‘Oh, dear, no!’ he said, sitting up in his chair. ‘Emily—couldn’t stay. Oh, no! It was a chance her being able to get away at all. She is going, I think, to-morrow.’

‘It must have been dreadfully sad for her—to arrive too late?’

The old man shuffled in his chair.

‘Emily—is not just like—any other person. She is not young, you know—not like a young girl—her eldest child is quite grown up, and—then there is John——’

‘Is she John’s mother, then?’ cried Mrs. Egerton, in surprise.

‘Well, you know—’ said old Mr. Sandford, and paused—‘she has been a long time away. She is kept very close by her engagements, and she never was a great letter-writer. My poor wife and me were glad to know just that she was well. What happened besides we didn’t—hear much about——’

‘But John?’ said Mrs. Egerton, quite bewildered by this speech. There was an air about the speaker of having explained all that was asked him, and this confused his questioner: though she said to herself after the first moment that John—was not an incident that could have passed without remark. Besides, John had been with them all these years—presumably before the period at which their daughter had been withdrawn from their view.

‘Emily is not at all an ordinary person,’ Mr. Sandford said: and then he added, ‘You have been away a long time, Mrs. Egerton, for you. My poor dear would have liked to say “Good-bye.”’

She felt that he was thus directing her away

from a dangerous subject, and she was more than ever curious and anxious to know.

‘I am very sorry I happened to be absent. I would have come home had I known how ill she was. And probably I could have been of use in sending for your daughter in time.’

‘Don’t disturb yourself about that,’ he said. ‘She was sent for, but could not come. And then we telegraphed, not knowing how near it was. They must all be very glad at the rectory to have you back.’

‘I suppose so,’ she replied, carelessly. ‘Mayn’t I see your daughter now I am here? I should like to tell her how sorry, how very sorry—— I don’t even know her name.’

‘Emily has gone out,’ he said. ‘She is giving some orders for me. She is very kind trying to save me trouble; though I might manage by means of John. John and I are so accustomed to each other. We’ll get on very well——when we’re alone.’

‘But John is going away to begin his work,’ she said, assuming ignorance notwithstanding what Mr. Cattley had said.

‘Not at present. His m—— I mean, I think

it is best to keep him at home for a little longer. Emily is going to look for something near London—but for my part I am glad to have him at home.’

‘Your daughter seems to be making great changes in your arrangements——’

‘I don’t know,’ said the old gentleman, somewhat testily, ‘who has so good a right. She is all I have. I have always given a great deal of heed to Emily. She knows most things—better than most people. I don’t know who I should trust to advise me if it wasn’t Emily; with her I know that I am safe.’

‘Oh, surely you are the best judge,’ said Mrs. Egerton, with offence. She had no right to be offended. What he said was perfectly just, and she had no ground whatever on which to stand with any idea of ousting Emily. What right could she have to oust Emily? She felt a great interest in John, but not enough to interfere on his account. Nevertheless, she was more or less indignant. It was ingratitude; it was a kind of insubordination. It was not often she was told in the parish what this old man virtually told her, that she had no right to interfere :

and there could be no doubt that she was annoyed. She talked a little, somewhat coldly, of ordinary topics, of the people who were ill in the village, and that it was rather a sickly season, and that Mr. Cattley had a great deal to do. And then she got up to go away, much dissatisfied, disappointed, and even a little humiliated, feeling that she had not shown the power which she was supposed to possess. But it was not fated that Mrs. Egerton was to withdraw thus uncontented. As she opened the door of the parlour to go out, there rose before her suddenly a tall shadow in the doorway. It was Emily herself.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. SANDFORD'S DAUGHTER.

‘OH!’ cried Mrs. Egerton.

This was so entirely unexpected after she had given up all thought of it. She decided within herself in a moment that the curate was right when he said that the stranger looked like a lady. Yes, she looked like it; but—there was something in the dress of Mr. Sandford’s daughter, in her look, in the gravity of her manners, which gave a sudden enlightenment to the inquirer. She wore a peculiar bonnet closely encircling her face; a long cloak, a black heavy gown which was not newly got for mourning, but evidently her habitual dress. The experienced half-clerical lady of the parish perceived in a moment with whom she had to do.

‘I am so glad to have met you before you go,’

she said, putting out her hand, 'although glad is scarcely a word to use—in the present sad circumstances.'

'How do you do?' Emily said, with a grave movement of her head. It was more disconcerting than if she had reproved the undue warmth of the visitor in so many words. Mrs. Egerton felt herself obliged to be conciliatory, to make herself agreeable if possible to this serious woman with her pale handsome face.

'I may call myself an old friend,' she said, with a feeble smile, 'though I have never seen you before. I have been away, unfortunately, during—all that has happened. I was so grieved to hear—and that you were just too late.'

'No one need be grieved to hear that suffering is over,' said Mr. Sandford's daughter; 'for my part I could not but be glad. I would not have had her suffer an hour or a moment longer, for me——'

'But you might have been called sooner—before the illness had gone so far. These, however, are vain things to say. No doubt,' said Mrs. Egerton, 'everything is for the best.'

To this general statement Emily made no reply. She did not ask the visitor to sit down again. She did not even come into the room herself, but stood in the little passage outside the open door.

‘I am glad to see your father so well,’ Mrs. Egerton said.

‘Yes, he is very well. The health does not suffer from distress of mind so much as people think.’

‘That is true, though it is very strange to think that it should be so.’

‘Oh, no, not at all strange,’ said Emily, with the calm of superior knowledge. ‘The more your mind is taken off yourself, the less you suffer physically—except, perhaps, in the case of actual disease, and I am not sure that the rule does not apply there too. It is always good to have the mind carried away from the contemplation of itself.’

‘You have experience in such cases.’

‘Yes, I have great experience. I am matron of a hospital, and see it every day.’

‘Ah, that explains,’ said Mrs. Egerton, who

had known this fact from the first glance. ‘Of course, with such a responsible post, you cannot give much time to—your relations.’

‘I can give none,’ said this calm, inscrutable woman. ‘I am going away to-night.’

‘To-night!’

‘Yes. I have been ten days here, and I think I’ve arranged everything comfortably. John, until a place has been found for him, will stay with his grandfather.’

‘John—oh, I suppose your—nephew. It is, no doubt, a good thing that he should be with his grandfather; but isn’t it a pity he should lose a good opening just for this; he must leave, one time or another.’

‘We did not feel, on thinking it over, that it was a very good opening,’ said Emily, with the same unalterable gravity. ‘The boy wishes to be a civil engineer; and this was an engine-foundry, mechanical engineering, not what he wants——’

‘But it was Mr. Cattley’s brother, a man who would have taken an interest——’

‘The interest which the head of a great foundry can take in one of his apprentices is not

much to rely upon. We preferred that he should not go.'

'Then there is nothing to be said, I suppose,' said Mrs. Egerton, 'with something like indignation.

It seemed so extraordinary that the Sandfords, or any people in their position, should not pause, and weigh what she might have to say. It was ridiculous, besides.

'Nothing, I think,' said this Emily, quite seriously. 'We have gone over it carefully, and our minds are quite made up.'

She stood in the passage, without any regret or apology, without any sign of yielding, not impatient, and yet, perhaps, a little tired, as might be seen in her eyes, of being thus stopped as she came into the house.

'Then, perhaps, there is nothing better for me to do than to take my leave,' said Mrs. Egerton, smiling as best she could, yet feeling, if truth must be told, very little inclination to smile.

Emily made no protest, nor any effort to detain the visitor. She turned round politely, and, opening the door, made room for the lady in her satin draperies to pass. And presently the rec-

tor's sister, the chief personage in Edgeley, found herself in the street again, feeling, she knew not how, that old Sandford's daughter, the matron of a hospital, a woman with a mystery about her, a stranger unknown in the place, had overcome and proved herself the better woman. Mrs. Egerton felt angry, humiliated, astonished. She felt, too, which was more remarkable, that she was herself in fault, that her attempted interference had been an unjustifiable intrusion, that she had no right to thrust herself into their house and dictate to them what they should do. Old Sandford was a lonely old man, over whom it might have been easy enough to domineer, but was it possible that she had really tried to do it? She was angry, first with them, then with herself. She met Mrs. Box's perambulator again, with the baby hanging out of it, in imminent risk of dislocating its neck; but Mrs. Egerton was so subdued that she let the little unfortunate pass, and never said a word. Finally, she met the curate, whose undoubting faith in her was her best consolation at such a moment.

‘I have been beaten,’ she said to him, ‘horse and foot—defeated all along the line.’

Meanwhile, Emily went into the parlour where her father sat, a little tremulous, glad to be out of it, leaving the women to struggle, if they pleased. The voices had been quite soft, and all had passed with the perfect decorum of good breeding, notwithstanding that Mrs. Egerton had been so conscious of her defeat. Mr. Sandford, though he had been listening anxiously, had heard no sound of any quarrel. He gave Emily a questioning look as she came in.

‘I hope she was not uncivil to you, my dear? She seems to think I want taking care of, now my poor dear’s gone. She’s a good woman, and a kind woman, Emily, and I’m glad you said nothing that was disagreeable to her, my dear.’

‘She is like many parish ladies,’ said his daughter, who was not without experience of such. ‘She thinks she should be allowed to meddle with everything, because her motives are good. I don’t doubt that she’s good and kind in her way, but she has nothing to do with you and me.’

‘Still she was always very nice to your mother; and when you are gone I may be thankful to have her come to see me. There are

times when we have both been very glad to see her coming in. Sometimes she would bring the papers, or *Punch*, or a new book—especially in the winter afternoons it was a pleasure—and if I am to be left without even John——’

‘But you are not to be left without John. And nothing has passed that need keep her from coming to see you. She will like to come and be kind. It is as good a way of filling up vacant time as any other,’ said Emily, with an experience of such matters which probably justified a little harshness of speech.

‘I shall be left very lonely,’ said the old man, with the break in his voice which was his substitute for weeping. ‘There is Mr. Cattley too. He was always very kind: but now you’ve gone and made me break with him—after giving him all that trouble with his brother about the boy.’

