

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

WITH WOLFE IN CANADA:
THE WINNING OF A
CONTINENT

George Henty

**With Wolfe in Canada: The
Winning of a Continent**

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G. A. Henty

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Preface

My Dear Lads,

In the present volume I have endeavoured to give the details of the principal events in a struggle whose importance can hardly be overrated. At its commencement the English occupied a mere patch of land on the eastern seaboard of America, hemmed in on all sides by the French, who occupied not only Canada in the north and Louisiana in the south, but possessed a chain of posts connecting them, so cutting off the English from all access to the vast countries of the west.

On the issues of that struggle depended not only the destiny of Canada, but of the whole of North America and, to a large extent, that of the two mother countries. When the contest began, the chances of France becoming the great colonizing empire of the world were as good as those of England. Not only did she hold far larger territories in America than did England, but she had rich colonies in the West Indies, where the flag of England was at that time hardly represented, and her prospects in India were better than our own. At that time, too, she disputed with us on equal terms the empire of the sea.

The loss of her North American provinces turned the scale. With the monopoly of such a market, the commerce of England increased enormously, and with her commerce her wealth and power of extension, while the power of France was proportionately crippled. It is true that, in time, the North American colonies, with the exception of Canada, broke away from their connection with the old country; but they still remained English, still continued to be the best market for our goods and manufactures.

Never was the short-sightedness of human beings shown more distinctly, than when France wasted her strength and treasure in a sterile contest on the continent of Europe, and permitted, with scarce an effort, her North American colonies to be torn from her.

All the historical details of the war have been drawn from the excellent work entitled *Montcalm and Wolfe*, by Mr. Francis Parkman, and from the detailed history of the Louisbourg and Quebec expeditions, by Major Knox, who served under Generals Amherst and Wolfe.

Yours very sincerely,

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: A Rescue

Most of the towns standing on our seacoast have suffered a radical change in the course of the last century. Railways, and the fashion of summer holiday making, have transformed them altogether, and great towns have sprung up where fishing villages once stood. There are a few places, however, which seem to have been passed by, by the crowd. The number yearly becomes smaller, as the iron roads throw out fresh branches. With the advent of these comes the speculative builder. Rows of terraces and shops are run up, promenades are made, bathing machines and brass bands become familiar objects, and in a few years the original character of the place altogether disappears.

Sidmouth, for a long time, was passed by, by the world of holiday makers. East and west of her, great changes took place, and many far smaller villages became fashionable seaside watering places. The railway, which passed by some twelve miles away, carried its tens of thousands westward, but left few of them for Sidmouth, and anyone who visited the pretty little place, fifteen years back, would have seen it almost as it stood when our story opens a century ago.

There are few places in England with a fairer site. It lies embosomed in the hills, which rise sharply on either side of it, while behind stretches a rich, undulating country, thickly dotted with orchards and snug homesteads, with lanes bright with wildflowers and ferns, with high hedges and trees meeting overhead. The cold breezes, which render so bare of interest the walks round the great majority of our seaside towns, pass harmlessly over the valley of the Sid, where the vegetation is as bright and luxuriant as if the ocean lay leagues away, instead of breaking on the shore within a few feet of the front line of houses.

The cliffs which, on either side, rise from the water's edge, are neither white like those to the east, nor grey as are the rugged bulwarks to the west. They are of a deep red, warm and pleasant to the eye, with clumps of green showing brightly up against them on every little ledge where vegetation can get a footing; while the beach is neither pebble, nor rock, nor sand, but a smooth, level surface sloping evenly down; hard and pleasant to walk on when the sea has gone down, and the sun has dried and baked it for an hour or two; but slippery and treacherous when freshly wetted, for the red cliffs are of clay. Those who sail past in a boat would hardly believe that this is so, for the sun has baked its face, and the wind dried it, till it is cracked and seamed, and makes a brave imitation of red granite; but the clammy ooze, when the sea goes down, tells its nature only too plainly, and Sidmouth will never be a popular watering place for children, for there is no digging sand castles here, and a fall will stain light dresses and pinafores a ruddy hue, and the young labourers will look as if they had been at work in a brick field.

But a century since, the march of improvement had nowhere begun; and there were few larger, and no prettier, seaside villages on the coast than Sidmouth.

It was an afternoon in August. The sun was blazing down hotly, scarce a breath of wind was stirring, and the tiny waves broke along the shore with a low rustle like that of falling leaves. Some fishermen were at work, recaulking a boat hauled up on the shore. Others were laying out some nets to dry in the sun. Some fisher boys were lying asleep, like dogs basking in the heat; and a knot of lads, sitting under the shade of a boat, were discussing with some warmth the question of smuggling.

"What do you say to it, Jim Walsham?" one of the party said, looking up at a boy some twelve years old, who was leaning against a boat, but who had hitherto taken no part in the discussion.

"There is no doubt that it's wrong," the boy said. "Not wrong like stealing, and lying, and that sort of thing; still it's wrong, because it's against the law; and the revenue men, if they come upon a gang landing the tubs, fight with them, and if any are killed they are not blamed for it, so there is no doubt about its being wrong. Then, on the other hand, no one thinks any the worse of the men that do it, and there is scarce a one, gentle or simple, as won't buy some of the stuff if he gets a chance, so it can't be so very wrong. It must be great fun to be a smuggler, to be always dodging the

king's cutters, and running cargoes under the nose of the officers ashore. There is some excitement in a life like that."

"There is plenty of excitement in fishing," one of the boys said sturdily. "If you had been out in that storm last March, you would have had as much excitement as you liked. For twelve hours we expected to go down every minute, and we were half our time bailing for our lives."

An approving murmur broke from the others, who were all, with the exception of the one addressed as Jim Walsham, of the fisher class. His clothing differed but little from that of the rest. His dark blue pilot trousers were old and sea stained, his hands and face were dyed brown with exposure to the sun and the salt water; but there was something, in his manner and tone of voice, which showed that a distinction existed.

James Walsham was, indeed, the son of the late doctor of the village, who had died two years previously. Dr. Walsham had been clever in his profession, but circumstances were against him. Sidmouth and its neighbourhood were so healthy, that his patients were few and far between; and when he died, of injuries received from being thrown over his horse's head, when the animal one night trod on a stone coming down the hill into Sidmouth, his widow and son were left almost penniless.

Mrs. Walsham was, fortunately, an energetic woman, and a fortnight after her husband's death, she went round among the tradesmen of the place and the farmers of the neighbourhood, and announced her intention of opening a school for girls. She had received a good education, being the daughter of a clergyman, and she soon obtained enough pupils to enable her to pay her way, and to keep up the pretty home in which her husband lived in the outskirts of Sidmouth.

If she would have taken boarders, she could have obtained far higher terms, for good schools were scarce; but this she would not do, and her pupils all lived within distances where they could walk backwards and forwards to their homes. Her evenings she devoted to her son, and, though the education which she was enabled to give him would be considered meagre, indeed, in these days of universal cramming, he learned as much as the average boy of the period.

He would have learned more had he followed her desires, and devoted the time when she was engaged in teaching to his books; but this he did not do. For a few hours in the day he would work vigorously at his lessons. The rest of his time he spent either on the seashore, or in the boats of the fishermen; and he could swim, row, or handle a boat under sail in all weather, as well or better than any lad in the village of his own age.

His disposition was a happy one, and he was a general favourite among the boatmen. He had not, as yet, made up his mind as to his future. His mother wanted him to follow his father's profession. He himself longed to go to sea, but he had promised his mother that he would never do so without her consent, and that consent he had no hope of obtaining.

The better-class people in the village shook their heads gravely over James Walsham, and prophesied no good things of him. They considered that he demeaned himself greatly by association with the fisher boys, and more than once he had fallen into disgrace, with the more quiet minded of the inhabitants, by mischievous pranks. His reputation that way once established, every bit of mischief in the place, which could not be clearly traced to someone else, was put down to him; and as he was not one who would peach upon others to save himself, he was seldom in a position to prove his innocence.

The parson had once called upon Mrs. Walsham, and had talked to her gravely over her son's delinquencies, but his success had not been equal to his anticipations. Mrs. Walsham had stood up warmly for her son.

"The boy may get into mischief sometimes, Mr. Allanby, but it is the nature of boys to do so. James is a good boy, upright and honourable, and would not tell a lie under any consideration. What is he to do? If I could afford to send him to a good school it would be a different thing, but that you know I cannot do. From nine in the morning, until five in the afternoon, my time is occupied by teaching, and I cannot expect, nor do I wish, that he should sit moping indoors all day. He had far better be out in the boats with the fishermen, than be hanging about the place doing nothing. If

anything happened to me, before he is started in life, there would be nothing for him but to take to the sea. I am laying by a little money every month, and if I live for another year there will be enough to buy him a fishing boat and nets. I trust that it may not come to that, but I see nothing derogatory in his earning an honest living with his own hands. He will always be something better than a common fisherman. The education I have striven to give him, and his knowledge that he was born a gentleman, will nerve him to try and rise.

"As to what you say about mischief, so far as I know all boys are mischievous. I know that my own brothers were always getting into scrapes, and I have no doubt, Mr. Allanby, that when you look back upon your own boyhood, you will see that you were not an exception to the general rule."

Mr. Allanby smiled. He had come rather against his own inclinations; but his wife had urged him to speak to Mrs. Walsham, her temper being ruffled by the disappearance of two favourite pigeons, whose loss she, without a shadow of evidence, most unjustly put down to James Walsham.

The parson was by no means strict with his flock. He was a tall man, inclined to be portly, a good shot and an ardent fisherman; and although he did not hunt, he was frequently seen on his brown cob at the meet, whenever it took place within a reasonable distance of Sidmouth; and without exactly following the hounds, his knowledge of the country often enabled him to see more of the hunt than those who did.

As Mrs. Walsham spoke, the memory of his old school and college days came across him.

"That is the *argumentum ad hominem*, Mrs. Walsham, and when a lady takes to that we can say no more. You know I like your boy. There is much that is good in him; but it struck me that you were letting him run a little too wild. However, there is much in what you say, and I don't believe that he is concerned in half the mischief that he gets credit for. Still, you must remember that a little of the curb, just a little, is good for us all. It spoils a horse to be always tugging at his mouth, but he will go very badly if he does not feel that there is a hand on the reins.

"I have said the same thing to the squire. He spoils that boy of his, for whom, between ourselves, I have no great liking. The old man will have trouble with him before he is done, or I am greatly mistaken."

Nothing came of Mr. Allanby's visit. Mrs. Walsham told James that he had been there to remonstrate with her.

"I do not want to stop you from going out sailing, Jim; but I wish you would give up your mischievous pranks, they only get you bad will and a bad name in the place. Many people here think that I am wrong in allowing you to associate so much with the fisher boys, and when you get into scrapes, it enables them to impress upon me how right they were in their forecasts. I do not want my boy to be named in the same breath with those boys of Robson's, or young Peterson, or Blame."

"But you know I have nothing to do with them, mother," James said indignantly. "They spend half their time about the public house, and they do say that when Peterson has been out with that lurcher of his, he has been seen coming back with his coat bulged out, and there is often a smell of hare round his father's cottage at supper time. You know I wouldn't have anything to do with them."

"No, Jim, I am sure you would not; but if people mix up your name with theirs it is almost as bad for you as if you had. Unfortunately, people are too apt not to distinguish between tricks which are really only the outcome of high spirit, and a lack of something better to do, and real vice. Therefore, Jim, I say, keep yourself from mischief. I know that, though you are out of doors so many hours of the day, you really do get through a good deal of work; but other people do not give you credit for this. Remember how your father was respected here. Try to act always as you would have done had he been alive, and you cannot go far wrong."

James had done his best, but he found it hard to get rid of his reputation for getting into mischief, and more than once, when falsely suspected, he grumbled that he might just as well have the fun of the thing, for he was sure to have the blame.

As Jim Walsham and his companions were chatting in the shade of a boat, their conversation was abruptly broken off by the sight of a figure coming along the road. It was a tall figure, with a stiff military bearing. He was pushing before him a large box, mounted on a framework supported by four wheels. Low down, close to the ground, swung a large flat basket. In this, on a shawl spread over a thick bed of hay, sat a little girl some five years old.

"It is the sergeant," one of the boys exclaimed. "I wonder whether he has got a fresh set of views? The last were first-rate ones."

The sergeant gave a friendly nod to the boys as he passed, and then, turning up the main street from the beach, went along until he came to a shaded corner, and there stopped. The boys had all got up and followed him, and now stood looking on with interest at his proceedings. The little girl had climbed out of her basket as soon as he stopped, and after asking leave, trotted back along the street to the beach, and was soon at play among the seaweed and stones.

She was a singularly pretty child, with dark blue eyes, and brown hair with a touch of gold. Her print dress was spotlessly clean and neat; a huge flapping sunbonnet shaded her face, whose expression was bright and winning.

"Well, boys," the sergeant said cheerfully, "how have you been getting on since I was here last? Nobody drowned, I hope, or come to any ill. Not that we must grumble, whatever comes. We have all got to do our duty, whether it be to march up a hill with shot and shell screaming and whistling round, as I have had to do; or to be far out at sea with the wind blowing fit to take the hair off your head, as comes to your lot sometimes; or following the plough from year's end to year's end, as happens to some. We have got to make the best of it, whatever it is.

"I have got a grand new set of pictures from Exeter. They came all the way down from London town for me by waggon. London Bridge, and Windsor Castle, with the flag flying over it, telling that the king—God bless his gracious majesty—is at home.

"Then, I have got some pictures of foreign parts that will make you open your eyes. There's Niagara. I don't know whether you've heard of it, but it's a place where a great river jumps down over a wall of rock, as high as that steeple there, with a roar like thunder that can be heard, they say, on a still night, for twenty miles round.

"I have got some that will interest you more still, because you are sailors, or are going to be sailors. I have got one of the killing of a whale. He has just thrown a boat, with five sailors, into the air, with a lash of his tail; but it's of no use, for there are other boats round, and the harpoons are striking deep in his flesh. He is a big fish, and a strong one; but he will be beaten, for he does not know how to use his strength. That's the case with many men. They throw away their life and their talents, just because they don't know what's in them, and what they might do if they tried.

"And I have got a picture of the fight with the Spanish Armada. You have heard about that, boys, surely; for it began out there, over the water, almost in sight of Sidmouth, and went on all the way up the Channel; our little ships hanging on to the great Spaniards and giving them no rest, but worrying them, and battering them, till they were glad to sail away to the Dutch coast. But they were not safe there, for we sent fire ships at them, and they had to cut and run; and then a storm came on, and sunk many, and drove others ashore all around our coasts, even round the north of Scotland and Ireland.

"You will see it all here, boys, and as you know, the price is only one penny."

By this time, the sergeant had let down one side of the box and discovered four round holes, and had arranged a low stool in front, for any of those, who were not tall enough to look through the glasses, to stand upon. A considerable number of girls and boys had now gathered round, for Sergeant Wilks and his show were old, established favourites at Sidmouth, and the news of his arrival had travelled quickly round the place.

Four years before, he had appeared there for the first time, and since then had come every few months. He travelled round the southwestern counties, Dorset and Wilts, Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall, and his cheery good temper made him a general favourite wherever he went.

He was somewhat of a martinet, and would have no crowding and pushing, and always made the boys stand aside till the girls had a good look; but he never hurried them, and allowed each an ample time to see the pictures, which were of a better class than those in most travelling peep shows. There was some murmuring, at first, because the show contained none of the popular murders and blood-curdling scenes to which the people were accustomed.

