

HENRY WOOD

MILDRED

ARKELL, VOL. 1

(OF 3)

Henry Wood

Mildred Arkell. Vol. 1 (of 3)

«Public Domain»

Wood H.

Mildred Arkell. Vol. 1 (of 3) / H. Wood — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER I. | 5 |
| CHAPTER II. | 12 |
| CHAPTER III. | 16 |
| CHAPTER IV. | 22 |
| CHAPTER V. | 28 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 32 |

Mrs. Henry Wood

Mildred Arkell: A Novel. Vol. 1 (of 3)

CHAPTER I.

WHICH IS NOTHING BUT AN INTRODUCTION

I am going to tell you a story of real life—one of those histories that in point of fact are common enough; but, hidden within themselves as they generally are, are thought to be so rare, and, if proclaimed to the world in all their strange details, are looked upon as a romance, not reality. Some of the actors in this one are living now, but I have the right to tell it, if I please.

A fair city is Westerbury; perhaps the fairest of the chief towns in all the midland counties. Its beautiful cathedral rises in the midst, the red walls of its surrounding prebendal houses looking down upon the famed river that flows gently past; a cathedral that shrouds itself in its unapproachable exclusiveness, as if it did not belong to the busy town outside. For that town is a manufacturing one, and the aristocracy of the clergy, with that of the few well-born families time had gathered round them, and the democracy of trade, be it ever so irreproachable, do not, as you know, assimilate. In the days gone by—and it is to them we must first turn—this feeling of exclusiveness, this line of demarcation, if you will, was far more conspicuous than it is now: it was indeed carried to a pitch that would now scarcely be believed in. There were those of the proud old prebendaries, who would never have acknowledged to knowing a manufacturer by sight; who would not have spoken to one in the street, had it been to save their stalls. You don't believe me? I said you would not. Nevertheless, I am telling you the simple truth. And yet, some of those manufacturers, in their intrinsic worth, in their attainments, ay, and in their ancestors, if you come to that, were not to be despised.

In those old days no town was more flourishing than Westerbury. Masters and workmen were alike enjoying the fruits of their skill and industry: the masters in amassing a rich competency; the workmen, or operatives, as it has become the fashion to call them of late years, in earning an ample living, and in bringing up their children without a struggle. But those times changed. The opening of our ports to foreign goods brought upon Westerbury, if not destruction, something very like it; and it was only the more wealthy of the manufacturers who could weather the storm. They lost, as others did, a very great deal; but they had (at least, some few of them) large resources to fall back upon, and their business was continued as before, when the shock was over; and none in the outer world knew how deep it had been, or how far it had shaken them.

Conspicuous amidst this latter class was Mr. George Arkell. He had made a great deal of money—not by the griping hand of extortion; by badly-paid, or over-tasked workmen; but by skill, care, industry, and honourable dealing. In all high honour he worked on his way; he could not have been guilty of a mean action; to take an unfair advantage of another, no matter how he might have benefited himself, would have been foreign to his nature. And this just dealing in trade, as in else, let me tell you, generally answers in the end. A better or more benevolent man than George Arkell did not exist, a more just or considerate master. His rate of wages was on the highest scale—and there were high and low scales in the town—and in the terrible desolation hinted at above, he had *never* turned from the poor starving men without a helping hand.

It could not be but that such a man should be beloved in private life, respected in public; and some of those grand old cathedral clergy, who, with their antiquated and obsolete notions, were fast dropping off to a place not altogether swayed by exclusiveness, might have made an exception in favour of Mr. Arkell, and condescended to admit their knowledge, if questioned, that a man of that name did live in Westerbury.

George Arkell had one son: an only child. No expense had been spared upon William Arkell's education. Brought up in the school attached to the cathedral, the college school as it was familiarly called, he had also a private tutor at home, and private masters. In accordance with the good old system obtaining in the past days—and not so very long past either, as far as the custom is concerned—the college school confined its branches of instruction to two: Greek and Latin. To teach a boy to read English and to spell it, would have been too derogatory. History, geography, any common branch you please to think of; mathematics, science, modern languages, were not so much as recognised. Such things probably did exist, but certainly nothing was known of them in the college school. Mr. Arkell—perhaps a little in advance of his contemporaries—believed that such acquirements might be useful to his son, and a private tutor had been provided for him. Masters for every accomplishment of the day were also given him; and those accomplishments were less common then than now. It was perhaps excusable: William Arkell was a goodly son: and he grew to manhood not only a thoroughly well-read classical scholar and an accomplished man, but a gentleman. "I should like you to choose a profession, William," Mr. Arkell had said to him, when his schooldays were nearly over. "You shall go to Oxford, and fix upon one while there; there's no hurry." William laughed; "I don't care to go to Oxford," he said; "I think I know quite enough as it is; and I intend to come into the manufactory to you."

And William maintained his resolution. Indulged as he had been, he was somewhat accustomed to like his own way, good though he was by nature, dutiful and affectionate by habit. Perhaps Mr. Arkell was not sorry for the decision, though he laughingly told his son that he was too much of a gentleman for a manufacturer. So William Arkell was entered at the manufactory; and when the proper time came he was taken into partnership with his father, the firm becoming "George Arkell and Son."

Mr. George Arkell had an elder brother, Daniel; rarely called anything but Dan. *He* had not prospered. He had had the opportunity of prospering just as much as his brother had, but he had not done it. A fatal speculation into which Dan always said he was "drawn," but which everybody else said he had plunged into of himself with confiding eagerness, had gone very far towards ruining him. He did not fail; he was of the honourable Arkell nature; and he paid every debt he owed to the uttermost penny—paid grandly and liberally; but it left him with no earthly possession except the house he lived in, and that he couldn't part with. Dan was a middle-aged man then, and he was fain to accept a clerkship in the city bank at a hundred a year salary; and he abjured speculation for the future, and lived quietly on in the old house with his wife and two children, Peter and Mildred. But wealth, as you are aware, is always bowed down to, and Westerbury somehow fell into the habit of calling the wealthy manufacturer "Mr. Arkell," and the elder "Mr. Dan."

How contrary things run in this world! The one cherished dream of Peter Arkell's life was to get to the University, for his heart was set on entering the Church; and poor Peter could not get to it. His cousin William, who might have gone had it cost thousands, declined to go; Peter, who had no thousands—no, nor pounds, either, at his command, was obliged to relinquish it. It is possible that had Mr. Arkell known of this strong wish, he might have smoothed the way for his nephew, but Peter never told it. He was of a meek, reticent, somewhat shy nature; and even his own father knew not how ardently the wish had been cherished.

"You must do something for your living, Peter," Mr. Dan Arkell had said, when his son quitted the college school in which he had been educated. "The bank has promised you a clerkship, and thirty pounds a year to begin with; and I think you can't do better than take it."

Poor, shy, timid Peter thought within himself he could do a great deal better, had things been favourable; but they were not favourable, and the bank and the thirty pounds carried the day. He sat on a high stool from nine o'clock until five, and consoled himself at home in the evenings with his beloved classics.

Some years thus passed on, and about the time that William Arkell was taken into partnership by his father, Mr. Daniel Arkell died, and Peter was promoted to the better clerkship, and to the hundred a year salary. He saw no escape now; he was a banker's clerk for life.

And now that all this preliminary explanation is over—and I assure you I am as glad to get it over as you can be—let us go on to the story.

In one of the principal streets of Westerbury, towards the eastern end of the town, you might see a rather large space of ground, on which stood a handsome house and other premises, the whole enclosed by iron gates and railings, running level with the foot pavement of the street. Removed from the bustle of the town, which lay higher up, the street was a quiet one, only private houses being in it—no shops. It was, however, one of the principal streets, and the daily mails and other stage-coaches, not yet exploded, ran through it. The house mentioned lay on the right hand, going towards the town, and not far off, behind various intervening houses, rose the towers of the cathedral. This house lay considerably back from the street—on a level with it, at some distance, was a building whose many windows proclaimed it what it was—a manufactory; and at the back of the open-paved yard, lying between the house and the manufactory, was a coach-house and stable—behind all, was a large garden.

Standing at the door of that house, one autumn evening, the red light of the setting sun falling sideways athwart his face, was a gentleman in the prime of life. Some may demur to the expression—for men estimate the stages of age differently—and this gentleman must have seen fifty-five years; but in his fine, unwrinkled, healthy face, his slender, active, upright form, might surely be read the indications that he was yet in his prime. It was the owner of the house and its appendages—the principal of the manufactory, George Arkell.

He was drawing on a pair of black gloves as he stood there, and the narrow crape-band on his hat proclaimed him to be in slight mourning. It was the fashion to remain in mourning longer then than now. Daniel Arkell had been dead twelve months, but the Arkell family had not put away entirely the signs. Suddenly, as Mr. Arkell looked towards the iron gates—both standing wide open—a gentlemanly young man turned in, and came with a quick step across the yard.

There was not much likeness between the father and son, save in the bright dark eyes, and in the expression of the countenance—*that* was the same in both; good, sensitive, benevolent. William was taller than his father, and very handsome, with a look of delicate health on his refined features, and a complexion almost as bright as a girl's. At the same moment that he was crossing the yard, an open carriage, well built and handsome, but drawn by only one horse, was being brought round from the stables. Nearly every afternoon of their lives, Sundays excepted, Mr. and Mrs. Arkell went out for a drive in this carriage, the only one they kept.

"How late you are starting!" exclaimed William to his father.

"Yes; I have been detained. I had to go into the manufactory after tea, and since then Marmaduke Carr called, and he kept me."

"It is hardly worth while going now."

"Yes, it is. Your mother has a headache, and the air will do her good; and we want to call in for a minute on the Palmers."