‘Father,’ she said, ‘I thought we had settled that question. I have never interfered with the boy. All his life, at least since he was a child, he has been with you: and you saw last night what it has come to, and what ideas he has on the subject. I don’t complain—I am not saying a word. Wait till I complain before you speak.’

But so it is: there is only one subject on which I am determined, and you know what that is too. I will not have the past made known to him. I will not have him find out—no, not for the world.'

'And how should he have found out by going to Liverpool?' said old Sandford, querulously, 'a boy serving his time in a foundry, is it likely that he would go raking up old stories in such a very different sphere?'

'Everything is likely that we don't want to happen,' she said.

'And now,' cried the old man, 'all's undone that was settled before she left me, my poor dear. She has gone to heaven carrying a false idea with her; thinking of things that were never going to happen. Do you call that keeping faith with those that are gone? I will never be able to explain it to her, without putting the blame upon you.'

'I hope it will be long before you have to explain it to her—and I don't mind about the blame. I can bear it, father; put it upon me.'

'It is all very easy for you to speak,' he said, in his broken voice, 'but you put me all in a

muddle, and I'm growing old, as Mrs. Egerton said.'

'What has she to do with your age? You are not old—to speak of. Most probably you will see us all out.'

This did not seem an unpleasant consideration at first, but afterwards he said, in his complaining voice,

'The longer I live the worse it will be for me, if you take away all my friends.'

To this she made no reply, but after a while sat down beside him, endeavouring to turn his thoughts to other subjects.

'I have settled everything I can for you,' she said, 'it will not be so comfortable as in mother's time. She was very comfortable, without having any method in particular or settled ways. If I don't make any fuss, yet I feel that all the same. But after a while you'll fall into the new method. Sarah's a good girl. She will do everything for you that she knows. And new customs creep up, and you will get on more comfortably than you think. The only question that there is any anxiety about is the boy.'

‘You had better take him back, Emily, into your own hands.’

‘How can I do that?’ Her face changed a little out of its fixed gravity and calm. ‘You can’t undo ten years in a day. By all the habits of his mind he’s your boy. It was a risk, but you took it. I ought to have thought, but I didn’t then, that in the course of nature I should most probably live the longest, and that, before he was fully set out in the world, you might——’

She paused, reflecting that this was the very contrary of what she had said a few minutes before.

‘What?’ he said, fretfully. ‘If you think that in consequence of what has happened I will make any change—of any kind—you are much mistaken, Emily. I’ll neither form new ties, nor change in any way. Half is left to you and half to him, as we always settled, and there shall be no alteration.’

‘I was not thinking of that,’ she said, gently; but she did not say any more. It is difficult, unless as a matter of business, to speak to any man of what will happen when he dies, and if

he does not care to contemplate that idea it is so much the worse. Emily let the subject drop. She had said he might see them all out, which indeed might happen, as such things happen every day; but though she said this she perceived with her experienced eyes that her father was a man unlikely to live long. The loss of the companion of his life, who had been his prop, though his mind had never been sensible to the fact, was not a thing likely to be got over so easily as seemed. Though she spoke of Sarah's faithfulness and the new ways, she had no real faith in the apparent composure with which he had accepted the change in his life. In many ways this was to her a painful conclusion, and hard to face. Something no doubt of natural feeling had survived the long separation, the great difference between her ways of thinking and his. To have that house swept from the face of the earth in which there was always a refuge whatever might happen; and still worse to have on her hands a responsibility from which she had shaken herself free; to have it back again with all its difficulties increased, and every kind of new complication, was a most

unwelcome thought. But her mind was a very clear and cool one in its peculiar way, and she foresaw everything that could possibly occur to make her arrangements vain, even while in the act of making those arrangements. How could she help seeing the extreme probability of another visit to that little house ere long, of a final winding up of all things, and the absolute necessity of regulating all future movements in her own person? People of very tender feelings conceal these prognostications from themselves, and think of them, if think they must, only with previsions of sorrow, not the clear arrangements of a foregone conclusion. But Emily Sandford had been separated from her parents for many years. She was not affectionate in the ordinary sense of the word. She was compelled to a system of rigid plans and rules by the necessities of her life, and she could not help giving a serious eye to the eventualities which she felt might be so near.

John accompanied her to the train as he had accompanied her from the train ten days before. It was again night, and to sit by her side during that short drive, which still afforded opportunity

for so many things to be said, was about as exciting to him as on the previous occasion; but it was a different kind of excitement. His heart was no longer quivering on the balance between love and opposition. It had taken strongly the latter poise; his very ears seemed to thrill with eagerness to hear every word she said, which his mind instantly construed in a sense offensive to himself. When this impulse seizes upon us, it is astonishing how much bitterness can be extracted from the very simplest phrases. She had no disposition to offend the boy that night. On the contrary, there was in her voice a softness, and in her words a tremulous feeling such as a week since would have gone to John's heart. She had an appearance of emotion about her altogether which, not even in the moment when they stood together beside the bed of death, had been in her before. And now it was she who was the most ready to speak.

‘It is only now,’ she said, ‘when I am gone, that you will settle down to your changed life—you will only realise it fully now.’

‘Oh! I have realised it,’ said John, ‘since the

first day. It will be less strange—less—when grandfather and I are alone.'

'Less?' she said, with a question unexpressed, 'you don't leave me room to think very much of myself.'

To this he made no reply : and there was the faint quiver of a laugh in the air, which, the speaker's face being unseen, was more suggestive of pain than any other sound could have been.

'I need not recommend your grandfather to your care, John. You will be as good to him and watchful of him as you can. He is not so strong as he thinks he is. You will write to me at once, if you see anything to be anxious about.'

'It didn't do much good,' said John, 'writing to you before.'

'You did not tell me the true state of the case,' she said, exercising evident control over herself. 'You wrote as if it was entirely from yourself——'

'I know better now,' he said, bitterly. 'You may be sure I will never do that again.'

He turned his head away from her, and

stared out of the window at the lights in the cottages which skirted the common—lights which twinkled at him many a time afterwards in his dreams.

‘Boy,’ she said, suddenly grasping his arm with her hand, ‘you don’t know what you say.’

‘That is no fault of mine,’ said John.

He would not yield even so much as to turn his head to her. It was, indeed, all he could do to keep himself from shaking off the hand on his arm. She took it away after a moment, and then resumed :

‘This is the last time I shall have the chance of saying anything to you. John, you’ve set your heart against me without any cause.’

‘Isn’t it cause enough that you’re taking both father and mother from me,’ cried the boy. ‘Isn’t that enough? But no, I’m saying too much, for you’ve given me back my mother, my faith in a mother. I had always been thinking you were my mother—till now.’

She gave a little, low cry as if some one had struck her, and paused for some time to recover herself, putting her hand up to her throat as if she were suffocating. He never looked round

nor moved, but, with his heart on flame, kept his shoulder towards her, looking out fixedly into the darkness of the night.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘well, if you feel so : I—I have nothing to say if you feel so. One thing I would ask of your honourable feeling, John. If it has been thought best by everyone, my mother included, not to enter into our family circumstances at your early age, I ask you to respect our decision. We know better than you. We must know better than you. Don’t try to surprise your poor old grandfather, in his loneliness, into saying—what he will regret. Don’t try——’

‘I’ll do nothing dishonourable, I hope,’ cried the boy, ‘but I’ll make no promises. I’ll find out, if I can. I’ll do all I can to find out——’

‘And when you have done so,’ she said, with an audible quiver in her voice, ‘what will you discover ? Nothing that is of any consequence to you or anyone—only that we wanted you, all of us, to respect and reverence your family until you were old enough to understand how things come about. That is all. And it was my mother’s wish as well as——’

‘Don’t say that,’ exclaimed John. ‘She died saying, “Tell him—tell him——”’

‘This is madness,’ she said, with a start, as if she would have sprung out of the carriage : then recovering herself. ‘Like every young and heated imagination you make mountains out of molehills,’ she said, in a very slow and measured voice. ‘A mere matter of family expediency, and you turn it into some dreadful secret. This shows how little you are to be treated with confidence. What a child you are still!’

He turned round upon her with all the fierceness of boyish wrath.

‘If it isn’t a dreadful secret, what is it? You’ve taken my father and my mother from me, both, both.’

She gave a little, quivering cry.

‘And what am I, then?’ she said.

The boy turned away with a sorrowful movement. They were drawing up at the little station, and there was time for no more.

‘You are Emily,’ he said.

CHAPTER XV.

A VISIT TO THE FOUNDRY.

JOHN was not, perhaps, very much pleased with himself as he came home after seeing Emily away. As soon as he said that to her, his heart swung back like a pendulum, and he asked himself what if he were wrong after all, what if it were not so? He had believed her to be his mother all his life, and what if, after all, that idea, which up to a few days since there had been no doubt about, what if it proved the right one, and this new light which had burst upon him, wrong? He shivered when this thought came into his mind, but he would not entertain it. Yet instinctively, involuntarily, it would come back and back. In all that he could recollect of his childhood there was nothing which indicated to him a different kind of

mother. He had little recollection of caresses or the softness of maternal tenderness. The bright spots in his childhood were those illegitimate moments which he knew enough to know must have been infringements of every rule, when he had been brought down in his night-gown in his father's arms. In place of all the ordinary pleasures of childhood, he had the recollection of those moments and nothing more; but of a mother, such as his grandmother had been, nothing. All that he did remember chimed in well enough with the image of her whom he had called Emily, a recollection which began to burn and sting, but which yet he justified to himself, remembering all the years in which he had heard her spoken of by that name, and in which she had never come near him, never expressed any wish to see him, as most mothers would. He came home distracted by these thoughts, driving back solitary in the cab—though he had meant to walk; and found that his grandfather had gone to bed, and that all was silent and miserable in the house. There was the fire, and that was all, to give a little cheerfulness. John was not old enough to feel

the companionship of a cheerful fire, making its little noises, its ashes falling, its flames breaking out, to cheer the solitary; but he liked the warmth in his nervous condition, and sat down by it and thought. If by chance it should have been to his mother that he dealt that cruel blow! but he would not think of a hazard so terrible. And then he put forward his hand and pulled out two old books from the shelf, where all his old classics stood untouched. These were classics too in a way, but it was not for their rank in literature that he prized them. One was the 'Robinson Crusoe,' which was so full of memories; the other, which was the one he chiefly sought, was Mrs. Trimmers' 'Robins.' But it was not the story of Pecksy and Chicksy that moved him. It was the name in a large scrawl of childish text, Johnny May. He remembered it so distinctly now, the name that had come to him with such vague souvenirs, such a familiar but long-forgotten sound. He had never heard it since he came to Edgeley. And why did his grandfather give him no answer to his question when he asked what he had to do with that name? The wildest fancies went

circling about his brain. Why was his name taken from him? Who was he? Had he indeed lost both father and mother in those old, long-forgotten days, or was she—the grave mother of old, the mother who never played with him or caressed him—was she—could she be after all—Emily? His heart grew sick at the thought—sick not so much with repugnance and opposition as with the recollection of how he must have wounded her, insulted her, if this was so.

