

BARR AMELIA

E.

THE HALLAM SUCCESSION

Amelia Barr

The Hallam Succession

«Public Domain»

Barr A.

The Hallam Succession / A. Barr — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	15
CHAPTER III	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

Amelia E. Barr

The Hallam Succession

CHAPTER I

"The changing guests, each in a different mood,
Sit at the road-side table and arise:
And every life among them in likewise
Is a soul's board set daily with new food.

"May not this ancient room thou sitt'st in dwell
In separate living souls for joy or pain?
Nay, all its corners may be painted plain
Where Heaven shows pictures of some life well-spent."

Yorkshire is the epitome of England. Whatever is excellent in the whole land is found there. The men are sturdy, shrewd, and stalwart; hard-headed and hard-fisted, and have notably done their work in every era of English history. They are also a handsome race, the finest specimens extant of the pure Anglo-Saxon, and they still preserve the imposing stature and the bright blonde characteristics of the race.

Yorkshire abounds in what is the typical English home—fine old halls and granges, set in wooded parks, and surrounded by sweet, shady gardens. One of the fairest of these homes is Hallam-Croft. There may be larger halls in the West Riding, but none that combines so finely all the charms of antiquity, with every modern grace and comfort. Its walls are of gray stone, covered with ivy, or crusted with golden lichens; its front, long and low, is picturesquely diversified with oriel windows, gable ends, and shadowy angles. Behind is a steep, craggy range of woody hills; in front, a terraced garden of great extent; full of old-fashioned bowers, and labyrinth-like walks, and sloping down to a noble park, whose oaks and beeches are of wonderful beauty, and whose turf is soft as velvet and greener than any artist ever dreamed of.

Fifty years ago the owner of this lovely spot was Squire Henry Hallam. He was about sixty years of age, stout and fair and dressed in fine drab broad-cloth, with a white vest, and a white cambric kerchief tied loosely round his neck. His hat, drab also, was low-crowned and broad-brimmed, and, as a general rule, he kept it on. In the holy precincts of a church, or if the national anthem was played, he indeed always bared his head; but, in the first case, it was his expression of a religious sentiment, in the second he saluted his country, and, in a measure, himself.

One evening in the early spring he was sitting upon a low sofa in the room that was specially his own, mending some fishing tackle. A couple of setter puppies were worrying each other on the sofa beside him, and a splendid fox-hound leaned her muzzle on one of his broad knees, and looked up into her master's face with sad reproachful eyes. She was evidently jealous, and watching anxiously for some look or word of favor. She had not long to wait. The puppies became troublesome; he chided them, and put the bit of leather they were quarreling about in his pocket. Then he patted the hound, and said: "There's a deal o' difference between them and thee, Fanny, and it's a' in thy favor, lass;" and Fanny understood the compliment, for she whimpered happily, and thrust her handsome head up against her master's breast.

At that moment his daughter, Elizabeth, entered the room. She had an open letter in her hand, and a look half-perplexed and half-pleased upon her face. "Father," she said, "there is a letter from America; Richard and Phyllis are coming; and I am afraid I shall not know how to make them happy."

"Don't thee meet troubles half 'way; they arn't worth th' compliment. What is ta feared for, dearie?"

"Their life is so different from ours—and, father, I do believe they are Methodists."

The squire fastened the bit of gaudy feather to the trout "fly" he was making, before he answered. "Surely to goodness, they'll nivver be that! Sibbald Hallam, my uncle, was a varry thick Churchman when he went to th' Carolinas—but he married a foreigner; she had plenty o' brass, and acres o' land, but I never heard tell owt o' her religion. They had four lads and lasses, but only one o' them lived to wed, and that was my cousin, Matilda Hallam—t' mother o' these two youngsters that are speaking o' coming here."

"Who did she marry, father?"

"Nay, I knowt o' th' man she married. He was a Colonel Fontaine. I was thinking a deal more o' my own wedding than o' hers at that time. It's like enough he were a Methodist. T' Carolinas hed rebelled against English government, and it's nobbut reasonable to suppose t' English Church would be as little to their liking. But they're Hallams, whatever else they be, Elizabeth, and t' best I hev is for them."

He had risen as he spoke; the puppies were barking and gamboling at his feet, and Fanny watching his face with dignified eagerness. They knew he was going to walk, and were asking to go with him. "Be still wi' you, Rattle and Tory!—Yes, yes, Fanny!—and Elizabeth, open up t' varry best rooms, and give them a right hearty welcome. Where's Antony?"

"Somewhere in the house."

"Hedn't ta better ask him what to do? He knows ivery thing."

There was a touch of sarcasm in the voice, but Elizabeth was too much occupied to notice it; and as the squire and his dogs took the road to the park, she turned, with the letter still open in her hand, and went thoughtfully from room to room, seeking her brother. There was no deeper motive in her thought than what was apparent; her cares were simply those of hospitality. But when a life has been bounded by household hopes and anxieties, they assume an undue importance, and since her mother's death, two years previously, there had been no company at Hallam. This was to be Elizabeth's first effort of active hospitality.

She found Antony in the library reading "The Gentleman's Magazine," or, perhaps, using it for a sedative; for he was either half asleep, or lost in thought. He moved a little petulantly when his sister spoke. One saw at a glance that he had inherited his father's fine physique and presence, but not his father's calm, clear nature. His eyes were restless, his expression preoccupied, his manner haughty. Neither was his voice quite pleasant. There are human instruments, which always seem to have a false note, and Antony's had this peculiarity.

"Antony, I have a letter from Richard and Phyllis Fontaine. They are going to visit us this summer."

"I am delighted. Life is dreadfully dull here, with nothing to do."

"Come to the parlor, and I will give you a cup of tea, and read you cousin Phyllis's letter."

The squire had never thought of asking Elizabeth why she supposed her cousins to be Methodists. Antony seized at once upon the point in the letter which regarded it.

"They are sailing with Bishop Elliott, and will remain until September, in order to allow the Bishop to attend Conference; what does that mean, Elizabeth?"

"I suppose it means they are Methodists."

The young man was silent a moment, and then he replied, emphatically, "I am very glad of it."

"How can you say so, Antony? And there is the rector, and the Elthams—"

"I was thinking of the Hallams. After a thousand years of stagnation one ought to welcome a ripple of life. A Methodist isn't asleep. I have often felt inclined to drop into their chapel as I passed it. I wonder how it would feel to be awake soul and body at once!"

"Antony, you ought not to talk so recklessly. Some people might imagine you meant what you said. You know very well that the thousand years of 'stagnation,' as you call it, of the Hallams, is a most respectable thing."

"Very respectable indeed! That is all women think about—born conservatives every one of them—'dyed in the wool,' as a Bradford man would say."

"Why do you quote what Bradford men say? I cannot imagine what makes you go among a crowd of weavers, when you might be at Eltham Castle with gentlemen."

"I will tell you why. At Eltham we yawn and stagnate together. The weavers prick and pinch me in a thousand places. They make me dream of living."

"Drink your tea, Antony and don't be foolish."

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed. Upon the whole, he rather liked the look of astonishment in his sister's gray eyes, and the air of puzzled disapproval in her manner. He regarded ignorance on a great many matters as the natural and admirable condition of womanhood.

"It is very good tea, Elizabeth, and I like this American news. I shall not go to the Tyrol now. Two new specimens of humanity to study are better than glaciers."

"Antony, do remember that you are speaking of your own cousins—'two new specimens of humanity'—they are Hallams at the root."

"I meant no disrespect; but I am naturally a little excited at the idea of American Hallams—Americans in Hallam-Croft! I only hope the shades of Hengist and Horsa wont haunt the old rooms out of simple curiosity. When are they to be here?"

"They will be in Liverpool about the end of May. You have two weeks to prepare yourself, Antony."

Antony did not reply, but just what kind of a young lady his cousin Phyllis Fontaine might be he had no idea. People could not in those days buy their pictures by the dozen, and distribute them, so that Antony's imagination, in this direction, had the field entirely to itself. His fancy painted her in many charming forms, and yet he was never able to invest her with any other distinguishing traits than those with which he was familiar—the brilliant blonde beauty and resplendent health of his countrywomen.

Therefore, when the real Phyllis Fontaine met his vision she was a revelation to him. It was in the afternoon of the last day of May, and Hallam seemed to have put on a more radiant beauty for the occasion. The sun was so bright, the park so green, the garden so sweet and balmy. Heart's-ease were every-where, honeysuckles filled the air, and in the wood behind, the blackbirds whistled, and the chaffinches and tomtits kept up a merry, musical chattering. The squire, with his son and daughter, was waiting at the great open door of the main entrance for his visitors, and as the carriage stopped he cried out, cheerily, "Welcome to Hallam!" Then there was a few minutes of pleasant confusion, and in them Phyllis had made a distinct picture on every mind.

"She's a dainty little woman," said the squire to himself, as he sat calmly smoking his pipe after the bustle of the arrival was over; "not much like a Hallam, but t' eye as isn't charmed wi' her 'ell hev no white in it, that's a' about it."

Antony was much interested, and soon sought his sister.

"If that is Cousin Phyllis, she is beautiful. Don't you think so, Elizabeth?"

"Yes; how perfectly she was dressed."

"That is a woman's criticism. Did you see her soft, dark eyes, her small bow-shaped mouth—a beauty one rarely finds in English women—her exquisite complexion, her little feet?"

"That is a man's criticism. How could you see all that in a moment or two of such confusion?"

"Easily; how was she dressed?"

"In a plain dress of gray cloth. The fit was perfect, the linen collar and cuffs spotless, the gray bonnet, with its drooping, gray feather bewitching. She wore gray gloves and a traveling cloak of the same color, which hung like a princess's mantle."

"How could you see all that in a moment or two of such confusion?"

"Do not be too clever, Antony. You forget I went with her to her rooms."

"Did you notice Richard?"

"A little; he resembles his sister. Their foreign look as they stood beside you and father was very remarkable. Neither of them are like Hallams."

"I am so glad of it; a new element coming into life is like a fresh wind 'blowing through breathless woods.'"

But Elizabeth sighed. This dissatisfaction with the old, and craving for the new, was one of the points upon which Antony and his father were unable to understand each other. Nothing permanent pleased Antony, and no one could ever predicate of him what course he would pursue, or what side he would take. As a general rule, however, he preferred the opposition in all things. Now, the squire's principles and opinions were as clear to his own mind as his own existence was. He believed firmly in his Bible, in the English Constitution, and in himself. He admitted no faults in the first two; his own shortcomings toward Heaven he willingly acknowledged; but he regarded his attitude toward his fellow-man as without fault. All his motives and actions proceeded from well-understood truths, and they moved in consistent and admirable grooves.