The carriage had come to a stand-still midway from the stables. There was a small seat behind for the groom, and William saw that it was open; when the groom did not attend them, it remained closed. Never lived there a man of less pretension than George Arkell; and the taking a servant with him for show would never have entered his imagination. They kept but this one man—he was groom, gardener, anything; his state-dress (in which he was attired now) being a long blue coat with brass buttons, drab breeches, and gaiters.

"You are going to take Philip to-night?" observed William.

"Yes; I shall want him to stay with the horse while we go in to the Palmers'. Heath Hall is a goodish step from the road, you know."

"I will tell my mother that the carriage is ready," said William, turning into the house.

But Mr. Arkell put up his finger with a detaining movement.

"Stop a minute, William. Marmaduke Carr's visit this evening had reference to you. He came to complain."

"To complain!—of me?" echoed William Arkell, his tone betraying his surprise. "What have I done to him?"

"At least, it sounded very like a complaint to my ears," resumed the elder man; "and though he did not say he came purposely to prefer it, but introduced the subject in an incidental sort of manner, I am sure he did come to do it."

"Well, what have I done?" repeated William, an amused expression mingling with the wonder on his face.

"After conversing on other topics, he began speaking of his son, and that Hughes girl. He has come to the determination, he says, of putting a final stop to it, and he requests it as a particular favour that you won't mix yourself up in the matter and will cease from encouraging Robert in it."

"I!" echoed William. "That's good. I don't encourage it."

"Marmaduke Carr says you do encourage it. He tells me you were strolling with the girl and Robert last Sunday afternoon in the fields on the other side the water. I confess I was surprised to hear this, William."

William Arkell raised his honest eyes, so clear and truthful, straight to the face of his father.

"How things may be distorted!" he exclaimed. "Do you remember, sir, my mother asked me, as we left the cathedral after service, to go and inquire whether there was any change for the better in Mrs. Pembroke?"

"I remember it quite well."

"Well, I went. Coming back, I chose the field way, and I had no sooner got into the first field, than I overtook Robert Carr and Martha Ann Hughes. I walked with him through the fields until we came to the bridge, and then I came on alone. Much 'encouragement' there was in that!"

"It was countenancing the thing, at any rate, if not encouraging it," remarked Mr. Arkell.

"There's no harm in it; none at all."

"Do you mean in the affair itself, or in your having so far lent yourself to it?"

"In both," fearlessly answered William. "I wonder who it is that carries these tales to old Carr! We did not meet a soul, that I remember; he must have spies at work."

The remark rather offended Mr. Arkell.

"William," he gravely asked, "do you consider it fitting that Robert Carr should marry that girl?"

William's eyes opened rather wide at the remark.

"He is not likely to do that, sir; he would not make a simpleton of himself."

"Then you consider that he should choose the other alternative, and turn rogue?" rejoined Mr. Arkell, indignation in his suppressed tone. "William, had anyone told me this of you, I would not have believed it."

William Arkell's sensitive cheek flushed red.

"Sir, you are entirely mistaking me; I am sure you are mistaking the affair itself. I believe that the girl is as honest and good a girl as ever lived; and Robert Carr knows she is."

"Then what is it that he proposes to himself in frequenting her society? If he has no end at all in view, why does he do it?"

"I don't think he *has* any end in view. There is really nothing in it—as I believe; we all form acquaintances and drop them. Marmaduke Carr need not put himself in a fever."

"We form acquaintances in our own sphere of life, mind you, young sir; they are the safer ones. I wonder some of the ladies don't give a hint to the two Miss Hughes's to take better care of their sister—she's but a young thing. At any rate, William, do not you mix yourself up in it."

"I have not done it, indeed, sir. As to my walking through the fields with them, when we met, as I tell you, accidentally, I could not help myself, friendly as I am with Robert Carr. There was no harm in it; I should do it again to-morrow under the circumstances; and if old Carr speaks to me, I shall tell him so."

The carriage came up, and no more was said. Philip had halted to do something to the harness. Mrs. Arkell came out.

She was tall, and for her age rather an elegant woman. Her face must once have been delicately beautiful: it was easy to be seen whence William had inherited his refined features; but she was simple in manner as a child.

"What have you been doing, William? Papa was speaking crossly to you, was he not?"

She sometimes used the old fond word to him, "papa." She looked fondly at her son, and spoke in a joking manner. In truth, William gave them little cause to be "cross" with him; he was a good son, in every sense of the term.

"Something a little short of high treason," replied William, laughing, as he helped her in; "Papa can tell you, if he likes."

Mr. Arkell took the reins, Philip got up behind, and they drove out of the yard. William Arkell went indoors, put down a roll of music he had been carrying, and then left the house again.

Turning to his right hand as he quitted the iron gates, he continued his way up the street towards the busier portion of the city. It was not his intention to go so far as that now. He crossed over to a wide, handsome turning on the left, and was speedily close upon the precincts of the cathedral. It was almost within the cathedral precincts that the house of Mrs. Daniel Arkell was situated. Not a large house, as was Mr. Arkell's, but a pretty compact red-brick residence, with a small garden lying before the front windows, which looked out on the Dean's garden and the cathedral elm-trees.

William Arkell opened the door and entered. In a little bit of a room on the left, sat Peter Arkell, deep in some abstruse Greek play. This little room was called Peter's study, for it had been appropriated to the boy and his books ever since he could remember. William looked in, just gave him a nod, and then entered the room on the other side the entrance-passage.

Two ladies sat in this, both of them in mourning: Mrs. Daniel Arkell, a stout, comfortable-looking woman, in widow's weeds; Mildred in a pretty dress of black silk. Peter and William were about the same age; Mildred was two years younger. She was a quiet, sensible, lady-like girl, with a gentle face and the sweetest look possible in her soft brown eyes. She had not been educated fashionably, according to the custom of the present day; she had never been to school, but had received, as we are told of Moses Primrose, a "sort of miscellaneous education at home." She possessed a thorough knowledge of her own language, knew a good deal of Latin, insensibly acquired through being with Peter when he took his earlier lessons in it from his father, read aloud beautifully, wrote an excellent letter, and was a quick arithmetician, made shirts and pastry to perfection, and was well read in our best authors. Not a single accomplishment, save dancing, had she been taught; and yet she was in mind and manners essentially a gentlewoman.

If Mildred was loved by her own mother, so was she by Mrs. George Arkell. Possessing no daughter of her own, Mrs. George seemed to cling to Mildred as one. She cherished within her heart a secret wish that her son might sometime call Mildred his wife. This may be marvelled at—it may seem strange that Mrs. George Arkell should wish to unite her attractive, wealthy, and accomplished son with his portionless and comparatively homely cousin; but *she* knew Mildred's worth and the sunshine of happiness she would bring into any home. Mrs. George Arkell never breathed a hint of this wish: whether wisely or not, perhaps the sequel did not determine.

And what thought Mildred herself? She knew nothing of this secretly-cherished scheme; but if ever there appeared to her a human being gifted with all earthly perfections, it was William Arkell. Perhaps the very contrast he presented to her brother—a contrast brought palpably before her sight every day of her life—enhanced the feeling. Peter was plain in person, so tall as to be ungainly,

thin as a lath, and stooping perpetually, and in manner shy and awkward; whilst William was all ease and freedom; very handsome, though with a look of delicate health on his refined features; danced minuets with Mildred to perfection—relics of the old dancing days, which pleased the two elder ladies; breathed love-songs to her on his flute, painted her pretty landscapes in water-colours, with which she decorated the walls of her own little parlour, drove her out sometimes in his father's carriage—the one you have just seen start on its expedition; passed many an evening reading to her, and quoting Shakespeare; and, in short, made love to her as much as it was possible to make it, not in words. But the misfortune of all this was, that while it told upon *her* heart, and implanted there its never-dying fruit, he only regarded her as a cousin or a sister. Brought up in this familiar intercourse with Mildred, he never gave a thought to any warmer feeling on either side, or suspected that such intimacy might lead to one, still less that it had, even then, led to it on hers. Had he been aware of his mother's hope of uniting them, it is impossible to say whether he would have yielded to it: he had asked himself the question many a time in his later life, *and he could never answer.*

The last remains of the setting sun threw a glow on the room, for the house faced the west. It was a middling-sized, comfortable apartment, with a sort of bright look about it. They rarely sat in any other. There was a drawing-room above, but it was seldom used.

"Well, aunt! well, Mildred! How are you this evening?"

Mildred looked up from her work at the well-known, cheery voice; the soft colour had already mantled in her cheek at the well-known step. William took a book from his pocket, wrapped in paper.

"I got it for you this afternoon, Mildred. Mind and don't spoil your eyes over it: its print is curiously small."

She looked at him with a smile amidst her glow of blushing thanks; she always smiled when he gave her the same caution. Her sight was remarkably strong—William's, on the contrary, was not so, and he was already obliged to use glasses when trying fresh pieces of music.

"William, my dear," began Mrs. Daniel, "I have a favour to ask your father. Will you carry it to him for me?"

"It's granted already," returned William, with the free confidence of an indulged son. "What is it?"

"I want to get over to see those children, the Carrs. Poor Mrs. John, when she was dying, asked me if I would go over now and then, and I feel as if I were neglecting the promise, for it is full six months since I was there. The coaches start so early in the morning, and I thought, if your father would let me have the carriage for the day, and Philip to drive me; Mildred can sit in the back seat—"

"I'll drive you, aunt," interrupted William. "Fix your own day, and we'll go."

But Mildred had looked up, a vivid blush of annoyance on her cheek.

"I do not care to go, mamma; I'd rather not go to Squire Carr's."

"You be quiet, Mildred," said William. "You are not going to see the squire, you are going to see the squire's grandchildren. Talking about the Carrs, aunt, I have just been undergoing a lecture on their score."

"On the score of the Carrs?"