He tried next day to get some satisfaction from his grandfather, but failed entirely. John began by telling the old man that, now he had found out his real name, he intended to be called no longer John Sandford, but John May—words which turned Mr. Sandford livid with horror, and for a moment dumb with passion.

‘You shall do nothing of the sort,’ he cried, ‘unless you want to break at once and for ever with me.’

‘But, grandfather——’

‘There’s no “but” in the matter. I’ll hear of no “buts.” Dismiss this nonsense out of your head, or else dismiss yourself out of this house. Do you hear me, sir? Not another word of it.

It shan't be—I won't hear of it. Silence, John! Say another word and I'll turn you out to the street. Cast off my name, who have been your guardian all your life, to take up—— Silence, John! Don't say another word to me.'

John, indeed, was saying no word. He was gazing at his grandfather with wide-open, astonished eyes. Never in his life had such words been said to him before. He was too much astonished to resent them. When the old man reproached him for his wish to cast off the name which was that of the tender protector, the only father he had really known, compunction came quick to the boy's heart. That was not what he had intended—it had never entered his thoughts.

'Grandfather, indeed you do me wrong. I—never thought of that.'

'How was it you didn't think of it? Haven't we done enough for you, my poor dear and me? What have we not done for you that heart could desire? And now you want to be shut of us, to clear out, to change your name. I am glad she's out of the way not to see it or to hear of it. I'm glad she's out of the way.'

‘Grandfather! don’t, for pity’s sake don’t——’

‘Pity!’ said the old man—‘you don’t show much for me. I’m settling down, my poor old dear in her grave, and the house desolate, and Emily gone, and nobody left but you and me. And the first day, the very first day when everything’s over, and I’ve got to face the world again alone, that’s the time you choose to tell me that you’re going to make a fuss and disturbance, and take a new name, and set all the village talking. Set ’em talking and inquiring and putting things together. Oh, I’ll not have it. I’ll rather clear out myself and go right away.’

‘Grandfather!’ said John again.

‘Don’t speak to me. I’ll go and telegraph for Emily back again. She’ll have to find me a place where I can have some peace; for all my peace will be gone here. Oh, John! oh, John! I am glad she has not lived to see this day.’

‘Don’t say that, grandfather,’ the boy cried. ‘I’ll not do anything to vex you. I only wanted to bear my own name.’

‘And who told you it was your own name? Your mother is Sandford, and so are you——’

‘My mother?’ said John, faltering—‘my mother?’

‘Perhaps,’ said old Sandford, ‘you’re going to deny her too——’

And then there was a silence in the middle of the storm—a silence which marked the dangerous point beyond which these two unused to fighting did not care to go.

‘Grandfather,’ said John at last, ‘I don’t want to vex you, nor to make myself as if I didn’t belong to you. But why shouldn’t you tell me? I’m old enough to understand. If there’s any secret, oughtn’t I to know it? Perhaps it isn’t half so bad as the things I take into my head. It would be so much better if you would trust me—tell me. One time or other I shall be sure to find out; and if I’ve been insulting my mother (how can I tell?) and vexing you, is it my fault? It is out of exasperation because I know there is something, and yet what it is I’m not allowed to know.’

The old man calmed down during this speech and perceived what his best policy was. He said:

‘You moider my poor brains with your talk

of secrets. Let alone, my boy. There's few families that haven't got something that they keep to themselves—but the Sandfords have less than most. We've never been very rich or great, but we've always been able to hold up our heads wherever we went. I'm very shaky this morning,' he said, relapsing into his broken voice. 'I'd like to take the air a little; but I've been so long indoors I don't know if I could keep my legs.'

'Will you have my arm, grandfather?' said John.

'Well,' said the old man, with his half sob, 'the first day we're alone it's a kind of natural to go out together; and we'll just look if there's a snowdrop or two out yonder. By this time there should be a snowdrop out.'

This altogether overcame John, who walked with the old man leaning on his arm to the new-made grave, which had been covered with snowdrops, and where already two or three of these pale, wintry blossoms, cold and pure, were peeping out. They were followed all along the street by many a sympathetic look. The men took off their hats, the women gave them

half-tearful greetings. 'They go unto the grave to weep there.' These words can never be said without moving the general heart, so easily touched, and to some griefs so sympathetic. That it should be an old man and a boy who were making that pilgrimage was, the gossips said, 'more heart-breakin' than if it had been a woman and a girl.' The helplessness of the pair, and yet the difference between their helplessness and that of the women who had lost their bread-winner, has something poignant in it. And if Mr. Sandford had exhausted all resources in finding an expedient for calming the mind of John, and diverting him from his inquiries, he could not have found one that was more effectual. The chill sweetness of the little snowdrop upon his tender old mother's grave quenched all the heat and fire of thought out of the boy's heart.

But he did not forget the question which tore it asunder. Some time after he heard that Mr. Cattley was going to Liverpool for a day or two to see his brother, and eagerly asked to be allowed to go with him. The boy was looking pale, they had all remarked without surprise,

and the curate was very willing to have him for a companion. John managed to get his grandfather's permission without letting him know where they were going; for Mr. Sandford was pleased and proud that his boy should be the curate's companion anywhere. It was with a mixture of excitement and trouble that John set out. He felt that he might be about to make some monstrous discovery, he knew not what, yet the sense of doing something clandestine and forbidden contended in his mind with that pleasure in carrying out our own desires, which is so strong in most hearts.

It was a long journey. Mr. Cattley and he went over the common to the station at twelve o'clock of a brilliant, sunshiny February day, when all the roads in their wetness reflected the wonderful colours of the sky, and the very puddles were strewn with turquoise and gold; but it was between six and seven at night, dark and cold, when they reached the great town, which John entered with all the natural excitement of a country boy who has never seen such a place before. Mr. Cattley took him to the lodging to which he himself usually came

on his visits here; for his brother, like most other people of his importance, lived out of town. He took John next morning through a world of streets, some of which were imposing and brilliant, but by far the greater part mean, narrow, and unlovely, to the place where the great foundry was, and where but for an accident he himself might have been. The youth went over it with a mixture of pleasure and repulsion. The novelty, the bustle, the feeling of a great new energy unknown to him before, the quickened sense of living and great creative work went to his head like a new inspiration; but the plunging and ploughing of pistons and wheels, the huge monstrous machines which looked like sentient creatures; the grind, and whirl, and noise, and endless movement, in so many different senses at once, up and down, round and round, back and forward, contradicting each other, made the brain of the country lad go round too, with a sickening confusion. A touch of envy of all those accustomed workmen, who understood, and moved about so coolly among, this confusing round of wheels, and at the same time a sense of thank-

fulness that he was not himself to take his place among them, was in John's mind. This was not what had fired his imagination, or rather, had fired Elly's imagination, and thrown a warm reflection upon his. The lighthouses, the canals, the civilising roads, the works that would be good for humanity, as well as worth a man's while, were different from all this buzzing and plunging. Yet John was wise enough to know that the two things were too closely connected to be severed. He was glad, however, that he was to be set to surveying and outdoor work rather than to this.

Mr. Cattley was with his brother in the office, and John was left to stray about the outskirts of the place, after he had been shown over it, to wait for the curate. The grimy courts, the big, ugly buildings, sheds, all the frightful accessories of the place were new to him. Why were such places so ugly? Was it necessary they should be so ugly? The black soil of the yard, over which the workmen went crunching in their heavy boots, seemed mixed up of cinders and coal dust and mud. He was asking himself, with a half laugh at his own simplicity, why this must

be—whether it might not be worth while to make the surroundings of the workshops less hideous—when his eye was caught by one of the labourers passing between him and the grimy wall. No skilled workman this, like those in the blackened moleskins, which, at the beginning of the week, were white, with their free step and independent aspect. The man was one of the drudges of the establishment, a skillless hanger-on, doing jobs as they were wanted, carrying the great, rusty bars of iron, bringing coals, doing all the rough work of the place. He was dressed in the indescribable clothes of the British labourer, who has no sort of habitual costume, not even a blouse under which to hide his rags, with a red cotton handkerchief knotted about his neck. Perhaps it was this bit of cotton that caught John's eyes: and then it seemed to him that the face above it was not unknown to him. It was a sufficiently villainous face; the features looked as if they had been roughly shaped out of some coarse paste, the small eyes, looking out from under shaggy brows, with a sidelong glance, the slouching gait, the unshaven chin, made up a very unattractive picture altogether.

‘Where can I have seen him?’ John said to himself. He had the keen recollection of youth, and soon identified the unlovely figure which had passed across his field of vision once, and no more. The man, seeing John’s gaze fixed on him, felt it expedient to touch his cap, and claim the recognition that was in the lad’s eyes. It might mean, if nothing more, a pint of beer.

‘Mornin’, sir,’ he said, as if he knew all about him.

John was a little startled by this recognition.

‘You know me, too?’ he said.

‘I never forget anyone I ever sets eyes upon—especially a young man as has little to do with them sixpences of his, and knows as a poor man is mostly dry.’