Antony had fallen upon different times, and been brought under more uncertain influences. Oxford, "the most loyal," had been in a religious ferment during his stay there. The spirit of Pusey and Newman was shaking the Church of England like a great wind; and though Antony had been but little touched by the spiritual aspect of the movement, the temporal accusations of corruption and desertion of duty were good lances to tilt against the Church with. It gave him a curiously mixed pleasure to provoke the squire to do battle for her; partly from contradiction, partly that he might show off his array of second-hand learning and logic; and partly, also, for the delight of asserting his own opinions and his own individuality.

Any other dispute the squire would have settled by a positive assertion, or a positive denial; but even the most dogmatic of men are a little conscientious about religious scruples. He had, therefore, allowed his son to discuss "the Church" with him, but in some subtle way the older man divined that his ideas were conviction; while Antony's were only drifting thoughts. Therefore, the moral strength of the argument was with him, and he had a kind of contempt for a Hallam who could be moved by every Will-o'-the-wisp of religious or Political opinions.

But Elizabeth was greatly impressed by her brother's accomplishments, and she loved him, and believed in him with all her heart. The Hallams hitherto had no reputation for mental ability. In times of need England had found them good soldiers and ready givers; but poets and scholars they had never been. Antony affected the latter character. He spoke several languages, he read science and German philosophy, and he talked such radical politics to the old gardener, that the man privately declared himself "fair cap't wi' t' young squire."

Yet after all, his dominant passion was a love of power, and of money as the means by which to grasp power. Below all his speculations and affectations this was the underlying thought. True, he was heir of Hallam, and as the heir had an allowance quite equal to his position. But he constantly reflected that his father might live many years, and that in the probable order of things he must wait until he was a middle-aged man for his inheritance; and for a young man who felt himself quite competent to turn the axle of the universe, it seemed a contemptible lot to grind in his own little mill at Hallam. He had not as yet voiced these thoughts, but they lay in his heart, and communicated unknown to himself an atmosphere of unrest and unreliability to all his words and actions.

It was soon evident that there would be little sympathy between Richard and Antony. Richard Fontaine was calm, dignified, reticent; never tempted to give his confidence to any one; and averse

to receive the confidences of others; therefore, though he listened with polite attention to Antony's aspirations and aims, they made very little impression upon him. Both he and Phyllis glided without effort into the life which must have been so new to them; and in less than a week, Hallam had settled happily down to its fresh conditions. But nothing had been just as Antony expected. Phyllis was very lovely, but not lovely specially for him, which was disappointing; and he could not help soon seeing that, though Richard was attentive, he was also unresponsive.

There is one charming thing about English hospitality, it leaves its guests perfect freedom. In a very few days Phyllis found this out; and she wandered, unnoticed and undisturbed, through the long galleries, and examined, with particular interest, the upper rooms, into which from generation to generation unwelcomed pictures and unfashionable furniture had been placed. There was one room in the eastern turret that attracted her specially. It contained an old spinet, and above it the picture of a young girl; a face of melancholy, tender beauty, with that far-off look, which the French call *predestinee*, in the solemn eyes.

It is folly to say that furniture has no expression; the small couch, the faded work-table, the straight chairs, with their twisted attenuated legs, had an unspeakable air of sadness. One day she cautiously touched the notes of the instrument. How weak and thin and hollow they were! And yet they blended perfectly with something in her own heart. She played till the tears were on her cheeks, it seemed as if the sorrowful echoes had found in her soul the conditions for their reproduction. When she went back to her own room the influence of the one she had left followed her like a shadow.

"How can I bring one room into another?" she asked herself, and she flung wide the large windows and let the sunshine flood the pink chintzes and the blooming roses of her own apartment. There was a tap at the door, and Elizabeth entered.

"I have brought you a cup of tea, Phyllis. Shall I drink mine beside you?"

"I shall enjoy both your company and the tea. I think I have been in an unhappy room and caught some of its spirit—the room with the old spinet in it."

"Aunt Lucy's room. Yes, she was very unhappy. She loved, and the man was utterly unworthy of her love! She died slowly in that room—a wasted life."

"Ah, no, Elizabeth! No life is waste in the great Worker's hands. If human love wounds and wrongs us, are we not circled by angels as the stars by heaven? Our soul relatives sorrow in our sorrow; and out of the apparent loss bring golden gain. I think she would know this before she died."

"She died as the good die, blessing and hoping."

Elizabeth looked steadily at Phyllis. She thought she had never seen any face so lovely. From her eyes, still dewy with tears, the holy soul looked upward; and her lips kept the expression of the prayer that was in her heart. She did not wonder at the words that had fallen from them. After a moment's silence, she said:

"My mother loved Aunt Lucy very dearly. Her death made a deal of difference in mother's life."

"Death is always a great sorrow to those who love us; but for ourselves, it is only to bow our heads at going out, and to enter straightway another golden chamber of the King's, lovelier than the one we leave."

Elizabeth scarce knew how to answer. She had never been used to discuss sacred subjects with girls her own age; in fact, she had a vague idea that such subjects were not to be discussed out of church, or, at least, without a clergyman to direct the conversation. And Phyllis's childish figure, glowing face, and sublime confidence affected her with a sense of something strange and remote. Yet the conversation interested her greatly. People are very foolish who restrain spiritual confidences; no topic is so universally and permanently interesting as religious experience. Elizabeth felt its charm at once. She loved God, but loved him, as it were, afar off; she almost feared to speak to him. She had never dared to speak of him.

"Do you really think, Phyllis, that angels care about our earthly loves?"

"Yes, I do. Love is the rock upon which our lives are generally built or wrecked. Elizabeth, if I did not believe that the love of God embraced every worthy earthly love, I should be very miserable."

"Because?"

"Because, dear, I love, and am beloved again."

"But how shall we know if the love be worthy?"

"Once in class-meeting I asked this question. That was when I first became aware that I loved John Millard. I am not likely to forget the answer my leader gave me."

"What was it?"

"Sister Phyllis," he said, "ask yourself what will your love be to you a thousand ages hence. Ask yourself if it will pass the rolling together of the heavens like a scroll, and the melting of the elements with fervent heat. Ask if it will pass the judgment-day, when the secret thoughts of all hearts will be revealed. Dare to love only one whom you can love forever."

"I have never thought of loving throughout all eternity the one whom I love in time."

"Ah! but it is our privilege to cherish the immortal in the man we love. Where I go I wish my beloved to go also. The thought of our love severed on the threshold of paradise makes me weep. I cannot understand an affection which must look forward to an irrevocable separation. Nay, I ask more than this; I desire that my love, even there assuming his own proper place, should be still in advance of me—my guide, my support, my master every-where."

"If you love John Millard in this way, he and you must be very happy."

"We are, and yet what earthly light has not its shadow?"

"What is the shadow, Phyllis?"

"Richard dislikes him so bitterly; and Richard is very, very near and dear to me. I dare say you think he is very cool and calm and quiet. It is the restraint which he puts upon himself; really Richard has a constant fight with a temper, which, if it should take possession of him, would be uncontrollable. He knows that."

"You spoke as if you are a Wesleyan, yet you went to Church last Sunday, Phyllis."

"Why not? Methodists are not bigots; and just as England is my mother-country, Episcopacy is my mother-Church. If Episcopacy should ever die, Elizabeth, Methodism is next of kin, and would be heir to all her churches."

"And Wesleyans and Methodists are the same?"

"Yes; but I like the old name best. It came from the pen of the golden-mouthed Chrysostom, so you see it has quite an apostolic halo about it."

"I never heard that, Phyllis."

"It is hardly likely you would. It was used at first as a word of reproach; but how many such words have been adopted and made glorious emblems of victory. It was thus in ancient Antioch the first followers of Christ were called 'Christians.'"

"But how came Chrysostom to find a name for John Wesley's followers?"

"Richard told me it was used first in a pamphlet against Whitefield. I do not remember the author, but he quoted from the pages of Chrysostom these words, 'To be a Methodist is to be beguiled.' Of course, Chrysostom's 'Methodist' is not our Methodist. The writer knew he was unjust and meant it for a term of reproach, but the word took the popular fancy, and, as such words do, clung to the people at whom it was thrown. They might have thrown it back again; they did better; they accepted it, and have covered it with glory."

"Why, Phyllis, what a little enthusiast you are!" and Elizabeth looked again with admiration at the small figure reclining in the deep chair beside her.

Its rosy chintz covering threw into vivid relief the exquisite paleness of Phyllis's complexion—that clear, warm paleness of the South—and contrasted it with the intense blackness of her loosened hair. Her dark, soft eyes glowed, her small hands had involuntarily clasped themselves upon her breast.

"What a little enthusiast you are!" Then she stooped and kissed her, a most unusual demonstration, for Elizabeth was not emotional. Her feelings were as a still lake, whose depths were only known to those who sounded them.

The conversation was not continued. Fine souls have an instinctive knowledge of times and seasons, and both felt that for that day the limit of spiritual confidence had been reached. But it was Phyllis's quicker nature which provided the natural return to the material life.

"I know I am enthusiastic, about many things, Elizabeth. The world is so full of what is good and beautiful! Look at those roses! Could flowers be more sweet and perfect? I always dream of happy things among roses."

"But you must not dream now, dear. It is very near dinner-time. We have had a very pleasant hour. I shall think of all you have said."

But the thing she thought most persistently of was Richard Fontaine's temper. Was it possible that the equable charm and serenity of his mood was only an assumed one? As she went to the dining-room she saw him standing in the great hall caressing two large hounds. In the same moment he raised his head and stood watching her approach. It seemed to him as if he had never seen her before. She advanced slowly toward him through the level rays of the westering sun, which projected themselves in a golden haze all around her. Those were not the days of flutings and bows and rufflings innumerable. Elizabeth's dress was a long, perfectly plain one, of white India mull. A narrow black belt confined it at the waist, a collar of rich lace and a brooch of gold at the throat. Her fair hair was dressed in a large loose bow on the crown, and lay in soft light curls upon her brow. Her feet were sandaled, her large white hands unjeweled and ungloved, and with one she lifted slightly her flowing dress. Resplendent with youth, beauty, and sunshine, she affected Richard as no woman had ever done before. She was the typical Saxon woman, the woman who had ruled the hearts and homes of his ancestors for centuries, and she now stirred his to its sweetest depths. He did not go to meet her. He would not lose a step of her progress. He felt that at last Jove was coming to visit him. It was a joy almost solemn in its intensity and expectation. He held out his hand, and Elizabeth took it. In that moment they saw each other's hearts as clearly as two drops of rain meeting in air might look into each other if they had life.

