YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

MY YOUNG ALCIDES: A FADED PHOTOGRAPH

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE ARGHOUSE INHERITANCE

One of the children brought me a photograph album, long ago finished and closed, and showed me a faded and blurred figure over which there had been a little dispute. Was it Hercules with club and lion-skin, or was it a gentleman I had known?

Ah me! how soon a man's place knoweth him no more! What fresh recollections that majestic form awoke in me—the massive features, with the steadfast eye, and low, square brow, curled over with short rings of hair; the mouth, that, through the thick, short beard, still invited trust and reliance, even while there was a look of fire and determination that inspired dread.

The thing seemed to us hideous and absurd when it was taken by Miss Horsman. I hated it, and hid it away as a caricature. But now those pale, vanishing tints bring the very presence before me; and before the remembrance can become equally obscure in my own mind, let me record for others the years that I spent with my young Alcides as he now stands before me in memory.

Our family history is a strange one. I, Lucy Alison, never even saw my twin brothers—nor, indeed, knew of their existence—during my childhood. I had one brother a year younger than myself, and as long as he lived he was treated as the eldest son, and neither he nor I ever dreamed that my father had had a first wife and two sons. He was a feeble, broken man, who seemed to my young fancy so old that in after times it was always a shock to me to read on his tablet, "Percy Alison, aged fifty-seven;" and I was but seven years old when he died under the final blow of the loss of my little brother Percy from measles.

The dear old place—house with five gables on the garden front, black timbered, and with white plaster between, and oh! such flowers in the garden—was left to my mother for her life; and she was a great deal younger than my father, so we went on living there, and it was only when I was almost a woman that I came to the knowledge that the property would never be mine, but would go in the male line to the son of one of my disinherited convict brothers.

The story, as my mother knew it, was this: Their names were Ambrose and Eustace: there was very little interval between their births, and there had been some confusion between them during the first few hours of their lives, so that the question of seniority was never entirely clear, though Ambrose was so completely the leader and master that he was always looked upon as the elder.

In their early youth they were led away by a man of Polish extraction, though a British subject, one Count Prometesky, who had thrown himself into every revolutionary movement on the Continent, had fought under Kosciusko in Poland, joined the Carbonari in Italy, and at last escaped, with health damaged by a wound, to teach languages and military drawing in England, and, unhappily, to spread his principles among his pupils, during the excitement connected with the Reform Bill. Under his teaching my poor brothers became such democrats that they actually married the two daughters of a man from Cumberland named Lewthwayte, whom Lord Erymanth had turned out of one of his farms for his insolence and radicalism; and not long after they were engaged in the agricultural riots, drilling the peasants, making inflammatory speeches, and doing all they could to bring on a revolution. Dreadful harm was done on the Erymanth estate, and the farm from which Lewthwayte had been expelled suffered especially, the whole of the ricks and buildings being burnt down, though the family of the occupant was saved, partly by Prometesky's exertions.

When the troops came, both he and my brothers were taken with arms in their hands; they were tried by the special commission and sentenced to death. Lewthwayte and his son were actually hung; but there was great interest made for Ambrose and Eustace, and in consideration of their early youth (they were not twenty-two) their sentence was commuted to transportation for life, and so was Prometesky's, because he was half a foreigner, and because he was proved to have saved life.

My father would not see them again, but he offered their wives a passage out to join them, and wanted to have had their two babies left with him, but the two young women refused to part with them; and it was after that that he married again, meaning to cast them off for ever, though, as long as their time of servitude lasted, he sent the wives an allowance, and as soon as his sons could hold property, he gave them a handsome sum with which to set themselves up in a large farm in the Bush.

And when little Percy died, he wanted again to have his eldest grandson sent home to him, and was very much wounded by the refusal which came only just before his death. His will had left the estate to the grandson, as the right heir. Everyone looked on it as a bad prospect, but no one thought of the "convict boy" as in the immediate future, as my mother was still quite a young woman.

But when I was just three-and-twenty, an attack of diphtheria broke out; my mother and I both caught it; and, alas! I alone recovered. The illness was very long with me, partly from my desolateness and grief, for, tender as my kind old servants were, and good as were my friends and neighbours, they could only make me feel what they were *not*.

Our old lawyer, Mr. Prosser, had written to my nephew, for we knew that both the poor brothers were dead; but he assured me that I might safely stay on at the old place, for it would be eight months before his letter could be answered, and the heir could not come for a long time after.

I was very glad to linger on, for I clung to the home, and looked at every bush and flower, blossoming for the last time, almost as if I were dying, and leaving them to a sort of fiend. My mother's old friends, Lady Diana Tracy and Lord Erymanth, her brother, used to bemoan with me the coming of this lad, born of a plebeian mother, bred up in a penal colony, and, no doubt, uneducated except in its coarsest vices. Lord Erymanth told at endless length all the advice he had given my father in vain, and bewailed the sense of justice that had bequeathed the property to such a male heir as could not fail to be a scourge to the country. Everyone had some story to tell of Ambrose's fiery speeches and insubordinate actions, viewing Eustace as not so bad because his mere satellite—and what must not their sons be?

The only person who had any feeling of pity or affection for them was old Miss Woolmer. She was the daughter of a former clergyman of Mycening, the little town which is almost at our park-gates. She was always confined to the house by rheumatic-gout. She had grown up with my brothers. I sometimes wondered if she had not had a little tenderness for one of them, but I believe it was almost elder-sisterly. She told me much in their excuse. My father had never been the fond, indulgent father to them that I remembered him, but a strict, stern authority when he was at home, and when he was absent leaving them far too much to their own devices; while Prometesky was a very attractive person, brilliant, accomplished, full of fire and of faith in his theories of universal benevolence and emancipation.

She thought, if the times had not been such as to bring them into action, Ambrose would have outgrown and modified all that was dangerous in his theories, and that they would have remained mere talk, the ebullition of his form of knight-errantry; for it was generous indignation and ardour that chiefly led him astray, and Eustace was always his double: but there were some incidents at the time which roused him to fury. Lewthwayte was a Cumberland man, who had inherited the stock and the last years of a lease of a farm on Lord Erymanth's property; he had done a good deal for it, and expended money on the understanding that he should have the lease renewed, but he was a man of bold, independent northern tongue, and gave great offence to his lordship, who was used to be listened to with a sort of feudal deference. He was of the fierce old Norse blood, and his daughters were tall, fair, magnificent young women, not at all uneducated nor vulgar, and it was the finding that

my brothers were becoming intimate at his farm that made Lord Erymanth refuse to renew the lease and turn the family out so harshly, and with as little notice as possible.

The cruelty, as they thought it, was, Miss Woolmer said, most ill-judged, and precipitated the very thing that was dreaded. The youths rushed into the marriage with the daughters, and cast in their lot with all that could overturn the existing order of things, but Miss Woolmer did not believe they had had anything to do with the rick-burning or machine-breaking. All that was taken out of their hands by more brutal, ignorant demagogues. They were mere visionaries and enthusiasts according to her, and she said the two wives were very noble-looking, high-spirited young women. She had gone to see them several times when their husbands were in prison, and had been much struck with Alice, Ambrose's wife, who held up most bravely; though Dorothy, poor thing, was prostrated, and indeed her child was born in the height of the distress, when his father had just been tried for his life, and sentenced to death.

It was their birth and education that caused them to be treated so severely; besides, there was no doubt of their having harangued the people, and stirred them up, and they were seen, as well as Prometesky, at the fire at what had been Lewthwayte's farm; at least, so it was declared by men who turned King's evidence, and the proof to the contrary broke down, because it depended on the wives, whose evidence was not admissible; indeed that—as the law then stood—was not the question. Those who had raised the storm were responsible for all that was done in it, and it was very barely that their lives were spared.

That was the comfort Miss Woolmer gave. No one else could see any at all, except a few old women in the parish, who spoke tenderly of poor Mr. Ambrose and Mr. Eustace; but then they had sons or brothers who had been out with the rioters, and after these twenty-six years no one remembered the outrages and terrors of the time with anything but horror; and the coming of the wild lad from the Bush was looked on as the end of all comfort.