‘And yet I never saw you but once,’ said John, with a laugh. He thought within himself that this was not a very dignified acquaintance, and yet to have remembered was something in the fellow’s favour. ‘When I saw you you were looking for some one down at Edgeley, don’t you know?’

And then it suddenly occurred to John that it was this man’s inquiries which had ended in

bringing to his mind his own forgotten name—the name of his childhood, which, for the present, at least, he was not allowed to claim—and this changed his countenance from its lighter aspect to profound gravity. For was not this the object with which he came here, to find out something?—which he was not likely to do wandering about the grimy yard of the foundry.

‘Ah!’ said the man, with a sudden lighting up of his seemingly impassive countenance, ‘I have ye now. Never forgets a face, but don’t always remember where I seen it. Edgeley, where I went to look up my mate’s wife? But where that mate was, I’m not a-goin’ to say now.’ He put his finger against his nose. ‘I warn’t a-minding down there. Bless you, I knew if I’d a-found her, she’d a-bought me off pretty smart, rather than let the story run that I was his mate and where he was. But mum’s the word in the foundry. You won’t peach on a poor man, that is trying to turn a honest penny, and get back his character—will ye, now?’

‘I!’ cried John, with great disdain. ‘I know nothing about you. I only remembered I had seen your face——’

‘And was so kind as to want to know if I was in good ’ealth—which the same to you, young man,’ said the fellow. ‘You wouldn’t give me no help, though, then; and ye might have done it, and no harm.’

‘I couldn’t have helped you; for I knew there was no one of the name you wanted in the village.’

‘Maybe there was, and maybe there wasn’t,’ said the man. ‘There was them belonging to her, if she wasn’t there herself. An old lady come and give me a sov. to go away. She did—she give me a sov.—though if it was for that, or because she thought her blasted village wasn’t good enough for the likes of me—Give us a shilling, young master, to drink your ’ealth.’

John was so unused to the magnificence of dispensing shillings that he took one mechanically from his pocket in answer to this appeal. But he said before he gave it, with much authority and wisdom,

‘You don’t deserve a shilling, or anything else—if all you wanted was to bring some poor woman to shame.’

‘It was very wrong,’ said the man, with a wink.
‘I know’d you’d think so. But that was only my
fun, bless you—and you’re sure there warn’t not
one o’ that name in the village, young master?
Why, I wanted to give her news of her ’usband
as was my mate. You’re sure there warn’t one
o’ that name?’

CHAPTER XVI.

RESEARCH.

JOHN reflected as he walked back to his lodging on the small matters on which great effects sometimes hang. This wretched fellow—hoping to get something out of a poor woman whose husband was a felon, but who was probably living in decent obscurity somewhere, keeping this dreadful fact from the knowledge of those about her—had pronounced the name which the boy had not heard for ten years, and thus, by an accident which had nothing whatever to do with John, had thrown a light upon the boy's life. At this moment it was not a very comfortable light. The gleam it had thrown had not brought peace, but the reverse. It had awoken difficulties, troubles which no doubt were there

and must have come into evidence some time, though not necessarily now. John did not feel that he had any reason to be grateful to the returned convict who had all unawares, by mere chance, thrown that passing gleam upon his way. But it was very strange to him to think how such things come about—perhaps by mere accident, if there was such a thing as mere accident in the world (John had touched the edge of philosophy, and liked to think that he had thought on such subjects), perhaps in the elaborate arrangements of a purpose which regulates the world in matters both small and great. It gave him a sense of pleasure that such high mysteries should come into his mind in connection with his own little affairs, and yet it was no doubt just as wonderful, nay, more so, that a sparrow can not fall without Divine Providence noting that infinitesimal event, than if the schemes of heaven concerned only nations and principalities and powers. He said to himself, following out that line of thought (and liking himself for the impulse to do so), that if one thing, then another; and that if God's purposes regulated one act of human affairs, they must regulate

all, for nothing could be small or great with Him. And whatever happened, though the present effect of the revelation had been perhaps more painful than pleasant it was always best to know. He said to himself that it is always best to know. Supposing there is anything unpleasant in the antecedents of your family, supposing they are less dignified, less well-off than you may now suppose, still to know is a great matter. He was determined to leave no stone unturned to find out why it was that he was not to be allowed to come to Liverpool, and what harm it was supposed that he should get there, and how his name, his father's name, was connected with it, and why he was forbidden to bear that name. These were momentous questions, but they were not of that kind which he could get solved by any of the ordinary means of procuring information.

On the last morning of his stay in Liverpool, John, being alone for an hour or two, set out with a distinct determination on his mind to do something, to leave not a stone unturned. He had already, when going about with the curate, fixed his mind upon this. Indeed it was never

out of his mind. What had he come here for but with the determination to find out something, to find out everything if it were possible? He had gone about always on the lookout, with his eyes open; but there had been nothing either said or done within his ken which threw any light upon his subject. On the last morning he was left alone, Mr. Cattley having business to execute with his brother, and John felt that now was his opportunity. He went out about ten o'clock with all the advantage of being by himself and unhindered by anyone else's business. By this time he had become a little accustomed to the place and knew his way about. He walked along straight in front of him, looking at all the shop windows and the names over the doors. He did not quite see what help was to be got out of that—but still he went on, observing everything, hoping that perhaps some street corner might awaken his own dormant recollection, or something that would give him a better guidance catch his eye. He meant to leave no stone unturned.

Was there ever a wilder undertaking than to try to find information about an unknown

family by walking about the streets of a great city? When he had walked for an hour or two, and began to feel tired, the futility of this mode of research suddenly struck him. It did not seem likely that he could do it in this way, when he came to think of it. But how was he to do it? In what way was he to turn the metaphorical stone under which knowledge might be hid?

He found himself in front of the Exchange when he woke up to this view of the question. He went in timidly by the archway through which so many men were streaming, and found himself suddenly in the midst of a sea of men, all intent upon affairs which seemed life and death to them, all too much absorbed in their own business to give any attention to the boyish stranger. Sometimes there would arise a clamour of voices speaking together, then this momentary storm would be over, and a lower hum of many voices, a sound of feet, the murmur of a crowd would be all that met his ear. And now and then this human tide would be moved like the sea by a wave setting in one direction, and then would break off into eddies and sweeps of

current here and there. John was very much interested by this sight. He had heard of such assemblies so often—the characteristic heads, the strange sombre important aspect of this crowd of men, the faces full of meaning and earnestness, affected him with mingled awe and interest. They had the affairs of half the world in their hands; many of them had a look of wealth, money written all over their substantial persons; and then there were the shabby ones, more exciting still to look at, with a hungry eagerness in their faces. The boy forgot himself altogether and stood for a long time watching them, pushed aside, now to one corner, now to another by the stream. Then it suddenly occurred to him that he was neglecting his quest. He wondered whether if he had the courage to call out in the midst of them all and ask whether they knew anything of his father he might perhaps acquire some information. But then shrank away into a corner ashamed of himself, wondering what all those occupied men would think of him if he disturbed their business consultations and arrangements with such a question. If John had done so, no doubt the merchants would

have been delighted. It would have been a delightful story to carry home: 'To-day on 'Change the funniest thing happened. A young fellow of seventeen or so, evidently fresh from the country, got up suddenly and asked if anyone was known there by the name of May!' That is what the merchants and stockbrokers would have told their families with great satisfaction. But the idea filled John with shame and sudden discomfiture. He saw for the first time how ridiculous were his hopes, and how impossible it was that he should discover anything in this way.

It was half from shame, to recover from the self-ridicule of this unaccomplished idea, that he plunged into a great public reading-room, where he sat down to recover himself. True, he had not done anything to be ashamed of, but the intention was so vivid that he felt as if he had done it, and threw himself into a seat in a tremor of excitement, his heart beating exactly as if he had carried that wild fancy into action. By-and-by, when he recovered himself, he turned over a newspaper or two mechanically, not knowing what he was doing, and feeling a con-

fused calm in this atmosphere—the quiet which was in the heart of the tumult, a noiseless room within and the roar of the traffic and the multitude without. While he thus sat in a kind of half-dazed condition his eye fell upon a large thick volume, which was the directory of the town. It seemed to him that an expedient more possible, more practicable, was here afforded to him. He got up hurriedly, and turned it over, finding without difficulty the name of a number of Mays. It was a May who was the Mayor even. If he had asked the merchants in the Exchange, there was no doubt this was what they would have thought he meant.

Then John went out again, and went straight to the Town Hall, which had been pointed out to him, and which was close to the Exchange. He went, not knowing very well what he was doing; and though he was shy by nature, not venturesome, pushed his way through the town officers and officials, and asked to see the Mayor. To see the Mayor! Had he gone to Windsor Castle and asked to see the Queen, it would have been only a little less reasonable. What did he want with the Mayor? It was only when this

question was asked him by a person of commanding presence and still more commanding costume, of the beadle race, that he came to himself. What did he want with the Mayor? To ask him if he could give any information as to some one of his name who ten years ago or thereabouts had lived in Liverpool (John supposed) and fallen into misfortune? Poor John made a very faltering explanation to the beadle, and shrank away, not without raising suspicions in that functionary, who watched him out of sight with a look which was not complimentary. And it was only then that the boy perceived the foolishness altogether of that fervent resolution of his to leave no stone unturned. What stone was there which he could hope to turn? What could he do? To appeal to the mayor because his name was May! He might just as well, he said to himself, have appealed to the ex-convict who had known some one of the name of May in prison. The one would really have been as sensible as the other, which was to say that both were folly itself. And, short of this appealing to some one, what was he to do?

He did, as may be supposed, nothing. When he went to meet the curate at the foundry in time for their train, he saw again the fellow who had known May the prisoner, and had a shame-faced laugh at himself as he thought of May the mayor. What if he were to interrogate this man, who was already his acquaintance, who touched his cap and brightened at sight of him, expectant of another shilling? The one, he said to himself, would be just as sensible as the other, and more easily carried out. When Mr. Cattley saw the recognition that passed between this labourer and his young companion he looked at John with surprise.