Yet they spoke only of the most trivial things—the dogs, and the weather, and Richard's ride to Leeds, and the stumbling of Antony's horse. "We left the Squire in the village," said Richard. "A woman who was apparently in very great trouble called him."

"A woman who lives in a cottage covered with clematis?"

"I think so."

"It must have been Martha Craven. I wonder what is the matter!" and they walked together to the open door. The squire had just alighted from his horse, and was talking earnestly to his favorite servant. He seemed to be in trouble, and he was not the man to keep either Sorrow or joy to himself. "Elizabeth! my word, but I'm bothered! Here's Jonathan Clough murdered, and Ben Craven under lock and key for it!"

"Why, father! Ben would never do a thing like that!"

"Not he! I'd be as like to do it mysen. Thou must go thy ways and see Martha as soon as iver t' dinner is eat. I s'all stand by Martha and Ben to t' varry last. Ben Craven murder any-body! Hee! I crack't out laughing when I heard tell o' such nonsense."

In fact, the squire had been touched in a very tender spot. Martha Craven's mother had been his nurse, and Martha herself, for many years, his wife's maid and confidential servant. He felt the imputation as a personal slander. The Cravens had been faithful servants of the Hallams for generations, and Clough was comparatively a new-comer. Right or wrong, the squire would have been inclined to stand by an old friend, but he had not a doubt of Ben's innocence.

"What have you done about it?" asked Antony.

"I've been to see Israel Potter, and I've bound him to stand up for Ben. What Israel doesn't know 'bout law, and what Israel can't do with t' law, isn't worth t' knowing or t' doing. Then I went for t' Wesleyan minister to talk a bit wi' Martha, poor body? She seemed to want something o' t' kind; and I'm bound to say I found him a varry gentlemanly, sensible fellow. He didn't think owt wrong o' Ben, no more than I did."

"People would wonder to see you at the Wesleyan's door."

"May be they'll be more cap't yet, son Antony. I'll ask neither cat nor Christian what door to knock at. I wish I may nivver stand at a worse door than Mr. North's, that's a'. What say you to that, then?"

"I say you are quite right, father."

"I'm nivver far wrong, my lad; nobody is that lets a kind heart lead them, and it would be against nature if I didn't stand up for any Craven that's i' trouble."

Phyllis, who was sitting beside him, laid her hand upon his a moment, and he lifted his eyes and met hers. There was such a light and look of sympathy and admiration in them, that she had no need to say a word. He felt that he had done the right thing, and was pleased with himself for doing it. In a good man there is still a deal of the divinity from which he has fallen, and in his times of trial his heart throbs upward.

Dinner was insensibly hurried, and when Elizabeth rose Phyllis followed her. "I must go with you dear; if Martha is a Methodist she is my sister, and she has a right to my sympathy and my purse, if it is necessary to her."

"I shall be glad. It is only a pleasant walk through the park, and Antony and Richard can meet us at the park gates. I think you will like Martha."

Few words were spoken by the two girls as they went in the amber twilight across the green, green turf of the park. Martha saw them coming and was at her door when they stepped inside the fragrant patch which she called her garden. She was a woman very pleasant to look at, tall and straight, with a strong ruddy face—and blue eyes, a little dim with weeping. Her cotton dress of indigo blue, covered with golden-colored moons, was pinned well up at the back, displaying her home-knit stockings and low shoes fastened with brass latches. She had on her head a cap of white linen, stiffly starched, and a checkered kerchief was pinned over her ample bosom.

Even in her deep sorrow and anxiety her broad sweet mouth could not forget its trick of smiling. "Come this ways in, Joy," she said to Elizabeth, at the same moment dropping a courtesy to Phyllis, an old-fashioned token of respect, which had no particle of servility in it.

"This is my cousin, Miss Fontaine, from America, Martha."

"Well, I'm sure I'm right suited at meeting her. Mother used to talk above a bit about Sibbald Hallam as crossed t' seas. She looked for him to come back again. But he nivver came."

"I am his granddaughter. I am very sorry, Sister Martha, to hear of your trouble."

"Why-a! Is ta a Methodist, dearie?"

Phyllis nodded brightly and took her hand.

"Well I nivver! But I'm fain and glad! And as for trouble, I'll not fear it. Why should I, wi' t' love o' God and t' love o' man to help me?"

"When did it happen, Martha?"

"Last night, Miss Hallam. My Ben and Jonathan Clough wern't as good friends as might be. There's a lass at t' bottom o' t' trouble; there's allays that. She's a good lass enough, but good 'uns mak' as much trouble as t' bad 'uns sometimes, I think. It's Jonathan's daughter, Mary. She's ta'en Ben's fancy, and she's ta'en Bill Laycock's fancy, too. T' lass likes my Ben, and Clough he liked Laycock; for Laycock is t' blacksmith now, and owns t' forge, and t' house behind it. My Ben is nobbut Clough's overlooker."

"It is a pity he stopped at Clough's mill, if there was ill-feeling between them."

"T' lad's none to blame for that. Clough is makkin' some new kind o' figured goods, and t' men are all hired by t' twelvemonth, and bound over to keep a quiet tongue i' their mouths about t' new looms as does t' work. Two days ago Clough found out that Tim Bingley hed told t' secret to Booth; and Clough wer' neither to hold nor bind. He put Bingley out o' t' mill, and wouldn't pay him t' balance o' t' year, and somehow he took t' notion that Ben was in t' affair. Ben's none so mean as that, I'm sure."

"But Bingley is a very bad man. My father sent him to the tread-mill last year for a brutal assault. He is quite capable of murder. Has no one looked for him?"

"Bingley says he saw my Ben shoot Clough, and Clough says it was Ben."

"Then Clough is still alive?"

"Ay, but he'll die ere morning. T' magistrates hev been wi' him, and he swears positive that Ben Craven shot him."

"Where was Ben last night?"

"He came from t' mill at six o'clock, and hed a cup o' tea wi' me. He said he'd go to t' chapel wi' me at eight o'clock; and after I hed washed up t' dishes, I went to sit wi' Sarah Fisher, who's bad off wi' t' fever; and when I came back Ben was standing at t' door, and folks wer' running here, and running there, and all t' village was fair beside itseln. We wer' just reading a bit in t' Bible, when constables knocked at t' door and said they wanted Ben. My heart sank into my shoes, Miss Hallam, and I said, 'That's a varry unlikely thing, lads; you're just talking for talking's sake.' And Jerry Oddy said, 'Nay, we bean't, dame; Jonathan Clough is dying, and he says Ben Craven shot him.' Then I said, 'He'll die wi' t' lie on his lips if he says that, thou tell him so.' And Jerry Oddy said, 'Not I, dame, keep a still tongue i' thy mouth, it'll mebbe be better for thee.'"

"Martha! How could you bear it?"

"I didn't think what I wer' bearing at t' time, Miss Hallam; I wer' just angry enough for any thing; and I wer' kind o' angry wi' Ben takkin' it so quiet like. 'Speak up for thysen, lad,' I said; 'hesn't ta got a tongue i' thy head to-need?'"

"Poor Ben! What did he say?"

"He said, 'Thou be still, mother, and talk to none but God. I'm as innocent o' this sin as thou art;' and I said, 'I believe thee, my lad, and God go wi' thee, Ben.' There's one thing troubles me, Miss Hallam, and it bothered t' squire, too. Ben was in his Sunday clothes—that wasn't odd, for he was going to t' chapel wi' me—but Jerry noticed it, and he asked Ben where his overlooker's brat and cap was, and Ben said they wer' i' t' room; but they wern't there, Miss Hallam, and they hev'n't found 'em either."

"That is strange."

"Ay, its varry queer, and t' constables seemed to think so. Jerry nivver liked Ben, and he said to me, 'Well, dame, it's a great pity that last o' t' Cravens should swing himsen to death on t' gallows.' But I told him, 'Don't thee be so sure that Ben's t' last o' t' Cravens: Thou's makkin' thy count without Providence, Jerry;' and I'm none feared," she added, with a burst of confidence; "I'll trust in God yet! I can't see him, but I can feel him."

"And you can hold fast to his hand, Sister Martha; and the darker it gets, you can cling the closer, until the daylight breaks and the shadows flee away."

"That I can, and that I will! Look there, my dearies!" and she pointed to a little blue and white tea-pot on the high mantle-shelf, above the hearth on which they were sitting. "Last night, when they'd taken Ben away, and I couldn't finish t' psalm and I couldn't do much more praying than a little bairn thet's flayed and troubled in t' dark night, I lifted my eyes to thet tea-pot, and I knew t' words thet was on it, and they wer' like an order and a promise a' in one; and I said, 'There! thet's enough, Lord!' and I went to my bed and slept, for I knew there 'ud be a deal to do to-day, and nothing weakens me like missing my sleep."

"And did you sleep, Martha?"

"Ay, I slept. It wasn't hard wi' t' promise I'd got."

Then Phyllis took a chair and stood upon it, and carefully lifted down the tea-pot. It was of coarse blue and white pottery, and had been made in Staffordshire, when the art was emerging from its rudeness, and when the people were half barbarous and wholly irreligious—one of half a dozen that are now worth more than if made of the rarest china, the Blue Wesley Tea-pot; rude little objects, yet formed by loving, reverential hands, to commemorate the apostolic labors of John Wesley in that almost savage district. His likeness was on one side, and on the other the words, so often in his mouth, "*In God we trust.*" Phyllis looked at it reverently; even in that poor portraiture recognizing the leader of men, the dignity, the intelligence, and the serenity of a great soul. She put it slowly back, touching it with a kind of tender respect; and then the two girls went home. In the green aisles of the park the nightingales were singing, and the sweet strength of the stars and the magic of the moon touched each heart with a thoughtful melancholy. Richard and Antony joined them, and they talked softly of the tragedy, with eloquent pauses of silence between.

On the lowest terrace they found the squire—Fanny walking with quiet dignity beside him. He joined Elizabeth and Richard, and discussed with them the plans he had been forming for the unraveling of the mystery. He had thought of every thing, even to the amount of money necessary.

"Have they no relations?" asked Richard, a little curiously. It seemed to him that the squire's kindness was a trifle officious. However lowly families might be, he believed that in trouble a noble independence would make them draw together, just as birds that scatter wide in the sunshine nestle up to each other in storm and cold. So he asked, "Have they no relatives?"