"It's true. I happened on Sunday to be crossing the opposite fields, on my way from Mrs. Pembroke's, and came upon Robert Carr and Miss Martha Ann Hughes, and walked with them to the bridge. Somebody carried the news to old Marmaduke, and he came down this evening, all flurry and fire, to my father, complaining that I was 'encouraging' the thing. Such nonsense! He need not be afraid that there's any harm in it."

Mrs. Dan Arkell gave her head a shake, as if she were not so sure upon the latter point as her nephew. Prudent age—impulsive youth: how widely different do they judge of things! William was turning to the door.

"You are not going?" said Mrs. Dan, and Mildred looked up from her work, a yearning wistfulness in her eye.

"I must, this evening; I asked young Monk to come in and bring his violin, and he'll be waiting for me, if I don't mind. Good-bye, Aunt Dan; pleasant dreams to you, Mildred!"

But as William went out, he opened the door of Peter's study, and stood there gossiping at least twenty minutes. He might have stood longer, but for the sight of two gentlemen who were passing along the road arm-in-arm, and he rushed out impulsively, forgetting to say good-evening to Peter.

CHAPTER II. THE MISS HUGHES'S HOME

Marmaduke Carr, of whom mention has been made, was one of the Westerbury manufacturers—a widower, and a wealthy man. He had only one son living—Robert; two other children had died in infancy. Robert Carr, about thirty years of age now, was not renowned for his steadiness of conduct; indeed, he had been a sad spendthrift, and innumerable unpleasant scenes had resulted therefrom between him and his father. It could not be said that his heart was bad; but his head was certainly light. Half the town declared that Robert Carr had no real evil in him; that his faults were but the result of youth and carelessness; that he would make a worthy man yet. The other half prophesied that he would be safe to come to a bad ending, like wicked Harry in the spelling-book. One of his escapades Mr. Carr was particularly sore upon. After a violent quarrel between them—for each possessed a temper of his own—Robert had started off clandestinely; that is, without saying a word to anyone. At the end of a month he returned, and bills to the amount of something like a hundred pounds came in to his father. Mr. Robert had been seeing life in London.

In one sense of the word, the fault was Mr. Carr's. There cannot be a greater mistake than to bring up a son to idleness, and this had been the case with Robert Carr. He would settle to nothing, and his father had virtually winked at it. Ostensibly, Robert had entered the manufactory; but he would not attend to the business: he said he hated it. One day there, and the other five days away. Idling his hours with his friends in the town; over at his uncle's, Squire Carr's, shooting, fishing, hunting; going somewhere out by the morning coach, and in again; anything, in fact, to avoid work and kill time. *This* should have been checked in the onset; it was not, and when Mr. Carr awoke to the consequences of his indulgent supineness, the habits had grown to a height that refused control. "Let him take his pleasure a bit," Mr. Carr had said to his own heart at first, "youth's never the worse for a little roaming before settling down. I have made plenty of money, and there's only Bob to inherit it." Dangerous doctrine; mistaken conclusions: and Mr. Carr lived to find them so.

Squire Carr was his elder brother. He was several years older than Marmaduke. He possessed a small property, and farmed it himself, and was consequently called "Squire" Carr—as many of those small landed proprietors were called by their neighbours in the days now passing away. Squire Carr, a widower of many years, had one son only—John. This John had made a marriage almost in his boyhood, and had three children born to him—Valentine, Benjamin, and Emma, and then his wife died. Next he married a second wife, and after some years she died, leaving several young children. They all lived with the squire, but the three elder children were now nearly grown up. It was to this house, and to see these younger children, that Mrs. Dan Arkell purposed going, if she could borrow Mr. Arkell's carriage. They lived about eight miles off, near to Eckford, a market town. By the coach road, indeed, it was considerably more.

Squire Carr and his brother were not very intimate. The squire would ride into Westerbury on the market day, or drive in with his son in the dogcart, but not once in three months did they call at Marmaduke's. There was no similarity between them; there was as little cordiality. The squire was of a grasping, mean, petty nature, and so was his son after him. Marmaduke was open-handed and liberal, despising meanness above every earthly failing.

Robert Carr had plunged into other costly escapades since that first one of the impromptu sojourn in London, and his father's patience was becoming exhausted. Latterly he, Robert, had struck up an acquaintance with a young girl, Martha Ann Hughes; and there is no doubt that this vexed Mr. Carr more than any previous aggression had done. The Carrs, in their way, were proud. They were really of good family, and in the past generation had been of some account. A horrible fear had taken

hold of Mr. Carr, that Robert, in his infatuation, might be mad enough to marry this girl, and he would have deemed it the very worst calamity that could fall upon his life.

For Robert was seen with this girl in public, and the girl and her family were, in their station, respectable people; and the other evening, when Mr. Carr had spoken out his mind in rather broad terms, Robert had flown in a passion, and answered that he'd "shoot himself rather than hurt a hair of her head." The fear that he might marry her entered then and there into Mr. Carr's head; and it grew into a torment.

The two gentlemen, passing Mrs. Dan Arkell's house as William flew out, were Robert Carr and a young clergyman with whom he was intimate, the Reverend John Bell. Mr. Bell had had escapades of his own, and that probably caused him to tolerate, or to see no harm in, Robert Carr's. Certain it is they were firm, almost inseparable friends; and rumour went that Mr. Bell was upon visiting terms at Miss Hughes's house, introduced to it by Robert. The Reverend John Bell had had his first year's curacy in Westerbury; he was now in priest's orders, hoping for employment, and, meanwhile, helping occasionally in the services at a church called St. James-the-Less, whose incumbent, one of the minor canons, had fits of gout.

William joined them. He did not say anything to Robert Carr then, in the presence of Mr. Bell; but he did intend, the first opportunity, to recommend him to drop the affair as profitless in every way, and one there seemed to be trouble over. They walked together to the end of the old cathedral outer wall, and there separated. William turned to the left, which would lead him to his home; while Mr. Bell passed through a heavy stone archway on the right, and was then within the precincts of the cathedral, in a large open space, surrounded by the prebendal and other houses; the deanery, the cloisters, and the huge college schoolroom being on one side. This was the back of the cathedral; it rose towering there behind the cloisters. Mr. Bell made straight for the residence of the incumbent of St. James-the-Less, the Reverend Mr. Elwin—a little old-fashioned house, with no windows to speak of, on the side opposite the deanery.

Robert Carr had turned neither to the right nor the left, but continued his way straight on. Passing an old building called the Palmery—which belonged, as may be said, to the cathedral—he turned into a by-street, and in three or four minutes was at the end of the houses on that side the town. Before him, at some little distance, in the midst of its churchyard, stood the church of St. James-the-Less, surrounded by the open country. The only house near it, a poor little dwelling, was inhabited by the clerk. That is, it had been inhabited by him; but the man was now dead, and a hot dispute was raging in the parish whether a successor should be appointed to him or not. Meanwhile, the widow benefited, for she was allowed to continue in the house until the question should be settled.

Robert Carr, however, had no intention of going as far as the church. He stopped at the last house but one in the street—a small, but very neat dwelling, with two brass plates on the door. You may read them. "Mr. Edward Hughes, Builder," was on one; "The Misses Hughes, Dressmakers," was on the other.

Yes, this was the house inhabited by the young person who was so upsetting the equanimity of Mr. Carr. Edward Hughes was a builder, in business for himself in a small way, and his two elder sisters were the dressmakers—worthy people enough all, and of good report, but certainly not the class from which it might be supposed Robert Carr would take a wife.

Two gaunt, ungainly women were these two elder Miss Hughes's, with wide mouths and standing-out teeth. The eldest, Sophia, was the manager and mistress of the home, and a clever one too, and a shrewd woman; the second, Mary, not in the least clever or shrewd, confined her attention wholly to her business, and went out to work by day at ladies' houses, and sat up half the night working after she got home.

She had been out on this day, but had returned, by some mutual arrangement with her patrons, earlier than usual; for it was a busy time with them at home, and the house was full of work. They were at work at a silk gown now; both sisters bending their heads over it, and stitching away as fast as

they could stitch. The parlour faced the street, and some one else was seated at the window, peeping out, between the staves of the Venetian blind.

This was Martha Ann, a young girl of twenty, pretty, modest, and delicate looking; so entirely different was she in person from her sisters, that people might have suspected the relationship. Perhaps it was from the great contrast she presented to themselves that the Miss Hughes's had reared her in a superior manner. How they had loved the pretty little child, so many years younger than themselves, they alone knew. They had sent her to school, working hard to keep her there; and when they brought her home it was, to use their own phrase, "to be a lady"—not to work. The plan was not a wise one, and they might yet live to learn it.

"I wish to goodness you could have put Mrs. Dewsbury off for to-morrow, Mary!" exclaimed the elder sister.

"But I couldn't," replied Mary. "The lady's-maid said I must go to-morrow, whether or not. In two days Mrs. Dewsbury starts on her visit."

"Well, all I know is, we shall never get these dresses home in time."

"I must sit up to-night—that's all," said Mary Hughes, with equanimity.

"I must sit up, too, for the matter of that," rejoined the elder sister. "The worst is, after *no* bed, one is so languid the next day; one can't get through half the work."

Martha Ann rose from her seat, and came to the table.

"I wish you would let me try to help you, Sophia. I'm sure I could do seams, and such-like straightforward work."

"You'd pucker them, child. No; we are not going to let your eyes be tried over close sewing."

"I'll tell you what you can do, Martha Ann," said the younger of the two. "You can go in the kitchen, and make me a cup of coffee. I feel dead tired, and it will waken me up."

"There now, Mary!" cried the young girl. "I knew you were not in bed last night, and you are talking of sitting up this! I shall tell Edward."

"Yes, I was in bed. I went to bed at three, and slept till six. Go and make the coffee, child."

Martha Ann quitted the room. Mary Hughes watched the door close, and then turned to her sister, and began to speak eagerly, dropping her voice to a half whisper.

"I say, Sophia, I met Mrs. Pycroft to-day, and she began upon me like anything. What do you think she said?"