‘Do you know that man?’ he asked, upon which John entered into the story of his appearance at Edgeley, saying,

‘Don’t you remember?’

‘I think I remember something of the kind,’ said the curate, ‘but I wonder you recollect the looks of the fellow. He is not a very attractive-looking acquaintance.’

‘He brought a name to my mind,’ said John, ‘that I had a recollection of—when I was quite

a child. I have been trying to find out something about it, but I can't.'

'What have you been trying to find out about?'

'Well, that's the funny part,' said John, with an embarrassed laugh. 'I don't exactly know. I want to know something, I can't tell what, about a gentleman of that name who I think lived here, or near here, ten or twelve years ago.'

'That's vague,' said the curate.

'Yes, it's very vague. I suppose it was silly to think I could find out anything. The mayor's name,' said John, with a touch of pride in it, 'is May.'

'Ah, the mayor. You didn't think it was he, I suppose? I remember some story of a May who embezzled or forged or something; no doubt the one whom your friend there' (Mr. Cattley jerked his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the man at the foundry) 'knew. Now, John, look sharp. We haven't got a minute to lose. Our train is at four.'

'My things are all ready,' said John: and they got their train, and there was an end of the

three days at Liverpool, in which he had hoped to find out so much.

It was not so easy to explain his little journey to his grandfather as he had hoped. He tried to give vague answers to the old man's questions, but in the end had to confess where he had been and why he had been so desirous of going there.

'To find out what?' Mr. Sandford cried, with a flash of displeasure quite unusual. 'What did you want to find out?'

'About my father, grandfather,' said John. 'I have never been satisfied with what I have been told, and now less than ever.'

'Why now? What has happened to make you dissatisfied? What does it all mean?'

'Since my—since your—since—Emily was here.'

'How dare you call her Emily, sir? What do you mean by it? Do you intend to drive me distracted in my lonely state? Am I to be brought to the grave with your questions and your doubts? Ah, you never would have taken that upon you,' said the old man, 'while *she* was here. You think you have got me at your

mercy. You think you can take every advantage of me now that I am alone.'

'No,' said John. 'Grandfather, it is you who are hard upon me. She was going to tell me. She would have told me if she had lived. The last thing she said was, "Emily, tell the boy."'

Old Mr. Sandford relapsed into his broken sobbing. It was quite genuine, and yet both now and on other occasions it had served his purpose.

'What is between two women,' he said, 'nobody can know, nobody but their Maker. And neither you nor me can tell what that was. But she never told you, bless her soul, that you were to insult your mother: oh no! nor me that have always been your support and provided for you all your life. You think perhaps you would have got on just as well without me, by yourself, left upon the world?'

And then he fell into such agitation that John was full of regret and self-reproach. He tried the best he could to make his grandfather forget all that had been said, and to forget it himself, and to return to their old life. But it was very hard to do. Indeed, this period in John's life

was altogether very hard; his lessons were given over and he had nothing to do: and after all the troubles and emotions of the past month or two he had not strength of mind to begin some study by himself, as Mr. Cattley advised and Elly urged him to do.

‘You should carry on your mathematics. Mathematics are always good for an engineer: or even draw,’ said Elly, as if that branch of industry was very frivolous in comparison, ‘that’s good for an engineer too. I am sure Mr. Cattley would help you if you were to ask him. But, for goodness sake, Jack, do something; don’t fall into the same ways as all the other boys, wandering about with your hands in your pockets. It is better to do anything,’ said Elly, ‘than to do nothing at all.’

John assented dutifully, but he neither resumed his drawing nor his mathematics. He began even to avoid Elly, lest she should scold him; and did wander about disconsolate with his hands in his pockets, with no heart to do anything. This pause in his life was very hard upon him. It had been settled that his mother, or Emily, whichever she was, should arrange

matters her own way at some engineer's office in London, where she had hopes of getting him taken in ; but in the meantime she made no sign, and it did not seem possible to do anything without her. Mr. Sandford himself would take no trouble ; sometimes he would lament querulously that the boy whom he had brought up wanted to leave him and had no feeling for him : sometimes he would say that his mother must settle all that, that Emily was the proper person to arrange for her son. But in any case nothing was done, and John relapsed into idleness and wretchedness, and did nothing, devouring his own heart.

Whether this was a calculation of a cold-blooded kind on the part of the woman who now seemed to have the lives of these two, the old man and the boy, in her hands, as to what would happen—or whether it was the mere course of events unquickened by any mortal calculation—it proved at all events that Emily's prognostics were right. Mr. Sandford never recovered the death of his lifelong companion. He went out a little fitfully as the spring came on, and took little walks chiefly ending in a visit to

her grave to see, after the snowdrops were over, if the primroses and then if the violets were coming out there. He had covered the little mound at first with all those spring flowers which she had loved, perhaps with a dim prevision that the sod would be displaced before the time for the later blossoms came. And all the long evenings he would sit with a book laid out open upon her little table, but not reading, gazing in the fire and twirling his thumbs. John sat at the table in his old place near the lamps with his books, and sometimes tried to talk. But his grandfather was not disposed to talk, and the hours would thus pass by on leaden wings, so slow, so endless, so silent, not a sound in the little parlour but the falling of the ashes from the fire, and the ticking of the clock, and the rustle now and then of a page turned. But John had no new books to tempt him, and at this turn of his life was but a languid reader, and yielded in spite of himself to the fascination of the strange dreary silence, and the contemplation of the old man twirling his thumbs by the fire.

The summer had scarcely begun when Mr.

Sandford's daughter was again summoned from London. When she arrived she found the sick-room in charge of John, who had learned all that had to be done for the patient as well as such an unlikely nurse could learn. The old man would not suffer him out of his sight. He would not let him go even when Emily with her superior knowledge came and took the seat at his bedside, and began, almost before she came in, to alter the arrangements which the boy-nurse had made.

'He shouldn't have this and that,' she said, 'they are bad for him in his present state.'

'My grandfather likes it so,' said John.

'We mustn't ask what he likes, but what is best for him,' said the new-comer. She was not unkind, but she was professional, seeing everything from a point of view very different from theirs, with a knowledge of what was right in the abstract and none of that tremulous desire to please which moves a domestic ministrant. And, as if he had waited for that sanction to his dying, the old man sank rapidly from the time of her arrival. Whenever he could talk at all, his talk was about 'the boy' over whose head these two

carried on their discussions, taking no more notice of his presence than if he had been a chair or a table.

‘He’s been used to your mother, Emily. Your mother was very indulgent. Perhaps he has been spoiled a little.’

‘A great deal, I fear, father.’

‘It was your mother did it. I like whatever she did best. It was all done in love. Love is what he has been used to.’ This was on the last night of his life. He was lying holding John’s hand, who was at one side of the bed, while Emily was at the other. ‘Oh, be kind to him, my dear. He’s a good boy. Don’t let there be any misunderstanding. When I am gone he will have no one but you.’

‘I will try to do my duty to him, father. I don’t think you need have any fear.’

‘Your duty, Emily, yes; but I hope it will be a little more than that. Your own flesh and blood wants a little more. Trust him as much as you can, my dear. He’s worthy of it. You would never repent it. Remember that he has no one in the world but you.’

At midnight, the two to whom these words

had been spoken stood again together over the bed in silence more significant than words. 'He had no one in the world but you.' The room was cold with the awe and chill of death, and John stood stupified, as if his heart was dead. No one in the world but her. Was this all he had to look to now?

CHAPTER XVII.

MOTHER AND SON.

THEY drove back together alone without a word, sitting close together, not looking at each other—saying nothing. A few neighbours, out of ‘respect,’ had attended old Mr. Sandford’s funeral; and many hearts in the village were sore for John. Behind the drawn blinds in the rectory, and in many humbler houses, they spoke of the boy with great tenderness. ‘He’ll find out the difference,’ people said. ‘The old people thought there was nobody like him: but if it’s an aunt, perhaps with children of her own——’ And none of the little cortége returned with the mourners to the house. The two were left altogether alone.

The little parlour was in painful good order,

the blinds drawn up, the daylight coming in as usual, the hearth so cleanly swept, the fire so bright, the two chairs standing one on each side. It was all so suggestive of the old people, as if they might have only gone out for a walk, arm in arm, in their old way, and soon would come in and sit down and look up smiling at their boy, and bid him come near the fire, for it was a cold day. This suggestion flashed to John's heart as he came in, and might have overwhelmed him with sorrow and tears; but the presence of that tall figure in her black cloak and close bonnet effectually put a stop to any expression. She drew one of those chairs from the fire to the table, without any sense of desecration, or of disturbing any sacred image, and sat down. Her face was very grave, but without any harshness. She was always very serious, yielding to no lighter impulses. She turned to John, who stood vaguely, not knowing what he was to do, by the table.

‘Now,’ she said, not without feeling, ‘there are only us two--we must try to understand each other.’

He made no reply. The movement she had

made of the chair, though perfectly simple and quite unintended, was enough to re-awaken in his mind all the resistance, the repulsion, which indeed her action throughout had never suffered to fade. For she had managed everything in a perfectly clear, unhesitating, business way, giving her orders with quiet and brief decision saving everybody trouble, but leaving no place for any consultation, for any of those faltering conversations upon what would have been most pleasant, or according to the ideas of the departed, which draw together mourners in their grief. There was no particular appearance of grief in her at all. She was serious and pale; but then, she was always so, and there had been no room for sentiment in anything she had done or said.