"No," the sergeant had said firmly, when the omission was suggested to him; "the young ones see quite enough scenes of drunkenness and fighting. When I was a child, I remember seeing in a peep show the picture of a woman lying with her head nearly cut off, and her husband with a bloody chopper standing beside her; and it spoiled my sleep for weeks. No, none of that sort of thing for Sergeant Wilks. He has fought for his country, and has seen bloodshed enough in his time, and the ground half covered with dead and dying men; but that was duty—this is pleasure. Sergeant Wilks will show the boys and girls, who pay him their pennies, views in all parts of the world, such as would cost them thousands of pounds if they travelled to see them, and all as natural as life. He will show them great battles by land and sea, where the soldiers and sailors shed their blood like water in the service of their country. But cruel murders and notorious crimes he will not show them."

It was not the boys and girls, only, who were the sergeant's patrons. Picture books were scarce in those days, and grown-up girls and young men were not ashamed to pay their pennies to peep into the sergeant's box.

There was scarcely a farm house throughout his beat where he was not known and welcomed. His care of the child, who, when he first came round, was but a year old, won the heart of the women; and a bowl of bread and milk for the little one, and a mug of beer and a hunch of bread and bacon for himself, were always at his service, before he opened his box and showed its wonders to the maids and children of the house.

Sidmouth was one of his regular halting places, and, indeed, he visited it more often than any other town on his beat. There was always a room ready for him there, in the house of a fisherman's widow, when he arrived on the Saturday, and he generally stopped till the Monday. Thus he had come to know the names of most of the boys of the place, as well as of many of the elders; for it was his custom, of a Saturday evening, after the little one was in bed, to go and smoke his pipe in the taproom of the "Anchor," where he would sometimes relate tales of his adventures to the assembled fishermen. But, although chatty and cheery with his patrons, Sergeant Wilks was a reticent, rather than a talkative, man. At the "Anchor" he was, except when called upon for a story, a listener rather than a talker.

As to his history, or the county to which he belonged, he never alluded to it, although communicative enough as to his military adventures; and any questions which were asked him, he quietly put on one side. He had intimated, indeed, that the father and mother of his grandchild were both dead; but it was not known whether she was the child of his son or daughter; for under his cheerful talk there was something of military strictness and sternness, and he was not a man of whom idle questions would be asked.

"Now, boys and girls," he said, "step up; the show is ready. Those who have got a penny cannot spend it better. Those who haven't must try and get their father or mother to give them one, and see the show later on. Girls first. Boys should always give way to their sisters. The bravest men are always the most courteous and gentle with women."

Four girls, of various ages, paid their pennies and took their places at the glasses, and the sergeant then began to describe the pictures, his descriptions of the wonders within being so exciting, that several boys and girls stole off from the little crowd, and made their way to their homes to coax their parents out of the necessary coin.

James Walsham listened a while, and then walked away to the sea, for there would be several sets of girls before it came to the turn of the boys. He strolled along, and as he came within sight of the beach stopped for a moment suddenly, and then, with a shout, ran forward at the top of his speed.

The little girl, after playing some time with the seaweed, had climbed into a small boat which lay at the edge of the advancing tide, and, leaning over the stern, watched the little waves as they ran up one after another. A few minutes after she had got into it, the rising tide floated the boat, and it drifted out a few yards, as far as its headrope allowed it. Ignorant of what had happened, the child was kneeling up at the stern, leaning over, and dabbling her hands in the water.

No one had noticed her. The boys had all deserted the beach. None of the fishermen were near the spot.

Just before James Walsham came within sight of the sea, the child had overbalanced itself. His eye fell on the water just as two arms and a frightened little face appeared above it. There was a little splash, and a struggle, and the sea was bare again.

At the top of his speed James dashed across the road, sprang down the beach, and, rushing a few yards into the water, dived down. He knew which way the tide was making, and allowed for the set. A few vigorous strokes, and he reached something white on the surface. It was the sunbonnet which had, in the child's struggles, become unfastened. He dived at once, and almost immediately saw a confused mass before him. Another stroke, and he seized the child's clothes, and, grasping her firmly, rose to the surface and swam towards shore.

Although the accident had not been perceived, his shout and sudden rush into the water had called the attention of some of the men, and two or three of them ran into the water, waist deep, to help him out with his little burden.

"Well done, Master Walsham! The child would have been drowned if you had not seed it. None of us noticed her fall over. She was playing on the beach last time I seed her."

"Is she dead?" James asked, breathless from his exertions.

"Not she," the fisherman said. "She could not have been under water a minute. Take her into my cottage, it's one of the nighest. My wife will put her between the blankets, and will soon bring her round."

The fisherman's wife met them at the door, and, taking the child from the lad, carried it in, and soon had her wrapped up in blankets. But before this was done she had opened her eyes, for she had scarcely lost consciousness when James had seized her.

The lad stood outside the door, waiting for the news, when the sergeant hurried up, one of the fishermen having gone to tell him what had happened, as soon as the child had been carried into the cottage—assuring him, as he did so, that the little one would speedily come round.

Just as he came up the door of the cottage opened, and one of the women, who had run in to assist the fisherman's wife, put her head out.

"She has opened her eyes," she said. "The little dear will soon be all right."

"Thank God for His mercies!" the sergeant said, taking off his hat. "What should I have done if I had lost her?"

"And I have to thank you, next to God," he said, seizing the boy's hand. "May God bless you, young gentleman! and reward you for having saved my darling. They tell me she must have been drowned, but for you, for no one knew she had fallen in. Had it not been for you, I should come round to look for her, and she would have been gone—gone forever!" and the showman dashed the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand.

"I was only just in time," the lad said. "I did not see her fall out of the boat. She was only a few yards away from it when she came up—just as my eyes fell on the spot. I am very glad to have saved her for you; but, of course, it was nothing of a swim. She could not have been many yards out of my depth. Now I will run home and change my things."

James Walsham was too much accustomed to be wet through, to care anything about his dripping clothes, but they served him as an excuse to get away, for he felt awkward and embarrassed at the gratitude of the old soldier. He pushed his way through the little crowd, which had now gathered round, and started at a run; for the news had brought almost all those gathered round the peep show to the shore, the excitement of somebody being drowned being superior even to that of the peep show, to the great majority; though a few, who had no hope of obtaining the necessary pennies, had lingered behind, and seized the opportunity for a gratuitous look through the glasses.

James ran upstairs and changed his clothes without seeing his mother, and then, taking down one of his lesson books, set to work, shrinking from the idea of going out again, and being made a hero of.

Half an hour later there was a knock at the front door, and a few minutes after his mother called him down. He ran down to the parlour, and there found the showman.

"Oh, I say," the boy broke out, "don't say anything more about it! I do hate being thanked, and there was nothing in swimming ten yards in a calm sea. Please don't say anything more about it. I would rather you hit me, ever so much."

The sergeant smiled gravely, and Mrs. Walsham exclaimed:

"Why didn't you come in and tell me about it, Jim? I could not make out at first what Mr.—Mr.—"

"Sergeant Wilks, madam."

"What Sergeant Wilks meant, when he said that he had called to tell me how grateful he felt to you for saving his little grandchild's life. I am proud of you, Jim."

"Oh, mother, don't!" the boy exclaimed. "It is horrid going on so. If I had swum out with a rope through the surf, there might be something in it; but just to jump in at the edge of the water is not worth making a fuss about, one way or the other."

"Not to you, perhaps, young gentleman, but it is to me," the showman said. "The child is the light of my life, the only thing I have to care for in the world, and you have saved her. If it had only been by stretching out your hand, I should have been equally grateful. However, I will say no more about it, but I shall not think the less."

"But don't you believe, madam, that there was no credit in it. It was just the quickness and the promptness which saved her life. Had your son hesitated a moment it would have been too late, for he would never have found her. It is not likely that your son will ever have any occasion for help of mine, but should there be an opportunity, he may rely upon it that any service I can render him shall be his to the death; and, unlikely as it may seem, it may yet turn out that this brave act of his, in saving the life of the granddaughter of a travelling showman, will not be without its reward."

"Is she all right now?" James asked abruptly, anxious to change the conversation.

"Yes. She soon came to herself, and wanted to tell me all about it; but I would not let her talk, and in a few minutes she dropped off to sleep, and there I left her. The women tell me she will probably sleep till morning, and will then be as well as ever. And now I must go and look after my box, or the boys will be pulling it to pieces."

It was, however, untouched, for in passing the sergeant had told the little crowd that, if they left it alone, he would, on his return, let all see without payment; and during the rest of the afternoon he was fully occupied with successive audiences, being obliged to make his lectures brief, in order that all might have their turn.

After the sergeant had left, James took his hat and went for a long walk in the country, in order to escape the congratulations of the other boys. The next day little Agnes was perfectly well, and appeared with her grandfather in the seat, far back in the church, which he always occupied on the Sundays he spent at Sidmouth. On these occasions she was always neatly and prettily dressed, and, indeed, some of the good women of the place, comparing the graceful little thing with their own children, had not been backward in their criticisms on the folly of the old showman, in dressing his child out in clothes fit for a lady.

Chapter 2: The Showman's Grandchild

Three months later the showman again appeared at Sidmouth, but did not set up his box as usual. Leaving it at his lodging, he went at once with his grandchild to Mrs. Walsham's.

"I have come, madam," he said after the first inquiries about the child had been answered, "on a particular business. It will seem a strange thing to you for a man like me to ask, but things are not quite as they seem, though I can't explain it now. But I am beating about the bush, and not getting any nearer. I have come to ask, madam, whether you would take charge of the child for two years. Of course I am ready to pay anything that you may think proper."

"But I don't take boarders," Mrs. Walsham said, much surprised at the proposition. "I only take girls who come in the morning and go away in the afternoon. Besides, they are all a good many years older than your grandchild. None of the girls who come to me are under twelve."

"I know, ma'm, I know; and I am sure you must think it a great liberty on my part to ask such a thing," the sergeant said apologetically. "It is not the teaching I want, but just a home for her."

Mrs. Walsham felt puzzled. She did, in her heart, feel it to be a liberty. Surely this wandering showman would find no difficulty in getting his grandchild taken care of among people of his own rank in life. It did seem most singular that he should seek to place the child with her. Mrs. Walsham was not given to thinking what her neighbours would say, but she thought of the buzz of comment and astonishment which her taking the charge of this child would excite. She had been particular in keeping her little school to some extent select, and as it was now as large as she could manage unaided, she was able to make it almost a favour to the farmers' wives to take their girls.

But to do Mrs. Walsham justice, this thought had less influence with her than that of the time and care which would be required by a child of that age in the house. Certainly, she thought, as she looked at her, sitting with her eyes wide open and an expression of grave wonder in her face, "she is a little darling, and as Jim saved her life I have a special interest in her; but this is out of the question."

It was two or three minutes before she answered the showman's last words.

"No, it cannot be done, Sergeant Wilks. No money that could be paid me would make up to me for the charge of a child of her age. I am all day in school, and what could a child, especially one accustomed to be out all day, do with herself? The worry and anxiety would be immense. Were it not for my school, it would be different altogether. A child of that age, especially such a sweet little thing as your granddaughter seems to be, would be a pet and amusement; but as it is, I am sorry to say that it is out of the question. But surely you will have no difficulty in finding plenty of good women who would be glad to take her, and to whom, having children of the same age, she would be no trouble whatever."

"Yes," the sergeant said slowly, "I was afraid you would say that, ma'm. Besides, though you are good enough not to say it, I know that there must be other objections. I know you must be surprised at my wanting her to be with a lady like yourself. So far as money goes, I could afford to pay fifty pounds a year, and perhaps you might get a girl who could look after Aggie while you are busy."

"Fifty pounds a year!" Mrs. Walsham said, greatly surprised. "That is a large sum, a great deal too large a sum for you to pay for the care of such a little child. For half that, there are scores of farmers' wives who would be happy to take her, and where she would be far more happy and comfortable than she would be with me."

"I know I could get plenty to take her," the soldier said, "but I have reasons, very particular reasons, why I wish to place her with a lady for two years. I cannot explain those reasons to you, but you may imagine they must be strong ones, for me to be willing to pay fifty pounds a year for her. That money has been laid by from the day she was born, for that purpose. I have other reasons, of my own, for wishing that she should be at Sidmouth rather than at any other place; and I have another reason," and a slight smile stole across his face, "for preferring that she should be with you rather

than anyone else. All this must seem very strange to you, madam; but at the end of the two years, when you know what my reasons were, you will acknowledge that they were good ones.

"God knows," he went on, looking very grave, "what a wrench it will be for me to part with her. How lonely I shall be, as I tramp the country without her pretty prattle to listen to; but I have got to do it sooner or later, and these two years, when I can see her sometimes, will be a break, and accustom me to do without her sweet face.

"Please, madam," he urged, "do not give me a final answer today. I shall not go till Monday, and will call again, if you will let me, that morning; and believe me, if I could tell you all, I could give you reasons which would, I think, induce you to change your mind."

So saying, he made a military salute, took the child's hand in his, and was soon striding along towards the sea.

Mrs. Walsham was some time before she recovered from her surprise. This was, indeed, a mysterious affair. The earnestness with which the old soldier pleaded his cause had moved her strongly, and had almost persuaded her to accept the proposal, which had at first seemed preposterous. Fifty pounds a year, too, was certainly a handsome sum. She could get a girl from the village for two or three shillings a week to look after the child, and go out with her during school hours, and a hundred pounds would be a very handsome addition to the sum which she had begun, little by little, to lay by for Jim's preparation for the medical profession.

In the five years which would elapse, before it would be time for him to enter upon his studies for it, she could hardly hope to lay by more than that sum, and this would at a stroke double it. Certainly it was a tempting offer. She could not do justice to the child, could not give her the care and attention which she ought to have, and which she could have for such a sum elsewhere; but the sergeant knew exactly how she was placed, and if he was willing and anxious for her to assume the charge of the child, why should she refuse this good offer?

However, her pupils were waiting for her in the next room, and with an effort Mrs. Walsham put the matter aside, and went in to them.

When James returned home to dinner, his mother related to him the whole conversation. James was more amused than puzzled.

"It seems a rum idea, mother; but I don't see why you shouldn't take her. She is a sweet little thing, and will be a great amusement. Fifty pounds a year seems a tremendous sum for a man like that to pay; but I suppose he knows his own business, and it will be a great pull for you. You will be able to have all sorts of comforts. I should like it very much. I have often wished I had had a little sister, and she can go out walks with me, you know. It would be like having a big dog with one, only much jollier."

"Yes," his mother said smiling; "and I shouldn't be surprised if you wanted to throw sticks into the water for her to fetch them out, and to be taking her out for a night's fishing, and be constantly bringing her home splashed with that nasty red mud from head to foot. You would be a nice playmate for a little girl, Jim. Perhaps it is that special advantage that the sergeant had in his mind's eye, when he was so anxious to put her with me."

James laughed.

"I would see that she didn't come to any harm, anyhow, you know; and, after all, I suppose it was my picking her out of the sea that had something to do with his first thinking of putting her with you."

"I suppose it had, Jim," she said more seriously. "But what do you think, my boy? You know there are disadvantages in it. There will be a good deal of talk about my taking this showman's grandchild, and some of the farmers' wives won't like it."

"Then let them dislike it," James said indignantly. "The child is as good as their daughters, any day. Why, I noticed her in church looking like a little lady. There was not a child there to compare to her."

"Yes, I have noticed her myself," Mrs. Walsham said. "She is a singularly pretty and graceful child; but it will certainly cause remark."

"Well, mother, you can easily say, what is really the fact, that you naturally felt an interest in her because I picked her out of the water. Besides, if people make remarks they will soon be tired of that; and if not, I can get into some scrape or other and give them something else to talk about."

Accordingly, when Sergeant Wilks called on Monday morning for his answer, Mrs. Walsham told him that she had decided to accept his offer.