"How do I know what she said?" returned Miss Sophia, indifferently, and speaking with her mouth full of pins, for she was deep in the intricacies of fitting one pattern to another. "Where did you meet her?"

"Just by the market-house. It was at dinner-time. I had run out for some more wadding, for me and the lady's-maid found we had made a miscalculation, and hadn't got enough to complete the cloak, and I met her as I was running back again. She never said, 'How be you?' or 'How bain't you?' but she begins upon me all sharp—'What be you doing with Martha Ann?' It took me so aback that for a moment I couldn't answer her, and she didn't give time for it, either. 'Is young Mr. Carr going to marry her?' she goes on. So of course I said he wasn't going to marry her that I knew of; and then—"

"And more idiot you for saying anything of the sort!" indignantly interrupted Sophia Hughes, dropping all the pins in a heap out of her mouth that she might speak freely. "It's no business of Mother Pycroft's, or of anybody else's."

The meeker younger sister—and as a very reed had she always been in the strong hands of the elder—paused for an instant, and then spoke deprecatingly.

"But Mr. Robert Carr is *not* going to marry her that we know of, Sophia. Where was the harm of my saying the truth?"

"A great deal of harm in saying it to that gabbling, interfering Mother Pycroft. She has wanted to put her nose into everything all these years and years since poor mother died. What do you say?"

proceeded Miss Sophia, drowning her sister's feeble attempt to speak. "A good heart—been kind to us?' *That* doesn't compensate for the worry she has been. She's a mischief-making old cat."

"She went on like anything to-day," resumed Mary Hughes, when she thought she might venture to speak again; "saying that young Mr. Carr ought not to come to the house unless he came all open and honourable, and had got a marriage-ring at his fingers' ends; and if we didn't mind, we should have Martha Ann a town's talk."

Sophia Hughes flung down her work, her eyes ablaze with anger.

"If you were not my sister, and the poorest, weakest mortal that ever stepped, I'd strike you for daring to repeat such words to me! A town's talk! Martha Ann!"

"Well, Sophia, you need not snap me up so," was the deprecating answer. "She says that folks are talking already of you and me, blaming us for allowing the acquaintance with young Mr. Carr. And I think they are," candidly added the young woman.

"Where's the harm? Martha Ann is as good as Robert Carr any day."

"But if people don't think so? If his folks don't think so? All the Carrs are as proud as Lucifer."

"And a fine lot Robert Carr has got to be proud of!" retorted Sophia. "Look at the scrapes he has been in, and the money he has spent! A good, wholesome, respectable attachment might be the salvation of him."

"Perhaps so. But then—but then—I wish you'd not be cross with me, Sophia—there'd be more chance of it if the young lady were in his own condition of life. Sophia, we are naturally fond of Martha Ann, and think there's nobody like her—and there's not, for the matter of that; but we can't expect other people to think so. I wouldn't let Martha Ann be spoken of disparagingly in the town for the world. I'd lay my life down first."

Sophia Hughes had taken up her work again. She put in a few pins in silence. Her anger was subsiding.

"*I'll* take care of Martha Ann. The town knows me, I hope, and knows that it might trust me. If I saw so much as the faintest look of disrespect offered by Robert Carr to Martha Ann, I should tell him he must drop the acquaintance. Until I do, he's free to come here. And the next time I come across old Mother Pycroft she'll hear the length of my tongue."

Mary Hughes dared say no more. But in the days to come, when the blight of scandal had tarnished the fair name of her young sister, she was wont to whisper, with many tears, that she had warned Sophia what might be the ending, and had not been listened to.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Sophia, as the form of some one outside darkened the window.

And once more putting down her work, but not in anger this time, she went to open the front door, at which Robert Carr was knocking.

CHAPTER III.

THE ADVENT OF CHARLOTTE TRAVICE

Mrs. George Arkell sat near her breakfast-table, deeply intent on a letter recently delivered. The apartment was a rather spacious one, handsomely fitted up. It was the general sitting-room of the family; the fine drawing-room on the other side of the hall being very much kept, as must be confessed, for state occasions. A comfortable room, this; its walls hung with paintings in water-colours, many of them William's doings, and its pleasant window looking across the wide yard, to the iron railings and the street beyond it. The room was as yet in the shade, for it faced due south; but the street yonder lay basking in the bright sun of the September morning; and Mrs. Arkell looked through the open window, and felt almost glad at the excuse the letter afforded her for going abroad in it.

Letters were not then hourly matters, as they are now; no, nor daily ones. Perhaps a quiet country lady did not receive a dozen in a year: certainly Mrs. Arkell did not, and she lingered on, looking at the one in her hand, long after her husband and son had quitted the breakfast-table for the manufactory.

"It is curious the child should write to me," was her final comment, and the words were spoken aloud. "I must carry it to Mrs. Dan, and talk it over with her."

She rang the bell for the breakfast things to be removed, and presently proceeded to the kitchen to consult with the cook about dinner—for consulting with the cook, in those staid, old-fashioned households, was far more the custom than the present "orders." That over, Mrs. Arkell attired herself, and went out to Mrs. Daniel Arkell's. Mrs. Dan was surprised to see her so early, and laid her spectacles inside the Bible she was reading, to mark the place.

"Betty," began Mrs. Arkell, addressing her sister-in-law by the abbreviation bestowed on her at her baptism, "you remember the Travices, who left here some years ago to make their fortune, as they said, in London?"

"To be sure," replied Mrs. Dan.

"Well, I fear they can't have made much. Here's a letter comes this morning from their eldest girl. It's very odd that she should write to me. A pretty little thing she was, of about eight or ten, I remember, when they left Westerbury."

"What does she write about?" interrupted Mrs. Dan. "I'm sure they have been silent enough hitherto. Nobody, so far as I know, has ever heard a word from any of them since they left."

"She writes to me as an old friend of her father's and mother's, she says, to ask if I can interest myself for her with any school down here. I infer, from the wording of the letter, that since their death, the children have not been well off."

"John Travice and his wife are dead, then?"

"So it would seem. She says—'We have had a great deal of anxiety since dear mamma died, the only friend we had left to us.' She must speak of herself and her sister, for there were but those two. Will you read the letter, Betty?"

Mrs. Dan took her spectacles from between the leaves of the Bible, and read the letter, not speaking immediately.

"She signs herself C. Travice," remarked Mrs. George; "but I really forget her name. Whether it was Catherine or Cordelia—"

"It was Charlotte," interposed Mrs. Dan. "We used to call her Lottie."

"The curious thing in the affair is, why she should write to *me*," continued Mrs. George Arkell. "You were so much more intimate with them, that I can only think she has made a mistake in the address, and really meant the letter for you."

A smile flitted over Mrs. Dan's face. "No mistake at all, as I should believe. You are Mrs. Arkell, you know; I am only Mrs. Dan. She must remember quite well that you have weight in the town, and I have none. She knows which of us is most capable of helping her."

"But, Betty, I and George had little or no acquaintance at all with the Travices," rejoined Mrs. Arkell, unconvinced. "We met them two or three times at your house; but I don't think they were ever inside ours. You brought one of the little girls to tea once with Mildred, I recollect: it must have been this eldest one who now writes. You, on the contrary, were intimate with them. Why, did you not stand godmother to one of the little ones?"

"To the youngest," assented Mrs. Dan, "and quite a fuss there was over it. Mrs. Travice wanted her to be named Betty; short, after me; but the captain wouldn't hear of it. He said Betty was old-fashioned—gone quite out of date. If you'll believe me it was not settled when we started for the church; but I decided it there, for when Mr. Elwin took the baby in his arms, and said, 'Name this child,' I spoke up and said, 'Elizabeth.' She grew to be a pretty little thing, too, meek and mild as a lamb; Charlotte had a temper."

"Well, I still retain the opinion that she must have been under the impression she was addressing you. 'I write to you as an old friend of papa and mamma's,' you see, she says. Now that can't in any way apply to me. But I don't urge this as a plea for not accepting the letter," Mrs. George hastened to add; "I'm sure we shall be pleased to do anything we can for her. I have talked the matter over with George, and we think it would be only kind to invite her to come to us for a month or so, while we see what can be done. We shall pay her coach fare down, and any other little matter, so that it will be no expense to her."

"It is exceedingly kind of you," remarked Mrs. Dan Arkell. "And when you write, tell her we will all try and make her visit a pleasant one," she added, in the honest simplicity of her heart. "Mildred will be a companion to her."

"I shall write to-day. The letter is dated Upper Stamford-street: but I'm sure I don't know in what part of London Upper Stamford-street lies," observed Mrs. Arkell, who had never been so far as London in her life, and would as soon have thought of going a journey to Cape Horn. "Where's Mildred?"

"She's in the kitchen, helping Ann with the damson jam. I did say I'd not have any made this year, sugar is so expensive, but Mildred pleaded for it. And what she says is true, that poor Peter comes in tired to death, and relishes a bit of jam with his tea, especially damson jam."

"I fear Peter's heart is not in his occupation, Betty."

Mrs. Dan shook her head. "It has never been that. From the time Peter was first taken to the Cathedral, a little fellow in petticoats, his heart has been set upon sometime being one of its clergy; but that is out of the question now: there's no help for it, you know."

Mildred came in, bright and radiant; she always liked the visits of her aunt George. They told her the news about Miss Travice, and showed her the letter.

"Played together when we were children, I and Charlotte Travice," she said, laughing; "I have nearly forgotten it. I hope she is a nice girl; it will be pleasant to have her down here."

"Mildred, I should like to take you back with me for the day. Will you come? Can you spare her, Betty?"

Mildred glanced at her mother, her lips parting with hope; dutiful and affectionate, she deferred to her mother in all things, never putting forth her own wishes. Mrs. Dan could spare her, and said so. Mildred flew to her chamber, attired herself, and set forth with her aunt through the warm and sunny streets—warm, sunny, bright as her own heart.