"She has two brothers Ilkley way," said the squire, with a dubious smile. "I nivver reckoned much on them."

"Don't you think she ought to send for them?"

"Nay, I don't. You're young, Richard, lad, and you'll know more some day; but I'll tell you beforehand, if you iver hev a favor to ask, ask it of any body but a relation—you may go to fifty, and not find one at hes owt o' sort about 'em."

They talked for half an hour longer in a desultory fashion, as those talk who are full of thoughts they do not share; and when they parted Richard asked Elizabeth for a rose she had gathered as they walked home together. He asked it distinctly, the beaming glance of his dark eyes giving to the request a meaning she could not, and did not, mistake. Yet she laid it in his hand, and as their eyes met, he knew that as "there is a budding morrow in the midnight," so also there was a budding love in the rose-gift.

CHAPTER II

"I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee."

Acts xviii, 10.

"There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat."

Exod. xxv, 22.

No man liveth unto himself. In that green, flowery Eden, with the soft winds blowing in at the open doors and windows, and the white sunshine glorifying every thing, there was the whisper of sorrow as well as the whisper of love. The homely life of the village, with its absorbing tragedy, touched all hearts; for men and women belie their nature when they do not weep with those that weep.

At the close of the London season the Elthams returned to their country home, and there was much visiting and good-will. One evening they were sitting in Eltham drawing-room after dinner. The squire had been discussing the Clough tragedy with great warmth; for Lord Eltham had not unnaturally judged Ben Craven upon the apparent evidence, and was inclined to think his position, whether he was innocent or guilty, one of great danger. Hallam would not see things in any such light. He had lived only in the morally healthy atmosphere of the woods and fields, and the sinful tragedies of life had not been actual to him. True, he had read of them in his weekly paper, but it was a different thing when they came to his own door, and called for his active sympathy.

"Right is right, Eltham," he said, with the emphasis of one closed hand striking the other; "and it 'ud be a varry queer thing if right should turn out to be wrong. It'll do nowt o' t' sort, not it."

"But, Hallam, it seems to me that you hev made up your mind that Craven is right—right or wrong—and lawyer Swale told me t' evidence was all against him."

"Swale!" replied the squire, snapping his fingers disdainfully. "Why-a! Swale nivver told t' truth i' all his life, if he nobbut hed t' time to make up a lie. As for Bingley, I wish I hed sent him over t' seas when I hed t' chance to do it—he's none fit to breathe t' air in a decent country."

"But Swale says that Bill Laycock has acknowledged that he also saw Craven in his working clothes running over t' moor just about t' time Clough was shot, and Bill and Craven were at one time all but brothers."

"Ay, ay; but there's a lass between 'em now—what do you make o' that?"

"As far as I can think it out, it's against Craven."

"Then think twice about it, Eltham, and be sure to change thy mind t' second time; for I tell thee, Craven is as innocent as thee or me; and though t' devil and t' lawyers hev all t' evidence on their side, I'll lay thee twenty sovereigns that right'll win. What dost ta say, Phyllis, dearie?"

And Phyllis, who had been watching his large, kindly face with the greatest admiration, smiled confidently back to him, and answered, "I think as you do Uncle Hallam,

"For right is right, since God is God;
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin."

Hallam looked proudly at her, and then at his opponent, who, with glistening eyes, bowed, and answered: "My dear young lady, that settles the question, here. I wish with a' my heart it did so in ivery court in t' kingdom; but, squire, thou knows little o' this world, I'm feared."

"What by that? I don't want to know. As far as I can judge, t' knowledge of t' world is only an acquaintance wi' all sorts o' evil and unjust things. But come thy ways, Eltham, and let's hev a bit of a walk through t' park. I hear t' cuckoos telling their names to ivery tree, and ivery bird in them, and there's few sounds I like better, if it bean't a nightingale singing."

It was getting late, and the squire's proposition was generally indorsed. The whole party resolved to walk to the park gates, and the carriage and Antony's saddle-horse were ordered to meet them there. It was a delightful evening, full of an indescribable tranquillity—a tranquillity not at all disturbed by the *craik* of the rail in the clover, or the plaintive minor of the cuckoo in the thick groves. Eltham and the squire talked earnestly of the coming election. Phyllis, leaning on Antony's arm, was full of thought, and Richard and Elizabeth fell gradually a little behind them. In that soft light her white garments and her fair loveliness had a peculiar charm. She reminded Richard of some Greek goddess full of grace and large serenity. He had resolved not to tell her how dear she was to him until he had better prepared the way for such a declaration; but when the time comes the full heart must speak, though it be only to call the beloved one's name. And this was at first all Richard could say:

"Elizabeth! Dear Elizabeth!"

She recognized the voice. It was as if her soul had been waiting for it. From the sweetest depths of her consciousness she whispered "Richard," and with the word made over her full heart to him. They stood one wonderful moment looking at each other, then he drew her to his breast and kissed her. The sweetest strongest words of love were never written. They are not translatable in earthly language. Richard was dumb with happiness, and Elizabeth understood the silence. As they rode home and sauntered up the terraces, Antony said, "What a dull evening we have had;" but Phyllis was of the initiated, and knew better. She looked at Elizabeth and smiled brightly, while Richard clasped tighter the dear hand he was holding.

About an hour later Phyllis went to Elizabeth's room. It was a large chamber open to the east and south, with polished oaken floors, and hung with white dimity. She sat at one of the open southern windows, and the wind, which gently moved the snowy curtains, brought in with it the scent of bleaching clover. There was no light but that shadow of twilight which, in English summers, lingers until it is lost in the dawning. But it was quite sufficient. She turned her face to meet Phyllis, and Phyllis kissed her, and said,

"I know, Elizabeth; and I am so glad."

"Richard told you?"

"No, indeed! Richard is too much astonished at his own happiness to speak of it to-night. But when one loves, one understands naturally. It has made me very happy. Why, Elizabeth, you are weeping!"

"I am strangely sorrowful, Phyllis. A shadow which I cannot account for chills me. You know that I am neither imaginative nor sentimental; but I am weeping to-night for grief which I apprehend, but which does not exist."

"Why do that? The ills that never come are just the ills that give us the sorest and most useless sorrow. They are not provided for—no grace is promised for them."

"That may be, Phyllis, but these intangible griefs are very real ones while they haunt us."

"I once knew a Methodist preacher who, whenever he felt himself haunted by prospective cares and griefs, took a piece of paper and reduced them, to writing, and so 'faced the squadron of his doubts.' He told me that they usually vanished as he mustered them. Elizabeth, there are more than sixty admonitions against fear or unnecessary anxiety in the Bible, and these are so various, and so positive, that a Christian has not actually a legitimate subject for worry left. Come, let us face your trouble. Is it because in marrying Richard you will have to give up this beautiful home?"

"That possibility faces me every day, Phyllis. When Antony marries, he will, of course, bring his wife here, and she will be mistress. I might, for father's sake, take a lower place, but it would be

hard. Father did not marry until his three sisters were settled, but Antony lives in another generation. I can hardly hope he will be so thoughtful."

"Do you fear that uncle will object to your marriage with Richard?"

"No; he is very fond of Richard, and very proud of him. Yesterday he made me notice now strongly Richard resembled Colonel Alfred Hallam, who was the cavalier hero of our family. And the likeness is wonderful."

"Has money any thing to do with it?"

"Nothing."

"Parting with Richard?"

"I think so—the feeling is one of a fear of long or final separation—a shadow like an abyss which neither my love nor my hope can cross. I find that I cannot follow out any dream or plan which includes Richard; my soul stumbles in all such efforts as if it was blind. Now is there any promise for an uncertain condition like this?"

"Yes, dear, there is a promise with a blessing added to it. 'I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.'" Isa. xlii, 16.

"Dear Phyllis, what a little comforter you are! I will be happy. Indeed, I have reason, for I never dreamed of a lover like Richard—and he says it was the merest accident that brought you to Europe this summer."

"Did Richard say 'accident?' Do you know, Elizabeth, I think what men call 'accident' is really God's own part—his special arrangement or interposition. We were going to Saratoga, and then one night Bishop Elliott called, and said he was going to Europe, and as he spoke we received a letter saying the rooms which we had always occupied were not to be had, and the Bishop said, 'Go with me to Europe,' and so, in five minutes we had decided to do so. Richard will dislike to return to America without you; have you thought of the many changes you must face? and some deprivations also, Elizabeth. We are not rich. Our home, beautiful in its way, is very different from Hallam Hall; our life altogether is unlike yours."

"I fear nothing of all that, Phyllis. But my marriage until Antony marries is out of the question. I could not leave father until he has another daughter. That is a thing not to be contemplated."

"Ah, Elizabeth, in my selfishness I had forgotten that! I was only thinking that when Richard had you, he could better spare me, and that John and I might have a hope also. But, of course, Uncle Hallam comes first."

"Yes; as long as my father needs me, my first duty is to him."

"Even if it be to the end of his life?"

"That is an event I never dare to call to mind. My soul shrinks back from the thought. A good parent is immortal to a good child, I think."

She said it very calmly, but no one would have thought of disputing her position. The still assured face partially uplifted, and the large white hands firmly clasped upon her knee, were a kind of silent amen to it.

Then Phyllis said "Good-night" and went away; but dim as the light was, she took with her a certain sense of warmth and color. The long pink dressing-gown she had worn and the pink rose in her hair had made a kind of glow in the corner of the wide window where she had sat. "How beautiful she is!" The words sprang spontaneously to Elizabeth's lips; and she added to them in her thoughts, "Few girls are so lovely, so graceful, and so clever, and yet she is as pure and unspoiled by the world as if God had just made her."

The formal ratification of the engagement was very quietly done. The squire had a conversation with Richard, and after it went for a long walk in the park. When he next met his daughter he looked at her steadily with eyes full of tears, and she went to him, and put her arms around his neck, and whispered some assurance to him, which he repaid with a hearty "God bless thee, Elizabeth!"

Antony was the least pleased. He had long had a friendship with George Eltham, Lord Eltham's younger son; and among many projects which the young men had discussed, one related to the marriage of Elizabeth. She had, indeed, no knowledge of their intentions, which were on a mercenary basis, but this did not prevent Antony from feeling that Richard had in some degree frustrated his plans. But he allowed himself no evidences of this feeling; he gave Richard his congratulations, and in a merry way "supposed that the kindest thing he could now do for all parties was to choose a wife also."