"You are aware how I am placed," she said, "and that I cannot give her the care and time which I could wish, and which she ought to have for such a liberal payment as you propose; but you know that beforehand, and you see that for two years' payments I could not sacrifice my school connection, which I should have to do if I gave her the time I should wish."

"I understand, madam," he said, "and I am grateful to you for consenting to take her. She is getting too old now to wander about with me, and since the narrow escape she had, last time I was here, I have felt anxious whenever she was out of my sight. It would not suit me to put her in a farm house. I want her to learn to speak nicely, and I have done my best to teach her; but if she went to a farm house she would be picking up all sorts of country words, and I want her to talk like a little lady."

"So that is settled, ma'm. I am going on to Exeter from here, and shall get her a stock of clothes there, and will bring her back next Saturday. Will it suit you to take her then?"

Mrs. Walsham said that would suit very well; and an hour later the sergeant set out from Sidmouth with his box, Aggie trotting alongside, talking continuously.

"But why am I to stop with that lady, grampa, and not to go about with you any more? I sha'n't like it. I like going about, though I get so tired sometimes when you are showing the pictures; and I like being with you. It isn't 'cause I have been naughty, is it? 'Cause I fell out of the boat into the water? I won't never get into a boat again, and I didn't mean to fall out, you know."

"No, Aggie, it's not that," the sergeant said. "You are always a good girl—at least, not always, because sometimes you get into passions, you know. Still, altogether you are a good little girl. Still, you see, you can't always be going about the country with me."

"But why not, grampa?"

"Well, my dear, because great girls can't go about the country like men. It wouldn't be right and proper they should."

"Why shouldn't it be, grampa?" the child persisted.

"Well, Aggie, I can't exactly explain to you why, but so it is. Men and boys have to work. They go about in ships, or as soldiers to fight for their country, just as I did. Girls and women have to stop at home, and keep house, and nurse babies, and that sort of thing. God made man to be hard and rough, and to work and go about. He made woman gentle and soft, to stop at home and make things comfortable."

Aggie meditated for some distance, in silence, upon this view of the case.

"But I have seen women working in the fields, grampa, and some of them didn't seem very soft and gentle."

"No, Aggie, things don't always go just as they ought to do; and you see, when people are poor, and men can't earn enough wages, then their wives and daughters have to help; and then, you see, they get rough, more like men, because they are not doing their proper work. But I want you to grow up soft and gentle, and so, for a time, I want you to live with that lady with the nice boy who pulled you out of the water, and they will make you very happy, and I shall come and see you sometime."

"I like him," the child said with a nod; "but I would rather be with you, you know."

"And the lady will teach you to read, Aggie. You have learned your letters, you know."

Aggie shook her head, to show that this part of the programme was not particularly to her liking.

"Do you think the boy will play with me, grampa?"

"I daresay he will, Aggie, when you are very good; and you must never forget, you know, that he saved your life. Just think how unhappy I should be, if he had not got you out of the water."

"The water was cold and nasty," Aggie said, "and it seemed so warm and nice to my hands. Aggie won't go near the water any more. Of course, if the boy is with me I can go, because he won't let me tumble in."

"Shall I get into the basket now, grampa? I is tired."

"Oh, nonsense, little woman! you have not walked half a mile yet. Anyhow, you must trot along until you get to the top of this hill, then you shall have a lift for a bit."

And so, with the child sometimes walking and sometimes riding, sometimes asleep in her basket and sometimes chatting merrily to her grandfather, the pair made their way across the country towards Exeter.

There was no little talk in Sidmouth when, on the following Sunday, the showman's grandchild appeared in Mrs. Walsham's pew in church, and it became known that she had become an inmate of her house. It was generally considered that Mrs. Walsham had let herself down greatly by taking the showman's grandchild, and one or two of the mothers of her pupils talked about taking them away. One or two, indeed, called upon her to remonstrate personally, but they gained nothing by the step.

"I do not understand what you mean," she said quietly, "by saying that the child is not fit to associate with my other pupils. She is singularly gentle and taking in her manner. She expresses herself better than any child of her own age in Sidmouth, so far as I know. There are few so neatly and prettily dressed. What is there to object to? Her grandfather has been a sergeant in the army. He bears a good character, and is liked wherever he goes. I do not consider that James or myself are, in any way, demeaned by sitting down to meals with the child, who, indeed, behaves as prettily and nicely as one could wish; and I certainly do not see that any of my pupils can be injuriously affected by the fact that, for an hour or two in the day, she learns her lessons in the same room with them. Had I thought that they would be, I should not have received her. I shall, of course, be sorry if any of my pupils are taken away, but as I have several girls only waiting for vacancies, it would make no difference to me pecuniarily."

And so it happened that Mrs. Walsham lost none of her pupils, and in a short time the wonder died out. Indeed, the child herself was so pretty, and taking in her ways, that it was impossible to make any objection to her personally.

Mrs. Walsham had been struck by the self command which she showed at parting with her grandfather. Her eyes were full of tears, her lip quivered, and she could scarcely speak; but there was no loud wailing, no passionate outburst. Her grandfather had impressed upon her that the parting was for her own good, and child though she was, she felt how great a sacrifice he was making in parting with her, and although she could not keep the tears from streaming down her cheeks, or silence her sobs as she bade him goodbye, she tried hard to suppress her grief.

The pain of parting was, indeed, fully as great to Sergeant Wilks as to his granddaughter; and it was with a very husky voice that he bade her goodbye, and then, putting her into Mrs. Walsham's arms, walked hastily away.

Aggie was soon at home. She and James very quickly became allies, and the boy was ever ready to amuse her, often giving up his own plans to take her for a walk to pick flowers in the hedgerow, or to sail a tiny boat for her in the pools left as the sea retired. Mrs. Walsham found, to her surprise, that the child gave little trouble. She was quiet and painstaking during the half hours in the morning and afternoon when she was in the school room, while at mealtimes her prattle and talk amused both mother and son, and altogether she made the house brighter and happier than it was before.

In two months the sergeant came round again. He did not bring his box with him, having left it at his last halting place; telling James, who happened to meet him as he came into Sidmouth, that he did not mean to bring his show there again.

"It will be better for the child," he explained. "She has done with the peep show now, and I do not want her to be any longer associated with it."

Aggie was delighted to see him, and sprang into his arms, with a scream of joy, as he entered. After a few minutes' talk, Mrs. Walsham suggested that she should put on her hat and go for a walk with him, and, in high contentment, the child trotted off, holding her grandfather's hand. Turning to the left, the sergeant took the path up the hill, and when he reached the top, sat down on the short turf, with Aggie nestling up against him.

"So you are quite well and happy, Aggie?" he asked.

"Quite well, grampa, and very happy; but I do wish so much that you were here. Oh, it would be so nice to have you to go out with every day!"

"I am afraid that cannot be managed, Aggie. I have been busy so long that I could not settle down quietly here. Besides, I must live, you know."

"But wouldn't people give you money for the show if you lived here, grampa? You always got money here the same as other places."

"Yes, my dear, but I could not get fresh pictures every day, and should soon tire them by showing the old house."

"But you are sorry sometimes, grampa, not to have me with you?"

"Yes, Aggie, very sorry. I miss you terribly sometimes, and I am always thinking about you."

"Then why don't you take me away again, grampa?"

"Because, as I told you, Aggie, I want you to learn to read, and to grow up quite a little lady."

"Does reading make one a lady, grampa?"

"No, Aggie, not by itself, but with other things."

"And when I am quite grown up and big, and know how to read nicely, shall I be able to go with you again?"

"We will see about that, Aggie, when the time comes. There is plenty of time yet to think about that."

"But I am getting on very fast, grampa, and the lady says I am a good girl. So it won't be such a very long time before I can leave."

"It will be some time, yet. You have only got to read little words yet, but there are lots of long words which you will come to presently. But Mrs. Walsham tells me that you are getting on nicely, and that you are a very good girl, which pleases me very much; and when I am walking along with my box, I shall like to be able to think of you as being quite comfortable and happy."

"And I go walks with Jim, grampa, and Jim has made me a boat, and he says someday, when it is very fine and quiet, he will take me out in a big boat, like that boat, you know; and he is going to ask you if he may, for the lady said I must not go out with him till he has asked you. And he said he won't let me tumble over, and I am going to sit quite, quite still."

"Yes, Aggie, I don't see any harm in your going out with him. I am sure he will only take you when it is fine, and he will look after you well. You like him, don't you?"

"Oh! I do, grampa; and you know, it was him who got me out of the water, else I should never have come out, and never have seen grampa again; and he has made me a boat. Oh! yes, I do like him!"

"That's right, my dear; always stick to those who are good to you."

A few days after this, as James was sailing the toy boat, for Aggie's amusement, in a pool, a boy sauntered up. He was somewhat taller than James Walsham, and at least two years older. He was well dressed, and James knew him as the nephew and heir of the squire.

It was not often that Richard Horton came down into the village. He was accustomed to be treated with a good deal of deference at the Hall, and to order servants and grooms about pretty much as he chose, and the indifference with which the fisher boys regarded him offended him greatly. He was a spoilt boy. His uncle had a resident tutor for him, but the selection had been a bad one. The library was large and good, the tutor fond of reading, and he was content to let the boy learn as little

as he chose, providing that he did not trouble him. As to any instruction beyond books, he never thought of giving it.

The squire never interfered. He was a silent and disappointed man. He attended to his duties as a magistrate, and to the management of his estate, but seldom went beyond the lodge gates. He took his meals by himself, and often did not see his nephew for a week together, and had no idea but that he was pursuing his studies regularly with his tutor. Thus, the character of Richard Horton formed itself unchecked. At the best it was a bad one, but under other circumstances it might have been improved.

Up to the age of ten, he had lived in London with his father and mother, the latter a sister of the squire, who, having married beneath her, to the indignation of Mr. Linthorne, he had never seen her afterwards.

Four years before the story begins, she had received a letter from him, saying that, as her eldest son was now his heir, he wished him to come and live with him, and be prepared to take his place. The Hortons, who had a numerous family, at once accepted the offer, and Richard, hearing that he was going to a grand house, and would no doubt have a pony and all sorts of nice things, left his father and mother without a tear.

He was essentially selfish. He was vain of his good looks, which were certainly striking; and with his changed fortunes he became arrogant, and, as the squire's servants said, hateful; and yet the change had brought him less pleasure than he expected. It was true that he had the pony, that he was not obliged to trouble himself with lessons, that he was an important person at the "Hall;" but he had no playfellows, no one to admire his grandeur, and the days often passed heavily, and there was a look of discontent and peevishness upon his handsome face.

Perhaps the reason why he so seldom came down into Sidmouth, was not only because the fisher boys were not sufficiently impressed with his importance, but because they looked so much happier and more contented than he felt, in spite of his numerous advantages. On this day he was in a particularly bad temper. He had lamed his pony the day before, by riding it furiously over a bad road after it had cast a shoe. The gardener had objected to his picking more than half a dozen peaches which had just come into perfection, and had threatened to appeal to the squire.

Altogether, he was out of sorts, and had walked down to the sea with a vague hope that something might turn up to amuse him. He stood for some little time watching James sail the boat, and then strode down to the edge of the pool. The boat was a model of a smack, with brown sails. James had taken a good deal of pains with it, and it was an excellent model.

Presently, in crossing, she stuck in a shallow some twelve feet from the edge. The intervening stretch of water was a foot deep.

James picked up some small stones and threw them close to her, that the tiny wave they made might float her off. He tried several times without success.

"What's the use of such little stones as that?" Richard said roughly. "You will never get her off like that;" and picking up one as large as his fist, he threw it with some force.

It struck the mast, and broke it asunder, and knocked the boat on to her side. James Walsham uttered an angry exclamation.

"You are a bad boy," Aggie said passionately. "You are a bad boy to break my boat;" and she burst into tears.

"I didn't mean to do it, you little fool!" Richard said angrily, vexed more at his own clumsiness than at the damage it had caused. "What are you making such a beastly noise about?" and he gave her a push.

It was not a hard one, but the ground was slippery, and the child's foot slipped, and she fell at the edge of the pool, her dress going partly into the water. At the same instant, Richard reeled, and almost fell beside her, from a heavy blow between the eyes from James's fist.

"You insolent blackguard!" he exclaimed furiously, "I will pay you for this;" and he rushed at James.

The combat was not a long one. Hard work at rowing and sailing had strengthened Jim Walsham's muscles, and more than balanced the advantage in height and age of his adversary. He had had, too, more than one fight in his time, and after the first sudden burst of passion, caused by the overthrow of Aggie, he fought coolly and steadily, while Richard rained his blows wildly, without attempting to guard his face.

The child, on regaining her feet, ran crying loudly towards the beach, making for two fishermen who were engaged in mending a net some distance away; but before she could reach them to beg for aid for her champion, the fight was over, terminating by a heavy right-handed hit from James, which landed Richard Horton on his back in the pool.

James stood quietly awaiting a renewal of the conflict when he arose, but Richard had had enough of it. One of his eyes was already puffed and red, his nose bleeding, and his lip cut. His clothes were soaked from head to foot, and smeared with the red mud.

"I will pay you out for this, you see if I don't," Richard gasped hoarsely.

"What! have you had enough of it?" James said scornfully. "I thought you weren't any good. A fellow who would bully a little girl is sure to be a coward."

Richard moved as if he would renew the fight, but he thought better of it, and with a furious exclamation hurried away towards the Hall.

James, without paying any further heed to him, waded after the boat, and having recovered it, walked off towards the child, who, on seeing his opponent had moved off, was running down to meet him.

"Here is the boat, Aggie," he said. "There is no great harm done, only the mast and yard broken. I can easily put you in fresh ones;" but the child paid no attention to the boat.

"He is a wicked bad boy, Jim; and did he hurt you?"

"Oh, no, he didn't hurt me, Aggie, at least nothing to speak of. I hurt him a good deal more. I paid him out well for breaking your boat, and pushing you down, the cowardly brute!"

"Only look, Jim," she said, holding out her frock. "What will she say?"

James laughed.

"Mother won't say anything," he said. "She is accustomed to my coming in all muddy."

"But she said 'Keep your frock clean,' and it's not clean," Aggie said in dismay.

"Yes, but that is not your fault, little one. I will make it all right with her, don't you fret. Come on, we had better go home and change it as soon as possible."

They passed close by the two fishermen on their way.

"You gave it to the young squire finely, Master Walsham," one of them said, "and served him right, too. We chanced to be looking at the moment, and saw it all. He is a bad un, he is, by what they say up at the Hall. I heard one of the grooms talking last night down at the 'Ship,' and a nice character he gave him. This thrashing may do him some good; and look you, Master Walsham, if he makes a complaint to the squire, and it's likely enough he will get up a fine story of how it came about—the groom said he could lie like King Pharaoh—you just send word to me, and me and Bill will go up to the squire, and tell him the truth of the matter."

Mrs. Walsham felt somewhat alarmed when her son told her what had happened, for the squire was a great man at Sidmouth, a magistrate, and the owner of the greater part of the place as well as of the land around it; and although Mrs. Walsham did not hold the same exaggerated opinion of his powers as did the majority of his neighbours, who would scarcely have dreamt of opposing it, had the squire ordered anyone to be hung and quartered, still she felt that it was a somewhat terrible thing that her son should have thrashed the nephew and heir of the great man.

In the evening there was a knock at the door, and the little maid came in with eyes wide open with alarm, for she had heard of the afternoon's battle, to say that the constable wished to speak to Mrs. Walsham.

"Servant, ma'am," he said as he entered. "I am sorry to be here on an unpleasant business; but I have got to say as the squire wishes to see Master Walsham in the justice room at ten o'clock, on a charge of 'salt and battery."