Very much to the surprise of Mrs. Arkell, as she turned in at the iron gates, she saw the carriage standing before the door, and the servant Philip in readiness to attend it. "Is your master going out?" she inquired of the man.

"Mr. William is, ma'am."

"Where to, do you know?"

"I think it is only to Mr. Palmer's," returned Philip. "I know Mr. William said we should not be away above an hour."

William appeared in the distance, coming from the manufactory with a fleet step, and a square flat parcel in his hand.

"I am going to Mr. Palmer's to take this," he said to his mother, indicating the parcel as he threw it into the carriage; "it contains some papers that my father promised to get for him as soon as possible to-day. He was going to send Philip alone, but I said I should like the drive. You have just come in time, Mildred; get up."

The soft pink bloom mantled in her face; but she rather drew away from the carriage than approached it. She *never* went out upon William's invitation alone.

"Why not, my dear?" said Mrs. Arkell, "it will do you good. You will be back in time for dinner."

William was looking round all the while, as he waited to help her up, a half laugh upon his face. Mildred's roses deepened, and she stepped in. Philip came round to his young master.

"Am I to go now, sir?"

"Go now? of course; why should you not go? There's the back seat, isn't there?"

Perhaps Philip's doubts did not altogether refer to seats. He threw back the seat, and waited. William took his place by his cousin's side, and drove away, utterly unconscious of *her* feelings or the man's thoughts. Had he not been accustomed to this familiar intercourse with Mildred all his life?

And Mrs. Arkell went indoors and sat down to write her letter to Charlotte Tralice. Westerbury had nearly forgotten these Travices; they were not natives of the place. Captain Tralice—but it should be observed that he had been captain of only a militia regiment—had settled at Westerbury sometime after the conclusion of the war, and his two children were born there. His income was but a slender one, still it was sufficient; but it came into the ex-captain's head one day, that, for the sake of his two little daughters, he ought to make a fortune if he could. Supposing that might be easier of accomplishment in the great metropolis, than in a sober, unspeculative cathedral town, he departed forthwith; but the fortune, as Mrs. Arkell shrewdly surmised, had never been made; and after various vicissitudes—ups and downs, as people phrase them—John Tralice finally departed this life in their lodgings in Upper Stamford-street, and his wife did not long survive him. Of the two daughters, Charlotte had been the best educated; what money there was to spare for such purposes, had been spent upon her; the younger one was made, of necessity, a household drudge.

Charlotte responded at once to Mrs. Arkell's invitation, and within a week of it was travelling down to Westerbury by the day-coach. It arrived in the town at seven o'clock, and rarely varied by a minute. Have you forgotten those old coach days? I have not. Mr. Arkell and his son stood outside the iron gates, Philip waiting in attendance; and as the coach with its four fine horses came up the street, the guard blew his horn about ten times, a signal that it was going to stop to set down a passenger—for Mr. Arkell had himself spoken to the guard, and charged him to take good care of the young lady on her journey. The coachman drew up at the gates, and touched his hat to Mr. Arkell, and the guard leaped down and touched his.

"All right, sir. The young lady's here."

He opened the coach door, and she stepped out, dressed in expensive mourning; a tall, showy, handsome girl, affable in manner, ready of speech; altogether fascinating; just the one—just the one to turn the head and win the heart of a young fellow such as William Arkell. They might have foreseen it even in that first hour.

"Oh, how kind it is of you to have me!" she exclaimed, as she quite fell into Mrs. Arkell's arms in the hall, and burst into tears. "But I thought you had no daughter?" she added, recovering herself and looking at the young lady who stood by Mrs. Arkell.

"It is my niece Mildred, my dear; but she is to me as a daughter. I asked her to come and help welcome you this evening."

"I am sure I shall love you very much!" exclaimed Miss Travice, kissing Mildred five or six times. "What a sweet face you have!"

A sudden shyness came over Mildred. The warm greeting and the words were both new to her. She returned a courteous word of welcome, drew a little apart, and glanced at William. He seemed to have enough to do gazing at the visitor.

Philip was coming in with the luggage. Mrs. Arkell took her hand.

"I will show you your room, Miss Travice; and if—"

"Oh, pray don't call me 'Miss Travice,' or anything so formal," was the young lady's interruption. "Begin with 'Charlotte' at once, or I shall fear you are not glad to see me."

Mrs. Arkell smiled; her young visitor was winning upon her greatly. She led her to a very nice room on the first floor.

"This will be your chamber, my dear; it is over our usual sitting-room. My room and Mr. Arkell's is on the opposite side the corridor, over the drawing-room. You face the street, you see; and across there to the right are the cathedral towers."

"What a charming house you have, Mrs. Arkell! So large and nice."

"It is larger than we require. Let me look at you, my dear, and see what resemblance I can trace. I remember your father and mother."

She held the young lady before her. A very pretty face, certainly—especially now, for Charlotte laughed and blushed.

"Oh, Mrs. Arkell, I am not fit to be seen; I feel as dusty as can be. You cannot think how dusty the roads were; I shall look better to-morrow."

"You have the bright dark eyes and the clear complexion of your father; but I don't see that you are like him in features—yours are prettier. But now, my dear, tell me—in writing to me, did you not think you were writing to Mrs. Daniel Arkell?"

"Mrs. Daniel Arkell! No, I did not. Who is she? I don't remember anything about her."

"But Mrs. Daniel was your mother's friend—far more intimate with her than I was. I am delighted at the mistake, if it was one; for Mrs. Dan might otherwise have gained the pleasure of your visit, instead of me."

"I don't *think* I made a mistake," said Charlotte, more dubiously than she had just spoken; "I used to hear poor mamma speak of the Arkells of Westerbury; and one day lately, in looking over some of her old letters and papers, I found your address. The thought came into my mind at once to write to you, and ask if you could help me to a situation. I believe papa was respected in Westerbury; and it struck me that somebody here might want a teacher, or governess, and engage me for his sake. You know we are of gentle blood, Mrs. Arkell, though we have been so poor of late years."

"I will do anything to help you that I can," was the kind answer. "Have you lost both father and mother?"

"Why yes," returned Charlotte, with a surprised air, as if she had thought all the world knew that. "Papa has been dead several months—twelve, I think, nearly; mamma has been dead five or six."

"And—I suppose—your poor papa did not leave much money?"

"Not a penny," freely answered Charlotte. "He had a few shares in some mining company at the time of his death; they were worth nothing then, but they afterwards went up to what is called a premium, and the brokers sold them for us. They did not realize much, but it was sufficient to keep mamma as long as she lived."

"And what have you done since?"

"Not much," sighed Charlotte; "I had a situation as daily governess; but, oh! it was so uncomfortable. There were five girls, and no discipline, no regularity; it was at a clergyman's, too. They live near to us, in Upper Stamford-street. I am so glad I wrote to you! Betsey did not want me to write; she thought it looked intrusive."

"Betsey!" echoed Mrs. Arkell.

"My sister Elizabeth—we call her Betsey. She is younger than I am."

"Oh yes, to be sure. I wondered you did not speak of her in your letter; Mrs. Daniel Arkell is her godmother. Where is she?"

"At Mrs. Dundyke's."

"Who is Mrs. Dundyke?"

"She keeps the house where we live, in Stamford-street. She is not a lady, you know; a worthy sort of person, and all that, but quite an inferior woman. Not but that she was always kind to us; she was very kind and attentive to mamma in her last illness. I can't bear her," candidly continued the young lady, "and she can't bear me; but she likes Betsey, and has asked her to stop there, free of cost, for a little while. Her daughter died and left two little children, and Betsey is to make herself useful with them."

"But why did you not mention Betsey? why did you not bring her?" cried Mrs. Arkell, feeling vexed at the omission. "She would have been as welcome to us as you are, my dear."

Miss Charlotte Travice shook back her flowing hair, and there was a little curl of contempt on her pretty nose. "You are very kind, Mrs. Arkell, but Betsey is better where she is. I could not think of taking her out with me."

"Why so?" asked Mrs. Arkell, rather surprised.

"Oh, you'd not say, why so, if you saw her. She is quite a plain, homely sort of young person; she has not been educated for anything else. Nobody would believe we were sisters; and Betsey knows that, and is humble accordingly. Of course some one had to wait upon mamma and me, for lodging-house servants are the most unpleasant things upon earth, and there was only Betsey."

Mrs. Arkell went downstairs, leaving her young guest to follow when she was ready. Mrs. Arkell did not understand the logic of the last admissions, and certainly did not admire the spirit in which they appeared to be spoken.

The hours for meals were early at Mr. Arkell's; dinner at one, tea at five; but the tea had this evening been put off, in politeness to Miss Travice. She came down, a fashionable-looking young lady, in a thin black dress of some sort of gauze, with innumerable rucheings and quillings of crape upon it. Certainly her attire—as they found when the days went on—betrayed little symptom of a straitened purse.

She took her place at the tea-table, all smiles and sweetness; she glanced shyly at William; she captivated Mr. Arkell's heart; she caused Mrs. Arkell completely to forget the few words concerning Betsey which had so jarred upon her ear; and before that tea-drinking was over, they were all ready to fall in love with her. All, save one.

Then she went round the room, a candle in her hand, and looked at the pictures; she freely said which of them she liked best; she sat down to the piano, unasked, and played a short, striking piece from memory. They asked her if she could sing; she answered by breaking into the charming old song "Robin Adair;" it was one of William Arkell's favourites, and he stood by enraptured, half bewildered with this pleasant inroad on their quiet routine of existence.

"You play, I am sure," she suddenly said to him.

He had no wish to deny it, and took his flute from its case. He was a finished player. It is an instrument very nearly forgotten now, but it never would have been forgotten had its players managed it as did William Arkell. They began trying duets together, and the evening passed insensibly. William loved music passionately, and could hardly tear himself away from it to run with Mildred home.