But very soon he ordered his horse and rode thoughtfully over to Eltham. The Hon. George was in his apartments reading "Blackwood," though there was a riding party gathering on the lawn.

"Are you not going with them?" asked Antony, indicating the laughing group outside with a motion of his hand.

"Not I. I hope to do something more with my life than be my elder brother's lieutenant. Last night I spoke to Lord Eltham concerning our intentions. He thinks well of them, Antony, and promises all the help he can give us."

"I am sorry to tell you, George, that Elizabeth is to marry cousin Fontaine. The engagement is formally made and sanctioned."

"I am very sorry. It is a great disappointment to me."

"You were too dilatory. I advised you to speak to Elizabeth some months ago."

"I tried to do so, but it was impossible to say pretty things to her. I felt abashed if I tried to compliment her, and she always appeared so unconscious of a fellow, that it was depressing."

"Well, it is too late now."

"How do you know that? When Mr. Fontaine has gone—"

"It will not make a particle of difference, George; let me tell you that. Elizabeth will be true to him, if she never sees him again. I know her, you do not."

"What is to be done, then?"

"I was thinking of Selina Digby."

"O you know she is not pretty at all!"

"We agreed not to let such things as that influence us."

"And she is older than I am."

"She has £50,000, that is more than double Elizabeth's fortune. A man can't have every thing. It is entirely at her own disposal also. Your brother-in-law is far too much absorbed in politics to interfere—the ground there is clear for you."

"If I succeed?"

"I will promise to find capital equal to yours. What did my lord say concerning our plan?"

"He said we must have some instruction, and that he would speak to Sir Thomas Harrington. My father secured his seat in Parliament, and he is sure to allow us to enter his house. We shall have every facility there for acquiring a rapid practical knowledge of banking and finance. I told father it was that or the colonies. I have no idea of being 'only Lord Francis's brother.'"

"Money is the axle on which the world turns, George. When you and I have it we can buy titles—if we want them."

The fever of fortune-making had seized both young men. They were ambitious in the most personal sense of the word. George's position as younger son constantly mortified him. He had had dreams of obtaining honor both as a scholar and a soldier, but he had satisfied himself that for one career he had not the mental ability, and for the other neither the physical courage nor endurance necessary. Of mere rank he was not envious. He had lived among noble men, and familiarity had bred its usual consequence. But he did want money. He fully recognized that gold entered every earthly gate, and he felt within himself the capacity for its acquirement. He had also precedents for this determination which seemed to justify it. The Duke of Norham's younger son had a share in an immense brewery and wielded a power far beyond that of his elder brother, who was simply waiting

for a dukedom. Lord Egremont, a younger son of the Earl of Soho, controlled large amounts of railway stock, and it was said held a mortgage on the family castle. To prove to his father and mother that no law of primogeniture could disinherit him, appeared to George Eltham an object worth striving for.

With these thoughts simmering in his heart he met Antony Hallam at Oxford. They speedily became friends. Antony wanted money also. But in him the craving arose from a more domineering ambition. He wished to rule men, to be first every-where. He despised the simple provincial title to which he was born, and the hall, with all its sweet gray antiquity, was only a dull prison. He compared its mediaeval strength, its long narrow lattices, its low rambling rooms, its Saxon simplicity, with the grand mansions of modern date in which he visited. It must be remembered that it is only recently old houses and old furniture and early English have become fashionable. Antony's dream of a home was not of Hallam, but of a grander Eltham castle, whose rooms should be twice as large and lofty and splendid.

He would control men through their idol, gold; he would buy some old earldom, and have orders and honors thrust upon him. His long, honorable descent would be a good foundation to build upon. He told himself that the Hallams ought to have built upon it generations ago. He almost despised his ancestors for the simple lives they had led. He could not endure to think of himself sitting down as squire Hallam and ruling a few cottagers and tilling a few hundred acres. In George Eltham he found a kindred spirit. They might work for different motives, but gold was the aim of both.

Many plans had been entertained and discussed, but they had finally settled upon a co-partnership in finance. They would discount bills, make advances, and secure government contracts. The latter was the special aim of Antony's desires. But they were not foolish enough to think they could succeed without some preliminary initiation, and this they proposed to acquire in the great banking house of Sir Thomas Harrington. M.P. Lord Eltham had approved the plan. It now remained to secure the squire's agreement and co-operation. As for the money necessary, George Eltham proposed to acquire it by marriage. Antony had his own plan; he was only waiting until the Fontaines' visit was over, and "that contemptible Craven affair settled."

For he saw plainly that for the time the squire's mind was full of outside interests, and when Antony discussed a subject so vital to himself, he was resolved his father should be in a position to feel its importance, and give it his undivided attention. Personally he had no ill-feeling toward Ben Craven, but he was annoyed at the intrusion of so vulgar an object of sympathy into his home. The squire's advocacy at Eltham had irritated him. He was quietly angry at Elizabeth and Phyllis daily visiting the dame. And when the Methodist preacher had been twice to Hallam to see the squire on the subject, he could not treat the affair with his usual tolerant indifference.

"I have changed my mind," he said, one evening, with that smiling positiveness which is so aggravating: "I am very much inclined to believe that Ben Craven did kill Clough."

The squire looked at him, first with amazement, then with anger, and asked, "When did ta lose thy good sense, and thy good-will, son Antony?"

"I had a talk with Swale to-day, and in his judgment—"

"Thou knows what I think o' Swale. Was there ever a bigger old cheat than he is? I'll put my heart afore Swale's judgment, Ben Craven's all right."

"He will have strong evidence and a clever lawyer against him. He is sure to be convicted."

"Don't thee reckon to know so much. Ben's got a clever lawyer, too; but if he'd nobbut God and his mother to plead for him, his cause 'ud be in varry good hands, thou may be sure o' that."

"I am only saying, father, what Swale says every-where."

"I'll warrant he'll talk. There's no tax on lying. My word, if there was, Swale'd hev to keep his mouth shut."

"I cannot imagine, father, what makes you trouble yourself so much about the Cravens."

"Thou can't, can't ta? Then thou canst imagine gratitude for faithful service given cheerfully for three hundred years. Why-a lad, 'twas a Craven saved Alfred Hallam's life at Worcester fight."

"I suppose he paid him for the service. Any how the debt is not ours."

"Ay, is it. It's my debt, and it's thine, too. Ben may live to do thee a service for aught thou knows."

Antony smiled contemptuously, and the squire continued, almost angrily, "There's things more unlikely; look here, my lad, nivver spit in any well: thou may hev to drink of t' water."

When the words were said the squire was sorry for them. They had come from his lips in that forceful prophetic way some speeches take, and they made an unpleasant impression on both father and son; just such an impression as a bad dream leaves, which yet seems to be wholly irrelevant and unaccountable.

Craven was in Leeds jail, and the trial was fixed for the summer term. All things may be better borne than suspense, and all were glad when Ben could have a fair hearing. But every thing was against him, and at the end of the second day's trial, the squire came home in sincere trouble; Ben had been found guilty, but a conviction of his innocence, in spite of the evidence, seemed also to have possessed the jury, for they had strongly recommended him to her majesty's mercy.

Elizabeth and Phyllis went with sick, sorrowful heart to see the dame. The strain had told upon her before the trial, and she had lost her cheerfulness somewhat. But she had come to a place now where anger and sense of wrong and impatience were past.

"Lost confidence, sister Phyllis," she said; "not I; I hev only stopped reckoning on any man or woman now, be 't queen's sen; and I hev put my whole trust i' God. Such like goings on as we've hed! Paper and ink and varry little justice; but God'll sort ivery thing afore long."

"The case is to come before the queen."

"That's well enough. Miss Hallam, but I'll tak' it mysen into God's council-chamber—there's no key on that door, and there's no fee to pay either. He'll put ivery thing right, see if he doesn't!"

"And besides, Sister Martha, things may not be as far wrong as we think they are—may not be wrong at all. God moves in a mysterious way."

"And he needs to, Sister Phyllis. There's many a soul 'ud run away from him, even when he was coming to help 'em, if they knew it was him." "I understand what you mean, Martha—'as a thief in the night.' He breaks all bars and bursts all doors closed against him when he visits either a soul or a cause. I heard you were at Leeds. Do you mind telling us how things went? The squire will not talk to any one."

"I nivver was one to shut my grief up i' my heart, and let it poison my life; not I, indeed. It seemed to me, though, as varry little fight were made for Ben Clough afore he died; he'd signed a paper, declaring positive as it were Ben who shot him; and t' case were half done when that were said. Then Bingley were sworn, and he said, as he were coming ovver t' moor, about half past six, he heard a shot, and saw Ben Craven come from behind a whin bush, and run toward t' village; and a minute after Bill Laycock came in sight; and Ben, he said, ran past him, also; and Laycock looked after Ben, and said to Bingley—'that's Ben Craven; he's in a bit of a hurry, I think.'"

"Was Laycock coming from the moor also?"

"Nay, he was coming from t' village, and was going across t' moor to a knur match on Eltham Common."

"Did Laycock swear to that?"

"Ay, he did. He were varry loth to do it; for Ben and him hed laked together when they were lads, and been thick as thack iver since, till Mary Clough came between 'em. But I noticed one thing, and I think the jury saw it, too—when Laycock were asked, 'if he were sure it was Ben that passed him,' he turned white to the varry lips, and could scarce make out to whisper, 'Ay, *he were sure.*' Then Ben looked at him, and I'll nivver forget that look, no, nor any body else that saw it, and least of a t' man hes got it."

"You think Laycock swore to a lie?"

"I know he swore to a lie."

"It is a pity that Ben's working-suit has never been found."

"It'll come to light; see if it doesn't."

"Who spoke for Ben?"

"I did. I told t' truth, and there's none that knows me hes a doubt o' that. I said that Ben came home a bit early. He hed his cup o' tea wi' me, and I told him how bad off Sarah Fisher was; and I said, 'I'll wash up t' tea things, lad, and go bide wi' her till it's chapel time; and so thou be ready to go wi' me.' Before I went out I looked into Ben's room, and he'd dressed himsen up i' his Sunday clothes, and were sitting studying i' a book called 'Mechanics;' and I said, 'Why, Ben! Whatever hes ta put thy best clothes on for?' I knew right well it was for Mary Clough, but I wasn't too well pleased wi' Mary, and so I couldn't help letting him see as he weren't deceiving me; and Ben said, 'Nivver thee mind, mother, what clothes I've on, and don't be too late for t' chapel.'"

"And yet Bingley and Laycock swore that Ben had his working-clothes on?"

"Ay, they sware that."