I meant, as soon as I heard he was on the way, to leave Arghouse, make visits among friends, and decide on my future home, for, alas! there was no one who wanted me. I was quite alone in the world; my mother's cousins were not near, and I hardly knew them; and my only relations were the bushrangers, as Lady Diana Tracy called them.

She was sister to Lord Erymanth, and widow to an Irish gentleman, and had settled in the next parish to us, with her children, on the death of her husband.

Her little daughter, Viola, had been spending the day with me, and it was a lovely spring evening, when we sat on the lawn, wondering whether I should ever care for anything so much as for those long shadows from the fir woods upon the sloping field, with the long grass rippling in the wind, and the border of primroses round the edge of the wood.

We heard wheels and thought it was the carriage come for Viola, much too soon, when out ran one of the maids, crying, "Oh! Miss Alison, he is come. There's ever so many of them!"

I believe we caught hold of one another in our fright, and were almost surprised when, outstripping lame old Richardson, as he announced "Mr. Alison!" there came only three persons. They were the two tallest men I had ever seen, and a little girl of eight years old. I found my hand in a very large one, and with the words "Are you my aunt Lucy?" I was, as it were, gathered up and kissed. The voice, somehow, carried a comfortable feeling in the kindness of its power and depth; and though it was a mouth bristly with yellow bristles, such as had never touched me before, the honest friendly eyes gave me an indescribable feeling of belonging to somebody, and of having ceased to be alone in the world.

"Here is Eustace," he said, "and little Dora," putting the child forward as she backed against him, most unwilling to let me kiss her. "And, I did not know I had another aunt."

"No," I said, starting between, for what would Lady Diana's feelings have been if Viola had carried home an Australian kiss? "This is Miss Tracy."

Viola's carriage was now actually coming, and as I went into the house with her, she held me, whispering to me to come home at once with her, but I told her I could not leave them in that way, and they were really my nephews.

"You are not afraid?" she said.

"What do you think he could do to me?" I asked, laughing.

"He is so big," said Viola. "I never saw any one so big, but I think he is like Coeur de Lion. Ah!" We both shrieked, for a most uncanny monster was rearing up in front of us, hopping about the hall, as far as was allowed by the chain that fastened it to the leg of a table.

"Mr. Alison brought it, ma'am," said Richardson, in a tone of disgust and horror. "Will you have the carriage out, Miss Alison, and go down to the Wyvern? Shuh! you brute! He shan't hurt you, my dear ladies. I'll stand between."

We had recovered our senses, however, enough to see that it was only a harmless kangaroo; and Dora came running out, followed by Harold, caressing the beast, calling it poor Nanny, and asking where he should shut it up for the night.

I suggested an outhouse, and we conducted the creature thither in procession, hearing by the way that the kangaroo's mother had been shot, and that the animal itself, then very young, and no bigger than a cat, had taken Harold's open shirt front for her pouch and leaped into his bosom, and that it had been brought up to its present stature tame at Boola Boola. Viola went with us, fed the kangaroo, and was so much interested and delighted, that she could hardly go away, Eustace making her a most elaborate and rather absurd bow, being evidently much impressed by the carriage and liveried servants who were waiting for her.

"Like the Governor's lady!" he said. "And I know, for I've been to a ball at Government House."

He plainly cared much more for appearances than did Harold. He was not so tall, much slighter, with darker hair, rather too shiny, and a neatly turned up moustache, a gorgeous tie and watch chain, a brilliant breast pin, a more brilliant ring, and a general air that made me conclude that he regarded himself as a Sydney beau. But Harold, in his loose, rough grey suit, was very different. His height was extraordinary, his breadth of chest and shoulder equally gigantic, though well proportioned, and with a look of easy strength, and, as Viola had said, his head was very much what one knows as the Lion Heart's, not Marochetti's trim carpet knight, but Vertue's rugged portrait from the monument at Fontevrand. There was the same massive breadth of feature, large yet not heavy, being relieved by the exceeding keenness and quickness of the light but very blue eyes, which seemed to see everywhere round in a moment, as men do in wild countries. The short thick yellow curly beard and moustache veiled the lower part of the face; but the general expression, when still, was decidedly a sad one, though a word or a trick of Dora's would call up a smile all over the browned cheeks and bright eyes. His form and colouring must have come from the Cumberland statesman, but people said his voice and expression had much of his father in them; and no one could think him ungentlemanly, though he was not like any English gentleman. He wore no gaieties like Eustace, the handkerchief loosely knotted round his neck sailor fashion was plain black, and he had a gold ring on his little finger.

Dora had the same yellow curly hair, in tight, frizzly rings all over her head, like a boy's, a light complexion, and blue eyes, in a round, pug-nosed face; and she hung so entirely on Harold that I never doubted that she was his sister till, as we were sitting down to eat, I said, "Can't you come a little way from your brother?"

Eustace gave his odd little giggle, and said, "There, Dora!"

"I'm not his sister—I'm his wife!"

"There!" and Eustace giggled again and ordered her away; but I saw Harold's brow knit with pain, and as she began to reiterate her assertion and resist Eustace, he gently sat her down on the chair near at hand, and silently made her understand that she was to stay there; but Eustace rather teasingly said:

"Aunt Lucy will teach you manners, Dora. She is my sister, and we have brought her home to send her to school."

"I won't go to school," said Dora; "Harold would not."

"You won't get away like him," returned Eustace, in the same tone.

"Yes, I shall. I'll lick all the girls," she returned, clenching a pair of red mottled fists that looked very capable.

"For shame, Dora!" said the low voice.

"Harold did," said she, looking up at me triumphantly; "he beat all the boys, and had to come back again to Boola Boola."

I longed to understand more, but I was ashamed to betray my ignorance of my near relations, for I did not even know whether their mothers were alive; but I saw that if I only listened, Eustace would soon tell everything. He had a runaway chin, and his mouth had a look at times that made me doubt whether there were not some slight want in his intellect, or at least weakness of character. However, I was relieved from the fear of the vice with which the neighbourhood had threatened us, for neither of them would touch wine or beer, but begged for tea, and drank oceans of it.

We had not long finished, when Richardson brought me a note from Lady Diana Tracy, saying she had sent the carriage for me that I might at once take refuge from this unforeseen invasion.

I felt it out of all possibility that I should thus run away, and yet I knew I owed an apology for Harold's finding me and the old servants in possession, so I began to say that my old friend had sent the carriage for me.—I had been taken by surprise, their journey (one of the first across the Isthmus) had been so much quicker than I had expected, or I should have left the house free for them.

"Why?" asked Harold. And when I answered that the place was his and I had no business there, he did not seem to see it. "It is your home," he said; "you have always lived here."

I began explaining that this was no reason at all; but he would not hear of my going away, and declared that it was I who belonged to the place, so that I confessed that I should be very thankful to stay a little while.

"Not only a little while," he said; "it is your home as much as ever, and the best thing in the world for us."

"Yes, yes," responded Eustace; "we kept on wondering what Aunt Lucy would be like, and never thought she could be such a nice *young* lady."

"Not realising that your aunt is younger than yourselves," I said.

"No," said Eustace, "the old folk never would talk of home—my father did not like it, you see—and Aunt Alice had moved off to New Zealand, so that we could not go and talk about it to her. Mr. Smith has got a school in Auckland, you know."

I did not know, but I found that a year or two after the death of my brother Ambrose, his widow had become the second wife of the master of a boarding-school at Sydney, and that it was there that Harold, at ten years old, had fought all the boys, including the step-children, and had been so audacious and uncontrollable, that she had been forced to return him to his uncle and aunt in the "Bush." Eustace had been with the Smiths at Sydney until her move to Auckland, he had even been presented, and had been to a ball at Government House, and thus was viewed as the polished member of the family, though, if he had come as master, I should never have been drawn, as I was by Harold's free, kindly simplicity, into writing my thanks to Lady Diana, and saying that I could not leave my nephews so abruptly, especially as they had brought a little sister.

It was gratifying to see that Harold was uneasy till the note was sent off and the carriage dismissed. "You are not going?" he said, as persuasively as if he were speaking to Dora, and I strove to make a wise and prudent answer, about remaining for the next few days, and settling the rest when he had made his plans.