"Well, Mildred, and how do you like her?" was Mrs. Dan's first question.

"I—I can hardly tell," was the hesitating answer.

"Not tell!" repeated Mrs. Dan; "you have surely found out whether she is pleasant or disagreeable?"

"She is very pretty, and her manners are perfectly charming. But—still—"

"Still, what?" said Mrs. Dan, wondering.

"Well, mother—but you know I never like to speak ill of anyone—there is something in her that strikes me as not being *true*."

CHAPTER IV. ROBERT CARR'S REQUEST

The time went on. The month for which Charlotte Travice had been invited had lengthened itself into nearly three, and December had come in.

Mrs. Dan Arkell (wholly despising Mildred's acknowledged impression of the new visitor, and treating her to a sharp lecture for entertaining it) had made a call on Miss Travice the following morning, and offered Mildred's services as a companion to her. But in a very short time Mildred found she was not wanted. William was preferred. *He* was the young lady's companion, and nothing loth so to be; and his visits to Mildred's house, formerly so frequent, became rare almost as those of angels. It was Charlotte Travice now. She went out with him in the carriage; she was his partner in the dance; and the breathings on the flute grew into strains of love. Worse than all to Mildred—more hard to bear—William would laugh at the satire the London lady was pleased to tilt at her. It is true Mildred had no great pretension to beauty; not half as much as Charlotte; but William had found it enough before. In figure and manners Mildred was essentially a lady; and her face, with its soft brown eyes and its sweet expression, was not an unattractive one. It cannot be denied that a sore feeling arose in Mildred's heart, though not yet did she guess at the full calamity looming for that heart in the distance. She saw at present only the temporary annoyance; that this gaudy, handsome, off-hand stranger had come to ridicule, rival, and for the time supplant her. But she thought, then, it was but for the time; and she somewhat ungraciously longed for the day when the young lady should wing her flight back to London.

That expression we sometimes treat a young child to, when a second comes to supplant it, that "its nose is put out of joint," might decidedly have been now applied to Mildred. Charlotte Travice took her place in all ways. In the winter evening visiting—staid, old-fashioned, respectable visiting, which met at six o'clock and separated at midnight—Mildred was accustomed to accompany her uncle and aunt. Mrs. Dan Arkell's visiting days were over; Peter, buried in his books, had never had any; and it had become quite a regular thing for Mildred to go with Mr. and Mrs. Arkell and William. They always drove round and called for her, leaving her at home on their return; and Mildred was generally indebted to her aunt for her pretty evening dresses—that lady putting forth as an excuse the plea that she should dislike to take out anyone ill-dressed. It was all altered now. Flies—as everybody knows—will hold but four, and there was no longer room for Mildred: Miss Travice occupied her place. Once or twice, when the winter parties were commencing, the fly came round as usual, and William walked; but Mildred, exceedingly tenacious of anything like intrusion, wholly declined this for the future, and refused the invitations, or went on foot, well cloaked, and escorted by Peter. William remonstrated, telling Mildred she was growing obstinate. Mildred answered that she would go out with them again when their visitor had returned to London.

But the visitor seemed in no hurry to return. She made a faint sort of pleading speech one day, that really she ought to go back for Christmas; she was sure Mr. and Mrs. Arkell must be tired of her: just one of those little pseudo moves to go, which, in politeness, cannot be accepted. Neither was it by Mr. and Mrs. Arkell: had the young lady remained with them a twelvemonth, in their proud and stately courtesy they would have pressed her to stay on longer. Mrs. Arkell had once or twice spoken of the primary object of her coming—the looking out for some desirable situation for her; but Miss Travice appeared to have changed her mind. She thought now she should not like to be in a country school, she said; but would get something in London on her return.

Mildred, naturally clear-sighted, felt convinced that Miss Travice was playing a part; that she was incessantly *labouring* to ingratiate herself into the good opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Arkell, and

especially into that of William. "Oh, that they could see her as she really is!" thought Mildred; "false and false!" And Miss Travice took out her recreation tilting lance-shafts at Mildred.

"How is it you never learned music, Miss Arkell?" she was pleased to inquire one day, as she finished a brilliant piece, and gave herself a whirl round on the music-stool to speak.

"I can't tell," replied Mildred; "I did not learn it."

"Neither did you learn drawing?"

"No."

"Well, that's odd, isn't it? Mr. and Mrs. Dan Arkell must have been rather neglectful of you."

"I suppose they thought I should do as well without accomplishments as with them," was the composed answer. "To tell you the truth, Miss Travice, I dare say I shall."

"But everybody is accomplished now—at least, ladies are. I was surprised, I must confess, to find William Arkell a proficient in such things, for men rarely learn them. I wonder they did not have you taught music, if only to play with him. He has to put up with a stranger, you see—poor me."

Mildred's cheek burnt. "I have *listened* to him," she said; "hitherto he has found that sort of help enough, and liked it."

"He is very attractive," resumed Charlotte, throwing her bright eyes full at Mildred, a saucy expression in their depths; "don't you find him so?"

"I think you do," was Mildred's quiet answer.

"Of course I do. Haven't I just said it? And so, I dare say, do a great many others. Yesterday evening—by the way, you ought to have been here yesterday evening."

"Why ought I?"

"Mrs. Arkell meant to send for you, and told William to go; I heard her. He forgot it; and then it grew too late."

Mildred did not raise her eyes from her work. She was hemming a shirt-frill of curiously fine cambric—Mr. Arkell, behind the taste of his day, wore shirt-frills still. Mrs. Arkell rarely did any plain sewing herself; what her maid-servants did not do, was consigned to Mildred.

"Do you *like* work?" inquired Miss Charlotte, watching her nimble fingers, and quitting abruptly the former subject.

"Very much indeed."

Charlotte shrugged her shoulders with a spice of contempt. "I hate it; I once tried to make a tray-cloth, but it came out a bag; and mamma never gave me anything more."

"Who did the sewing at your house?"

"Betsey, of course. Mamma also used to do some, and groan over it like anything. I think ladies never ought—"

What Charlotte Travice was about to say ladies ought not to do was interrupted by the entrance of William. He had not been indoors since the early dinner, and looked pleased to see Mildred, who had come by invitation to spend a long afternoon.

"Which of you will go out with me?" he asked, somewhat abruptly; and his mother came into the room as he was speaking.

"Out where?" she asked.

"My father has a little matter of business at Purford to-day, and is sending me to transact it. It is only a message, and won't take me two minutes to deliver; but it is a private one, and must be spoken either by himself or me. I said I'd go if Charlotte would accompany me," he added, in his half-laughing, half-independent manner. "I did not know Mildred was here."

"And you come in and ask which of them will go," said Mrs. Arkell. "I think it must be Mildred. Charlotte, my dear, you will not feel offended if I say it is her turn? I like to be just and fair. It is you who have had all the drives lately; Mildred has had none."

Charlotte did not answer. Mildred felt that it *was* her turn, and involuntarily glanced at William; but he said not a word to second his mother's wish. The sensitive blood flew to her face, and she

spoke, she hardly knew what—something to the effect that she would not deprive Miss Travice of the drive. William spoke then.

"But if you would like to go, Mildred? It *is* a long time since you went out, now I come to think of it."

Now I come to think of it! Oh, how the admission of indifference chilled her heart!

"Not this afternoon, thank you," she said, with decision. "I will go with you another opportunity."

"Then, Charlotte, you must make haste, or we shall not be home by dark," he said. "Philip is bringing the carriage round."

Mildred stood at the window and watched the departure, hating herself all the while for standing there; but there was fascination in the sight, in the midst of its pain. Would she win the prize, this new stranger? Mildred shivered outwardly and inwardly as the question crossed her mind.

She saw them drive away—Charlotte in her new violet bonnet, with its inward trimming of pretty pink ribbons, her prettier face raised to his—William bending down and speaking animatedly—sober old Philip, who had been in the family ten years, behind them. Purford was a little place, about five miles off, on the road to Eckford; and they might be back by dusk, if they chose. It was not much past three now, and the winter afternoon was fine.

Would she win him? Mildred returned to her seat, and worked on at the cambric frill, the question running riot in her brain. A conviction within her—a prevision, if you will—whispered that it would be a marriage particularly distasteful to Mr. and Mrs. Arkell. *They* did not yet dream of it, and would have been thankful to have their eyes opened to the danger. Mildred knew this; she saw it as clearly as though she had read it in a book; but she was too honourable to breathe it to them.

When the frill was finished, she folded it up, and told her aunt she would take her departure; Peter had talked of going out after banking hours with a friend, and her mother, who was not well, would be alone. Mrs. Arkell made but a faint resistance to this: Mildred came and went pretty much as she liked.

Peter, however, was at home when she got there, sitting over the fire in the dusk, in a thoughtful mood. On two afternoons in the week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, the bank closed at four; this was Thursday, and Peter had come straight home. Mildred took her seat at the table, against five o'clock should strike, the signal for their young maid-servant to bring the tea-tray in. It was quite dark outside, and the room was only lighted by the fire.

"What are you thinking of, Peter?" Mrs. Dan presently broke the silence by asking.

Peter took his chin from his hand where it had been resting, and his eyes from the fire, and turned his head to his mother. "I was thinking of a proposal Colonel Dewsbury made to me to-day," he answered; "deliberating upon it, in fact, and I think I have decided."

This was something like Greek to Mrs. Dan; even Mildred was sufficiently aroused from her thoughts to turn to him in surprise.

"The colonel wants me to go to his house in an evening, mother, and read the classics with his eldest son."

"Peter!"

"For about three hours, he says, from six till nine. He will give me a guinea a week."

"But only think how you slave and fag all day at that bank," said Mrs. Dan, who in her ailing old age thought work (as did Charlotte Travice) the greatest evil of life.