"You are come into deep waters, Martha."

"Ay, I am; but there's One on t' water wi' me. I hev his hand, and he's none going to let me sink. And good-night to you, dearies, now; for I want to be alone wi' him. He isn't far off; you can tak' t' word of a sorrowful woman that he lets himsen be found, if nobbut you're i' earnest seeking him."

She turned from them, and seated herself before her lonely hearthstone, and Phyllis saw her glance upward at the four words, that even in the darkest night was clear to her—"In God we trust."

"Martha used to be so curious, so gossippy, so well acquainted with all her neighbors, so anxious for their good opinion, that it strikes me as singular," said Elizabeth, "that she seems to have forgotten the whole village, and to be careless as to its verdict. Does sorrow make us indifferent, I wonder?"

"No, I think not; but the happy look at things upon their own level—the earth-level; the sorrowful look up."

Not far from Martha's garden gate they met the Methodist preacher. He was going to see Martha, but hearing of her wish to be alone, he turned and walked with Phyllis and Elizabeth toward the park. He was a little man, with an unworldly air, and very clear truthful eyes. People came to their cottage doors and looked curiously at the trio, as they went slowly toward the hall, the preacher between the girls, and talking earnestly to them.

"Well I nivver!" said old Peggy Howarth, nodding her head wisely, "what does ta think o' that, Jane Sykes?"

"It beats ivery thing! There's Ezra Dixon. He's on his way to a class-meeting, I'll lay thee owt ta likes; Ezra!"

"Well, woman! What does ta want?"

"Does ta see Miss Hallam and that American lass wi' t' preacher?"

"For sure I do. They're in varry good company."

"They'll hev been at Martha Cravens, depend on't. They say Martha taks it varry quiet like."

"Ay, she's none o' them as whimpers and whines. Now if it wer' thee, Peggy, thou'd worrit, and better worrit; as if worritting wer' thy trade, and thou hed to work at it for thy victuals. Martha's none like that. Is ta going to thy class to-night?"

"Nay, then, I'm not going."

"I'd go if I was thee, Peggy. Thou'lt hev thysen to talk about there, and thou'lt not be tempted to say things about t' Cravens thou wont be able to stand up to."

"I'd hev some human nature in me, Ezra Dixon, if I was thee. To think o' this being t' first murder as iver was i' Hallam! and thou talking as if I ought to buckle up my tongue about it."

"Thou ought; but 'oughts' stand for nothing. To be sure thou'll talk about it; but go and talk i' thy class-meeting wi' Josiah Banks looking i' thy face, and then thou'll talk wi' a kind heart. Do as I tell thee."

"Nay, I'll not do it."

"Thou nivver will disappoint t' devil, Peggy."

Peggy did not answer; she was too much interested in the rector's proceedings. He was actually crossing the road and joining the ladies and the preacher.

"Now, then! Dost ta see that, Ezra? Whativer's coming to folk? Why-a! They're a' going on together!"

"Why not? T' rector's a varry good man. It 'ud be strange if he didn't feel for poor Martha as well as ivery other kind heart. Her trouble hes made a' maks o' Christians feel together."

"If Martha was nobbut a Church o' England woman."

"Dost ta really think that t' rector is cut on that sort o' a pattern? Not he. A man may be a Christian, Peggy, even if he isn't a Wesleyan Methody. Them's my principles, and I'm not a bit 'shamed o' them."

It was quite true; the rector had joined the girls and the preacher, and they walked on together as far as the park gates, talking of Martha and her great sorrow and great faith. Then the preacher turned back, carrying with him to his little chapel the strength that comes from real Christian sympathy and communion.

"What clear prophetic eyes that Mr. North has," said the rector, as they walked thoughtfully under the green arches of the elms.

"He lives very near to the other world," said Phyllis; "I think his eyes have got that clear far-off look with habitually gazing into eternity. It is a great privilege to talk to him, for one always feels that he is just from the presence of God."

"I have heard that you are a Dissenter, Miss Fontaine."

"O no, I am not. I am a Methodist."

"That is what I meant."

"But the two are not the same. I am quite sure that the line between Dissent and Methodism has been well defined from the beginning."

The rector smiled tolerantly down at Phyllis's bright thoughtful face, and said: "Do young ladies in America study theological history?"

"I think most of them like to understand the foundation upon which their spiritual faith is built. I have found every side study of Methodism very interesting. Methodism is a more charitable and a more spiritual thing than Dissent."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. Dissenters began every-where with showing how fallen was the Church, how unworthy were her ministers; but Methodism began every-where with showing her hearers how fallen they themselves were, and how utterly unworthy. Dissent was convinced that Episcopacy was wrong; Methodism sprang from a sense of personal guilt. Dissent discussed schemes of church government, as if the salvation of the world depended upon certain forms; Methodism had one object, to save souls and inculcate personal holiness. Dissent boldly separated herself from the Church; Methodism clung with loving affection to her mother. Her separation was gradual, and accompanied with fond regrets."

"I like that reasoning, Miss Fontaine."

"Do not give me credit for it; it comes from those who have authority to speak upon such matters. But ought not a young lady to know as much about the origin and constitution of her Church as of her country?"

"I suppose she ought. What do you say, Miss Hallam?"

"That I will begin and study the history of my Church. I am ashamed to say I know nothing about it."

"And I say that I will look into Methodism a little. John Wesley, as a man, has always possessed a great attraction to me. It was a pity he left the Church."

"But he never did leave it. Just as St. Peter and St. Paul and St. John went up to the temple at Jerusalem to pray, so Wesley, until the very last, frequented the Church ordinances. I think he was

really a very High-Churchman. He was even prejudiced against Presbyterians; and a very careless reader of his works must see that he was deeply impressed with the importance of Episcopacy, and that he regarded it as an apostolic institution. If he were to return to this world again, he would undoubtedly give in his membership to the American Methodist Episcopal Church."

"But remember how he countenanced field-preaching and religious services without forms."

"Do you think it a sin to save souls out of church? Don't you think the Sermon on the Mount a very fair precedent in favor of field-preaching?"

"Miss Fontaine, you argue like a woman. That question is not in logical sequence. Here come Mr. Fontaine and the squire. I hope some other time you will allow me to resume this conversation."

The squire's face brightened when he saw the rector. "A 'good-evening,' parson. Thou thought I'd be in a bit o' trouble to-night, didn't ta?"

"I knew your kind heart, squire, and that it would be sad for Martha and Ben Craven to-night."

"Ay, to be sure." He had clasped Phyllis's hand in one of his own, and turned round with the party; as he did so, drawing the rector's attention by a significant glance to Elizabeth, who had fallen behind with Richard.

"I am very glad if that is the case, squire."

"Ay, it pleases me, too. But about poor Martha, hev you seen her?"

"She wishes to be alone."

"And no wonder. I'm sure I don't know whativer must be done."

"Perhaps the queen will have mercy."

"Mercy! He'll get a life sentence, if that is mercy. Hanging isn't any better than its called, I'll be bound; but if I was Ben, I'd a-deal rather be hung, and done wi' it. That I would!"

"I think Ben Craven will yet be proved innocent. His mother is sure of it, uncle."

"That's t' way wi' a mother. You can't make 'em understand—they will hang on."

"Yes," said the rector. "Mother-love almost sees miracles."

"Mother-love *does* see miracles," answered Phyllis. "The mother of Moses would 'hang on,' as uncle defines it, and she saw a miracle of salvation. So did the Shunammite mother, and the Syro-phoenician mother, and millions of mothers before and since. Just as long as Martha hopes, I shall hope; and just as long as Martha prays, she will hope."

"Does ta think Martha can pray against t' English Constitution?"

"I heard the rector praying against the atmospheric laws last Sunday, and you said every word after him, uncle. When you prayed for fine weather to get the hay in, did you expect it in spite of all the conditions against it—falling barometer, gathering clouds? If you did, you were expecting a miracle."

"Ay, I told t' beadle, mysen, that there wasn't a bit o' good praying for fine weather as long as t' wind kept i' such a contrary quarter; and it's like enough to rain to-night again, and heigh, for sure! its begun mizzling. We'll hev to step clever, or we'll be wet before we reach t' hall."

The rector smiled at the squire's unconscious statement of his own position; but the rain was not to be disregarded, and, indeed, before they reached shelter the ladies' dresses were wet through, and there was so many evidences of a storm that the rector determined to stay all night with his friends. When Elizabeth and Phyllis came down in dry clothing, they found a wood fire crackling upon the hearth, and a servant laying the table for supper.

"Elizabeth, let's hev that round o' spiced beef, and some cold chicken, and a bit o' raspberry tart, and some clouted cream, if there's owt o' t' sort in t' buttery. There's nothing like a bit o' good eating, if there's owt wrong wi' you."

The rector and the squire were in their slippers, on each side of the ample hearth, and they had each, also, a long, clean, clay pipe in their mouth. The serenity of their faces, and their air of thorough comfort was a delightful picture to Phyllis. She placed herself close to her uncle, with her head resting on his shoulder. The two men were talking in easy, far-apart sentences of "tithes," and, as the subject did not interest her, she let her eyes wander about the old room, noting its oaken walls, richly carved

and almost black with age, and its heavy oaken furniture, the whole brightened up with many-colored rugs, and the gleaming silver and crystal on the high sideboard, and the gay geraniums and roses in the deep bay windows. The table, covered with snowy damask, seemed a kind of domestic altar, and Phyllis thought she had never seen Elizabeth look so grandly fair and home-like as she did that hour, moving about in the light of the fire and candles. She did not wonder that Richard heard nothing of the conversation, and that his whole attention was given to his promised wife.

The squire got the delicacies he wanted, and really it appeared as if his advice was very good medicine. Happiness, hope, and a sense of gratitude was in each heart. The old room grew wonderfully cozy and bright; the faces that gathered round the table and the fire were full of love, and sweet, reasonable contentment. When supper was over Richard and Elizabeth went quietly into the great entrance hall, where there was always a little fire burning. They had their own hopes and joys, in which no heart, however near and dear, could intermeddle, and this was fully recognized. Phyllis only gave them a bright smile as they withdrew. The squire ignored their absence; Antony was at Eltham; for an hour the two little groups were as happy as mortals may be.

The rector had another pipe after supper, and still talked fitfully about "tithes." It seemed to be a subject which fitted in comfortably to the pauses in a long pipe. But when he had finished his "thimbleful" of tobacco, and shaken out its ashes carefully, he looked at Phyllis with a face full of renewed interest, and said,

"Squire, do you know that your niece thinks John Wesley was a High-Churchman?"