"Don't you be afeard ma'am," he went on confidentially. "I don't think as anything is going to be done to him. I ain't got no warrant, and so I don't look upon it as regular business. I expects it will be just a blowing up. It will be just the squire, and not the magistrate, I takes it. He told me to have him up there at ten, but as he said nothing about custody, I thought I would do it my own way and come to you quiet like; so if you say as Master Walsham shall be up there at ten o'clock, I'll just take your word for it and won't come to fetch him. The doctor was allus very good to me and my missus, and I shouldn't like to be walking through Sidmouth with my hand on his son's collar."

"Thank you, Hobson," Mrs. Walsham said quietly. "You can rely upon it my son shall be there punctually. He has nothing to be afraid or ashamed of."

Full of rage as Richard Horton had been, as he started for home, he would never have brought the matter before the squire on his own account. His case was too weak, and he had been thrashed by a boy younger than himself. Thus, he would have probably chosen some other way of taking his vengeance; but it happened that, just as he arrived home, he met his tutor coming out. The latter was astounded at Richard's appearance. His eyes were already puffed so much that he could scarcely see out of them, his lips were cut and swollen, his shirt stained with blood, his clothes drenched and plastered with red mud.

"Why, what on earth has happened, Richard?"

Richard had already determined upon his version of the story.

"A brute of a boy knocked me down into the water," he said, "and then knocked me about till he almost killed me."

"But what made him assault you in this outrageous manner?" his tutor asked. "Surely all the boys about here must know you by sight; and how one of them would dare to strike you I cannot conceive."

"I know the fellow," Richard said angrily. "He is the son of that doctor fellow who died two years ago."

"But what made him do it?" the tutor repeated.

"He was sailing his boat, and it got stuck, and he threw in some stones to get it off; and I helped him, and I happened to hit the mast of his beastly boat, and then he flew at me like a tiger, and that's all."

"Well, it seems to be a monstrous assault, Richard, and you must speak to the squire about it."

"Oh, no, I sha'n't," Richard said hastily. "I don't want any row about it, and I will pay him off some other way. I could lick him easy enough if it had been a fair fight, only he knocked me down before I was on my guard. No, I sha'n't say anything about it."

But Richard's tutor, on thinking the matter over, determined to speak to the squire. Only the evening before, Mr. Linthorne had surprised him by asking him several questions as to Richard's progress and conduct, and had said something about examining him himself, to see how he was getting on. This had caused Mr. Robertson no little alarm, for he knew that even the most superficial questioning would betray the extent of Richard's ignorance, and he had resolved that, henceforth, he would endeavour to assert his authority, and to insist upon Richard's devoting a certain portion of each day, regularly, to study. Should the squire meet the boy anywhere about the house, he must at once notice the condition of his face; and even if he did not meet him, he could not fail to notice it on Sunday, when he sat beside him in the pew. It would be better, therefore, that he should at once report the matter to him.

Without saying a word to Richard of his intentions, he therefore went to the squire's study, and told him what had taken place, as he had learned it from Richard. The squire listened silently.

"Very well, Mr. Robertson. You were quite right to tell me about it. Of course, I cannot suffer my nephew to be treated in this manner. At the same time, I am sorry that it was Walsham's son. I don't know anything about the boy, and should not know him even by sight, but I had an esteem for his father, who was a hard-working man, and, I believe, clever. He used to attend here whenever any of the servants were ill, and I had intended to do something for the boy. I am sorry he has turned out so badly. However, I will have him up here and speak to him. This sort of thing cannot be permitted."

And accordingly, orders were given to the constable. When, in the evening, Mr. Robertson informed Richard what he had done, the boy flew into a terrible passion, and abused his tutor with a violence of language which shocked and astonished him, and opened his eyes to his own culpability, in allowing him to go on his way unchecked. He in vain endeavoured to silence the furious lad. He had been so long without exercising any authority, that he had now no authority to exercise, and, after an angry scene, Richard flung himself out of the room, and left his tutor in a state bordering on consternation.

Chapter 3: The Justice Room

Richard's feelings were not to be envied, as he lay awake that night, thinking over what had taken place in the morning. It had never, for a moment, entered his mind that his tutor would repeat his statement to the squire, and he would have given a good deal if he had not made it. However, there was nothing for him now but to stick to the story, and he felt but little doubt of the result. He had no idea that any, but the actors in it, had witnessed the scene by the pool, and he felt confident that his uncle would, as a matter of course, take his word in preference to that of this boy, who would naturally tell lies to screen himself. Of course, the child was there, but no one would mind what a baby like that said. Still, it was a nuisance, and he gnashed his teeth with rage at the interference of his tutor in the matter.

"I will get rid of him, somehow, before long," he said. "I will pay him out for his meddling, as sure as my name's Richard Horton. I will get him out of this before three months are gone."

The next morning at breakfast, Richard received a message from the squire that he was to be present at ten o'clock in the justice room, and accordingly, at that hour he presented himself there with a confident air, but with an inward feeling of misgiving.

The squire was sitting at his table, with his clerk beside him. Mr. Robertson was in a chair a short distance off. The constable was standing by the side of James Walsham, at the other end of the room. Mr. Linthorne nodded to his nephew.

"I wish you to repeat the story which you told Mr. Robertson yesterday."

Richard had thought over whether it would be better to soften his story, but as it had already been told to the squire, he had concluded that there would be more danger in contradicting his first version than in sticking to it. Accordingly, he repeated his story almost word for word as he had told it to Mr. Robertson.

"What have you to say to this, James Walsham?" the squire asked. "This is a serious charge, that you without any provocation assaulted and maltreated my nephew."

"I say it is all a lie, sir," James said fearlessly.

The squire uttered a short exclamation of surprise and anger. He had been, at first, favourably impressed with the appearance of the young prisoner, though he had been surprised at seeing that he was younger than his nephew, for he had expected to see a much older boy.

"That is not the way to speak, sir," he said sternly, while the constable pressed a warning hand on James's shoulder.

"Well, sir, it's not true then," the boy said. "It's all false from beginning to end, except that I did strike him first; but I struck him, not because he had thrown a great stone and broken my boat, but because he pushed a little girl who was with me down into the water."

"She slipped down. I never pushed her," Richard broke in.

"Hold your tongue, sir," the squire said sternly. "You have given your evidence. I have now to hear what the accused has to say."

"Now, tell your story."

James now gave his version of the affair.

When he had ended, Mr. Linthorne said gravely, "Have you any witnesses to call?"

"Yes, sir, there are two fishermen outside who saw it."

"Bring them in," the magistrate said to the constable.

Not a word was spoken in the justice room until the constable returned. As James had told his story, the magistrate had listened with disbelief. It had not occurred to him that his nephew could have told a lie, and he wondered at the calmness with which this boy told his story. Why, were it true, Richard was a coward as well as a liar, for with his superior age and height, he should have been

able to thrash this boy in a fair fight; yet James's face had not a mark, while his nephew's showed how severely he had been punished.

But his eye fell upon Richard when James said that he had witnesses. He saw an unmistakable look of terror come over his face, and the bitter conviction flashed across him that James's story was the true one.

"There is no occasion to give him the book, Hobson," he said, as the constable was about to hand the Testament to one of the fishermen. "This is a private investigation, not a formal magisterial sitting, and there is no occasion, at this stage, to take any evidence on oath."

"What is your name, my man?"

"John Mullens, your honour."

"Well, just tell me, Mullens, what you know about this business."

"I was a-mending my nets, yer honour, along with Simon Harte, and young Master Walsham was a-sailing his boat in a pool, along with the little gal as lives at his mother's."

"How far were you from the spot where he was?" the squire asked.

"Two hundred yards or so, I should say," the fisherman replied. "We was working behind a boat, but we could see over it well enough. Presently we saw Master Horton come down, and stand alongside the others."

"I said to Simon, 'He is a good-looking young fellow, is the squire's nephew,'" and the fisherman's eye twinkled with a grim humour, as he glanced at Richard's swollen face.

"The boat got stuck, and Master Walsham threw something in close to it to get it off. Then I see Master Horton stoop, and pick up a chunk of stone, and chuck it hard; and it hit the boat and knocked it over. I see the little girl turn round and say something to Master Horton, and then she put her apron up to her face and began to cry. He gave her a sort of shove, and she tumbled down into the edge of the pool."

"I says to Simon, 'What a shame!' but afore the words was out of my mouth, Master Walsham he hits him, and hits him hard, too. Then there was a fight, but Master Horton, he hadn't a chance with James, who gave him as sound a licking as ever you see'd, and ending with knocking him backwards into the pool. Then he gets up and shakes his fist at James, and then goes off as hard as he could. That's all I know about it."

"It's a wicked lie," Richard burst out. "They have made it up between them. There was nobody there."

"Hold your tongue, sir, I tell you," the squire said, so sternly that Richard, who had risen from his seat, shrank back again and remained silent; while Simon Harte gave his evidence, which was almost identical with that of the other fisherman.

"Have you any other witnesses?" the magistrate asked James.

"Only the little girl, sir, but I did not bring her up. She is so little, I thought it was better she should not come, but I can send for her if you wish it."

"It is not necessary," Mr. Linthorne said. "I have heard quite sufficient. The manner in which you and these fishermen have given your evidence convinces me that you are speaking the truth, and I am sorry that you should have been placed in this position. You will understand that this is not a formal court, and therefore that there is no question of discharging you. I can only say that, having heard the story of what took place at this fight between you and my nephew, I am convinced that you did what any other boy of spirit would have done, under the same circumstances, and that the punishment which you administered to him was thoroughly deserved."

"Good morning!"

James Walsham and his witnesses left the room. Mr. Linthorne rose, and saying to his nephew, "Follow me, sir," went to his study.

Without saying a word as to what had passed, he took down some books from the shelves, and proceeded to examine Richard in them. A few minutes sufficed to show that the boy was almost

absolutely ignorant of Latin, while a few questions in geography and history showed that he was equally deficient in these also.

"That will do," the squire said. "Go up to your room, and remain there until I send for you."

An hour after this a dog cart came round to the door. Mr. Robertson took his place in it with his trunk, and was driven away to Exeter, never to return.

For two days Richard remained a prisoner in his room. His meals were brought up to him, but the servant who came with them answered no questions, telling him that the squire's orders were that he was not to hold any conversation with him. There was, indeed, a deep pleasure among the servants at the Hall, at the knowledge that Richard Horton was in disgrace. The exact circumstances of the affair were unknown, for the fishermen had not been present when Richard had told his story, and Mrs. Walsham, who was much shocked when James told her the circumstances, had impressed upon him that it was better to say nothing more about it.

"You are clear in the matter, Jim, and that is enough for you. The squire will, no doubt, punish his nephew for the wicked lies he has told. Some day, you know, the boy will be master here. Don't let us set everyone against him by telling this disgraceful story."

So, beyond the fact that there had been a fight between James Walsham and the squire's nephew, and that Richard Horton had been thrashed, and that the squire himself had said that it served him right, Sidmouth knew nothing of what had taken place in the justice room.

Mr. Linthorne's first impulse had been to send his nephew at once back to his parents, with the message that he would have nothing more to do with him; but, though he had the reputation of being a stern man, the squire was a very kind-hearted one. He was shocked to find that the boy was a liar, and that, to shield himself, he had invented this falsehood against his opponent; but upon reflection, he acknowledged that he himself had been to blame in the matter. He had taken the boy into his house, had assigned to him the position of his heir, and had paid no further attention to him.

Unfortunately, the man he had selected as his tutor had proved false to the trust. The boy had been permitted to run wild, his head was turned with the change in his prospects, his faults had grown unchecked. It was to be said for him that he had not intended, in the first place, to bring his opponent into disgrace by making this false accusation against him, for his tutor had acknowledged that he had said he did not intend to tell him, or to take any step in the matter, and his position of accuser had been, to some extent, forced upon him by the necessity of his confirming the tale, which he had told to account for his being thrashed by a boy smaller than himself.

Yes, it would be unfair upon the boy utterly to cast him off for this first offence. He would give him one more trial.

The result of the squire's reflection was that, on the third day of his imprisonment, Richard was sent for to the study. The squire did not motion to him to sit down, and he remained standing with, as the squire said to himself, a hang-dog look upon his face.

"I have been thinking over this matter quietly, Richard, for I did not wish to come to any hasty conclusion. My first impulse was to pack you off home, and have no more to do with you, but I have thought better of it. Mean and despicable as your conduct has been, I take some blame to myself, for not having seen that your tutor did his duty by you. Therefore, I have resolved to give you another chance, but not here. I could not bear to have a boy, who has proved himself a despicable liar, about me; but I will try and think that this was a first offence, and that the lesson which it has taught you may influence all your future life, and that you may yet grow up an honourable man.

"But you will remember that, henceforth, you are on trial, and that the position in which you will stand by my will, will depend solely and entirely on your own conduct. If you prove, by that, that this lesson has had its effect, that you deeply repent of your conduct, and are resolved to do your best to be henceforth straight, honourable, and true, you will, at my death, occupy the position I have intended for you. If not, not one single penny of my money will you get. I am going to put you in a school where you will be looked strictly after, and where you will have every chance of retrieving

yourself. I have just written to a friend of mine, a post captain in his majesty's service, asking him to receive you as a midshipman. I have told him frankly that you have been somewhat over indulged, and that the discipline of the sea life will be of great benefit to you, and have requested him to keep a tight hand over you, and let me know occasionally how you are going on. I have told him that your position as my heir will, to a very large extent, depend upon his reports, and have asked him, in the name of our old friendship, to be perfectly frank and open in them with me. I have said 'he is my eldest nephew, but I have others who will take his place, if he is unworthy of the position, and although I should be sorry if he should be found wanting, I will commit the interests of all the tenants and people on my estate to no one who is not, in every respect, an honourable gentleman.'

"That will do, sir. You need not remain longer in your room, but you will not leave the grounds. My friend's ship is at Portsmouth at present, and doubtless I shall receive an answer in the course of a few days. Until then, the less we see each other, the more pleasant for us both."

There were few more miserable boys in England than Richard Horton, during the week which elapsed before the answer to the squire's letter was received. It cannot be said that, in the true sense of the word, he was sorry for his fault. He was furious with himself, not because he had lied, but because of the consequences of the lie. A thousand times he called himself a fool for having imperilled his position, and risked being sent back again to the dingy house in London, merely to excuse himself for being thrashed by a boy smaller than himself. Mad with his folly, not in having invented the story, but in having neglected to look round, to assure himself that there were no witnesses who would contradict it, he wandered disconsolate about the gardens and park, cursing what he called his fortune.

It was an additional sting to his humiliation, that he knew every servant in and about the house rejoiced at his discomfiture, and he imagined that there was a veiled smile of satisfaction, at his bruised visage and his notorious disgrace with the squire, on the face of every man he met outside, and of every woman who passed him in the house.

During the whole week he did not venture near the stables, for there he knew that he had rendered himself specially obnoxious, and there was nothing for him to do but to saunter listlessly about the garden, until the day arrived that the letter came granting the squire's request, and begging that he might be sent off at once, as the vessel would probably put to sea in a few days.

"Now, Richard," the squire said that evening to him, in a kinder voice than he had used on the last occasion, "you understand exactly how we stand towards each other. That being so, I do not wish to maintain our present uncomfortable relations. You have had your punishment, and, unless I hear to the contrary, I shall assume that the punishment has had its effect. When you return from sea, after your first voyage, you will come home here as if nothing had happened, and this business need never be alluded to between us. If you turn out as I have hitherto believed you to be, I shall receive you as warmly as if my opinion of you had never been shaken.

"I have requested Captain Sinclair to let me know what is the average allowance that the midshipmen receive from their parents, and shall see that you have as much as your messmates. I have also asked him to kindly allow one of his officers to order you a proper outfit in all respects, and to have the bill sent in to me. So now, my boy, you will have a fresh and a fair start, and I trust that you will turn out everything that I can wish."