"And only think what a many additional comforts a guinea a week could purchase for you, mother," cried Peter in his affection; "our house would be set up in riches then."

"Peter, my dear," she gravely said, "I do not suppose I shall be here very long; and for comforts, I have as many as I require."

"Well, put it down to my own score, if you like," said Peter, with as much of a smile as he ever attempted; "I shall find the guinea useful."

"But if you thus dispose of your evenings, what time should you have for your books?" resumed Mrs. Arkell.

"I'll make that; I get up early, you know; and in one sense of the word, I shall be at my books all these three hours."

"How came Colonel Dewsbury to propose it to you?"

"I don't know. I met him as I was returning to the bank after dinner, and he began saying he was trying to find some one who would come in and read with Arthur. Presently he said, 'I wish you would come yourself, Mr. Arkell.' And after a little more talk I told him I would consider of it."

"I thought Arthur Dewsbury was to go into the army," remarked Mrs. Dan, not yet reconciled to the thing. "Soldiers don't want to be so very proficient in the classics."

"Not Arthur; he is intended for the church: the second son will be brought up for the army. Mildred, what do you say—should you take it if you were me?"

"I should," replied Mildred; "it appears to me to be a wonderfully easy way of earning money. But it is for your own decision entirely, Peter: do not let my opinion sway you."

"I think I had decided before I hung up my top-coat and hat on the peg at the bank," answered Peter. "Yes, I shall take it; I can but resign it later, you know, mother, if I find it doesn't work well."

The cathedral clock, so close to them, was chiming the quarters, and the first stroke of five boomed out; Peter rose and stretched himself with a relieved air. "It's always a weight off my mind when I get any knotty point decided," quoth he, rather simply; and in truth Peter was not good for much, apart from his Latin and Greek.

At the same moment, when that melodious college clock was striking, William Arkell was driving in at his own gates. He might have made more haste had he so chosen; and Mr. Arkell had charged him to be home "before dark;" but William had not hurried himself.

He was driving in quickly now, and stopped before the house-door. Philip left his seat and went to the horse's head, and William assisted out Miss Travice.

"Have you enjoyed your drive, Charlotte?" he whispered, retaining her hand in his, longer than he need have done; and there was a tenderness in his tone that might have told a tale, had anyone been there to read it.

"Oh! very, very much," she answered, in the soft, sweet, earnest voice she had grown to use when alone with William. "Stolen pleasures are always sweetest."

"Stolen pleasures?"

"*This* was a stolen one. You know I usurped the place of your cousin Mildred. She ought to have come."

"No such thing, Charlotte. She can go anytime."

"I felt quite sorry for her. I am apt to think those poor seamstresses require so much air. They—"

"Those what?" cried out William—and Miss Charlotte Travice immediately knew by the tone, that she had ventured on untenable ground. "Are you speaking of my cousin Mildred?"

"She is so kind and good; hemming cambric frills, and stitching wristbands! I wish I could do it. I was always the most wretched little dunce at plain sewing, and could never be taught it. My sister on the contrary—"

"I want to speak a word to you, Arkell."

William turned hastily, wondering who was at his elbow. At that moment the hall-door was thrown open, and the rays of the lamp shone forth, revealing the features of Robert Carr. Charlotte ran indoors, vouchsafing no greeting. She had taken a dislike to Robert Carr. He was free of speech, and the last time he and the young lady met, he had said something in her ear for which she would be certain to hate him for his life—"How was the angling going on? Had Bill Arkell bit yet?"

"Hallo!" exclaimed William as he recognised him. "I thought you were in London! I heard you went up on Tuesday night!"

"And came down last night. I want you to do me a favour, Arkell."

He put his arm within William's as he spoke, and began pacing the yard. William thought his manner unusual. There seemed a nervous restlessness about it—if he could have fancied such a thing of Robert Carr. William waited for him to speak.

"I have had an awful row with the governor to-day," he began at length. "I don't intend to stand it much longer."

"What about?"

"Oh! the old story—my extravagance. He was angry at my running up to town for a day, and called it waste of money and waste of time. So unreasonable of him, you know. Had I stayed a month, he'd not have made half the row."

"It does seem like waste, to go so far for only a day," said William, "unless you have business. That is a different thing."

"Well, I had business. I wanted to see a fellow there. You never heard any one make such a row about nothing. I have the greatest mind in the world to shake off the yoke altogether, and start for myself in life."

William could not help laughing. "*You start?*"

"You think I couldn't? If I do, rely upon it I succeed. I'm nearly sick of knocking about. I declare I'd rather sweep a crossing, and get ten shillings a week and keep myself upon it, than I'd continue to have my life bothered out by him. I shall tell him so one of these first fine days if he doesn't let me alone. Why doesn't he!"

"I suppose the fact is you continue to provoke him," remarked William.

"What about?" was the fierce rejoinder.

"Oh! you know, Carr. What I spoke to you of, before—though it is not any business of mine. Why don't you drop it?"

"Because I don't choose," returned Robert Carr, understanding the allusion. "I declare, before Heaven, that there's no wrong in it, and I don't choose to submit myself, abjectly, to the will of others. The thing might have been dropped at first but for the opposition that was raised. So long as fools continue that, I shall go there."

"For the girl's own sake, you should drop it. I presume you can't intend to marry her—"

"Marry her!" scoffingly interrupted Robert Carr.

"Just so. But she is a respectable girl, and—"

"I'd knock any man down that dared to say she wasn't," said Robert, quietly.

"But don't you know that the very fact of your continuing to go there must tend to damage her in public opinion? Edward Hughes must be foolish to allow it."

"Where's the wrong, or harm, of my going there?" demanded Robert, condescending to argue the question. "I like the girl excessively; I like talking to her. She has been as well reared as I have."

"Nonsense," returned William. "You can't separate her from her family; from what she is. I say you ought to drop it."

"What on earth has made you so squeamish all on a sudden? The society of that fine London lady, Miss Charlotte Travice?"

They were passing in a ray of light at the moment, thrown across the yard from one of the carriage lamps. Philip had left the carriage and the lamps outside, and was in the stable with the horse. Robert Carr saw his companion's face light up at the allusion, but William replied, without any symptom of anger—

"I will tell you what, people are beginning to talk of it from one end of the town to the other. I don't think you have any right to bring the scandal upon her. You bring it *needlessly*, as you yourself admit. A girl's good name, once lost, is not easy to regain, although it may be lost unjustly."

"I told you months ago, that there was nothing in it."

"I believe you; I believe you still. But now that the town has taken the matter up, and is passing its opinion upon it, I say that for the young girl's sake you should put a stop to it, and let the acquaintance cease."

"The town may be smothered for all I care—and serve it right!" was Robert Carr's reply. "But look here, Arkell, I didn't come to raise up this discussion, I have no time for it; and you may just take one fact into your note-book—that all you can say, though you talked till doomsday, would not alter my line of conduct by a hair's breadth. I came to ask you a favour."

"What is it?"

"Will you lend me the carriage for an hour or so to-morrow morning? It's to go to Purford."

"To Purford! Why that's where I have just been. I dare say you may have it. I will ask my father."

"But that is just what I don't want you to ask. I have to go there on a little private business of my own, and I don't wish it known that I have gone."

William hesitated. Only son, and indulged son though he was, he had never gone the length of lending out his father's carriage without permission; and he very much disliked the idea of doing so now. Robert Carr did not give him much time for consideration.

"You will be rendering me a service which I shan't forget, Arkell. If Philip will drive me over—"

"Philip! Do you want Philip with you?"

"Philip must go to bring back the carriage; I shan't return until the afternoon. Why, he will be there and home again almost before Mr. Arkell's up. I must go pretty early."

This, the going of Philip, appeared to simplify the matter greatly. To allow Robert Carr or anyone else to take the carriage off for a day without permission was one thing; for Philip to drive him to Purford early in the morning, and be back again directly, was another. "I think you may have it, Carr," he said; "but if my father misses the carriage and Philip—as he is sure to do—and asks where they are—"

"Oh, you may tell him then," interrupted Robert Carr.

"Very well. Shall Philip bring the carriage to your house?"

"No need of that; I'll come here and get up. I'd better speak to Philip myself. Don't stay out any longer in the cold, Arkell. Good night, and thank you."

William went indoors; and Robert Carr sought Philip in the stable to give him his instructions for the morning.

CHAPTER V. THE FLIGHT

In a quiet and remote street of the city was situated the house of Mr. Carr. Robert Carr walked towards it, with a moody look upon his face, after quitting William Arkell—a plain, dull-looking house, as seen from the street, presenting little in aspect beyond a dead wall, for most of the windows looked the other way, or on to the side garden—but a perfect bijou of a house inside, all on a small scale, with stained glass illuminating the hall, and statues and pictures ornamenting the rooms. The fretwork in the hall, and the devices on the windows—bright in colours when the sun shone through them, but otherwise dark and sombre—imparted the idea of a miniature chapel, when seen by a stranger for the first time. Old Mr. Carr had spent much time and money on his house, and was proud of it.

Robert swung himself in at the outer door in the wall, and then in at the hall door, which he shut with a bang; things, in fact, had arrived at a pitch of discomfort between him and his father hardly bearable by the temper of either. Neither would give way—neither would conciliate the other in the smallest degree. The disputes—arising, in the first place, from Robert's extravagance and unsteady habits—had continued for some years now; but during the past two or three months they had increased both in frequency and violence. Robert was idle—Robert spent—Robert did hardly anything that he ought to do, as member of a respectable community; these complaints made the basis of the foundation in all the disputes. But graver sins, in old Mr. Carr's eyes, of some special nature or other, cropped up to the surface from time to time. Latterly, the grievance had been this acquaintance of Robert's with Martha Ann Hughes; and it may really be questioned whether Robert, in his obstinate spirit, did not continue it on purpose to vex his father.