"What I meant, sir, was this: Wesley had very decided views in favor of the Episcopacy. He would suffer none to lay unconsecrated hands upon the sacraments; and in personal temperament, I think he was as ascetic as any monk."

"Do you think, then, that if he had lived before the Reformation he might have founded an order of extreme rigor, say, like La Trappe?"

"No, indeed, sir! He might have founded an order, and it would, doubtless, have been a rigorous one; but it would not have been one shut up behind walls. It would have been a preaching order, severely disciplined, perhaps, but burning with all the zeal of the Redemptionist Fathers on a mission."

The squire patted the little hand, which was upon his knee, and proudly asked,

"Now, then, parson, what does ta say to that?"

"I say it would be a very good description of 'the people called Methodists' when they began their crusade in England."

"It is always a good description of them when they have missionary work to do. We have had brave soldiers among the Fontaines, and wise statesmen, also; but braver than all, wiser than all, was my grandfather Fontaine, who went into the wilderness of Tennessee an apostle of Methodism, with the Bible in his heart and his life in his hand. If I was a man, I would do as Richard always does, lift my hat whenever his name is mentioned."

"Such ministers are, indeed, spiritual heroes, Miss Fontaine; men, of whom the world is not worthy."

"Ah, do not say that! It was worthy of Christ. It is worthy of them. They are not extinct. They are still preaching—on the savannas of the southwest—on all the border-lands of civilization—among the savages of the Pacific isles, and the barbarians of Asia and Africa; voices crying in the wilderness, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son' for its salvation. A Methodist preacher is necessarily an evangelist. Did you ever happen to read, or to hear Wesley's 'charge' to his preachers?"

"No, I never heard it, Miss Fontaine."

"If ta knows it, Phyllis, dearie, let him hev it. I'se warrant it'll fit his office very well."

"Yes, I know it; I have heard it many a time from my grandfather's lips. In his old age, when he was addressing young preachers, he never said any thing else to them. 'Observe,' charged Wesley, 'it is not your business to preach so many times, or to take care of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can.'"

"Now, then, that's enough. Phyllis, dearie, lift t' candle and both o' you come wi' me; I've got summat to say mysen happen."

He had that happy look on his face which people wear who are conscious of having the power to give a pleasant surprise. He led them to a large room above those in the east wing which were specially his own. It was a handsome bedroom, but evidently one that was rarely used.

"Look 'ee here, now;" and he lifted the candle toward a picture over the fire place. "Who do you mak' that out to be?"

"John Wesley," said Phyllis.

"For sure; it's John Wesley, and in this room he slept at intervals for thirty years. My great grandfather, Squire Gregory Hallam, was a Methodist—one o' t' first o' them—and so you see, Phyllis, my lass, you hev come varry naturally by your way o' thinking."

The rector was examining the face with great interest. "It is a wonderful countenance," he said; "take a look at it, Miss Fontaine, and see if it does not bear out what I accidentally said about La Trappe."

"No, indeed, it does not! I allow that it is the face of a refined, thorough-bred ecclesiastic. He was the son of the Church."

"Yes; he came, indeed, from the tribe of Levi."

"It is a fine, classical, clearly-chiseled face—the face of a scholar and a gentleman."

"A little of the fanatic in it—admit that. I have seen pictures of grand inquisitors, by Velasquez, which resemble it."

"You must not say such things, my dear rector. Look again. I admit that it is a clever face, and I have seen it compared to that of Richelieu and Loyola, as uniting the calm iron will and acute eye of the one with the inventive genius and habitual devotion of the other; but I see more than this, there is the permeation of that serenity which comes from an assurance of the love of God."

"God love thee, Phyllis! Thou'lt be makkin' a Methodist o' me, whether I will or no. I hed no idea afore there was a' that in t' picture. I wont stay here any longer. Thanks be! It's sleeping-time, missee."

"I should like to sleep in this room, squire."

"Why, then, rector, thou shall. A bit o' fire and some aired bed-clothes is a' it wants. Thou's sure to sleep well in it, and thou'lt hev t' sunrise to wake thee up."

And Phyllis thought, when she saw him in the morning, that he had kept some of the sunshine in his face. He was walking up and down the terrace softly humming a tune to himself, and watching the pigeons promenade with little, timid, rapid steps, making their necks change like opals with every movement. The roofs and lintels and the soft earth was still wet, but the sun shone gloriously, and the clear air was full of a thousand scents.

"How beautiful all is, and how happy you look," and Phyllis put her hand in the rector's, and let him lead her to the end of the terrace, where she could see the green country flooded with sunshine.

"Did you sleep well in Wesley's chamber?"

"I slept very well; and this morning the pleasantest thing happened. Upon a little table I saw a Bible lying, and I read the morning lesson, which was a very happy one; then I lifted another book upon the stand. It was 'The Pilgrim's Progress;' and this was the passage I lighted upon: 'The Pilgrim they laid in a large upper chamber facing the sunrising. The name of the chamber was Peace.' There was a pencil-mark against the passage, and I fancy John Wesley put it there. It was a little thing, but it has made me very happy."

"I can understand."

"God bless you, child! I am sure you can."

CHAPTER III

"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble;
I will deliver him, and honor him."

Psa. xci, 15.

"Alas for hourly change! Alas for all
The loves that from his hand proud Youth lets fall,
Even as the beads of a told rosary!"

That very day Richard received a letter from Bishop Elliott. He was going to the Holy Land and wished Richard to join him in Rome, and then accompany him to Palestine. Richard preferred to remain at Hallam, but both Elizabeth and Phyllis thought he ought to respond to the Bishop's desire. He was an aged man among strangers, and, apart from inclination, it seemed to be a duty to accede to his request. So rather reluctantly Richard left Hallam, half-inclined to complain that Elizabeth was not sorry enough to part with him. In truth she was conscious of feeling that it would be pleasant to be a little while alone with the great joy that had come to her; to consider it quietly, to brood over it, and to ask some questions of her soul which it must answer very truthfully.

People of self-contained natures weary even of happiness, if happiness makes a constant demand upon them. She loved Richard with the first love of her heart, she loved him very truly and fondly, but she was also very happy through the long summer days sitting alone, or with Phyllis, and sewing pure, loving thoughts into wonderful pieces of fine linen and cambric and embroidery. Sometimes Phyllis helped her, and they talked together in a sweet confidence of the lovers so dear to them, and made little plans for the future full of true unselfishness.

In the cool of the day they walked through the garden and the park to see Martha; though every day it became a more perplexing and painful duty. The poor woman, as time went by, grew silent and even stern. She heeded not any words of pity, she kept apart from the world, and from all her neighbors, and with heart unwaveringly fixed upon God, waited with a grand and pathetic patience the answer to her prayers. For some reason which her soul approved she remained in the little chapel with her petition, and the preacher going in one day, unexpectedly, found her prostrate before the communion table, pleading as mothers only can plead. He knelt down beside her, and took her hand, and prayed with her and for her.

Quite exhausted, she sat down beside him afterward and said, amid heart-breaking sobs, "It isn't Ben's life I'm asking, sir. God gave him, and he's a fair right to tak' him, when and how he will. I hev given up asking for t' dear lad's life. But O if he'd nobbut clear his good name o' the shameful deed! I know he's innocent, and God knows it; but even if they hang Ben first, I'll give my Maker no peace till he brings the guilty to justice, and sets t' innocent in t' leet o' his countenance."

"'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,' Martha, 'and the violent take it by force.' Don't get weary. Christ had a mother, and he loved her. Does he not love her still?"

"Thank you, sir, for that word. I'll be sure and remind him o' her. I'd forget that there was iver any mother but me; or any son but my son." "Say a word for all other weeping mothers. Think of them, Martha, all over the world, rich and poor, Christian and heathen. How many mothers' hearts are breaking to-day. You are not alone, Martha. A great company are waiting and weeping with you. Don't be afraid to ask for them, too. There is no limit to God's love and power."

"I'll pray for ivery one o' them, sir."

"Do, Martha, and you'll get under a higher sky. It's a good thing to pray for ourselves; it's a far grander thing to pray for others. God bless you, sister, and give you an answer of peace."

Very shortly after this conversation one of those singular changes in public opinion, which cannot be accounted for, began to manifest itself. After Clough's positive dying declaration, it was hardly to be expected that his daughter Mary could show any kindness to her old lover, Ben Craven. But week after week went by, and people saw that she positively refused to speak to Bill Laycock, and that she shrank even from his passing shadow, and they began to look queerly at the man. It amounted at first to nothing more than that; but as a mist creeps over the landscape, and gradually possesses it altogether, so this chill, adverse atmosphere enfolded him. He noticed that old acquaintances dropped away from him; men went three miles farther off to get a shoe put on a horse. No one could have given a clear reason for doing so, and one man did not ask another man "why?" but the fact needed no reasoning about. It was there. At the harvest festivals the men drew away from him, and the girls would not have him for a partner in any rural game. He was asked to resign his place in the knur club, and if he joined any cricket eleven, the match fell to the ground.

One September evening Elizabeth and Phyllis went to the village to leave a little basket of dainties in Martha's cottage. They now seldom saw her, she was usually in the chapel; but they knew she was grateful for the food, and it had become all they could do for her in the hard struggle she was having. The trees were growing bare; the flowers were few and without scent; the birds did not sing any more, but were shy, and twittered and complained, while the swallows were restless, like those going a long journey. Singing time was over, life burning down, it was natural to be silent and to sigh a little.

They left the basket on Martha's table and went quietly up the street. In a few minutes they met the preacher, but he also seemed strangely solemn, and very little inclined to talk. At the chapel gates there were five or six people standing. "We are going to have a prayer-meeting," he said, "will you come in?"

"It will soon be dark," answered Elizabeth, "we must reach home as quickly as possible."

Just then Martha Craven came out of the chapel. A sorrow nobly borne confers a kind of moral rank. Her neighbors, with respect and pity, stood aside silently. She appeared to be quite unconscious of them. At Phyllis and Elizabeth she looked with great sad eyes, and shook her head mournfully. To the preacher she said, "It's t' eleventh hour, sir, and no answer yet!"

"Go thy ways, Martha Craven. It will come! It is impossible thy prayers should fail! As the Lord liveth no harm shall come to thee or to thine!"

The plain little man was transfigured. No ancient prophet at the height of his vision ever spoke with more authority. Martha bowed her head and went her way without a word; and Elizabeth and Phyllis, full of a solemn awe, stood gazing at the man whose rapt soul and clear, prophetic eyes looked into the unseen and received its assurance. He seemed to have forgotten their presence, and walked with uplifted face into the chapel.