Then I proposed to take Dora up to bed, but though manifestly very weary, the child refused, and when her brother tried to order her, she ran between Harold's knees, and there tossed her head

and glared at me. He lifted her on his lap, and she drew his arm round her in defence. Eustace said he spoilt her, but he still held her, and, as she dropped asleep against his breast, Eustace related, almost in a tone of complaint, that she had cared for no one else ever since the time she had been lost in the Bush, and Harold had found her, after three days, in the last stage of exhaustion, since which time she had had neither eyes, ears, nor allegiance for any other creature, but that she must be taught something, and made into a lady.

Harold gazed down on her with his strange, soft, melancholy smile, somehow seeming to vex Eustace, who accused him of not caring how rough and uncultivated she was, nor himself either.

"We leave the polish to you," said Harold.

"Why, yes," said Eustace, simpering, "my uncle Smith gave me the first advantages in Sydney, and everyone knew my father was 'a gentleman.'"

Harold bit the hair that hung over his lip, and I guessed, what I afterwards found to be the truth, that his stepfather was no small trial to him; being, in fact, an unprosperous tutor and hanger-on on some nobleman's family, finally sent out by his patrons in despair, to keep school in Sydney.

Poor Ambrose had died of lock-jaw from a cut from an axe very soon after his emancipation, just as his energy was getting the farm into order, and making things look well with the family, and, after a year or two, Alice, deceived by the man's air and manners, and hoping to secure education for her son, had married, and the effect had been that, while Harold was provoked into fierce insubordination, Eustace became imbued with a tuft-hunting spirit, a great contrast to what might have been expected from his antecedents.

I cannot tell whether I found this out the first evening, or only gradually discovered it, with much besides. I only remember that when at last Harold carried Dora upstairs fast asleep, and my maid Colman and I had undressed her and put her into a little bed in a room opening out of mine, I went to rest, feeling rejoiced that the suspense was over and I knew the worst. I felt rather as if I had a magnificent wild beast in the house; and yet there was a wonderful attraction, partly from the drawing of kindred blood, and partly from the strength and sweetness of Harold's own face, and, aunt-like, I could not help feeling proud, of having such a grand creature belonging to me, though there might be a little dread of what he would do next.

In the morning all seemed like a dream, for Dora had vanished, leaving no trace but her black bag; but while I was dressing a tremendous cackling among my bantams caused me to look out, when I beheld them scurrying right and left at sight of the kangaroo leaping after the three strangers, and my cat on the top of the garden wall on tiptoe, with arched back, bristling tail, and glassy eyes, viewing the beast as the vengeful apotheosis of all the rats and mice she had slaughtered in her time.

From the stairs I heard Dora scouting her brother's orders to tidy herself for breakfast, adding that Harry never did, to which he merely replied, "I shall now. Come."

There was a sound of hoisting, that gave me warning rather fortunately, for he came striding upstairs with that great well-grown girl of eight perched on his shoulder as if she had been a baby, and would have run me down if I had not avoided into the nook on the landing.

All that day and the next those three were out; I never saw them but at meals, when they came in full of eager questions and comments on their discoveries in farming and other matters. These were the early bright days of spring, and they were out till after dark, only returning to eat and go to bed. I found the fascination of Harold's presence was on all the servants and dependents, except perhaps our bailiff Bullock, who disliked him from the first. All the others declared that they had no doubt about staying on, now that they saw what the young squire really was. It made a great impression on them that, when in some farmyard arrangements there was a moment's danger of a faggot pile falling, he put his shoulder against it and propped the whole weight without effort. His manhood, strength, and knowledge of work delighted them, and they declared already that he would be a good friend to the poor.

I confess that here lay what alarmed me. He was always given to few words, but I could see that he was shocked at the contrast between our poor and the Australian settlers, where food and space were plenty and the wages high. I was somewhat hurt at his way of viewing what had always seemed to me perfection, at least all that could be reasonably expected for the poor—our pet school, our old women, our civil dependents in tidy cottages, our picturesque lodges; and I did not half like his trenchant questions, which seemed to imply censure on all that I had hitherto thought unquestionable, and perhaps I told him somewhat impatiently that, when he had been a little longer here, he would understand our ways and fall naturally into them.

"That's just what I don't want," he said.

"Not want?" I exclaimed.

"Yes; I want to see clearly before I get used to things."

And as, perhaps, I seemed to wonder at this way of beginning, he opened a little, and said, "It is my father. He told me that if ever I came here I was to mind and do his work."

"What kind of work?" I asked, anxiously.

"Doing what he meant to have done," returned Harold, "for the poor. He said I should find out about it."

"You must have been too young to understand much of what he meant then," I said. "Did he not regret anything?"

"Yes, he said he had begun at the wrong end, when they were not ripe for it, and that the failure had ruined him for trying again."

"Then he did see things differently at last?" I said, hoping to find that the sentiments I had always heard condemned had not been perpetuated.

"Oh yes!" cried Eustace. "They were just brutes, you know, that nobody could do any good to, and were only bent on destroying, and had no gratitude nor sense; and that was the ruin of him and of my father too."

"They were ignorant, and easily maddened," said Harold, gravely. "He did not know how little they could be controlled. I must find out the true state of things. Prometesky said I must read it up."

"Prometesky!" I cried in despair. "Oh, Harold, you have not been influenced by that old firebrand?"

"He taught me almost all I know," was the answer, still much to my dismay; but I showed Harold to the library, and directed him to some old books of my father's, which I fancied might enlighten him on the subjects on which he needed information, though I feared they might be rather out of date; and whenever he was not out of doors, he was reading them, sometimes running his fingers through his yellow hair, or pulling his beard, and growling to himself when he was puzzled or met with what he did not like. Eustace's favourite study, meanwhile, was "Burke's Peerage," and his questions nearly drove me wild by their absurdity; and Dora rolled on the floor with my Spitz dog, for she loathed the doll I gave her, and made me more afraid of her than of either of the others.

Harold was all might and gentleness; Eustace viewed me as a glass of fashion and directory of English life and manners; but I saw they both looked to me not only to make their home, but to tame their little wild cat of a child; and that was enough to make her hate and distrust me. Moreover, she had a gleam of jealousy not far from fierce in her wild blue eyes if she saw Harold turn affectionately to me, and she always protested sullenly against the "next week," when I was to begin her education.

She could only read words of four letters, and could not, or would not, work a stitch. Harold had done all her mending. On the second day I passed by the open door of his room, and saw him at work on a great rectangular rent in her frock. I could not help stopping to suggest that Colman or I might save him that trouble, whereupon Dora slammed the door in my face.

Harold opened it again at once, saying, "You ought to beg Aunt Lucy's pardon;" and when no apology could be extracted from her, and with thanks he handed over the little dress to me, she gave a shriek of anger (she hardly ever shed tears) and snatched it from me again.

"Well, well," said Harold, patting her curly head; "I'll finish this time, but not again, Dora. Next time, Aunt Lucy will be so good as to see to it. After old Betty's eyes grew bad we had to do our own needling."

I confess it was a wonderful performance—quite as neat as Colman could have made it; and I suspect that Harold did not refrain from producing needle and thread from his fat miscellaneous pocket-book, and repairing her many disasters before they reached the domestic eye; for there was a chronic feud between Dora and Colman, and the attempts of the latter to make the child more like a young lady were passionately repelled, though she would better endure those of a rough little under-housemaid, whose civilisation was, I suppose, not quite so far removed from her own.

On Sunday, she and Harold disappeared as soon as breakfast was over, and only Eustace remained, spruce beyond all imagination, and giving himself childlike credit for not being with them; but when at church I can't say much for his behaviour. He stared unblushingly, whispered remarks and inquiries, could not find the places in his book, and appeared incapable of kneeling. Our little church at Arghouse was then a chapelry, with merely Sunday morning service by a curate from Mycening, and the congregation a village one, to the disgust of Eustace, who had expected to review his neighbours, and thought his get-up thrown away.

"No one at all to see," he observed with discontent over our luncheon, Harold and Dora having returned from roaming over Kalydon Moor.