"I will try, sir. I will indeed," Richard said earnestly; and he spoke from his heart, for the inheritance was very dear to him, and it would be a terrible thing indeed to forfeit it.

For two years after Richard Horton's departure, things went on quietly at Sidmouth. James Walsham continued to make a pet and a playmate of little Aggie. Her out-of-door life had made her strong and sturdy, and she was able to accompany him in all his rambles, while, when he was at work at home preparing fishing lines, making boats, or otherwise amusing himself, she was content to sit hours quietly beside him, chattering incessantly, and quite content with an occasional brief answer to the questions. When he was studying, she too would work at her lessons; and however much she might be puzzled over these, she would never disturb him by asking him questions when so engaged.

She was an intelligent child, and the hour's lesson, morning and afternoon, soon grew into two. She was eager to learn, and rapidly gained ground on Mrs. Walsham's older pupils. During the two years, that lady never had cause to regret that she had yielded to the sergeant's entreaties. Aggie was no trouble in the house, which she brightened with her childish laughter and merry talk; and her companionship, James's mother could not but think, did the boy much good. It softened his manner, and, although he still often went out with the fishermen, he was no longer thrown entirely for companionship upon the boys on the beach.

The sergeant came and went, seldom being more than two months without paying a visit to Sidmouth. The child was always delighted to see her grandfather, and James took to him greatly, and liked nothing better than to stroll up with him to a sheltered spot on the hillside, where he would throw himself down on the grass, while the sergeant smoked his pipe and told him stories of his travels and adventures, and Aggie ran about looking for wildflowers, or occasionally sat down, for a while, to listen also.

The squire lived his usual lonely life up at the Hall. The absence of his nephew, whose ship had sailed for a foreign station, was a relief rather than otherwise to him. It had, from the first, been a painful effort to him to regard this boy as his heir, and he had only done it when heartsick from a long and fruitless search for one who would have been nearer and dearer to him. Nor had he ever taken to the lad personally. The squire felt that there was not the ring of true metal in him. The careless way in which he spoke of his parents showed a want of heart; and although his uncle was ignorant how much the boy made himself disliked in the household, he was conscious, himself, of a certain antipathy for him, which led him to see as little of him as possible.

The two years, for which the sergeant had placed his grandchild with Mrs. Walsham, came to an end. That he did not intend to continue the arrangement, she judged from something he said on the occasion of his last visit, two months before the time was up, but he gave no hint as to what he intended to do with her.

In those weeks Mrs. Walsham frequently thought the matter over. That the sergeant had plans for the child she could hardly doubt. The child herself had told her that she knew of no other relations than her grandfather, and yet he could hardly intend to take her about with him, after placing her for two years in a comfortable home. She was but seven years old now—far too young to go out into a place as servant girl in a farm house. She doubted not that the sergeant had expended the whole of his savings, and she thought him foolish in not having kept her with him for some little time longer, or, if he could not do that, he might have placed her with some honest people, who would have kept her for the sum he had paid until she was old enough to take a place as a nurse girl.

And yet, while she argued thus, Mrs. Walsham felt that the old showman had not acted without weighing the whole matter. There must be something in it which she did not understand. In fact, he had said so when he placed the child with her.

As the time approached, she became more worried at the thought of Aggie leaving her. The little one had wound herself very closely round her heart. The expense of keeping her was small indeed, the cost of her food next to nothing; while the extra girl, whom Mrs. Walsham had taken on when she first came, had been retained but a very short time, James's constant companionship with her rendering the keeping of a nurse altogether unnecessary.

At last she made up her mind that she would offer to keep her on without pay. She and James would miss her companionship sorely, and it could not be considered an extravagance, since the money she had received for her would pay for the cost of her keep for years to come. When Mrs. Walsham's mind was once made up, her only fear was that these mysterious plans of the sergeant would not allow him to leave Aggie with her.

Punctual to the day, Sergeant Wilks arrived, and after a little talk in the parlour, as usual, with James and Aggie present, he formally requested the favour of a conversation with Mrs. Walsham alone.

"Take Aggie for a walk, James. Do not stay out above three quarters of an hour, as your tea will be ready for you then."

"You must have wondered, ma'am, a good deal," the sergeant began when they were alone, "why I, who get my living by travelling the country with a peep show, wished to place my grandchild in a position above her, and to have her taught to be a little lady. It is time now that I should tell you. Aggie is my granddaughter, but she is the granddaughter, too, of Squire Linthorne up at the Hall."

"Bless me!" Mrs. Walsham ejaculated, too astonished for any further expression of her feelings.

"Yes, ma'am, she is the daughter of the squire's son Herbert, who married my daughter Cissie."

"Dear me, dear me," Mrs. Walsham said, "what an extraordinary thing! Of course I remember Herbert Linthorne, a handsome, pleasant young fellow. He was on bad terms, as everyone heard, eight years ago, with his father, because he married somebody beneath—I mean somebody of whom the squire did not approve. A year afterwards, we heard that he was dead, and there was a report that his wife was dead, too, but that was only a rumour. The squire went away just at the time, and did not come back for months afterwards, and after that he was altogether changed. Before, he had been one of the most popular men in this part of the country, but now he shut himself up, gave up all his acquaintances, and never went outside the park gates except to come down to church. I remember it gave us quite a shock when we saw him for the first time—he seemed to have grown an old man all at once. Everyone said that the death of his son had broken his heart."

"And Aggie is his granddaughter! Well, well, you have astonished me. But why did you not tell me before?"

"There were a good many reasons, ma'am. I thought, in the first place, you might refuse me, if you knew, for it might do you harm. The squire is a vindictive man, and he is landlord of your house; and if he came to know that you had knowingly taken in his granddaughter, there was no saying how he might have viewed it. Then, if you had known it, you might have thought you ought to keep her in, and not let her run about the country with your son; and altogether, it would not have been so comfortable for you or her. I chose to put her at Sidmouth because I wanted to come here often, to hear how the squire was going on; for if he had been taken ill I should have told him sooner than I intended."

"But why did you not tell him before?" Mrs. Walsham asked.

"Just selfishness, ma'am. I could not bring myself to run the risk of having to give her up. She was mine as much as his, and was a hundred times more to me than she could be to him. I took her a baby from her dead mother's arms. I fed her and nursed her, taught her her first words and her first prayer. Why should I offer to give her up to him who, likely enough, would not accept the offer when it was made to him? But I always intended to make it some day. It was my duty to give her the chance at least; but I kept on putting off the day, till that Saturday when she was so nearly drowned; then I saw my duty before me."

"I had, from the first, put aside a hundred pounds, to give her more of an education than I could do; but if it hadn't been for that fall into the sea, it might have been years before I carried out my plan. Then I saw it could not go on any longer. She was getting too old and too bold to sit quiet while I was showing my box. She had had a narrow escape, and who could say what might happen the next time she got into mischief? Then I bethought me that the squire was growing old, and that it was better not to put it off too long. So, ma'am, I came to you and made up my mind to put her with you."

"And you had your way," Mrs. Walsham said, smiling, "though it was with some difficulty."

"I expected it would be difficult, ma'am; but I made up my mind to that, and had you kept on refusing I should, as a last chance, have told you whose child she was."

"But why me?" Mrs. Walsham asked. "Why were you so particularly anxious that she should come to me, of all people?"

The sergeant smiled.

"It's difficult to tell you, ma'am, but I had a reason."

"But what was it?" Mrs. Walsham persisted.

The sergeant hesitated.

"You may think me an old fool, ma'am, but I will tell you what fancy came into my mind. Your son saved Aggie's life. He was twelve years old, she was five, seven years' difference."

"Why, what nonsense, sergeant!" Mrs. Walsham broke in with a laugh. "You don't mean to say that fancy entered your head!"

"It did, ma'am," Sergeant Wilks said gravely. "I liked the look of the boy much. He was brave and modest, and a gentleman. I spoke about him to the fishermen that night, and everyone had a good word for him; so I said to myself, 'I can't reward him for what he has done directly, but it may be that I can indirectly.'"

"Aggie is only a child, but she has a loving, faithful little heart, and I said to myself, 'If I throw her with this boy, who, she knows, has saved her life, for two years, she is sure to have a strong affection for him.'"

"Many things may happen afterwards. If the squire takes her they will be separated. He may get to care for someone, and so may she, but it's just giving him a chance."

"Then, too, I thought a little about myself. I liked to fancy that, even though she would have to go from me to the squire, my little plan may yet turn out, and it would be I, not he, who had arranged for the future happiness of my little darling. I shouldn't have told you all this, ma'am; but you would have it."

"I am glad you brought her to me, Sergeant Wilks, anyhow," Mrs. Walsham said, "for I love her dearly, and she has been a great pleasure to me; but what you are talking about is simply nonsense. My son is a good boy, and will, I hope, grow up an honourable gentleman like his father; but he cannot look so high as the granddaughter of Squire Linthorne."

"More unequal marriages have been made than that, ma'am," the sergeant said sturdily; "but we won't say more about it. I have thought it over and over, many a hundred times, as I wheeled my box across the hills, and it don't seem to me impossible. I will agree that the squire would never say yes; but the squire may be in his grave years before Aggie comes to think about marriage. Besides, it is more than likely that he will have nothing to say to my pet. If his pride made him cast his son off, rather than acknowledge my daughter as his, it will keep him from acknowledging her daughter as his grandchild. I hope it will, with all my heart; I hope so."

"In that case, Sergeant Wilks," Mrs. Walsham said, "let this be her home for the time. Before you told me your story, I had made up my mind to ask you to let her remain with me. You need feel under no obligation, for the money you have paid me is amply sufficient to pay for the expenses of what she eats for years. It will be a real pleasure for me to keep her, for she has become a part of the house, and we should miss her sorely, indeed. She is quick and intelligent, and I will teach her all I know, and can train her up to take a situation as a governess in a gentleman's family, or perhaps—" and she laughed, "your little romance might come true some day, and she can in that case stop in this home until James makes her another."

"You are very kind, ma'am," the sergeant said. "Truly kind indeed; and I humbly accept your offer, except that so long as I live she shall be no expense to you. I earn more than enough for my wants, and can, at any rate, do something towards preventing her from being altogether a burden on your hands. And now, ma'am, how would you recommend me to go to work with the vindictive old man up at the Hall?"

"I shouldn't have thought he was vindictive. That is not at all the character he bears."

"No," the sergeant said, "I hear him spoken well of; but I have seen, in other cases, men, who have had the name of being pleasant and generous, were yet tyrants and brutes in their own family. I judge him as I found him—a hard hearted, tyrannical, vindictive father. I think I had better not see him myself. We have never met. I have never set eyes on him save here in church; but he regarded me as responsible for the folly of his son. He wrote me a violent letter, and said I had inveigled the

lad into the marriage; and although I might have told him it was false, I did not answer his letter, for the mischief was done then, and I hoped he would cool down in time.

"However, that is all past now; but I don't wish to see him. I was thinking of letting the child go to the Hall by herself, and drop in suddenly upon him. She is very like her father, and may possibly take his heart by storm."

"Yes," Mrs. Walsham assented. "Now I know who she is, I can see the likeness strongly. Yes; I should think that that would be the best way. People often yield to a sudden impulse, who will resist if approached formally or from a distance. But have you any reason to suppose that he will not receive her? Did he refuse at first to undertake the charge of the child? Does he even know that she is alive? It may be that, all these years, he has been anxious to have her with him, and that you have been doing him injustice altogether."

"I never thought of it in that light," the sergeant said, after a pause. "He never came near his son when he lay dying, never wrote a line in answer to his letters. If a man could not forgive his son when he lay dying, how could he care for a grandchild he had never seen?"

"That may be so, Sergeant Wilks; but his son's death certainly broke him down terribly, and it may be that he will gladly receive his granddaughter."

"But there are the young ones back again. I will think over what you have been telling me, and we can discuss it again tomorrow."

Chapter 4: The Squire's Granddaughter

The following day another council was held, and Mrs. Walsham told the sergeant that, on thinking it over, she had concluded that the best way would be to take the old butler at the Hall, who had served the family for forty-five years, into their confidence, and to ask him to arrange how best Aggie might be introduced to the squire.

"I have been thinking over what you said, ma'am, and it may be that you are right, and that I have partly misjudged the squire. I hope so, for Aggie's sake, and yet I cannot help feeling sorry. I have always felt almost sure he would have nothing to say to her, and I have clung to the hope that I should not lose my little girl. I know, of course, how much better it will be for her, and have done all I could to make her so that she should be fit for it, if he took her. But it will be a wrench, ma'am. I can't help feeling it will be a wrench," and the old soldier's voice quivered as he spoke.

"It cannot be otherwise, sergeant," Mrs. Walsham said kindly. "You have been everything to each other, and though, for her good and happiness, you are ready to give her up, it is a heavy sacrifice for you to make."

That afternoon, the sergeant went for a long walk alone with Aggie, and when they returned Mrs. Walsham saw, by the flushed cheeks and the swollen eyes of the child, that she had been crying. James noticed it also, and saw that she seemed depressed and quiet. He supposed that her grandfather had been telling her that he was going to take her away, for hitherto nothing had been said, in her hearing, as to the approaching termination of the stay with his mother.

As they came out of church, Mrs. Walsham had waited for a moment at the door, and had told the butler at the Hall that she wished particularly to speak to him, that afternoon, if he could manage to come down. They were not strangers, for the doctor had attended John's wife in her last illness, and he had sometimes called with messages from the Hall, when the doctor was wanted there.

John Petersham was astonished, indeed, when Mrs. Walsham informed him that the little girl he had seen in her pew, in church, was his master's granddaughter.

"You don't say so, ma'am. You don't say as that pretty little thing is Master Herbert's child! But why didn't you say so afore? Why, I have caught myself looking at her, and wondering how it was that I seemed to know her face so well; and now, of course, I sees it. She is the picture of Master Herbert when he was little."

"I couldn't say so before, John, because I only knew it myself last night. Her grandfather—that is, her other grandfather, you know—placed her with me to educate, and, as he said, to make a little lady of, two years ago; but it was only last night he told me."

"Only to think of it!" the butler ejaculated. "What will the squire say?"

"Yes, that is the point, John. What will the squire say? Her grandfather thinks he will have nothing to say to her."

"Nothing to say to her, ma'am! Why, he will be off his head with joy. Didn't he search for her, and advertise for her, and do all he could to find her for months? It wasn't till he tried for over a year that he gave it up, and sent for Richard Horton to come to him."

"Her grandfather can only judge by what he knows, John. He tells me that the son wrote to his father, over and over again, on his deathbed, and that he never came near him, or took any notice of the letters."

"That's true enough, ma'am," the butler said sadly; "and it is what has pretty nigh broken the squire's heart. He was obstinate like at first, and he took me with him when he travelled about across the sea among the foreigners, and when he was at a place they called Athens, he got a fever and he was down for weeks. We came home by sea, and the winds was foul, and we made a long voyage of it, and when we got home there was letters that had been lying months and months for us, and among them was those letters of Master Herbert's."

"The squire wasn't an hour in the house afore the carriage was round to the door, and we posted as hard as horses could take us right across England to Broadstairs, never stopping a minute except to change horses; and when we got there it was a month too late, and there was nothing to do but to go to the churchyard, and to see the stone under which Master Herbert and his young wife was laid.

"The house where they had died was shut up. There had been a sale, and the man who was the father of Master Herbert's wife was gone, and we learned there had been a baby born, and that had gone too. The squire was like a madman, blaming himself for his son's death, and a-raving to think what must Master Herbert have thought of him, when he never answered his letters. I had a terrible time with him, and then he set to work to find the child; but, as I told you, we never did find it, or hear a word of it from that time to this, and the squire has never held up his head. He will be pretty well out of his mind with joy."