Elizabeth was the first to speak. "What did he mean?"

"He has had some assurance from God. *He knows.*"

"Do you mean to say, Phyllis, that God speaks to men?"

"Most surely God speaks to those who will hear. Why should you doubt it? He changeth not. When God talked with Enoch, and Abraham spoke with God, no one was astonished. When Hagar wandered in the desert, and saw an angel descend from heaven with succor, she was not surprised. In those days, Elizabeth, men whose feet were in the dust breathed the air of eternity. They spoke to God, and he answered them."

"Does Methodism believe that this intercourse is still possible?"

"Methodism knows it is possible. The doctrine of assurance is either a direct divine interposition or it is a self-deception. It is out of the province of all human reason and philosophy. But it is impossible that it can be self-deception. Millions of good men and women of every shade of mental and physical temperament have witnessed to its truth."

"And you, Phyllis?"

"I know it."

How wonderfully certain moods of nature seem to frame certain states of mind. Elizabeth never forgot the still serenity of that September evening; the rustling of the falling leaves under their feet, the gleaming of the blue and white asters through the misty haze gathering over the fields and park. They had expected to meet the squire at the gates, but they were nearly at home ere they saw him. He was evidently in deep trouble; even Fanny divined it, and, with singular canine delicacy, walked a little behind him, and forebore all her usual demonstrations.

Antony was sitting at the hall fire. His handsome person was faultlessly dressed, and, with a newspaper laid over his knee, he was apparently lost in the contemplation of the singular effects made by the firelight among the antlers and armor that adorned the wall. He roused himself when the girls entered, and apologized for not having come to meet them; but there was an evident constraint and unhappiness in the home atmosphere. Even the "bit o' good eating," which was the squire's panacea, failed in his own case. Antony, indeed, sat and laughed and chatted with an easy indifference, which finally appeared to be unbearable to his father, for he left the table before the meal was finished.

Then a shadow settled over the party. Elizabeth had a troubled look. She was sure there had been some very unusual difference between Antony and his father. They soon separated for the night, Elizabeth going with Phyllis to her room for a final chat. There was a little fire there, and its blaze gave a pleasant air of cozy comfort to the room, and deepened all its pretty rose tints. This was to the girls their time of sweetest confidence. They might be together all the day, but they grew closest of all at this good-night hour.

They spoke of the squire's evident distress, but all Elizabeth's suppositions as to the cause fell distant from the truth. In fact, the squire had received one of those blows which none but a living hand can deal, for there are worse things between the cradle and the grave than death—the blow, too, had fallen without the slightest warning. It was not the thing that he had feared which had happened to him, but the thing which he had never dreamed of as possible. He had been walking up and down the terrace with Fanny, smoking his pipe, and admiring the great beds of many-colored asters, when he saw Antony coming toward him. He waited for his son's approach, and met him with a smile. Antony did not notice his remark about the growing shortness of the days, but plunged at once into the subject filling his whole heart.

"Father, George Eltham and I are thinking of going into business together."

"Whatever is ta saying? Business? What business?"

"Banking."

"Now, then, be quiet, will ta? Such nonsense!"

"I am in dead earnest, father. I cannot waste my life any longer."

"Who asks thee to waste thy life? Hev I iver grudged thee any thing to make it happy? Thou hes hed t' best o' educations. If ta wants to travel, there's letters o' credit waiting for thee. If ta wants work, I've told thee there's acres and acres o' wheat on the Hallam marshes, if they were only drained. I'll find ta money, if ta wants work."

"Father, I could not put gold in a marsh, and then sit down and wait for the wheat to grow; and all the wheat on Hallam, unless it bore golden ears, would not satisfy me. George and I are going into Sir Thomas Harrington's for a few months. Lord Eltham has spoken to him. Then George is to marry Selina Digby. She has fifty thousand pounds; and we are going to begin business."

"Wi' fifty thousand pounds o' Miss Digby's money! It's t' meanest scheme I iver heard tell on! I'm fair shamed o' thee!"

"I must put into the firm fifty thousand pounds also; and I want to speak to you about it."

"For sure! How does ta think to get it out o' me now?"

"I could get Jews to advance it on my inheritance, but I would do nothing so mean and foolish as that. I thought it would be better to break the entail. You give me fifty thousand pounds as my share of Hallam, and you can have the reversion and leave the estate to whom you wish."

The squire fairly staggered. Break the entail! Sell Hallam! The young man was either mad, or he was the most wicked of sons.

"Does ta know what thou is talking about! Hallam has been ours for a thousand years. O Antony! Antony!"

"We have had it so long, father, that we have grown to it like vegetables."

"Has ta no love for t' old place? Look at it. Is there a bonnier spot in t' wide world? Why-a! There's an old saying,

"'When a' t' world is up aloft, God's share will be fair Hallam-Croft.'

"Look at ta dear old home, and t' sweet old gardens, and t' great park full o' oaks that hev sheltered Saxons, Danes, Normans—ivery race that has gone to make up t' Englishman o' to-day."

"There are plenty of fairer spots than Hallam. I will build a house far larger and more splendid than this. There shall be a Lord Hallam, an Earl Hallam, perhaps. Gold will buy any thing that is in the market."

"Get thee out o' my sight! And I'll tell Lord Eltham varry plainly what I think o' his meddling in my affairs. In order to set up his youngest son I must give up t' bond on t' home that was my fathers when his fathers were driving swine, the born thralls of the Kerdics of Kerdic Forest. Thou art no Hallam. No son o' mine. Get out o' my sight wi' thee!"

Antony went without anger and without hurry. He had expected even a worse scene. He sat down by the hall fire to think, and he was by no means hopeless as to his demand. But the squire had received a shock from which he never recovered himself. It was as if some evil thing had taken all the sweetest and dearest props of love, and struck him across the heart with them. He had a real well-defined heart-ache, for the mental shock had had bodily sympathies which would have prostrated a man of less finely balanced *physique*.

All night long he sat in his chair, or walked up and down his room. The anger which comes from wronged love and slighted advantages and false friendship alternately possessed him. The rooms he occupied in the east wing had been for generations the private rooms of the masters of Hallam, and its walls were covered with their pictures—fair, large men, who had for the most part lived simple, kindly lives, doing their duty faithfully in the station to which it had pleased God to call them. He found some comfort in their pictured presence. He stood long before his father, and tried to understand what he would have done in his position. Toward daylight he fell into a chill, uneasy sleep, and dreamed wearily and sadly of the old home. It was only a dream, but dreams are the hieroglyphics of the other world if we had the key to them; and at any rate the influences they leave behind are real enough. "Poor Martha!" was the squire's first thought on rousing himself. "I know now what t' heart-ache she spoke of is like. I'm feared I heven't been as sorry as I might hev been for her."

Yet that very night, while the squire was suffering from the first shock of wounded, indignant amazement, God had taken Martha's case in his own hand. The turn in Ben's trouble began just when the preacher spoke to Martha. At that hour Bill Laycock entered the village ale-house and called for a pot of porter. Three men, whom he knew well, were sitting at a table, drinking and talking. To one of them Bill said, "It's a fine night," and after a sulky pause the man answered, "It ails nowt." Then he looked at his mates, put down his pot, and walked out. In a few minutes the others followed.

Laycock went back to his house and sat down to think. There was no use fighting popular ill-will any longer. Mary would not walk on the same side of the street with him. It was the evident intention of the whole village to drive him away. He remembered that Swale had told him there was "a feeling against him," and advised him to leave. But Swale had offered to buy his house and forge for half their value, and he imagined there was a selfish motive in the advice. "And it's Swale's doing, I know," he muttered; "he's been a-fighting for it iver since. Well, I'll tak t' L300 he offers, wi' t' L80 I hev in t' house, I can make shift to reach t' other side o' t' world, and one side is happen as good as t' other side. I'll go and see Swale this varry hour."

He was arrested by a peculiar sound in the cellar beneath his feet, a sound that made him turn pale to the very lips. In a few moments the door opened, and Tim Bingley stepped into the room.

"Thou scoundrel! What does ta want here?"

"Thou get me summat to eat and drink, and then I'll tell thee what I want."

His tone was not to be disputed. He was a desperate man, and Laycock obeyed him.

"Thou told me thou would go abroad."

"I meant to go abroad, but I didn't. I got drunk and lost my brass. Thou'll hev to give me some more. I'll go clean off this time."

"I've got none to give thee."

"Varry well, then I'll hev to be took up; and if I'm sent to York Castle, thou'lt hev lodgings varry close to me. Mak' up thy mind to that, Bill Laycock."

"I didn't kill Clough, and thou can't say I did."

Bingley did not answer. He sat munching his bread and casting evil glances every now and then at his wretched entertainer.

"What does ta want?"

"Thou hed better give me a fresh suit o' clothes; these are fair worn out—and L20. I'll be i' Hull early to-morrow, and I'll tak' t' varry first ship I can get."

"How do I know thou will?"

"Thou'lt hev to trust my word—it's about as good as thine, I reckon."

O but the way of the transgressor is hard! There was nothing else to be done. Hatefully, scornfully, he tossed him a suit of his own clothes, and gave him L20 of his savings. Then he opened the door and looked carefully all around. It was near midnight, and all was so still that a bird moving in the branches could have been heard. But Laycock was singularly uneasy. He put on his hat and walked one hundred yards or more each way.

"Don't be a fool," said Bingley, angrily; "when did ta iver know any body about at this time o' night, save and it might be at Hallam or Crossley feasts?"

"But where was ta a' day, Bingley? Is ta sure nobody saw thee? And when did ta come into my cellar?"

"I'll tell thee, if ta is bad off to know. I got into Hallam at three o'clock this morning, and I hid mysen in Clough's shut-up mill a' day. Thou knows nobody cares to go nigh it, since—"

"Thou shot him."

"Shut up! Thou'd better let that subject drop. I knew I were safe there. When it was dark and quiet, I came to thee. Now, if ta'll let me pass thee, I'll tak' Hull road."

"Thou is sure nobody has seen thee?"

"Ay, I'm sure o' that. Let be now. I hev'n't any time to waste."

Laycock watched him up the Hull road till he slipped away like a shadow into shade. Then he sat down to wait for morning. He would not stay in Hallam another day. He blamed himself for staying so long. He would take any offer Swale made him in the morning. There would be neither peace nor safety for him, if Tim Bingley took it into his will to return to Hallam whenever he wanted money.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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

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