"I go to afternoon service at Mycening, Harold," I said. "Will not you come with me?"

"There will be somebody there?" asked Eustace; to which I replied in the affirmative, but with some protest against his view of the object, and inviting the others again, but Dora defiantly answered that Harold was going to swing her on the ash tree.

"You ought to appear at church, Harry," said Eustace. "It is expected of an English squire. You see everybody, and everybody sees you."

"Well, then, go," said Harold.

"And won't you?" I entreated.

"I've promised to swing Dora," he answered, strolling out of the room, much to my concern; and though Eustace did accompany me, it was so evidently for the sake of staring that there was little comfort in that; and it was only by very severe looks that I could keep him from asking everyone's name. I hoped to make every one understand that he was not the squire, but no one came across us as we went out of church, and I had to reply to his torrent of inquiries all the way home.

It was a wet evening, and we all stayed in the house. Harold brought in one of his political economy studies from the library, and I tried to wile Dora to look at the pictures in a curious big old Dutch Scripture history, the Sunday delight of our youth.

Eustace came too, as if he wanted the amusement and yet was ashamed to take it, when he exclaimed, "I say, Harry; isn't this the book father used to tell us about—that they used to look over?"

Harold came, and stood towering above us with his hands in his pockets; but when we came to the Temptation of Eve, Dora broke out into an exclamation that excited my curiosity too much not to be pursued, though it was hardly edifying.

"Was that such a snake as Harold killed?"

"I have killed a good many snakes," he answered.

"Yes, but I meant the ones you killed when you were a little tiny boy."

"I don't remember," he said, as if to stop the subject, hating, as he always did, to talk about himself.

"No, I know you don't," said Dora; "but it is quite true, isn't it, Eustace?"

"Hardly true that Harold ever was a little tiny boy," I could not help saying.

"No, he never was *little*," said Eustace. "But it is quite true about the snakes. I seem to remember it now, and I've often heard my mother and my Aunt Alice tell of it. It was at the first place where we were in New South Wales. I came running out screaming, I believe—I was old enough to know

the danger—and when they went in there was Harry sitting on the floor, holding a snake tight by the neck and enjoying its contortions like a new toy."

"Of course," said Harold, "if it were poisonous, which I doubt, the danger would have been when I let go. My mother quietly bade me hold him tight, which I suppose I had just sense enough to do, and in another moment she had snatched up the bill-hook they had been cutting wood with, and had his head off. She had the pluck."

I could but gasp with horror, and ask how old he was. About two! That was clear to their minds from the place where it happened which Harold could not recollect, though Eustace could.

"But, Harold, you surely are the eldest," I said.

"Oh no; I am six months the eldest," said Eustace, proud of his advantage.

We were to hear more of that by-and-by.

Monday afternoon brought Mr. Prosser, who was closeted with Harold, while Eustace and I devoted our faculties to pacifying Dora under her exclusion, and preventing her from climbing up to the window-sill to gaze into the library from without. She scorned submission to either of us, so Eustace kept guard by lying on the grass below, and I coaxed her by gathering primroses, sowing seeds, and using all inducements I could think of, but my resources were nearly exhausted when Harold's head appeared at the window, and he called, "Eustace! Lucy! here!"

We came at once, Dora before us.

"Come in," said Harold, admitting us at the glass door. "It is all a mistake. I am not the man. It is Eustace. Eu, I wish you joy, old chap—"

Mr. Prosser was at the table with a great will lying spread out on it. "I am afraid Mr. Alison is right, Miss Alison," he said. "The property is bequeathed to the eldest of the late Mr. Alison's grandsons born here, not specifying by which father. If I had copied the terms of the will I might have prevented disappointment, but I had no conception of what he tells me."

"But Ambrose was Harold's father," I exclaimed in bewilderment, "and he was the eldest."

"The seniority was not considered as certain," said Mr. Prosser, "and therefore the late Mr. Alison left the property to the eldest child born at home. 'Let us at least have an English-born heir,' I remember he said to me."

"And that is just what I am not," said Harold.

"I cannot understand! I have heard Miss Woolmer talk of poor Ambrose's beautiful child, several months older than Eustace's, and his name was Harold."

"Yes," said Harold, "but that one died on the voyage out, an hour or two before I was born. He was Harold Stanislas. I have no second name."

"And I always was the eldest," reiterated Eustace, hardly yet understanding what it involved.

All the needful documents had been preserved and brought home. There was the extract from the captain's log recording the burial at sea of Harold Stanislas Alison, aged fifteen months, and the certificate of baptism by a colonial clergyman of Harold, son of Ambrose and Alice Alison, while Eustace was entered in the Northchester register, having been born in lodgings, as Mr. Prosser well recollected, while his poor young father lay under sentence of death.

It burst on him at last. "Do you mean that I have got it, and not you?"

"That's about it," said Harold. "Never mind, Eu, it will all come to the same thing in the end."

"You have none of it!"

"Not an acre. It all goes together; but don't look at me in that way. There's Boola Boola, you know."

"You're not going back there to leave me?" exclaimed Eustace, with a real sound of dismay, laying hold of his arm.

"Not just yet, at any rate," said Harold.

"No, no; nor at all," reiterated Eustace, and then, satisfied by the absence of contradiction, which did, in fact, mean a good deal from the silent Harold, he began to discover his own accession of

dignity. "Then it all belongs to me. I am master. I am squire—Eustace Alison, Esquire, of Arghouse. How well it sounds. Doesn't it, Harry, doesn't it, Lucy? Uncle Smith always said I was the one cut out for high life. Besides, I've been presented, and have been to a ball at Government House."

I saw that Mr. Prosser was a little overcome with amusement, and I wanted to make my retreat and carry off Dora, but she had perched on her favourite post—Harold's knee—and I was also needed to witness Eustace's signatures, as well as on some matters connected with my own property. So I stayed, and saw that he did indeed seem lost without his cousin's help. Neither knew anything about business of this kind, but Harold readily understood what made Eustace so confused, that he was quite helpless without Harold's explanations, and rather rough directions what he was to do. How like themselves their writing was! Eustace's neat and clerkly, but weak and illegible; and Harold's as distinct, and almost as large, as a schoolboy's copy, but with square-turned joints and strength of limb unlike any boy's writing.

The dressing-bell broke up the council, and Harold snatched up his hat to rush out and stretch his legs, but I could not help detaining him to say:

"Oh, Harry, I am so sorry!"

"Why?" he said.

"What does it leave you, Harry?"

"Half the capital stock farm, twelve thousand sheep, and a tidy sum in the Sydney bank," said Harold readily.

"Then I am afraid we shall lose you."

"That depends. I shall set Eustace in the way of doing what our fathers meant; and there's Prometesky—I shall not go till I have done his business."

I hardly knew what this meant, and could not keep Harold, whose long legs were eager for a rush in the fresh air; and the next person I met was Eustace.

"Aunt Lucy," he said, "that old fellow says you are going away. You can't be?"

I answered, truly enough, that I had not thought what to do, and he persisted that I had promised to stay.

"But that was with Harry," I said.

"I don't see why you should not stay as much with me," he said. "I'm your nephew all the same, and Dora is your niece; and she must be made a proper sister for me, who have been, &c."

I don't know that this form of invitation was exactly the thing that would have kept me; but I had a general feeling that to leave these young men and my old home would be utter banishment, that there was nothing I so cared for as seeing how they got on, and that it was worth anything to me to be wanted anywhere and by anyone; so I gave Eustace to understand that I meant to stay. I rather wished Harold to have pressed me; but I believe the dear good fellow honestly thought everyone must prefer Eustace to himself; and it was good to see the pat he gave his cousin's shoulder when that young gentleman, nothing loath, exultingly settled down in the master's place.

Before long I found out what Harold meant about Prometesky's business; for we had scarcely begun dinner before he began to consult Mr. Prosser about the ways and means of obtaining a pardon for Prometesky. This considerably startled Mr. Prosser. Some cabinets, he said, were very lenient to past political offences, but Prometesky seemed to him to have exceeded all bounds of mercy.

"You never knew the true facts, then?" said Harold.