No creature more desolate than the boy himself at that moment ever stood by a new-filled grave. The love which had enveloped him so closely all his life had passed altogether away. He felt as if there was no longer anyone that cared for him in the world. He felt that this familiar place, which had been his home for so long, was not only to cease to be his home, but

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to cease altogether. The jar of the chair as it was drawn aside seemed to go through his heart. It was only a commonplace piece of furniture now, a common old chair to be put up at an auction. The place seemed to be desecrated by that simple movement. He had thought he would keep the house just as it was, like a little temple to the memory of the good guardians of his childhood. He was to be their heir, he took that for granted. He would leave everything, he thought, and from time to time come back out of the midst of the active life he had planned for himself, and always find them in imagination sitting there to meet him. No doubt John would soon have found out the impossibility of that fond imagination; but this was what he thought. He had even planned how he should put the gardener and his wife—themselves old people for whom it would make a provision—into the house to keep it for him, which he had said to himself, with tender childish pleasure, would please grandmamma. But with the jar of that chair as it was drawn aside, John's tender imaginations went from him, leaving him with a sense of astonishment and startled waking up. He had

another will to calculate with of which he had not thought.

She kept looking at him while these thoughts passed in a tumult through his mind, waiting for an answer. It was but for a very short time, yet to both of them it seemed long: and with all her seriousness she was of a disposition which could not brook waiting. She said, 'Well!' a little sharply, when he made no reply.

'I did not say anything,' John replied.

'No, you did not say anything—you made no response. You look at me as if you wanted to make a quarrel over those graves. But you shall not make any quarrel, on that point I am resolved. We must understand each other.'

He went and leant upon the mantelpiece and stood looking down into the fire. Make a quarrel! It seemed to John that his heart would burst with the pang this misconception gave him. A quarrel, over their graves! But, though the suggestion was so abhorrent, he felt the sense of rebellion and resistance grow stronger and stronger. He would not even meet her eye. He would withdraw into that passive unyielding silence which of all things in

the world is most difficult to meet and to withstand.

She turned again towards him though she could not see his face.

‘John,’ she said, ‘don’t make me feel, at a moment when I am far from wishing to feel it, how you have been spoiled by my father and mother—and how wrong I was in giving you out of my own care.’

He made a fierce gesture of denial at the first part of her sentence, and added at the last, with a sort of mocking echo, ‘Out of your own care!’

‘I have said that it is time we understood each other,’ she said, ‘I don’t know whether it was merely to wound me that you flung at me that suggestion that I was not your mother.’ Here she made a pause, and he too, his attention suspended with an excitement that took away his breath. ‘If that was the motive, it was fully successful. It did wound me. But if you had any real doubt on the subject——’

‘He had, he had!’ he said to himself, the blood throbbing in his head with a giddy sense of mounting up and up to the circles of the brain,

and yet he knew very well what she was going to say, and knew also that it was true.

‘It seems strange that I should have to put such an assurance into words. Who would have borne with your alienation and your caprices, but your mother? Many women even, in the circumstances, would have said, Let him go. If nature has no voice, if there are no recollections of your childhood to move you—never mind! Say it since you feel it. But I have not been willing to do that. I have felt that the moment would come—and the moment has come—when you would have nobody but me. I have spoken to Susie about it,’ she added, with a slight tremor in her voice.

‘Susie!’ The name brought a new sensation—something that touched his heart.

‘Your sister—your only sister—as I am your only mother, though you have so strangely misconceived me and denied me. I put that all down to the circumstances, not to you. I am not blaming you—only we must understand each other now.’

John, leaning on the mantelpiece with his face overshadowed by his hand, knew in his heart that

all this was true. He made no attempt within himself to deny it. The reality of it was too much for him. It went into his heart like a stone in deep water, deep, deep to the bottom, where it lay a dead weight never to be got rid of. He could not protest or say anything, as if he were surprised by this sudden announcement. He was not surprised. He felt now that he had known it all well enough, that when he said otherwise it had only been in the impulse of the moment, with a frantic short-lived hope that perhaps that might come true. Alas! he knew very well that it was this which was true. He seemed to remember her now always silent, cold, an image of reserve and gravity in the midst of the more cheerful scenes in his memory. It was rather from the extreme occupation of his mind with these thoughts and recollections which surged through it, than from any antagonistic intention that he said nothing. But standing there with his head bent and his eyes lowered it was not wonderful that he should appear to her an impersonation of silent rebellion, a determined opponent.

‘You say nothing;’ she spoke in a tone in which

a growing exasperation began to make itself felt. ‘It might have been less painful for me to let you go on in your own delusion—if delusion it was. But unfortunately you cannot be free of me and my authority ; you are at an age when your life has to be settled for you, and in that as in everything else it is with me only that you have to do.’

John changed his position a little, which, in the high strain of emotion at which they were, seemed to both of them like a sort of response ; so that he was almost forced to add, ‘With you only?’ faintly. He did not intend to say it. It did not mean anything. It was a mere echo, as if the air caught the words. But it had not upon her this harmless effect. Her paleness, which nothing else had touched, flushed high at these words ; she made a sudden movement as if she had received a blow.

‘With me only,’ she repeated, with mingled energy and irritation, as if he had suggested a doubt. ‘Who else?—do you mean to say? do you think——?’ These questions came from her hurriedly with something quite unlike her usual gravity and calm. Then she stopped with a

panting hard-drawn breath, and added after a moment, in a tone almost of derision, 'As you are so intent on setting yourself against me, perhaps you will tell me what, left to yourself, you would do.'

John could not quite tell what this change of tone meant. He was not used to the quick interchange of argument nor was he quick to note the significance of the inflections of a voice. He had never known controversy at all, until he had embarked upon this one, and the moment he withdrew from the unintentional force of silence, in which he had at first wrapped himself, his ignorance and defencelessness became apparent. He thought however that she was withdrawing from her position, and recognising some claim in him to know and judge for himself. He left the place where he had been standing, and came to the middle of the room, throwing himself into a chair on the other side of the table.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that all this is mine now.'

'What is yours?'

'I mean: I suppose it is—all left to me? I could stay here, and—give no one any trouble.'

‘Left to you, my father’s house and all that he had!’ Is that what you mean? and you would stay here?’

‘I suppose so,’ said John. ‘I don’t know why. It seems natural. I thought it would always be mine. If I was wrong, I’m—I’m very sorry,’ he cried, giving a sudden bewildered glance round him, with a new and painful light of possibility breaking on his mind.

‘And you would stay here?’ she said. ‘And do—what? nothing? If you have your plans made——’

‘I have no plans made. I have not thought of anything. I supposed—that was how it could be.’ He looked at her for the first time with a bewildered appeal in his eyes. ‘If you knew what it was—to change all at once from being so—spoilt, perhaps, as you say, always understood, never found any fault with——’ in spite of himself his voice faltered, ‘to change from that to—to——and being not very old, nor knowing very well: it makes a great difference,’ John said, feeling a sob swell upwards in his boyish throat, and breaking off that he might not betray himself. And he did not look at her

again to see if there was in her any responsive feeling, but leaned his head upon his hands, shading his countenance from the light. And then there followed a moment of silence,—so silent, so long—with the clock ticking loudly through it with a sort of triumphant click-clack, as if that ceaseless measure were the master of all.

After a while she spoke again, with a softened voice.

‘I recognise,’ she said, ‘all the difference: poor boy!—it is natural you should feel it. I am a stranger—so to speak—though I—gave you birth, which is something, perhaps. But it is not your fault. Tell me—you think that all my father had to leave is yours, and that you might continue to live here, just as before—is that what you expect?’

He made a little movement with one hand, still leaning his head on the other. It was a movement that looked like assent. And yet this was not what he had expected; for he had expected nothing, nor had he any thought what he was to do.

‘To do nothing?’ she continued, ‘or to do—

what? To live all alone at your age—to carry on the sort of life my father led? That was suitable enough at his time of life, but not at all for you. To keep the maid Sarah and the gardener, and doze in your chair of an afternoon? This could not be seriously what you thought.'

He started a little and cast a look at her, half indignant, half piteous, but did not reply.

'I am not laughing at you,' she said, quite gently; 'you will yourself see when I put it to you that this would be quite impossible. Now I must tell you how things really are. All that my father had is divided between you and me; but you are too young to enter into possession of your share. It will accumulate for you till you are twenty-one, and in the meantime the charge of you naturally lies with me. Whatever has to be determined is between us two. This is what I told you when we came in; you have nobody but me.'

To describe what John's feelings were while she spoke would be impossible; everything seemed to swim and dissolve around him. It was true that he had formed no definite idea to himself of what was to come; and yet there had

never seemed any question about this—that he was his grandfather's heir—his natural and lawful heir. Nothing else had occurred to him. There had been nothing said about it; but it was this arrangement which seemed inevitable to the boy. He did not think even that any will was wanted. He, John Sandford, and no one else, could succeed John Sandford. This was what he had believed; and in this inheritance a certain sense of liberty was involved. He had thought of various things he would do. That about keeping up the house for one thing, and putting in the old gardener to take care of it; and then of the measures he would take in his own person to learn his profession, and prepare himself for a larger life. But in all of these thoughts emancipation was the first article. He did not suppose that he could have much to do with Emily. He had shivered a little when he so named her in his own mind, feeling a chill shadow of doubt as to who she was. But he had never remembered that he was only seventeen, much under age, and that he might have to yield to some other will instead of doing his own. He looked at her with a sort of help-

less alarm in his eyes, feeling that everything was going to pieces round him, and as if he were feeling for something to clutch at in the general whirl.

‘You are surprised,’ she said, ‘and yet it is quite true. You have been put, perhaps, in a false position, John. It is not your fault, nor any-one’s; but I cannot let it go on. You are only seventeen. Who at seventeen is fit to be his own master? The position would be absurd, if it were not worse. It is sad for us both that you have not been brought up to care for me. I never realised how it might be when I left you in my father’s and mother’s hands. I was willing that they should have you, but not that they should turn the heart of my child away from me.’

John’s voice broke forth hoarse, not as it had sounded in his own ears before, ‘It was not their fault.’

‘I do not ask whose fault it was. Mine, perhaps, for giving you up; but that is past and need not to be taken into account. The thing we have to do is to get right now.’