"I am very glad to hear what you say, John," Mrs. Walsham said. "I could hardly fancy the squire, who always has borne such a name for kindness, being so hard that he would not listen to his dying son's entreaties."

"No, ma'am. The squire was hard for a bit. Master Herbert's marriage was a sad disappointment to him. He had made up his mind he was going to do so well, and to cut such a figure in the world; but he would have come round. Lord bless you, he only meant to hold out for a bit. When he was ill at Athens, he was talking all the time about forgiving his son, and I could see how hard it had been to him to keep separated from him. On the voyage home he fidgeted ever so at the delay, and I knew that the first thing he did, when he got back, would be to write to Master Herbert and tell him to bring his wife down to the Hall. There's not a hard corner in the squire's heart.

"I thank the good God for the news you have told me, ma'am; it's the best I ever heard in all my life."

Mrs. Walsham now told him how the child had been brought up, and then the sergeant himself, who was waiting in the next room, was brought in; and to him John Petersham related the story of the squire's illness, the reason of the letters not reaching him for months after they had been written, and his intense sorrow and self reproach at having arrived too late, and told him of the efforts that had been made to find the child. The sergeant listened in grave silence.

"I am glad it is so," he said, after a pause. "I have misjudged the squire, and I am glad of it. It will be a blow to me to lose the child. I do not pretend that it won't; but it is for her good, and I must be content. He can hardly object to my seeing her sometimes, and if I know that she is well and happy, that is all I care for; and now the sooner it's over the better. Can she come up this evening?"

"Surely she can," John Petersham said. "The squire dines at five. If you will bring her up at six, I will take her in to him."

And so it was arranged, and in his walk with Aggie, afterwards, the sergeant told her the history of her parents, and that Squire Linthorne was her other grandfather, and that she was to go up and see him that evening.

Aggie had uttered her protest against fate. She did not wish to leave her grampa who had been so good to her, and Mrs. Walsham, and James. The description of the big house and its grandeurs, and the pleasures of a pony for herself, offered no enticement to her; and, weeping, she flung her arms round her grandfather's neck and implored him not to give her up.

"I must, my dear. It is my duty. I wish to God that it were not. You know how I love you, Aggie, and how hard it is for me to part with you; but it is for your good, my darling. You mayn't see it now, but when you get older you will know it. It will not be so hard now on me, dear, nor on you, as it would have been had I given you up two years ago; but we have learned to do a little without each other."

"But you will come and see me, just as you have here, won't you?" Aggie said, still weeping.

"I hope so, my dear. You see, the squire is your father's father, while I am only your mother's father, and somehow the law makes him nearer to you than I am, and he will have the right to say what you must do."

"I won't stay with him. I won't," Aggie said passionately, "if he won't let you come."

"You must not say that, dear," the sergeant said. "We must all do our duty, even when that duty is hard to do, and your duty will be to obey the squire's orders, and to do as he tells you. I have no doubt he will be very kind, and that you will be very happy with him, and I hope he will let you see me sometimes."

It was a long time before the child was at all reconciled. When her sobs began to cease, her grandfather told her what she was to do when she saw the squire.

"You will remember, my dear, that I have been more fortunate than he has. I have had you all these years, and he has had no one to love or care for him. You must remember that he was not to blame, because he objected to his son marrying my daughter. They were not in the same position of life, and it was only natural that he should not like it, at first; and, as I told you, he was coming home to make them both happy, when he found it was too late.

"You must think, dear, that while I have been happy all these years with you, he has been sorrowing and grieving, and you must try and love him, and make up to him for what he has suffered. I know you will not forget your old friends. You will love me whether you see me often or not; and Mrs. Walsham, who has been very kind to you; and James, you know, who saved your life."

"I shall never forget anyone, grampa. I shall always love you better than anyone," the child exclaimed, throwing her arms round his neck with a fresh burst of tears.

"There, there, my pet," the sergeant said soothingly. "You must not cry any more. I want you to look your best this evening, you know, and to do credit to us all. And now, I think we have settled everything, so we will be going back to tea."

That evening, the squire was sitting by himself in the great dining room, occasionally sipping the glass of port, which John Petersham had poured out before he left the room. The curtains were drawn, and the candles lighted; for it was late in September, and the evenings were closing in fast; and the squire was puzzling over John Petersham's behaviour at dinner.

Although the squire was not apt to observe closely what was passing around him, he had been struck with the old butler's demeanour. That something was wrong with him was clear. Usually he was the most quiet and methodical of servants, but he had blundered several times in the service. He had handed his master dishes when his plate was already supplied. He had spilled the wine in pouring it out. He had started nervously when spoken to. Mr. Linthorne even thought that he had seen tears in his eyes. Altogether, he was strangely unlike himself.

Mr. Linthorne had asked him if anything was the matter, but John had, with almost unnecessary earnestness, declared there was nothing. Altogether, the squire was puzzled. With any other servant, he would have thought he had been drinking, but such a supposition, in John's case, was altogether out of the question.

He could have had no bad news, so far as the squire knew, for the only children he had, had died young, and he had no near relatives or connections. It was ridiculous to suppose that John, at his age, had fallen in love. Altogether, the squire failed to suggest to himself any explanation of his old butler's conduct, and had just concluded, philosophically, by the reflection that he supposed he should know what it was sooner or later, when the door of the room quietly opened.

The squire did not look up. It closed again as quietly, and then he glanced towards it. He could hardly believe his eyes. A child was standing there—a girl with soft smooth hair, and large eyes, and a sensitive mouth, with an expression fearless but appealing. Her hands were clasped before her, and she was standing in doubt whether to advance. There was something so strange, in this apparition in the lonely room, that the squire did not speak for a moment. It flashed across him, vaguely, that there was something familiar to him in the face and expression, something which sent a thrill through him; and at the same instant, without knowing why, he felt that there was a connection between the appearance of the child, and the matter he had just been thinking of—John Petersham's strange conduct. He was still looking at her, when she advanced quietly towards him.

"Grandpapa," she said, "I am Aggie Linthorne."

A low cry of astonishment broke from the squire. He pushed his chair back.

"Can it be true?" he muttered. "Or am I dreaming?"

"Yes, grandpapa," the child said, close beside him now. "I am Aggie Linthorne, and I have come to see you. If you don't think it's me, grampa said I was to give you this, and then you would know;" and she held out a miniature, on ivory, of a boy some fourteen years old; and a watch and chain.

"I do not need them," the squire said, in low tones. "I see it in your face. You are Herbert's child, whom I looked for so long.

"Oh! my child! my child! have you come at last?" and he drew her towards him, and kissed her passionately, while the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"I couldn't come before, you know," the child said, "because I didn't know about you; and grampa, that's my other grandpapa," she nodded confidentially, "did not know you wanted me. But now he knows, he sent me to you. He told me I was to come because you were lonely.

"But you can't be more lonely than he is," she said, with a quiver in her voice. "Oh! he will be lonely, now!"

"But where do you come from, my dear? and how did you get here? and what have you been doing, all these years?"

"Grampa brought me here," the child said. "I call him grampa, you know, because I did when I was little, and I have always kept to it; but I know, of course, it ought to be grandpapa. He brought me here, and John—at least he called him John—brought me in. And I have been living, for two years, with Mrs. Walsham down in the town, and I used to see you in church, but I did not know that you were my grandpapa."

The squire, who was holding her close to him while she spoke, got up and rang the bell; and John opened the door, with a quickness that showed that he had been waiting close to it, anxiously waiting a summons.

"John Petersham," the squire said, "give me your hand. This is the happiest day of my life."

The two men wrung each other's hands. They had been friends ever since John Petersham, who was twelve years the senior of the two, first came to the house, a young fellow of eighteen, to assist his father, who had held the same post before him.

"God be thanked, squire!" he said huskily.

"God be thanked, indeed, John!" the squire rejoined, reverently. "So this was the reason, old friend, why your hand shook as you poured out my wine. How could you keep the secret from me?"

"I did not know how to begin to tell you, but I was pretty nigh letting it out, and only the thought that it was better the little lady should tell you herself, as we had agreed, kept it in. Only to think, squire, after all these years! But I never quite gave her up. I always thought, somehow, as she would come just like this."

"Did you, John? I gave up hope years ago. How did it come about, John?"

"Mrs. Walsham told me, as I came out of church today, as she wanted to speak to me. So I went down, and she told me all about it, and then I saw him—" John hesitated at the name, for he knew that, perhaps, the only man in the world against whom his master cherished a bitter resentment, was the father of his son's wife. "It seems he never saw your advertisements, never knew as you wanted to hear anything of the child, so he took her away and kept her. He has been here, off and on, all these years. I heard tell of him, often and often, when I had been down into Sidmouth, but never dreamt as it was him. He went about the country with a box on wheels with glasses—a peep show as they calls it."

The squire winced.

"He is well spoken of, squire," John said, "and I am bound to say as he doesn't seem the sort of man we took him for, at all, not by no means. He did not know you wanted to have her, but he thought it his duty to give her the chance, and so he put her with Mrs. Walsham, and never told her,

till yesterday, who she was. Mrs. Walsham was quite grieved at parting with her, for she says she is wonderfully quick at her lessons, and has been like a daughter with her, for the last two years."

The child had sat quietly down in a chair, and was looking into the fire while the two men were speaking. She had done what she was told to do, and was waiting quietly for what was to come next. Her quick ear, however, caught, in the tones of John Petersham, an apologetic tone when speaking of her grandfather, and she was moved to instant anger.

"Why do you speak like that of my grampa?" she said, rising to her feet, and standing indignantly before him. "He is the best man in the world, and the kindest and the nicest, and if you don't like him, I can go away to him again. I don't want to stay here, not one minute.

"You may be my grandpapa," she went on, turning to the squire, "and you may be lonely, but he is lonely, too, and you have got a great house, and all sorts of nice things; and you can do better without me than he can, for he has got nothing to love but me, poor grampa!"

And her eyes filled with sudden tears, as she thought of him tramping on his lonely walks over the hills.

"We do not mean to speak unkindly of your grandfather, my dear," the squire said gently. "I have never seen him, you know, and John has never seen him but once. I have thought, all these years, bitterly of him; but perhaps I have been mistaken. He has ever been kind and good to you, and, above all, he has given you back to me, and that will make me think differently of him, in future. We all make mistakes, you know, and I have made terrible mistakes, and have been terribly punished for them. I daresay I have made a mistake here; but whether or no, you shall never hear a word, from me, against the man who has been so kind to you."

"And you will let me see him sometimes, grandpapa?" the child said, taking his hand pleadingly. "He said, if you said no, I must do as you told me; because somehow you are nearer to me than he is, though I don't know how that can be. But you won't say that, will you? For, oh! I know he is so lonely without me, and I should never be happy, thinking of him all alone, not if you were to be ever so kind to me, and to give me all sorts of grand things."

"No, my dear, I certainly shall not say so. You shall see him as often as you like."

"Oh, thank you, grandpapa!" she exclaimed joyfully, and she held up her face to kiss him.

The squire lifted her in his arms, and held her closely to him.

"John," he said, "you must tell Mrs. Morcombe to get a room ready for my granddaughter, at once, and you had better bring the tea in here, and then we will think of other things. I feel quite bewildered, at present."

When John returned with the tea, Aggie was sitting on the squire's knee. She was perfectly at home, now, and had been chattering to him of her life with her grandfather, and had just related the incident of her narrow escape from drowning.

"Do you hear that, John?" the squire said. "She was nearly drowned here, within sight of our home, and I might never have known anything about it. It seems that lad of Dr. Walsham's saved her life. He is a fine lad. He was her champion, you know, in that affair with my nephew. How strange that the two boys should have quarrelled over my granddaughter!"

"Yes, squire, and young Walsham came well out of it!" John said heartily; for to him, only, did the squire mention the circumstances of the case, and he chuckled now to himself, as he thought that Richard Horton had made an even greater mistake in that matter than he thought of, for John detested the boy with all his heart, and had only abstained from reporting his conduct, to the squire, from fear of giving his master pain.

The squire's brow clouded a little at the allusion.

"It will make a difference to him, John," he said, "for, of course, now my granddaughter will take his place."

"And a good thing, too!" John said heartily. "I have never said a word before, squire, because, as you had chosen him as your heir, there was no use in setting you against him; but a more hatefuller lad

than Richard Horton I never comed across, and so said everyone here. You did not see much of him, squire, and natural thought well of him, for he was a good-looking boy, and could speak fair enough when he liked. I thought well of him, myself, when he first came, but I larned better, afterwards."

"There are many excuses to be made for him, John," the squire said, "and I have had good reports of him, since. Of course, I shall see that, although he can no longer be regarded as my heir here, he shall be well provided for. But there will be plenty of time to think of this."

"Mr. Wilks asked me to say, sir," the butler said as he prepared to leave them, "that he shall be staying in Sidmouth tomorrow, and that, if you wish to see him, he will come up here."

"Certainly I wish to see him," the squire replied. "I have many things to ask him. Let the boy go down, the first thing in the morning, or—no, if you don't mind, John, would you go down yourself tonight? He will naturally be anxious to know how his grandchild is getting on. Tell him with what joy I have received her, and take any message she may give you."

"Is there anything you would like to say to your grandfather, child?"

"Oh, yes. Please tell him that I think I shall like it, and that he is to come and see me when he likes, and that, of course, he is to see me when he comes in the morning, and then I can tell him all about it."

"And say, I shall be glad to see him the first thing after breakfast," the squire added.

The housekeeper soon entered, and Aggie, very sleepy after the excitements of the day, was taken off to bed. Her sleepiness, however, disappeared in her wonder at the size of the house, and at the vastness of her bedroom.

"Why, you have got a fire!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "I never saw a fire in a bedroom, before."

"I didn't light it for the cold, miss," the housekeeper said; "but because it is a long time since the room was slept in before, and because I thought it would be cheerful for you. I shall sleep in the next room, till things are settled, so that, if you want anything, you will only have to run in."

"Thank you," Aggie said gratefully. "It does all seem so big; but I am sure not to want anything. Thank you."

"Here is your box, miss. Would you like me to help undress you?"

"Oh, no!" Aggie laughed. "Why, of course I can undress myself;" and she laughed at the idea of assistance being required in such a matter.

"Then, good night!" the housekeeper said. "I shall leave the door ajar, between the two rooms, when I come to bed."

The next morning, soon after breakfast, Sergeant Wilks was ushered into the study, where the squire was expecting him. The two men had had hard thoughts of each other, for many years. The squire regarded the sergeant as a man who had inveigled his son into marrying his daughter, while the sergeant regarded the squire as a heartless and unnatural father, who had left his son to die alone among strangers. The conversation with John Petersham had taught the sergeant that he had wronged the squire, by his estimate of him, and that he was to be pitied rather than blamed in the matter. The squire, on his part, was grateful to the sergeant for the care he had bestowed upon the child, and for restoring her to him, and was inclined, indeed, at the moment, to a universal goodwill to all men.

The sergeant was pale, but self possessed and quiet; while the squire, moved, by the events of the night before, out of the silent reserve in which he had, for years, enveloped himself, was agitated and nervous. He was the first to speak.

"Mr. Wilks," he said. "I have to give you my heartfelt thanks, for having restored my granddaughter to me—the more so as I know, from what she has said, how great a sacrifice you must be making. John has been telling me of his conversation with you, and you have learned, from him, that I was not so wholly heartless and unnatural a father as you must have thought me; deeply as I blame myself, and shall always blame myself, in the matter."

"Yes," the sergeant said. "I have learned that I have misread you. Had it not been so, I should have brought the child to you long ago—should never have taken her away, indeed. Perhaps we have both misjudged each other."