"I know the facts that satisfied the jury."

"You never saw my father's statement?"

No, Mr. Prosser had been elsewhere, and had not been employed in my brother's trial; he had only inherited the connection with our family affairs when the matter had passed into comparative oblivion.

My brothers had never ceased to affirm that he had only started for the farm that had been Lewthwayte's on hearing that an attack was to be made on it, in hopes of preventing it, and that the

witness, borne against him on the trial by a fellow who had turned king's evidence, had been false; but they had been unheeded, or rather Prometesky was regarded as the most truly mischievous of all, as perhaps he really had been, since he had certainly drawn them into the affair, and his life had barely been saved in consideration of his having rescued a child from the fire at great personal peril.

Ambrose had written again and again about him to my father, but as soon as the name occurred the letter had been torn up. On their liberation from actual servitude they had sent up their statement to the Government of New South Wales; but in the meantime Prometesky had fared much worse than they had. They had been placed in hands where their education, superiority, and good conduct had gained them trust and respect, and they had quickly obtained a remission of the severer part of their sentence and become their own masters; indeed, if Ambrose had lived, he would soon have risen to eminence in the colony. But Prometesky had fallen to the lot of a harsh, rude master, who hated him as a foreigner, and treated him in a manner that roused the proud spirit of the noble. The master had sworn that the convict had threatened his life, and years of working in chains on the roads had been the consequence.

It was no time for entertaining a petition on his account, and before the expiration of this additional sentence Ambrose was dead.

By that time Eustace, now a rich and prosperous man, would gladly have taken his old tutor to his home, but Prometesky was still too proud, and all that he would do was to build a little hut under a rock on the Boola Boola grounds, where he lived upon the proceeds of such joiner's and watchmaker's work as was needed by the settlers on a large area, when things were much rougher than even when my nephews came home. No one cared for education enough to make his gifts available in that direction, except as concerned Harold, who had, in fact, learnt of him almost all he knew in an irregular, voluntary sort of fashion, and who loved him heartily.

His health was failing now, and to bring him home was one of Harold's prime objects, since London advice might yet restore him. Harold had made one attempt in his cause at Sydney, sending in a copy of his father's dying statement, also signed by his uncle; but though he was told that it had been received, he had no encouragement to hope it would be forwarded, and had been told that to apply direct to the Secretary of State, backed by persons from our own neighbourhood, would be the best chance, and on this he consulted Mr. Prosser, but without meeting much sympathy. Mr. Prosser said many people's minds had changed with regard to English or Irish demagogues, and that the Alison Brothers themselves might very probably have been pardoned, but everyone was tired of Poles, and popular tradition viewed Prometesky as the ogre of the past. Mr. Prosser did not seem as if he would even very willingly assist in the drawing up in due form a petition in the Pole's favour, and declared that without some influential person to introduce it, it would be perfectly useless.

Eustace turned round with, "There, you see, Harold, nothing can be done."

"I do not see that," said Harold, in his quiet way.

"You do not mean to do anything?"

"Yes, I do."

"But what—what? What can you do?"

"I do not yet know."

"You see it is of no use. We shall only get into a scrape with all the gentlemen of the county."

"Never mind now, Eustace," said Harold, briefly. But I knew the expression of his face by this time quite well enough to be certain that nothing would make him abandon the cause of his father's old friend; and that his silence was full of the strongest determination. I think it fascinated me, and though in my cooler senses I reverted to my old notion of Prometesky as a dangerous firebrand, I could not help feeling for and with the youth whose soul was set on delivering his friend from exile.

My turn came the next morning, before Mr. Prosser went away. He had much to say against my making Arghouse my home, telling me that I had a full independence and could live where I pleased; but that I knew already, and had decided on the amount I ought to pay towards the housekeeping.

Then he wanted me to understand how the young men were looked upon, and the dread all the neighbourhood had of them. I said I had shared this dread, but on better acquaintance I found it quite undeserved, and this being the case it was incumbent on their only relation to stand by them, and not shun them as if they had brought the leprosy.

This he allowed, calling it a generous feeling, if they were worthy of it. But what greatly amazed me was his rejoicing that Eustace had proved to be the heir, since nothing was known against him, and when the other young man was gone there was hope that any little distrusts might be allayed, and that he might ultimately take his place in the county.

The other young man! Why should there be any distrust of Harold? I grew hot and indignant, and insisted on knowing what was meant; but Mr. Prosser declared that he knew nothing, only there were vague reports which made him rejoice that Mr. Harold Alison was not called to be the manager of the property, and would make him question whether a young lady would find it expedient to be long an inmate of the same house.

What reports could he mean? No—I could get no more out of him; he was too cautious to commit himself, and seemed to be satisfied by observing that if I changed my mind, I could at any time leave my nephews.

"Her nephews," I heard him mutter to himself; "yes, her nephews. No one has any right to object, and she can but judge for herself—there's no harm done."

I shall always believe, however, that he set on my friends to remonstrate, for letters began coming in, in all the senses of the imperative mood, commanding and entreating me to leave Arghouse. There was one such as only Lord Erymanth could write. He was an old man, and never could make short work of anything. They say that his chief political value was to be set on when anyone was wanted to speak against time. I know he was very dreadful at all the platforms in the county; but he was very good and conscientious, and everyone looked up to him as a sort of father of the country.

But oh! that letter! Such a battery of heavy arguments against my unprecedented step in taking up my residence with these unfortunate young men, who, though they had not themselves openly transgressed the law of the land, yet were the offspring of unhallowed unions with the children of a felon. I cannot go through it all, but it hinted that besides their origin, there was some terrible stain on Harold, and that society could not admit them; so that if I persisted in casting in my lot with them, I should share the ban. Indeed, he would have thought my own good sense and love of decorum would have taught me that the abode of two such youths would be no fit place for the daughter of such respected parents, and there was a good deal more that I could not understand about interceding with his sister, and her overlooking my offence in consideration of my inexperience and impulsiveness.

On my first impulse I wrote to thank my old friend, but to say I could see no harm in an aunt's being with her nephews, and that I was sure he had only to know them to lay aside all doubts of their being thorough gentlemen and associates for anybody. My little niece required my care, and I should stay and give it to her till some other arrangement was made. If Lady Diana were displeased with me, I was very sorry, but I could see no reason for it.

When I looked over the old Earl's letter, before closing mine, some expressions wound out of the mist that made me uncomfortable, especially when I recollected that though it was a week since their arrival, no one had attempted to call but Mr. Crosse, the vicar of Mycening, a very "good man in the pulpit," as the servants said, and active in the parish, but underbred and no companion.

Our neighbourhood was what is called very clannish. There were two families, the Horsmans and the Stympsons, who seemed to make up all the society. The sons either had the good livings, or had retired from their professions into cottages round and about, and the first question after any party was, how many of each. The outsiders, not decidedly of inferior rank, were almost driven into making a little clique—if so it might be called—of their own, and hanging together the more closely. Lord Erymanth of course predominated; but he was a widower of many years' standing, and his heir lived

in a distant county. His sister, Lady Diana, had been married to an Irish Mr. Tracy, who had been murdered after a few years by his tenants, upon which she had come with her three children to live at Arked House. I never could guess how she came to marry an Irish landlord, and I always thought she must have exasperated his people. She was viewed as the perfection of a Lady Bountiful and pattern of excellence; but, I confess, that I always thought of her when I heard of the devout and honourable women who were stirred up against St. Paul. She was a person who was admired more than she was liked, and who was greatly praised and honoured, but somehow did not proportionably endear herself on closer acquaintance, doing a great deal of good, but all to large masses rather than individuals. However, all the neighbourhood had a pride in her, and it was a distinction to be considered a fit companion for Diana and Viola Tracy. I never cared for Di, who was her mother over again, and used to set us to rights with all her might; but she had married early, a very rich man—and Viola and I had always been exceedingly fond of one another, so that I could not bear to be cut off from her, however I might be disposed to defy her mother.

The upshot of my perplexities was that I set off to Mycening to lay them before Miss Woolmer, another of the few belonging to neither clan, to know what all this meant, as well as to be interested in my nephews.