Right! did she call this right? Whose doing had it been that she had become Emily, the daugh-

ter of the old people, in his eyes—not herself, not his mother? And then he gave her a furtive look to see if, perhaps, she looked like his mother now, and was no longer Emily. She met his wistful look with one that was troubled too; but even this expression did not change her. And whose fault was that? He seemed to hear the old people talking of Emily with many unguarded comments. It was like her, they would say. When a letter came, or when they would ramble off into those mutual recollections with which so often, to John's amusement, they had traced out for him, with glimpses of the half-seen landscape all around, the story of their lives, that name always came in from time to time: 'Emily said—Emily did—this or that. How like that was to Emily! It was her way of looking at things: for Emily never would see, don't you know—never made any allowance——' A hundred such scenes appeared to him, like scenes out of some plays suddenly becoming visible without any will of his. How could he help it, if his mind had collected out of all these unconscious portraits an image of Emily, which was more clear than any-

thing else he knew? It was not their fault. Was it not she herself who was to blame if this was how he knew her best, as the daughter whom the old people were half afraid of, whose probable criticism alarmed them, whose thoughts were not as theirs? The fear of her which crept into his own mind was more chill, more overwhelming—for how could he make any stand against her if it was true that he was entirely at her mercy, without any defence or shield.

That little quiet parlour, the old people's room with all its old-fashioned furniture and little prim ornaments! Had it ever beheld such a mute encounter, such a strange struggle before? The boy looked at his mother and she at him. His eyes appealed to her, yet resisted her, while hers—but he could not read what they meant. He was not capable of comprehending, in his youthful inexperienced judgment, the many things he wot not of, the recollections, the sternness, the relentings that were in his mother's eyes. But no more was said. For just then Sarah came in, pushing open the door with the great tray in her arms

to prepare for tea—which was a thing that could not be intermitted, though heaven and earth should be beginning to dissolve and drop away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FAREWELL.

JOHN went up the village street towards the rectory with a heavy heart.

It was all over—his resistance and his notion of being able to resist, his hopes and all the foundation for them, his fond dreams and thoughts (so fallacious and so foolish) of independence, of settling matters for himself, of keeping the little house as a sort of monument to the old people to whom it belonged. Could anything be more vain than these visions? It was all settled now, and not a child in the village had less to do with it than he. The furniture was to be sold, the house itself to be let if it could not be disposed of. The gardener and Sarah had received their dismissal. They remained only till ‘the family’ left, which was an event now fixed for next day.

In short, every part of John's little world had crumbled under him. Himself was of no account in all the changes that had been determined upon. They were all quite reasonable, perhaps necessary, and his childish intention had been silly as well as vain. He understood that now ; but how painful was the discovery ? It left him aching body and soul, not only with the thought of what was to come, but with the smarting sensation of pain and shame, that overwhelming sense of having formed ludicrous intentions impossible to carry out, which is so terrible to youth. He felt himself blush from head to foot when he thought how foolish he had been, and how impossible that which he had supposed the most natural thing in the world. For the sting of it was that he saw the impossibility, and how childish it was to suppose that he could have done it, and the futility of everything he had imagined and planned. It was natural that she should take all the steps she had done—calmly, without the silly sentiment into which he had fallen. She was acting only as reasonable people should act—but he, he had been going on like a foolish boy.

John had passed through a great many vicissitudes both of mind and situation in these past days. He had been to his own thinking independent, feeling very young and forlorn indeed, but yet with a firmness of purpose and a tenderness of feeling which had given him confidence in himself. He had felt that he would not abuse the old people's confidence. He would make a man of himself to do them credit. He would show them honour in his keeping up of everything that had pleased them, in his return, whenever he had leisure, to the home in which their love had guarded him. That had been his first phase, and it had been full of a simple youthful dignity, and a sense of worthiness of the trust they had placed in him. And then there had come a revolution, a storm, a fierce moment of fighting and resistance to the new will, a fight which was weakened from the beginning by the fatal conviction that it must be lost. And now even the struggle was over, and he had fallen—into what had he fallen? Into a child again—into what perhaps was his natural position—the place of a boy who did not quite know what was going to be done with

him, whose fate was in other hands, who had to wait and hear what was intended, where he was to be placed, with a knowledge that his own wishes had very little to do with it, and no dignity, no freedom at all! Could there be a greater downfall for a sensitive, high-spirited boy? With a certain mental elation, tempered by sorrow, he had felt himself a man though only seventeen, with all the tender ambitions of a boy, to do credit to those that loved him: now he had fallen back to the position of a child—wistfully dependent, uncertain what his fate was to be. In more ordinary circumstances even, such as happen every day, a boy who has been brought up by his grandparents, made into the son of their old age, matured by the constant company of people full of experience, and the indulgence which comes with the end of life, is apt to feel a terrible downfall when he goes back into his own family, where his parents, in their busy prime, think but little of his precocious wisdom, and do not respect at all the fictitious independence into which he has grown, and where his brothers and sisters, a rabble rout, knock him about in a way which is

supposed to be very much to his advantage.

John's experiences were but a little more painful. The disenchantment was complete. He was shaken out of all opinion of himself. Perhaps even his feeling that his own will or way was of no importance at all exceeded reality: for he had no reason to suppose that his mother would be entirely indifferent to what he wished. She had not been unkind. She was not an emotional woman, nor given to any effusion of sympathetic feeling; but she was not unkind. But John in his downfall and dismay could not consider that. He felt himself altogether brought low. And then his position, so far as his mother was concerned, was so painful and extraordinary. She was his mother; he could not, even to himself, set up any other hope. He could not blind himself to the conviction that this was she that appeared in his childish recollections, always so silent, putting him aside, saying that the boy was not to know. But he could not call her 'mother,' having known her so long and seen to the depths of her character as Emily. He said 'she' to himself, and no more. She was the arbiter of his life.

He did not think she cared at all for him, or minded whether he was happy or otherwise. Secretly, perhaps, he thought that she preferred he should not be happy ; but that he knew, even while he entertained the thought, was a wrong thing to think, unkind and untrue : yet he kept it in his mind all the same.

He was strolling along with his hands deeply thrust into his pockets, and despondency unspeakable in his soul, feeling that everything that made life worth living had been taken from him. He was going to the rectory to say good-bye. Good-bye was what was in his heart towards everything he looked on. Not a house he passed but was familiar to him—the shop, the post-office, even Johnson at the public-house, though the old people had so disapproved of him, and John had grown up in the idea that he was not much better than the roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour, of Scripture ; they were all kind, familiar objects now. He regretted them all, worthy and unworthy. As he went along, there was some recollection associated with every bit of the road. There, Dick Spencer had thrown a snowball and hit him, and

made his forehead bleed ; a snowball with a stone in it—but how sorry Dick was ! There he had run against Percy on the way to school and they had both come to the ground, rolling over each other. At another corner was the spot where Elly used to start to run and get before them all, with swift, light steps like a deer, scarcely touching the ground. All the boys had united in saying that it was not fair, that Elly could not stay, that the slowest of them could have beaten her in a quarter-of-a-mile ; but, nevertheless, she had always got first whatever they might say. He was turning over all these old things in his heart while he strode along slowly, languidly, his whole being in pain, when suddenly, in the midst of his troubled thoughts, a slap came on his shoulder from behind, and a cheerful voice hailed him :

‘ Why, Jack ! what are you doing here at this time of day ? ’

Then another voice addressed the first one with that pleasant frankness which characterises brothers or dear friends, and bid him for a block-head to remember. Whereupon the first speaker penitently cried out :

‘I beg your pardon! You know I didn’t mean to be unfeeling, Jack.’

John had scarcely the heart to turn round. He did so, half, saying, in a tone of little interest,

‘Have you fellows come back?’

The fellows were two. They were older than John. One—the nearest to him in age—was short and of spare figure, neat and careful of apparel; the other was some two years older, a person of advanced age in the estimation of his juniors, who did not think Dick’s sense was on a level with his years. He was large and fair, a full-grown man in person, with a moustache which many an older man might envy, and a careless good-humour and heartiness about him which was very attractive to many of his fellow-creatures, though his own immediate belongings were a little contemptuous of them. Both the lads were dressed with a little of that jauntiness which characterises the University. They came from a centre of boyish fashion; their coats were cut on the correctest model, and even Percy, though so much the wiser of the two, would have died, it was evident to the

commonest observer, rather than wear anything which he ought not to have worn. The very canes which both of them scrupulously carried were exactly the right kind of cane. When John turned round slowly upon them, he was a little overawed as he awoke to it by the splendour of their appearance.

‘I didn’t know you were here,’ he said.

‘No, only for the day. Where are you going—to the rectory? Come along, then. That’s all right,’ said Dick. ‘We wanted to go and look you up, but didn’t like.’

Percy gave his brother a push aside.

‘I should have come fast enough; but I wanted to know first—that’s to say, we thought you might have relations or something. We’re awfully sorry, you know, Jack.’

‘Awfully sorry,’ echoed Dick, eager to make his sympathy known.

‘There’s nobody but my mother,’ said John, with an effort. ‘We are going away to-morrow morning.’

‘Going away?’

‘Yes. I’m going back with my mother. There is to be a sale and the house is to be let.’

John forced himself to say all this with an appearance of stolid calm.

Dick thrust his arm into John's, and, half roughly, half tenderly, led him along.

'Come and talk to Aunt Mary,' he said. This was his own idea of consolation. He could not himself say anything that would be of any use to a mourner; but Aunt Mary, if anyone, could. Dick always said that he would back her against the world.

John suffered himself to be led along a little more quickly than the pace at which he had been going along the street. He was vaguely encouraged by Dick's arm within his, and even by Percy's little trim shadow walking along on the other side of him. The boys had naturally nothing to say. What could they have to say to a comrade in trouble? They could only stand by him; grip his hand till he cried out; hold his arm tight in theirs; get him a chair, as if he had been a girl; minister to his wants in any way he would let them: but otherwise, beyond 'awfully sorry,' what could they say?

'We have made a run home to see Aunt Mary and Elly,' said Percy, 'but we can't stay

above an hour or two. It's a capital offence, don't you know, to be out of college without leave; but Dick had something he wanted to look to, and so had I. I wish we had come before yesterday.'

'It didn't matter,' said John.