On the Tuesday (this was Thursday, remember) Robert had been, to use his father's expression, "swinging about all day"—meaning that Mr. Robert had passed it out of doors, nobody knew where, only going in to his meals. Their hours were early—as indeed was the general custom at Westbury, and elsewhere, also, in those days—dinner at one o'clock, tea at five. About half-past four, on the Tuesday, Robert had gone in, ordered himself some tea made at once, and something to eat with it, and then went out again, taking a warm travelling rug, and telling the servant to say he was gone to London. And he proceeded to the coach-office, took his seat in the mail, then on the point of starting, and departed.

Mr. Carr came in from the manufactory at five to *his* tea, and received the message—"Mr. Robert had gone to London by the mail." He was very wroth. It was an independent, off-hand mode of action, calculated to displease most fathers; but it was not the first time, by several, that Robert had been guilty of it. "He's gone off to spend that money," cried Mr. Carr, savagely; "and he won't come back until there's not a farthing of it left." Mr. Carr alluded to a hundred pounds which Robert had received not many days previously. A twelvemonth before, an uncle of Mr. Carr's and of Squire Carr's had died, leaving Robert Carr a legacy of a hundred pounds, and the same sum *between* the two sons of Mr. John Carr. This, of course, was productive of a great deal of heart-burning and jealousy in the Squire's family, that Robert should have the most; but it has nothing to do with our history just now. At the expiration of a year from the time of the death, the legacies were paid, and Robert had been in possession of his since the previous Saturday.

"He's gone to spend the money," Mr. Carr repeated. No very far-fetched conclusion; and Mr. Carr got over his wrath, or bottled it up, in the best way he could. He certainly did not expect Robert back again for a month at least; very considerably astonished, therefore, was he, to find Mr. Robert arrive back by the mail that took him, and walk coolly in to breakfast on the Thursday morning, having only stayed a few hours in London. A little light skirmishing took place then—not much.

Robert said he had been to London to see a friend, and, having seen him, came back again; and that was all Mr. Carr could obtain. For a wonder, Robert spent the morning in the manufactory, but not in the presence of his father, who was shut in his private room. At dinner they met again, and before the meal was over the quarrel was renewed. It grew to a serious height. The old housekeeper, who had been in her place ever since the death of Mrs. Carr, years before, grew frightened, and stole to the door with trembling limbs and white lips. The clock struck three before it was over; and, in one sense, it was not over then. Robert burst out of the room in its very midst, an oath upon his lips, and strode into the street. Where he passed the time that afternoon until five o'clock could never be traced. Mr. Carr endeavoured afterwards to ascertain, and could not. Mr. Carr's opinion, to his dying day, was that he passed it at Edward Hughes's house; but Miss Hughes positively denied it, and she was by nature truthful. She stated freely that Robert Carr had called in that afternoon, and was for a few minutes alone with Martha Ann, she herself being upstairs at the time; but he left again directly. At five o'clock, as we have seen, he was with William Arkell, and then he went straight home.

Mr. Carr had nearly finished tea when he got in. The meal was taken in a small, snug room, at the end of the hall—a *round* room, whose windows opened upon the garden in summer, but were closed in now behind their crimson-velvet curtains.

Robert sat down in silence. He looked in the tea-pot, saw that it was nearly empty, and rang the bell to order fresh tea to be made for him. Whether the little assumption of authority (though it was no unusual circumstance) was distasteful to Mr. Carr, and put him further out of temper, cannot be told; one thing is certain, that he—he, the father—took up again the quarrel.

It was not a seemly one. Less loud than it had been at dinner-time, the tones on either side were graver, the anger more real and compressed. It seemed too deep for noise. An hour or so of this unhappy state of things, during which many, many bitter words were said by both, and then Robert rose.

"Remember," he said to his father, in a low, firm tone, "if I am driven from my home and my native place by this conduct of yours, I swear that I will never come back to it."

"And do you hear me swear," retorted Mr. Carr, in the same quiet, concentrated voice of passion, "if you marry that girl, Martha Ann Hughes, not one penny of my money or property shall you ever inherit; and you know that I will keep my word."

"I never said I had any thought of marrying her."

"As you please. Marry her; and I swear that I will leave all I possess away from you and yours. Before Heaven, I will keep my oath!"

And now we must go to the following morning, to the house of Mr. Arkell. These little details may appear trivial to the reader, but they bear their significance, as you will find hereafter; and they are remembered and talked of in Westerbury to this day.

The breakfast hour at Mr. Arkell's was nine o'clock. Some little time previous to it, William was descending from his room, when in passing his father's door he heard himself called to. Mr. Arkell appeared at his door in the process of dressing.

"William, I heard the carriage go out a short while ago. Have you sent it anywhere?"

Just the question that William had anticipated would be put. Being released now from his promise, he told the truth.

"Over to Purford! Why could he not have gone by the coach?"

"I don't know I'm sure," said William; and the same thought had occurred to himself. "I did not like to promise him without speaking to you, hut he made such a favour of it, and—I thought you would excuse it. I fancy he is on worse terms than ever with his father, and feared you might tell him."

"He need not have feared that: what should I tell him for?" was the rejoinder of Mr. Arkell as he retreated within his room.

Now it should have been mentioned that Mary Hughes was engaged to work that day at Mr. Arkell's. It was regarded in the town as a singular coincidence; and, perhaps, what made it more

singular was the fact that Mrs. Arkell's maid, Tring (who had lived in the house ever since William was a baby, and was the only female servant kept besides the cook), had arranged with Mary Hughes that she should go *before* the usual hour, eight o'clock, so as to give a long day. The fact was, Mary Hughes's work this day was for the maids. It was Mrs. Arkell's custom to give them a gown apiece for Christmas, and the two gowns were this day to be cut out and as much done to them as the dressmaker, and Tring at odd moments, could accomplish. Mary Hughes, naturally obliging, and anxious to stand well with the servants in one of her best places, as Mrs. Arkell's was, arrived at half-past seven, and was immediately set to work in what Tring called her pantry—a comfortable little boarded room, a sort of offshoot of the kitchen.

Mr. Arkell spoke again at breakfast of this expedition of Robert Carr's. It wore to him a curious sound—first, that Robert could not have gone by the coach, which left Westerbury about the same hour, and had to pass through Purford on its way to London; and, secondly, why the matter of borrowing the carriage need have been kept from him. William could not enlighten him on either point, and the subject dropped.

Breakfast was over, and Mr. Arkell had gone into the manufactory, when the carriage came back. Philip drove at once to the stables, and William went out.

"Well," said he, "so you are back!"

"Yes, sir."

Philip began to unharness the horse as he spoke, and did not look up. William, who knew the man and his ways well, thought there was something behind to tell.

"You have driven the horse fast, Philip."

"Mr. Carr did, sir; it was he who drove. I never sat in front at all after we got to the three-cornered field. He drove fast, to get on pretty far before the coach came up."

"What coach?" asked William.

"The London coach, sir. He's gone to London in it."

"What! did he take it at Purford?"

"We didn't go to Purford at all, Mr. William. He ain't gone alone, neither."

"Philip, what do you mean?"

"Miss Hughes—the young one—is gone with him."

"No!" exclaimed William.

"It was this way, sir," began the man, disposing himself to relate the narrative consecutively. "I had got the carriage ready and waiting by a few minutes after eight, as he ordered me; but it was close upon half-past before he came, and we started. 'I'll drive, Philip,' says he; so I got in beside him. Just after we had cleared the houses, he pulls up before the three-cornered field, saying he was waiting for a friend, and I saw the little Miss Hughes come scuttering across it—it's a short cut from their house, you know, Mr. William—with a bit of a brown-paper parcel in her hand. 'You'll sit behind, Philip,' he says; and before I'd got over my astonishment, we was bowling along—she in front with him, and me behind. Just on this side Purford he pulled up again, and waited—it was in that hollow of the road near the duck-pond—and in two minutes up came the London coach. It came gently up to us, stopping by degrees; it was expecting him—as I could hear by the guard's talk, a saying he hoped he'd not waited long—and they got into it, and I suppose he's gone to London. Mr. William, I don't think the master will like this?"

William did not like it, either; it was an advantage that Robert Carr had no right to take. Had the girl forgotten herself at last, and gone off with him? Too surely he felt that such must be the case. He saw how it was. They had not chosen to get into the coach at Westerbury, fearing the scandal—fearing, perhaps, prevention; and Robert Carr had made use of this *ruse* to get her away. That there would be enough scandal in Westerbury, as it was, he knew—that Mr. Arkell would be indignant, he also knew; and he himself would come in for a large portion of the blame.

"Philip," he said, awaking from his reverie, "did the girl appear to go willingly?"

"Willingly enough, sir, for the matter of that, for she came up of her own accord—but she was crying sadly."

"Crying, was she?"

"Crying dreadfully all the way across the field as she came up, and along in this carriage, and when she got into the coach. He tried to persuade and soothe her; but it wasn't of any good. She hid her face with her veil as well as she could, that the outside passengers mightn't see her state as she got in; and there was none o' the inside."

William Arkell bit his lip. "Carr had no business to play me such a turn," he said aloud, in his vexation.

"Mr. William, if I had known what he was up to last night, I should just have told the master, in spite of the half-sovereign he gave me."

"Oh, he gave you one, did he?"

"He gave me one last evening, and he gave me another this morning; but, for all that, I should have told, if I'd thought she was to be along of him. I know what the master is, and I know what he'll feel about the business. And the two other Miss Hughes's are industrious, respectable young women, and it's a shabby thing for Mr. Carr to go and do. A fine way they'll be in when they find the young one gone!"

"They can't have known of it, I suppose," observed William, slowly, for a doubt had crossed his mind whether Robert could be taking the young girl away to marry her.

"No, that they don't, sir," impulsively cried the man. "I heard him ask her whether she had got away without being seen; and she said she had, as well as she could speak for her tears."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.