Mycening is one of the prettiest country towns I know, at least it was twenty years ago. There is a very wide street, unpaved, but with a broad smooth gravelled way, slightly sloping down towards the little clean stone-edged gutters that border the carriage road along the centre, which is planted on each side with limes cut into arches. The houses are of all sorts, some old timbered gable-ended ones with projecting upper stories, like our own, others of the handsome old Queen Anne type with big sash windows, and others quite modern. Some have their gardens in front, some stand flush with the road, and the better sort are mixed with the shops and cottages.

Miss Woolmer lived in a tiny low one, close to the road, where, from her upstairs floor, she saw all that came and went, and, intellectual woman as she certainly was, she thoroughly enjoyed watching her neighbours, as by judiciously-arranged looking-glasses, she could do all up and down the street. I believe she had been a pretty woman, though on a small scale, and now she had bright eyes, and a very sweet bright look, though in complexion she had faded into the worn pallor that belongs to permanent ill health. She dressed nicely, and if she had been well, might, at her age, scarcely above forty, have been as much a young lady as Philippa Horsman; but I fancy the great crush of her life had taken away her girlhood and left her no spring of constitution to resist illness, so that she had sunk into a regular crippled invalid before I could remember, though her mind was full of activity.

"You are come to tell me about them, my dear," was her greeting. "I've seen them. No, I don't mean that they have been to see me. You'll bring them some day, won't you? I'm sure Ambrose's boy would come to see a sick woman. I watched one of them yesterday pick up old Molly's oranges for her in the street, when her basket got upset by a cart, and he then paid her for them, and gave them among the children round. It did my heart good, I'd not seen such a sight since the boys were sent away."

"Harold would do anything kind," I said, "or to see an old friend of his father. The worst of it is that there seem to be so few who wish to see him, or can even forgive me for staying with him."

I showed her Lord Erymanth's letter, and told her of the others, asking her what it meant. "Oh, as to Lady Diana," she said, "there is no doubt about that. She was greatly offended at your having sent away her carriage and not having taken her advice, and she goes about saying she is disappointed in you."

For my mother's sake, and my little Viola, and Auld Lang Syne besides, I was much hurt, and defended myself in a tone of pique which made Miss Woolmer smile and say she was far from blaming me, but that she thought I ought to count the cost of my remaining at Arghouse. And then she told me that the whole county was up in arms against the new comers, not only from old association of their name with revolutionary notions, but because the old Miss Stympsons, of Lake Side, who had connections in New South Wales, had set it abroad that the poor boys were ruffians, companions of

the double-dyed villain Prometesky, and that Harold in especial was a marked man, who had caused the death of his own wife in a frenzy of intoxication.

At this I fairly laughed. Harold, at his age, who never touched liquor, and had lived a sort of hermit life in the Bush, to be saddled with a wife only to have destroyed her! The story contradicted itself by its own absurdity; and those two Miss Stympsons were well-known scandal-mongers. Miss Woolmer never believed a story of theirs without sifting, but she had been in a manner commissioned to let me know that society was determined not to accept Eustace and Harold Alison, and was irate at my doing so. Mothers declared that they should be very sorry to give poor Lucy Alison up, but that they could not have their children brought into contact with young men little better than convicts, and whom they would, besides, call my cousins, instead of my nephews. "I began to suspect it," I said, "when nobody left cards but Mr. Lawless and Peter Parsons."

"And that is the society they are to be left to?"

"But I shall not leave them," I cried. "Why should I, to please Miss Stympson and Lord Erymanth? I shall stand by my own brothers' sons against all the world."

"And if they be worthy, Lucy, your doing so is the best chance of their weathering the storm. See! is not that one of them? The grand-looking giant one, who moves like a king of men. He is Ambrose's son, is he not? What a pity he is not the squire!"

Harold was, in effect, issuing from the toy-shop, carrying an immense kite on his arm, like a shield, while Dora frisked round in admiration, and a train of humbler admirers flocked in the rear.

I hurried down into the street to tell Harold of my old friend's wish to see them, and he followed me at once, with that manner which was not courtesy, because, without being polished, it was so much more. Dora was much displeased, being ardent on the kite's tail, and followed with sullen looks, while Harold had to stoop low to get into the room, and brushed the low ceiling with his curly hair as he stood upright, Miss Woolmer gazing up to the very top of him. I think she was rather disappointed that he had not taken more after his father; and she told him that he was like his uncle Lewthwayte, looking keenly to see whether he shrunk from the comparison to a man who had died a felon's death; but he merely answered, "So I have been told."

Then she asked for his mother, and he briefly replied that she was well and in New Zealand. There was an attempt at noticing Dora, to which she responded like the wild opossum that she was, and her fidgeting carried the day. Harold only made answer to one or two more observations, and then could not but take leave, promising on the entreaty of the old lady, to come and see her again. I outstayed them, being curious to hear her opinion.

"A superb being," she said, with a long breath; "there's the easy strength of a Greek demi-god in every tread."

"He seems to me more like Thor in Nifelheim," I said, "being, no doubt, half a Viking to begin with."

"They are all the same, as people tell us now," she said, smiling. "Any way, he looks as if he was a waif from the heroic age. But, my dear, did not I hear him call you Lucy?"

"They generally do."

"I would not let them. Cling to your auntship; it explains your being with them. A grand creature! I feel like the people who had had a visit from the gods of old."

"And you understand how impossible it would be to run away," I said.

She smiled, but added, "Lucy, my dear, that looked very like a wedding-ring!"

I could not think it possible. Why, he was scarcely five-and-twenty! And yet the suggestion haunted me, whenever my eyes fell on his countenance in repose, and noted the habitual sadness of expression which certainly did not match with the fine open face that seemed fitted to express the joy of strength. It came on me too when, at the lodge, a child who had been left alone too long and had fallen into an unmitigated agony of screaming, Harry had actually, instead of fleeing from the

sound, gone in, taken the screamer in his arms, and so hushed and pacified it, that on the mother's return she found it at perfect rest.

"One would think the gentleman was a father himself, ma'am," she had said to me; and thereupon Harold had coloured, and turned hastily aside, so that the woman fancied she had offended him and apologised, so that he had been forced to look back again and say, "Never mind," and "No harm done," with a half laugh, which, as it now struck me, had a ring of pain in it, and was not merely the laugh of a shy young man under an impossible imputation. True, I knew he was not a religious man, but to believe actual ill of him seemed to me impossible.

He had set himself to survey the Arghouse estate, so as to see how those dying wishes of his father could best be carried out, and he was making himself thoroughly acquainted with every man, woman, child, and building, to the intense jealousy of Bullock, who had been agent all through my mother's time, and had it all his own way. He could not think why "Mr. Harold" should be always hovering about the farms and cottages, sometimes using his own ready colonial hand to repair deficiencies, and sometimes his purse, and making the people take fancies into their heads that were never there before, and which would make Mr. Alison lose hundreds a year if they were attended to. And as Mr. Alison always did attend to his cousin, and gave orders accordingly, the much-aggrieved Bullock had no choice but in delaying their execution and demonstrating their impracticability, whereas, of course, Harold did not believe in impossibilities.

It was quite true, as he had once said, that though he could not bring about improvements as readily as if he had been landlord, yet he could get at the people much better, and learn their own point of view of what was good for them. They were beginning to idolise him; for, indeed, there was a fascination about him which no one could resist. I sometimes wondered what it was, considering that he was so slow of speech, and had so little sunshine of mirth about him.

I never did enforce my title of Aunt, in spite of Miss Woolmer's advice. It sounded too ridiculous, and would have hindered the sisterly feeling that held us together.

Eustace was restless and vexed at not being called upon, and anxious to show himself on any occasion, and I was almost equally anxious to keep him back, out of reach of mortification. Both he and Harold went to London on business, leaving Dora with me. The charge was less severe than I expected. My first attempts at teaching her had been frustrated by her scorn of me, and by Harold's baffling indulgence; but one day, when they had been visiting one of the farms, the children had been made to exhibit their acquirements, which were quite sufficient to manifest Dora's ignorance. Eustace had long declared that if she would not learn of me she must either have a governess or go to school, and I knew she was fit for neither. Harold, I believe, now enforced the threat, and when he went away, left her a black silk necktie to be hemmed for him, and a toy book with flaming illustrations, with an assurance that on her reading it to him on his return, depended his giving her a toy steam-engine.