"I fear that we have," the squire said, remembering the letters he wrote to his son, in his anger, denouncing the sergeant in violent language.

"It does not matter, now," the sergeant went on quietly; "but, as I do not wish Aggie ever to come to think ill of me, in the future, it is better to set it right."

"When I left the army, I had saved enough money to furnish a house, and I took one at Southampton, and set up taking lodgers there. I had my pension, and lived well until my wife died—a year before your son came down, from London, with another gentleman, and took my rooms. My daughter was seventeen when her mother died, and she took to managing the house. I was careful of her, and gave her orders that, on no account, was she ever to go into the lodgers' rooms. I waited on them, myself."

"How your son first saw her, and got to speak to her, I don't know; but I am not surprised that, when he did, he loved her, for there was no prettier or sweeter girl in Hampshire. They took the rooms, first, only for a fortnight, then the other gentleman went away, and your son stayed on."

"One day—it came upon me like a thunderbolt—your son told me he wanted to marry my Agnes. I was angry, at first. Angry, because it had been done behind my back, and because I had been deceived. I said as much; but your son assured me that he had never spoken to her in the house, but had met her when she went out for her walks. Still, it was wrong, and I told him so, and I told her so, though, in my heart, I did not altogether blame them; for young people will be young people, and, as he had acted honourably in coming to me at once, I let that pass."

"But, squire, though but a sergeant in His Majesty's service, I had my pride as you had yours, and I told him, at once, that I would not give my consent to my daughter's marrying him, until you had given yours; and that he must leave the house at once, and not see Agnes again, until he came with your written consent to show me."

"He went away at once. After a time, he began to write to me, urging me to change my decision; and from this, although he never said so, I was sure that you had refused to sanction his marriage. However, I stuck to what I had said, though it was hard for me to do so, with my child growing thin and pale before my eyes, with all her bright happiness gone."

"So it went on, for three months, and then one morning she was gone, and I found a letter on her table for me, saying that she had been married to him a week before, when she went out, as I thought, to spend the day with a friend. She begged and prayed me to forgive her, and said how miserable she had been, and that she could not say no to her lover's pleadings."

"I wrote to the address she had given me, saying that she had well nigh broken my heart. She knew that I had only refused my consent because it would have seemed a dishonourable action, to allow your son to marry her without your consent. She knew how hard it had been for me to do my duty, when I saw her pining before my eyes, but I forgave her wholly, and did not altogether blame her, seeing that it was the way of Nature that young women, when they once took to loving, should put their father altogether in the second place;

"It was hard to me to write that letter, for I longed to see her bonny face again. But I thought it was my duty. I thought so then; but I think, now, it was pride."

"From time to time she wrote to me. I learned that you still refused to see your son, and I gathered, though she did not say much of this, that things were going badly with them. At last, she wrote that her husband was ill—very ill, she feared. He had, in vain, tried to get employment. I don't think he was naturally strong, and the anxiety had broken him down. Then I went up to London at once, and found them, in a little room, without the necessities of life. I brought them down home, and nursed him for three months, till he died."

"A week later, Aggie was born. Ten days afterwards, I laid her mother by the side of her father. No answer had come to the letters he had written to you, while he had been ill, though in the later ones he had told you that he was dying. So, I looked upon the child as mine.

"Things had gone badly with me. I had been able to take no lodgers, while they were with me. I had got into debt, and even could I have cleared myself, I could not well have kept the house on, without a woman to look after it. I was restless, too, and longed to be moving about. So I sold off the furniture, paid my debts, and laid by the money that remained, for the child's use in the future.

"I had, some time before, met an old comrade travelling the country with a show. I happened to meet him again, just as I was leaving, and he told me the name of a man, in London, who sold such things. I left the child, for a year, with some people I knew, a few miles out of Southampton; came up to London, bought a show, and started. It was lonely work, at first; but, after a year, I fetched the child away, and took her round the country with me, and for four years had a happy time of it.

"I had chosen this part of the country, and, after a time, I became uneasy in my mind, as to whether I was doing right; and whether, for the child's sake, I ought not to tell you that she was alive, and offer to give her up, if you were willing to take her. I heard how your son's death had changed you, and thought that, maybe, you would like to take his daughter; but, before bringing her to you, I thought she should have a better education than I had time to give her, and that she should be placed with a lady, so that, if you took her, you need not be ashamed of her manners.

"I hoped you would not take her. I wanted to keep her for myself; but my duty to her was clear.

"And now, squire, you know all about it. I have been wrong to keep her so long from you, I grant; but I can only say that I have done my duty, as far as I could, and that, though I have made many mistakes, my conscience is clear, that I did the best, as far as it seemed to me at the time."

Chapter 5: A Quiet Time

As the sergeant was telling the story, the squire had sat with his face shaded by his hand, but more than one tear had dropped heavily on the table.

"I wish I could say as much," he said sadly, when the other ended. "I wish that I could say that my conscience is clear, Mr. Wilks. I have misjudged you cruelly, and that without a tithe of the reason, which you had, for thinking me utterly heartless and cruel. You will have heard that I never got those letters my son wrote me, after he was ill, and that, when I returned home and received them, I posted to Southampton, only to find that I was too late; and that, for a year, I did all in my power to find the child. Still, all this is no excuse. I refused to forgive him, returned his letters unanswered, and left him, as it seemed, to his fate.

"It is no excuse to say that I had made up my mind to forgive him, when he was, as I thought, sufficiently punished. He did not know that. As to the poverty in which you found him, I can only plead that I did not dream that he would come to that. He had, I knew, some money, for I had just sent him his half-year's allowance before he wrote to me about this business. Then there was the furniture of his rooms in London, his horses, jewels, and other matters. I had thought he could go on very well for a year.

"Of course, I was mistaken. Herbert was always careless about money, and, no doubt, he spent it freely after he was first married. He would naturally wish to have everything pretty and nice for his young wife, and, no doubt, he counted upon my forgiving him long before the money was spent.

"I am not excusing myself. God knows how bitterly I have condemned myself, all these years. I only want to show you that I had no idea of condemning him to starvation. He was my only son, and I loved him. I felt, perhaps, his rebellion all the more, because he had never before given me a day's trouble. I was harsh, obstinate, and cruel.

"I have only the one old excuse. I never thought it would turn out as it did. What would I give, if I could say, as you can, that you have a clear conscience, and that you acted always as it seemed to be your duty!

"And now, Mr. Wilks, now that I have heard your story, I trust that you will forgive my past suspicions of you, and let me say how much I honour and esteem you for your conduct. No words can tell you how I thank you, for your goodness and kindness to my little granddaughter; our little granddaughter, I should say. You have the better right, a thousand-fold, to her than I have; and, had I been in your place, I could never have made such a sacrifice.

"We must be friends, sir, great friends. Our past has been saddened by the same blow. All our hopes, in the future, are centred on the same object."

The two men rose to their feet together, and their hands met in a firm clasp, and tears stood in both their eyes.

Then the squire put his hand on the other's shoulder, and said, "We will talk again, presently. Let us go into the next room. The little one is longing to see you, and we must not keep her."

For the next hour, the two men devoted themselves to the child. Now that she had her old friend with her, she felt no further misgivings, and was able to enter into the full delight of her new home.

The house and its wonders were explored, and, much as she was delighted with these, the gardens and park were an even greater excitement and pleasure. Dancing, chattering, asking questions of one or the other, she was half wild with pleasure, and the squire was no less delighted. A new light and joy had come into his life, and with it the ten years, which sorrow and regret had laid upon him, had fallen off; for, although his habits of seclusion and quiet had caused him to be regarded as quite an old man by his neighbours, he was still three years short of sixty, while the sergeant was two years younger.

It was a happy morning for them, all three; and when John Petersham went in, after lunch, to the kitchen, he assured his fellow servants that it was as much as he could do to keep from crying with joy, at the sight of the squire's happy face, and to hear him laugh and joke, as he had not done for eight years now.

The sergeant had stopped to that meal, for he saw, by the manner in which the squire asked him, that he should give pain if he refused; and there was a simple dignity about the old soldier, which would have prevented his appearing out of place at the table of the highest in the land.

"Now, pussy," the squire said, when they had finished, "you must amuse yourself for a bit. You can go in the garden again, or sit with Mrs. Morcombe in her room. She will look you out some picture books from the library. I am afraid there is nothing very suited to your reading, but we will soon put all that right. Your grandfather and I want to have another quiet chat together."

"Now I want your advice," he said when they were both comfortably seated in the study. "You see, you have been thinking and planning about the child for years, while it has all come new upon me, so I must rely upon you entirely. Of course, the child must have a governess, that is the first thing; not so much for the sake of teaching her, though, of course, she must be taught, but as a companion for her."

"Yes," the sergeant assented, "she must have a governess."

"It will be a troublesome matter to find one to suit," the squire said thoughtfully. "I don't want a harsh sort of Gorgon, to repress her spirits and bother her life out with rules and regulations; and I won't have a giddy young thing, because I should like to have the child with me at breakfast and lunch, and I don't want a fly-away young woman who will expect all sorts of attention. Now, what is your idea? I have no doubt you have, pictured in your mind, the exact sort of woman you would like to have over her."

"I have," the sergeant answered quietly. "I don't know whether it would suit you, squire, or whether it could be managed; but it does seem, to me, that you have got the very woman close at hand. Aggie has been for two years with Mrs. Walsham, who is a lady in every way. She is very fond of the child, and the child is very fond of her. Everyone says she is an excellent teacher. She would be the very woman to take charge of her."

"The very thing!" the squire exclaimed, with great satisfaction. "But she has a school," he went on, his face falling a little, "and there is a son."

"I have thought of that," the sergeant said. "The school enables them to live, but it cannot do much more, so that I should think she would feel no reluctance at giving that up."

"Money would be no object," the squire said. "I am a wealthy man, Mr. Wilks, and have been laying by the best part of my income for the last eight years. I would pay any salary she chose, for the comfort of such an arrangement would be immense, to say nothing of the advantage and pleasure it would be to the child. But how about the boy?"

"We both owe a good deal to the boy, squire," the sergeant said gravely, "for if it had not been for him, the child would have been lost to us."

"So she was telling me last night," the squire said. "And he really saved her life?"

"He did," the sergeant replied. "But for his pluck and promptitude she must have been drowned. A moment's hesitation on his part, and nothing could have saved her."

"I made up my mind last night," the squire said, "to do something for him. I have seen him before, and was much struck with him."

"Then, in that case, squire, I think the thing could be managed. If the lad were sent to a good school, his mother might undertake the management of Aggie. She could either go home of an evening, or sleep here and shut up her house, as you might arrange with her; living, of course, at home, when the boy was home for his holidays, and only coming up for a portion of the day."

"That would be a capital plan," the squire agreed warmly. "The very thing. I should get off all the bother with strange women, and the child would have a lady she is already fond of, and who, I

have no doubt, is thoroughly qualified for the work. Nothing could be better. I will walk down this afternoon and see her myself, and I have no doubt I shall be able to arrange it.

"And now about yourself—what are your plans?"

"I shall start tomorrow morning on my tramp, as usual," the sergeant answered quietly; "but I shall take care, in future, that I do not come with my box within thirty miles or so of Sidmouth. I do not want Aggie's future to be, in any way, associated with a showman's box. I shall come here, sometimes, to see her, as you have kindly said I may, but I will not abuse the privilege by coming too often. Perhaps you won't think a day, once every three months, to be too much?"

"I should think it altogether wrong and monstrous!" the squire exclaimed hotly. "You have been virtually the child's father, for the last seven years. You have cared for her, and loved her, and worked for her. She is everything to you, and I feel how vast are your claims to her, compared to mine; and now you talk about going away, and coming to see her once every three months. The idea is unnatural. It is downright monstrous!"

"No, you and I understand each other at last; would to Heaven we had done so eight years back! I feel how much more nobly you acted in that unhappy matter than I did, and I esteem and honour you. We are both getting on in life, we have one common love and interest, we stand in the same relation to the child, and I say, emphatically, that you have a right, and more than a right, to a half share in her. You must go away no more, but remain here as my friend, and as joint guardian of the child.

"I will have no refusal, man," he went on, as the sergeant shook his head. "Your presence here will be almost as great a comfort, to me, as to the child. I am a lonely man. For years, I have cut myself loose from the world. I have neither associates nor friends. But now that this great load is off my mind, my first want is a friend; and who could be so great a friend, who could enter into my plans and hopes for the future so well, as yourself, who would have an interest in them equal to my own?"

The sergeant was much moved by the squire's earnestness. He saw that the latter had really at heart the proposal he made.

"You are very good, squire," he said in a low voice; "but even if I could bring myself to eat another man's bread, as long as I can work for my own, it would not do. I am neither by birth nor education fitted for such a position as that you offer to me."

"Pooh, nonsense!" the squire said hotly. "You have seen the world. You have travelled and mixed with men. You are fit to associate as an equal with anyone. Don't you deceive yourself; you certainly do not deceive me.

"It is pride that stands in your way. For that you are going to risk the happiness of your granddaughter, to say nothing of mine; for you don't suppose that either of us is going to feel comfortable and happy, when the snow is whirling round, and the wind sweeping the moors, to think of you trudging along about the country, while we are sitting snugly here by a warm fire.

"You are wanting to spoil everything, now that it has all come right at last, by just the same obstinate pride which wrecked the lives of our children. I won't have it, man. I won't hear of it.

"Come, say no more. I want a friend badly, and I am sure we shall suit each other. I want a companion. Why, man, if I were a rich old lady, and you were a poor old lady, and I asked you to come as my companion, you would see nothing derogatory in the offer. You shall come as my companion, now, or if you like as joint guardian to the child. You shall have your own rooms in the house; and when you feel inclined to be grumpy, and don't care to take your meals with the child and me, you can take them apart.

"At any rate, try it for a month, and if you are not comfortable then I will let you go, though your rooms shall always be in readiness for you, whenever you are disposed to come back.

"Come, give me your hand on the bargain."

Sergeant Wilks could resist no longer. The last two years work, without the child, had indeed been heavy, and especially in winter, when the wind blew strong across the uplands, he began to feel

that he was no longer as strong as he used to be. The prospect of having Aggie always near him was, however, a far greater temptation than that of ending his days in quiet and comfort.

His hand and that of the squire met in a cordial grip, and the matter was settled. Fortunately, as the sergeant reflected, he had still his pension of ten shillings a week, which would suffice to supply clothes and other little necessities which he might require, and would thus save him from being altogether dependent on the squire.

Aggie was wild with delight, when she was called in and informed of the arrangement. The thought of her grandfather tramping the country, alone, had been the one drawback to the pleasure of her life at Mrs. Walsham's, and many a time she had cried herself to sleep, as she pictured to herself his loneliness. That he was to be with her always, was to give up his work to settle down in comfort, was indeed a delight to her.

Greatly pleased was she, also, to hear that Mrs. Walsham was to be asked to come up to be her governess.

"Oh, it will be nice!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "Just like the fairy stories you used to tell me, grampa, when everyone was made happy at the end by the good fairy. Grandpapa is the good fairy, and you and I are the prince and princess; and James—and what is to be done with James? Is he to come up, too?"

"No, my dear," the squire said, smiling. "James is to go to a good school, but you will see him when he comes home for his holidays. But that part of it is not arranged yet, you know; but if you will put on your hat, you can walk down with us to the town, and introduce me to Mrs. Walsham."

Mrs. Walsham had just dismissed her pupils, when the party arrived, and was thinking how quiet and dull the house was without Aggie, when the door opened, and the child rushed in and threw her arms round her neck.

"Oh, I have such good news to tell you! Grandpapa is so good and kind, and grampa is going to live with us, and you are to come up, too, and James is to go to school. Isn't it all splendid?"