'We tried hard,' said Dick, 'and then we thought at least you'd like to see us before——'

'Are you going to town, Jack? Best thing for you. You will be sure to get something there. And nothing so easy as to meet one's friends in town,' said Percy, briskly. Dick was inclined to make allusions, to dwell upon the departure from Edgeley, and repeat that he was awfully sorry. But Percy was much more a man of the world. It was always better, he had heard, to speak in the most cheerful way to fellows who were in trouble, and direct their eyes beyond the trouble to the time when all should be cheerful again. 'You must leave us your address,' he said. 'We constantly run up to town. We shall see more of you than if you were staying here.'

'I don't know if I shall have an address,' said John. 'I—don't know where I'm going. I'm

—all at sea. I know nothing. It's like a mist—'

'I know,' said Percy, soothingly: 'that's how fellows feel; but it can't last like that. You'll have to pick up, and go on again, don't you know.'

Dick did not say anything, but he gave John's arm a sort of hug, which almost threw the boy off his feet.

'Why, there's Elly running along in her wild way. She ought to know that she's not a child now,' said Percy, who understood it was a good thing to divert a fellow's thoughts from himself and his troubles as soon as possible. 'Hallo, Ell! Where are you running, like a rabbit, and never looking? and here we are, and here's Jack.'

'Oh, you have come!' said Elly, suddenly perceiving them, with a flash of her eyes from one to another, but holding out her hand to John between them. 'You ought to have been here yesterday, you know. What does it matter coming now? Jack, Aunt Mary wants you. Never mind the boys. Oh, you two, why didn't you come yesterday? Don't tell me you couldn't have come if you had tried!'

‘We couldn’t, though,’ said Percy; while Dick, drawing his arm from John’s, stood abashed, making no reply. ‘You don’t know what a fellow old Scrymgeour is. He won’t give you leave. And to-day we came, you know, without asking. So we’ve got to be back before the gates are closed.’

‘I know,’ said Elly, ‘you’ve come to-day for your own pleasure; but when there was something serious to do, something you were wanted for—— John, do run; Aunt Mary is waiting for you, and afterwards you can see these two. You might have had sense enough,’ she added, as John left them; ‘you might have had heart enough—the last of the two old people that were always so nice to us—and then poor Jack. Papa saw it,’ said Elly, as if that was something unusual, ‘as well as Aunt Mary and me.’

‘Funerals are horrible things,’ said Dick, under his breath.

‘But what is the use of talking when we couldn’t manage it?’ said Percy, glibly. ‘We thought it better to come and see him, poor old beggar, after. And, I say, what’s all this about a mother? Has he got a mother? and perhaps

a sister and a brother? and no doubt a nearer one still and a dearer one?’

‘How dare you laugh,’ cried Elly, stamping her foot: and ‘I say, stop that!’ said Dick, with a low growl.

John did not hear anything beyond the merest murmur of this conversation. He left them quarrelling, explaining themselves with that ease of brother and sisterhood which sets all politeness at defiance, and hurried on as Elly had directed him to see Mrs. Egerton. Perhaps John had not the same absolute confidence in her powers of consolation that her nephew had, but she had always been very kind to him, and he went with a sort of dull pleasure, knowing that she would be even more kind than usual to-day. She was in her own special room, the morning-room, which looked out over the shrubberies to the village street in the distance, and whence she saw, more or less, all that was going on. It was a room more useful than ornamental, with bookshelves filled with shabby books, which formed a sort of extra lending library for the parish, and cupboards full of the goods purchased for the Clothing

Club, and all sorts of parish necessities; but it was also very bright, with its corner windows, one in each angle, and its air of occupation and cheerfulness. Mrs. Egerton looked up as John came in after a little tap at the door. She held out her hand to him across the table, where she was busy with the concerns of the parish, and drew him to a chair opposite to her.

‘Dear boy,’ she said, ‘how I have wanted to see you.’ Her smile was beaming warm with kindness. It was not love, but it was the nearest thing to it, and it warmed the chilled and famished youth.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I hope you were coming to me of yourself, John.’

‘I was on my way,’ he said.

‘That’s right! I thought you would not desert your old friends. I told Elly to look out for you, and, if you were not coming, to bring you. Now tell me, my dear boy, do you go or stay?’

‘We are going to-morrow, Mrs. Egerton.’

‘To-morrow? So soon as that? And you say we——’

‘With my mother, Mrs. Egerton.’

He grew a little pale, and so, it seemed, did she.

‘Is that—that lady your mother, John?’

‘Yes,’ he said, and no more.

‘And you knew all along that your mother was living? How strange that you never spoke of her—that we never heard—I hope, dear John, I—I trust——’

She had meant to say, ‘that she is kind to you.’ But her courage failed her in sight of his pale, set face.

‘We heard from her always regularly, but there seemed nothing to write about. She had given me up to my grandparents.’ John had to pause to get rid of the sob in his throat; but he was determined to tell all he knew, to leave nothing to be found out. ‘She has been living in London, with little time to herself.’

It was a curiously lame story. He felt it was so, as he told it; hitherto it had all seemed simple enough. He met Mrs. Egerton’s look of interest and her interrogative ‘Yes?’ with sudden confusion, as if it was all a made-up tale.

‘Yes?’ she said, and paused with her eyes full of a hundred questions expecting him to resume.

But John had told everything he had to tell, and stopped short with no more to say. She sat looking at him for a minute longer expecting when he should resume. Then, as he said nothing, she asked, as if to make a beginning again and draw him on, 'Are there any more of the family?'

'I have a sister,' John said.

'Oh! a sister. I am very glad to hear it. I am extremely glad for your sake. A sister is so near—a sister will sympathise. I have seen—Mrs. Sandford, once: it seems so strange to say that name and not to mean your dear old grand-mamma, my kind, true old friend.' Mrs. Eger-ton's bright eyes were moistened with tears, but John sat stolid in the stupidity of his grief, and made no sign. 'Did you know I had seen her once?' she said. 'She is Mrs. Sandford, isn't she? and that is your name? She must have married—a cousin, I suppose?'

John made no reply. He felt a sense of guilt come over him. He said to himself that she was not Mrs. Sandford, nor was that his name; but his lips were sealed. He did not himself know how it was. His discovery of his own

childish name had led to no further discoveries, and in his own family no one had given him any help to understand how it was. The subject was one which now he could not enter upon with his mother; and he felt by instinct, though no warning had ever been given to him, that it was a subject he must not speak of to others. So he made no answer, but in his heart felt a pang of secret guilt. He had not been used to secrets, especially he had not been used to concealing anything about himself: and now, in the sting of this consciousness, he sat silent, unresponsive, feeling himself dull and blank in presence of the kind, genial, affectionate woman full of curiosity, who wanted to know everything. She wanted him to tell her everything—to confide in her: and she was disappointed that the boy to whom she had been so kind should close up all the avenues to his heart and make no reply. Then Mrs. Egerton opened her drawer and took out her present to John. She was very liberal in the way of presents, loving to give them, delighted to give pleasure to others. What she had got for John was a gift of real value, a pretty gold hunting-watch,

which was much better than the silver one that his grandparents had given him. It was very pretty, very nice, very kind ; but when he took the old shabby silver one out of his pocket which had been given him when he was a boy, which had never gone very well, in order to make place for the new one, he tried his best to thank his kind friend, but he held the little old watch in his hand and gazed at it with troubled eyes.

‘You must give it away to some one,’ said Mrs. Egerton. ‘It will be a pleasure for you to give it to some good lad—Hedger’s boy, perhaps, who has been with you so long.’

He murmured an assent, but put the old watch back again into another pocket with a quick revolt of feeling. Give it away—to Ned Hedger. Oh! no, no, not for the world! He would keep it all his life for grandmamma’s sake.

Then there was a tumult in the room with the entrance of all the young people, and John did his best to allow himself to be ‘cheered up’ by the boys as they intended. But he was not cheered up, and was very glad to steal away with

Elly to go 'once round the garden,' she said, before he went away. The rectory garden had witnessed so many of the pleasures of his childhood. It was big and old-fashioned, with an orchard attached, where the children had roamed at their pleasure. The girl and the boy set out talking with a little show of vivacity, but, as they strayed along the shady paths, they got more and more silent. At the bottom of the orchard, where the long stretch of the common showed under the trees, and all was silent and full of recollections, Elly suddenly thrust her hand into his.

'Oh, Jack!' she said, 'how will you bear going away? Always think of me just here under the old pear-tree. Look how it is coming out like a great white tower of blossoms. I shall come here and think of you; and that will keep us near to each other. And, Jack——'

'Yes, Elly?'

'If you should feel lonely or anything—if you should miss home very much—oh, just think! I'll come and do my algebra here, and think of you. It will be always something—not like your grandmother, but always something—a

little bit of a home just here under the pear-tree.'

'Elly,' said John, 'will you do one thing for me? There is nobody but you that I would ask.'

'Yes, I will, Jack; half-a-dozen. Tell me what it is.'

'There are the two old chairs by the fire. They will be sold like all the rest. I've money enough to buy them, but nowhere to put them. Oh, Elly!'

'They shall stand in my own room. I'll always keep them there,' said Elly, with enthusiasm, 'the two dear old chairs! Oh! yes, yes, Jack; in my own room.'

'Thanks, awfully,' said John.

He grasped the little, warm hand she had put into his, and they stood for a moment holding each other, like two children, by the hand.

'Oh, Jack! this is dreadfully like good-bye now!'

'It is good-bye. Elly, you give the boys a kiss when they go away. Won't you give me one too? Oh, not if you don't like; it's only because it seems cold, just shaking hands, after what you have said.'

There was no blush on John's simple face. He meant in absolute sincerity what he said. The girl reddened, being, perhaps, a little more advanced in life, though a year younger than the boy. She turned away her head for the moment, but then turned to him again with a steady look, and suddenly inclined her head towards him.

'Yes, Jack; it will be like being brother and sister really, and for good.'

'For good,' he repeated, touching her fresh cheek with honest, tender lips; and then they went back sedately to the house, very quiet, with a certain awe upon them. For it is a ceremonial, and a sad one, to say that first good-bye.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.