Dora knew that Harold kept his word, even with her. I think she had a great mind to get no one's assistance but the kitchenmaid's, but this friendship was abruptly terminated by Dora's arraying the kangaroo in Sarah's best bonnet and cloak, and launching it upon a stolen interview between her and her sweetheart. The screams brought all the house together, and, as the hero was an undesirable party who had been forbidden the house, Sarah viewed it as treachery on Miss Dora's part, and sulked enough to alienate her.

Dora could make out more to herself in a book than she could read aloud, and one day I saw her spelling over the table of degrees of marriage in a great folio Prayer-Book, which she had taken down in quest of pictures. Some time later in the day, she said, "Lucy, are you Harry's father's sister?" and when I said yes, she added, with a look of discovery, "A man cannot marry his father's sister."

It was no time to protest against the marriage of first cousins. I was glad enough that from that time the strange child laid aside her jealousy of me; and that thenceforth her resistance was simply the repugnance of a wild creature to be taught and tamed. Ultimately she let me into the recesses of

that passionate heart, and, as I think, loved me better than anybody else, except Harold; but even so, at an infinite distance from that which seemed the chief part of her whole being.

CHAPTER II
THE LION OF NEME HEATH

The work was done. The sixteen pages of large-type story book were stumbled through; and there was a triumphant exhibition when the cousins came home—Eustace delighted; Harold, half-stifled by London, insisting on walking home from the station to stretch his legs, and going all the way round over Kalydon Moor for a whiff of air!

If we had not had a few moors and heaths where he could breathe, I don't know whether he could have stayed in England; and as for London, the din, the dinginess, the squalor of houses and people, sat like a weight on his heart.

"They told me a great deal had been done for England. It is just nothing," he said, and hardly anything else that whole evening; while Eustace, accoutred point-device by a London tailor, poured forth volumes of what he had seen and done. Mr. Prosser made up a dinner party for them, and had taken them to an evening party or two—at least, Eustace; for after the first Harold had declined, and had spent his time in wandering about London by gas-light, and standing on the bridges, or trying how far it was on each side to green fields, and how much misery lay between.

Eustace had evidently been made much of, and had enjoyed himself greatly. It grieved me that his first entrance into society should be under no better auspices than those of the family solicitor; but he did not yet perceive this, and was much elated. "I flatter myself it was rather a success," was the phrase he had brought home, apropos to everything he had worn or done, from his tie to his shoe-buckles. He told me the price of everything, all the discussions with his tradesmen, and all the gazes fixed on him, with such simplicity that I could not help caring, and there sat Harold in his corner, apparently asleep, but his eye now and then showing that he was thinking deeply.

"Lucy," he said, as we bade one another good-night, "is nothing being done?"

"About what?" I asked.

"For all that wretchedness."

"Oh yes, there are all sorts of attempts," and I told him of model cottages, ragged schools, and the like, and promised to find him the accounts; but he gave one of his low growls, as if this were but a mockery of the direful need.

He had got his statement of Prometesky's case properly drawn up, and had sent up a copy, but in vain; and had again been told that some influential person must push it to give it any chance. Mr. Prosser's acquaintance lay in no such line; or, at least, were most unlikely to promote the pardon of an old incendiary.

"What will you do?" I asked. "Must you give it up?"

"Never! I will make a way at last."

Meantime, he was necessary to Eustace in accomplishing all the details of taking possession. Horses were wanted by both, used to riding as they had always been, and there was an old-fashioned fair on Neme Heath, just beyond Mycening, rather famous for its good show of horses, where there was a chance of finding even so rare an article as a hunter up to Harold's weight, also a pony for Dora.

An excellent show of wild beasts was also there. Harold had been on the heath when it was being arranged in the earliest morning hours, and had fraternised with the keepers, and came home loquacious far more than usual on the wonders he had seen. I remember that, instead of being disappointed in the size of the lions and tigers, he dwelt with special admiration on their supple and terrible strength of spine and paw.

He wanted to take Dora at once to the menagerie, but I represented the inexpedience of their taking her about with them to the horse-fair afterwards, and made Eustace perceive that it would not do for Miss Alison; and as Harold backed my authority, she did not look like thunder for more than

ten minutes when she found we were to drive to Neme Heath, and that she was to go home with me after seeing the animals. Eustace was uncertain about his dignity, and hesitated about not caring and not intending, and not liking me to go alone, but made up his mind that since he had to be at the fair, he would drive us.

So we had out the barouche, and Eustace held the reins with infinite elation, while Harold endured the interior to reconcile Dora to it, and was as much diverted as she was at the humours of the scene, exclaiming at every stall of gilt gingerbread, every see-saw, and merry-go-round, that lined the suburbs of Mycening, and I strongly suspect meditating a private expedition to partake of their delights. Harold was thoroughly the great child nature meant him for, while poor Eustace sat aloft enfolded in his dignity, not daring to look right or left, or utter a word of surprise, lest he should compromise himself in the eyes of the coachman by his side.

The fair was upon the heath, out to which the new part of the town was stretching itself, and long streets of white booths extended themselves in their regular order. We drove on noiselessly over the much-trodden turf, until we were checked by the backward rush of a frightened crowd, and breathless voices called out to Eustace, "Stop, sir; turn, for Heaven's sake. The lion! He's loose!"

Turning was impossible, for the crowd was rushing back on us, blocking us up; and Eustace dropped the reins, turning round with a cry of "Harry! Harry! I see him. Take us away!"

Harold sprang on the back seat as the coachman jumped down to run to the horses' heads. He saw over the people's heads, and after that glance made one bound out of the carriage. I saw then what I shall never forget, across the wide open space round which the principal shows were arranged, and which was now entirely bare of people. On the other side, between the shafts of a waggon, too low for him to creep under, lay the great yellow lion, waving the tufted end of his tail as a cat does, when otherwise still, showing the glassy glare of his eyes now and then, growling with a horrible display of fangs, and holding between those huge paws a senseless boy as a sort of hostage. From all the lanes between the booths the people were looking in terror, ready for a rush on the beast's least movement, shrieking calls to someone to save the boy, fetch a gun, bring the keeper, &c.

That moment, with the great thick carriage-rug on his arm, Harold darted forward, knocking down a gun which some foolish person had brought from a shooting-gallery, and shouting, "Don't! It will only make him kill the boy!" he gathered himself up for a rush; while I believe we all called to him to stop: I am sure of Eustace's "Harry! don't! What shall I do?"

Before the words were spoken, Harold had darted to the side of the terrible creature, and, with a bound, vaulted across its neck as it lay, dealing it a tremendous blow over the nose with that sledge-hammer fist, and throwing the rug over its head. Horrible roaring growls, like snarling thunder, were heard for a second or two, and one man dashed out of the frightened throng, rifle in hand, just in time to receive the child, whom Harold flung to him, snatched from the lion's grasp; and again we saw a wrestling, struggling, heaving mass, Harry still uppermost, pinning the beast down with his weight and the mighty strength against which it struggled furiously. Having got free of the boy, his one ally was again aiming his rifle at the lion's ear, when two keepers, with nets and an iron bar, came on the scene, one shouting not to shoot, and the other holding up the bar and using some word of command, at which the lion cowered and crouched. The people broke into a loud cheer after their breathless silence, and it roused the already half-subdued lion. There was another fierce and desperate struggle, lasting only a moment, and ended by the report of the rifle.

In fact, the whole passed almost like a flash of lightning from the moment of our first halt, till the crowd closed in, so that I could only see one bare yellow head, towering above the hats, and finally cleaving a way towards us, closely followed by Dermot Tracy, carrying the rifle and almost beside himself with enthusiasm and excitement. "Lucy—is it you? What, he is your cousin? I never saw anything like it! He mastered it alone, quite alone!"