"What are you talking about, Aggie?" Mrs. Walsham asked, bewildered, as the child poured out her news.

"Aggie is too fast, madam," the squire said, entering the room accompanied by the sergeant. "She is taking it all for granted, while it has yet to be arranged. I must apologize for coming in without knocking; but the child opened the door and rushed in, and the best thing to do was, we thought, to follow her.

"I have come, in the first place, to thank you for your great kindness to my little granddaughter, and to tell your son how deeply I feel indebted to him, for having saved her life two years ago.

"Now, Aggie, you run away and look for your friend, while I talk matters over with Mrs. Walsham."

Aggie scampered away to find James, who was at work at his books, and to tell him the news, while the squire unfolded his plans to Mrs. Walsham.

His offers were so handsome that Mrs. Walsham accepted them, without an instant's hesitation. She was to have the entire charge of the child during the day, with the option of either returning home in the evening, when Aggie went in to dessert after dinner, or of living entirely at the Hall. The squire explained his intention of sending James to a good school at Exeter, as an instalment of the debt he owed him for saving the child's life, and he pointed out that, when he was at home for his holidays, Aggie could have her holidays, too, and Mrs. Walsham need only come up to the Hall when she felt inclined.

Mrs. Walsham was delighted with the offer, even more for James's sake than her own, although the prospect for herself was most pleasant. To have only Aggie to teach, and walk with, would be delightful after the monotony of drilling successive batches of girls, often inordinately tiresome and stupid. She said, at once, that she should prefer returning home at night—a decision which pleased the squire, for he had wondered what he should do with her in the evening.

The arrangement was at once carried into effect. The school was broken up, and, as the parents of the children were almost all tenants of the squire, they offered no objection to the girls being suddenly left on their hands, when they heard that their teacher was going to live as governess at the Hall. Indeed, the surprise of Sidmouth and the neighbourhood, at learning that the little girl at Mrs. Walsham's was the squire's granddaughter, and that the showman was therefore a connection of the squire, and was going also to live at the Hall, was so great, that there was no room for any other emotion. Save for wrecks, or the arrival of shoals of fish off the coast, or of troubles between the smugglers and the revenue officers, Sidmouth had few excitements, and the present news afforded food for endless talk and conjecture.

On comparing notes, it appeared that there was not a woman in the place who had not been, all along, convinced that the little girl at Mrs. Walsham's was something more than she seemed to be, and that the showman was a man quite out of the ordinary way. And when, on the following Sunday, the sergeant, who had in the meantime been to Exeter, walked quietly into church with the squire, all agreed that the well-dressed military-looking man was a gentleman, and that he had only been masquerading under the name of Sergeant Wilks until, somehow or other, the quarrel between him and the squire was arranged, and the little heiress restored to her position; and Sidmouth remained in that belief to the end.

The sergeant's military title was henceforth dropped. Mr. Linthorne introduced him to his acquaintances—who soon began to flock in, when it was known that the squire's granddaughter had come home, and that he was willing to see his friends and join in society again—as "My friend Mr. Wilks, the father of my poor boy's wife."

And the impression made was generally favourable.

None had ever known the exact story of Herbert's marriage. It was generally supposed that he had married beneath him; but the opinion now was that this must have been a mistake, for there was nothing in any way vulgar about the quiet, military-looking gentleman, with whom the squire was evidently on terms of warm friendship.

The only person somewhat dissatisfied with the arrangement was James Walsham. He loved his mother so much, that he had never offered the slightest dissent to her plan, that he should follow in his father's footsteps. She was so much set on the matter, that he could never bring himself to utter a word in opposition. At heart, however, he longed for a more stirring and more adventurous life, such as that of a soldier or sailor, and he had all along cherished a secret hope, that something might occur to prevent his preparing for the medical profession, and so enable him to carry out his secret wishes. But the present arrangement seemed to put an end to all such hopes, and, although grateful to the squire for sending him to a good school, he wished, with all his heart, that he had chosen some other way of manifesting his gratitude.

Four years passed quietly. James Walsham worked hard when at school, and, during his holidays, spent his time for the most part on board the fishermen's boats. Sometimes he went up to the Hall, generally at the invitation of Mr. Wilks.

"Why don't you come oftener, Jim?" the latter asked him one day. "Aggie was saying, only yesterday, that you used to be such friends with her, and now you hardly ever come near her. The squire is as pleased as I am to see you."

"I don't know," Jim replied. "You see, I am always comfortable with you. I can chat with you, and tell you about school, and about fishing, and so on. The squire is very kind, but I know it is only because of that picking Aggie out of the water, and I never seem to know what to talk about with him. And then, you see, Aggie is growing a young lady, and can't go rambling about at my heels as she used to do, when she was a little girl. I like her, you know, Mr. Wilks, just as I used to do; but I can't carry her on my shoulder now, and make a playfellow of her."

"I suppose that's all natural enough, Jim," Aggie's grandfather said; "but I do think it is a pity you don't come up more often. You know we are all fond of you, and it will give us a pleasure to have you here."

Jim was, in fact, getting to the awkward age with boys. When younger, they tyrannize over their little sisters, when older they may again take pleasure in girls' society; but there is an age, in every boy's life, when he is inclined to think girls a nuisance, as creatures incapable of joining in games, and as being apt to get in the way.

Still, Jim was very fond of his former playmate, and had she been still living down in Sidmouth with his mother, they would have been as great friends as ever.

At the end of the fourth year, Richard Horton came back, after an absence of five years. He was now nearly twenty, and had just passed as lieutenant. He was bronzed with the Eastern sun, and had grown from a good-looking boy into a handsome young man, and was perfectly conscious of his good looks. Among his comrades, he had gained the nickname of "The Dandy"—a name which he accepted in good part, although it had not been intended as complimentary, for Richard Horton was by no means a popular member of his mess.

Boys are quick to detect each other's failings, and several sharp thrashings, when he first joined, had taught Richard that it was very inexpedient to tell a lie on board a ship, if there was any chance of its being detected. As he had become one of the senior midshipmen, his natural haughtiness made him disliked by the younger lads; while, among those of his own standing, he had not one sincere friend, for there was a general feeling, among them, that although Richard Horton was a pleasant companion, and a very agreeable fellow when he liked, he was not somehow straight, not the sort of fellow to be depended upon in all emergencies.

By the captain and lieutenants, he was considered a smart young officer. He was always careful to do his duty, quiet, and gentlemanly in manner, and in point of appearance, and dress, a credit to the ship. Accordingly, all the reports that his captain had sent home of him had been favourable.

Great as was the rage and disappointment which Richard had felt, when he received the letter from his uncle telling him of the discovery of his long-lost granddaughter, he had the tact to prevent any signs of his feelings being visible, in the letter in which he replied. The squire had told him that, although the discovery would, of course, make a considerable difference in his prospects, he should still, if the reports of his conduct continued satisfactory, feel it his duty to make a handsome provision for him.

"Thanks to my quiet life during the last ten years," the squire had written, "I have plenty for both of you. The estate will, of course, go to her; but, always supposing that your conduct will be satisfactory, I shall continue, during my lifetime, the allowance you at present receive, and you will find yourself set down, in my will, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds."

Richard had replied in terms which delighted the squire.

"You see, the boy has a good heart," he said, as he handed the letter to Mr. Wilks. "No one could express himself better."

His companion read the letter over in silence.

"Charmingly expressed," he said as he returned it. "Almost too charmingly, it seems to me."

"Come, come, Wilks, you are prejudiced against the young fellow, for that business with Aggie and young Walsham."

"I hope I am not prejudiced, squire," his friend replied; "but when I know that a lad is a liar, and that he will bring false accusations to shield himself, and when I know that he was detested by all who came in contact with him—John Petersham, the gardener, and the grooms—I require a good deal more than a few satisfactory reports from his captain, who can know very little of his private character, and a soft-soldering letter like that, to reinstate him in my good opinion. I will wager that, if you and I had been standing behind him when he opened your letter, you would have heard an expression of very different sentiments from those he writes you here."

"Look at this: 'I regret, indeed, my dear uncle, that my new cousin must have such a bad opinion of me, owing to my roughness in that unfortunate affair, which I have never ceased to regret; but I hope that, when we meet, I shall be able to overcome the dislike which she must feel for me.'

"Bah!" the old soldier said scornfully. "I would lay all my pension, to a shilling, that boy has already made up his mind that someday he will marry Aggie, and so contrive to get the estates after all."

The squire burst into a good-humoured laugh.

"It's well I don't take up your wager. Such ideas as that might occur to you and me, but hardly to a lad not yet seventeen."

"Well, we shall see," the other said, cooling down. "I hope I may be mistaken in him. We shall see when he comes home."

When he did come home, the old soldier could find but little fault with the young man. He had a frank and open manner, such as is common to men of his profession. He was full of life and anecdote. His manner to the squire was admirable, affectionate, and quietly respectful, without any air of endeavouring especially to ingratiate himself with him. Nor could the ex-sergeant find anything to complain of in the young man's manner towards himself. He took the first opportunity, when they were alone, to say how glad he had been, to hear that his grandfather had met with a friend and companion in his lonely life, and to express a hope that the bad opinion, which he had doubtless formed of him from his conduct when a boy, would not be allowed to operate against him now.

But, though there was nothing he could find fault with, the old soldier's prejudices were in no way shaken, and, indeed, his antipathy was increased, rather than diminished, by the young officer's conduct towards Aggie. It might be, of course, that he was only striving to overcome the prejudiced feeling against him; but every time the old soldier saw him with his granddaughter, he felt angry.

In point of fact, Aggie was disposed to like Richard, even before his arrival. Six years had eradicated every tinge of animosity for that shove on the sand. His letters had been long, bright, and amusing, and with the mementos of travel which he picked up in the ports of India and China, and from time to time sent home to his uncle, there was always a little box with some pretty trinket "for my cousin." She found him now a delightful companion. He treated her as if she had been seventeen, instead of eleven; was ready to ride or walk with her, or to tell her stories of the countries he had seen, as she might choose; and to humour all her whims and fancies.

"Confound him and his pleasant manners!" the ex-sergeant would mutter to himself, as he watched them together, and saw, as he believed, in the distance, the overthrow of the scheme he had at heart. "He is turning the child's head; and that foolish boy, James, is throwing away his chances."

James, indeed, came home from school for the last time, two or three weeks after Richard Horton's return. He was now nearly eighteen, and, although a broad and powerful fellow, was still a boy at heart. He did not show to advantage by the side of Richard Horton. The first time he went up to the Hall, after his return, the latter had met him with outstretched hand.

"I am glad to meet you again," he said. "I behaved like a blackguard, last time we met, and you gave me the thrashing which I deserved. I hope we shall get on better, in the future."

Aggie and her two grandfathers were present, and James Walsham certainly did not show to advantage, by the side of the easy and self-possessed young officer. He muttered something about its being all right, and then found nothing else to say, being uncomfortable, and ill at ease. He made some excuse about being wanted at home, and took his leave; nor did he again go up to call. Several times, the old soldier went down to Sidmouth to see him, and on one occasion remonstrated with him for not coming up to the Hall.

"What's the use?" James said, roughly. "I have got lots of reading to do, for in two months, you know, I am to go up to London, to walk the hospitals. No one wants me up there. Aggie has got that cousin of hers to amuse her, and I should feel only in the way, if I went."

Mr. Wilks was fairly out of temper at the way things were going. He was angry with James; angry with the squire, who evidently viewed with satisfaction the good understanding between his granddaughter and nephew; angry, for the first time in his life, with Aggie herself.

"You are growing a downright little flirt, Miss Aggie," he said one day, when the girl came in from the garden, where she had been laughing and chatting with her cousin.

He had intended to speak playfully, but there was an earnestness in his tone which the girl, at once, detected.

"Are you really in earnest, grampa?" she asked, for she still retained the childish name for her grandfather—so distinguishing him from the squire, whom she always called grandpapa.

"No; I don't know that I am in earnest, Aggie," he said, trying to speak lightly; "and yet, perhaps, to some extent I am."

"I am sure you are," the girl said. "Oh, grampa! You are not really cross with me, are you?" and the tears at once sprang into her eyes. "I have not been doing anything wrong, have I?"

"No, my dear, not in the least wrong," her grandfather said hastily. "Still, you know, I don't like seeing Jim, who has always been so good and kind to you, quite neglected, now this young fellow, who is not fit to hold a candle to him, has turned up."

"Well, I haven't neglected him, grampa. He has neglected me. He has never been near since that first day, and you know I can't very well go round to Sidmouth, and say to him, 'Please come up to the Hall.'"

"No, my dear, I know you can't, and he is behaving like a young fool."

"Why is he?" Aggie asked, surprised. "If he likes sailing about better than coming up here, why shouldn't he?"

"I don't think it's for that he stays away, Aggie. In fact, you see, Jim has only just left school, and he feels he can't laugh, and talk, and tell you stories about foreign countries, as this young fellow can, and having been so long accustomed to have you to himself, he naturally would not like the playing second fiddle to Richard Horton."

"But he hasn't been here much," the girl said, "ever since I came here. He used to be so nice, and so kind, in the old days when I lived down there, that I can't make out why he has changed so."

"My dear, I don't think he has changed. He has been only a boy, and the fact is, he is only a boy still. He is fond of sailing, and of the amusements boys take to, and he doesn't feel at home, and comfortable here, as he did with you when you were a little girl at his mother's. But mind, Aggie, James is true as steel. He is an honourable and upright young fellow. He is worth fifty of this self-satisfied, pleasant-spoken young sailor."

"I know James is good and kind, grampa," the girl said earnestly; "but you see, he is not very amusing, and Richard is very nice."

"Nice! Yes," the old soldier said; "a fair weather sort of niceness, Aggie. Richard Horton is the squire's nephew, and I don't wish to say anything against him; but mark my words, and remember them, there's more goodness in James's little finger, than there is in his whole body. But there, I am a fool to be talking about it. There is your cousin calling you, in the garden. Go along with you."

The girl went off slowly, wondering at her grandfather's earnestness. She knew she liked her old playmate far better than Richard Horton, although the latter's attentions pleased and flattered her. The old soldier went straight off to the squire's study.

"Squire," he said, "you remember that talk we had, three years ago, when your nephew's answer came to your letter, telling him that Aggie was found. I told you that I would wager he had made up his mind to marry her. You laughed at me; but I was right. Child though she still is, he is already paving the way for the future."

"Master Richard certainly is carrying on a sort of flirtation with the little witch," the squire said, smiling; "but as she is such a mere child as you say, what does it matter?"

"I think it matters a great deal," the old soldier said seriously. "I see, squire, the young fellow has quite regained your good opinion; and unless I am mistaken, you have already thought, to yourself, that it would not be a bad thing if they were to come together someday.

"I have thought it over, and have made up my mind that, in spite of your four years' continued kindness to me, and of the warm friendship between us, I must go away for a time. My box is still lying at Exeter, and I would rather tramp the country again, and live on it and my pension, than stay here and see my darling growing up a woman with that future before her. I am sorry to say, squire, that what you call my prejudice is as strong as ever. I doubt that young fellow as strongly as I did before he came home. Then, I only had his past conduct and his letter to go by. Now I have the evidence of my own senses. You may ask me what I have against him. I tell you—nothing; but I misdoubt him from my heart. I feel that he is false, that what he was when a boy, he is now. There is no true ring about him."

The squire was silent for a minute or two. He had a very sincere friendship and liking for his companion, a thorough confidence in his judgment and principles. He knew his self-sacrificing nature, and that he was only speaking from his love for his grandchild.

"Do not let us talk about it now, old friend," he said quietly. "You and I put, before all other things, Aggie's happiness. Disagreement between us there can be none on the subject. Give me tonight to think over what you have said, and we will talk about it again tomorrow."

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