And then we heard Harry bidding those around not touch him, and Dora screamed with dismay, and I saw he had wrapped both hands in his handkerchief. To my frightened question, whether he

was hurt, he answered, "Only my hands, but I fancy the brute has done for some of my fingers. If those fellows could but have held their tongues!"

He climbed into the carriage to rid himself of the crowd, who were offering all sorts of aid, commiseration, and advice, and Dermot begged to come too, "in case he should be faint," which made Harry smile, though he was in much pain, frowning and biting his lip while the coachman took the reins, and turned us round amid the deafening cheers of the people, for Eustace was quite unnerved, and Dora broke into sobs as she saw the blood soaking through the handkerchiefs—all that we could contribute. He called her a little goose, and said it was nothing; but the great drops stood on his brow, he panted and moved restlessly, as if sitting still were unbearable, and he could hardly help stamping out the bottom of the carriage. He shouted to Eustace to let him walk, but Dermot showed him how he would thus have the crowd about him in a moment. It was the last struggle that had done the mischief, when the lion, startled by the shout of the crowd, had turned on him again, and there had been a most narrow escape of a dying bite, such as would probably have crushed his hand itself beyond all remedy; and, as it was, one could not but fear he was dreadfully hurt, when the pain came in accesses of violence several times in the short distance to Dr. Kingston's door.

No, Dr. Kingston was not at home; nor would be in for some time; but while we were thinking what to do, a young man came hastily up, saying "I am Dr. Kingston's partner; can I do anything?"

Harold sprang out on this, forbidding Eustace to follow him, but permitting Dermot; and Mrs. Kingston, an old acquaintance of mine, came and invited us all to her drawing-room, lamenting greatly her husband's absence, and hoping that Mr. Yolland, his new partner, would be able to supply his place. The young man had very high testimonials and an excellent education. She was evidently exercised between her own distrust of the assistant and fear of disparaging him. Seeing how much shaken we were, she sent for wine, and I was surprised to see Eustace take some almost furtively, but his little sister, though still sobbing, glared out from behind the knuckles she was rubbing into her eyes, and exclaimed, "Eustace, I shall tell Harry."

"Hold your tongue," said Eustace, petulantly; "Harry has nothing to do with it."

Mrs. Kingston looked amazed. I set to work to talk them both down, and must have given a very wild, nervous account of the disaster. At last Dermot opened the door for Harry, who came in, looking very pale, with one hand entirely covered and in a sling, the other bound up all but the thumb and forefinger. To our anxious inquiries, he replied that the pain was much better now, and he should soon be all right; and then, on being further pressed, admitted that the little finger had been so much crushed that it had been taken off from the first joint, the other three fingers had been broken and were in splints, and the right hand was only torn and scratched. Mrs. Kingston exclaimed at this that Mr. Yolland should have waited for the doctor to venture on such an operation, but both Dermot and Harold assured her that he could not have waited, and also that it could not have been more skilfully done, both of which assurances she must have heard with doubts as to the competence of the judges, and she much regretted that she could not promise a visit from her doctor that evening, as he was likely to be detained all night.

Dermot came downstairs with us, and we found Mr. Yolland waiting at the door to extract a final promise that Harold would go to bed at once on coming home. It seemed that he had laughed at the recommendation, so that the young surgeon felt bound to enforce it before all of us, adding that it was a kind of hurt that no one could safely neglect. There was something in his frank, brusque manner that pleased Harold, and he promised with half a smile, thanking the doctor hastily as he did so, while Dermot Tracy whispered to me, "Good luck getting him; twice as ready as the old one;" and then vehemently shaking all our hands, to make up for Harold's not being fit to touch, he promised to come and see him on the morrow. The moment we were all in the carriage—Eustace still too much shaken to drive home—his first question was, who *that* was?

"Mr. Tracy," I answered; and Eustace added, "I thought you called him Dermont?"

"Dermot—Dermot Tracy. I have known him all our lives."

"I saw he was a gentleman by his boots," quoth Eustace with deliberation, holding out his own foot as a standard. "I saw they were London made."

"How fortunate that you had not on your Sydney ones," I could not help saying in mischief.

"I took care of that," was the complacent answer. "I told Richardson to take them all away."

I don't think Harold saw the fun. They had neither of them any humour; even Harold was much too simple and serious.

Eustace next treated us to a piece of his well-conned manual, and demonstrated that Dermot St. Glear Tracy, Esquire, of Killy Marey, County Cavan, Ireland, was grandson to an English peer, great grandson to an Irish peer, and nephew to the existing Edward St. Glear, 6th Earl of Erymanth. "And a very fashionable young man," he went on, "distinguished in the sporting world."

"An excellent good fellow, with plenty of pluck," said Harold warmly. "Is he not brother to the pretty little girl who was with you when we came?"

I answered as briefly as I could; I did not want to talk of the Tracys. My heart was very sore about them, and I was almost relieved when Dora broke in with a grave accusing tone: "Harry, Eustace drank a glass of wine, and I said I would tell you!"

"Eustace has no reason to prevent him," was Harold's quiet answer.

"And, really, I think, in my position, it is ridiculous, you see," Eustace began stammering, but was wearily cut short by Harold with, "As you please."

Eustace could never be silent long, and broke forth again: "Harold, your ring."

By way of answer Harold, with his available thumb and finger, showed the ring for a moment from his waistcoat pocket. Instantly Dora sprang at it, snatched it from his finger before he was aware, and with all her might flung it into the river, for we were crossing the bridge.

There was strength in that thumb and finger to give her a sharp fierce shake, and the low voice that said "Dora" was like the lion's growl.

"It's Meg's ring, and I hate her!" she cried.

"For shame, Dorothy."

The child burst into a flood of tears and sobbed piteously, but it was some minutes before he would relent and look towards her. Eustace scolded her for making such a noise, and vexing Harold when he was hurt, but that only made her cry the more. I told her to say she was sorry, and perhaps Harold would forgive her; but she shook her head violently at this.

Harold relented, unable to bear the sight of distress. "Don't tease her," he said, shortly, to us both. "Hush, Dora; there's an end of it."

This seemed to be an amnesty, for she leant against his knee again.

"Dora, how could you?" I said, when we were out of the carriage, and the two young men had gone upstairs together.

"It was Meg's ring, and I hate her," answered Dora, with the fierce wild gleam in her eyes.

"You should not hate anyone," was, of course, my answer.

"But she's dead!" said Dora, triumphantly as a little tigress.

"So much the worse it is to hate her. Who was she?"

"His wife," said Dora.

I durst not ask the child any more questions.

"Eustace, who is Meg?"

I could not but ask that question as we sat tete-a-tete after dinner, Dora having gone to carry Harold some fruit, and being sure to stay with him as long as he permitted.

Eustace looked round with a startled, cautious eye, as if afraid of being overheard, and said, as Dora had done, "His wife."

"Not alive?"

"Oh, no—thank goodness."

"At his age!"

"He was but twenty when he married her. A bad business! I knew it could not be otherwise. She was a storekeeper's daughter."

Then I learnt, in Eustace's incoherent style, the sad story I understood better afterwards.

This miserable marriage had been the outcome of the desolate state of the family after the loss of all the higher spirits of the elder generation. For the first few years after my brothers had won their liberation, and could hold property, they had been very happy, and the foundations of their prosperity at Boola Boola had been laid. Had Ambrose lived he would, no doubt, have become a leading man in the colony, where he had heartily embraced his lot and shaped his career.

Poor Eustace was, however, meant by nature for a quiet, refined English gentleman, living in his affections. He would never have transgressed ordinary bounds save for his brother's overmastering influence. He drooped from the time of Ambrose's untimely death, suffered much from the loss of several children, and gradually became a prey to heart complaint. But his wife was full of sense and energy, and Ambrose's plans were efficiently carried on, so that all went well till Alice's marriage; and, a year or two later on, Dorothy's death, in giving birth to her little girl, no woman was left at the farm but a rough though kind-hearted old convict, who did her best for the motherless child.

Harold, then sixteen, and master of his father's half of the property, was already its chief manager. He was, of course, utterly unrestrained, doing all kinds of daring and desperate things in the exuberance of his growing strength, and, though kind to his feeble uncle, under no authority, and a thorough young barbarian of the woods; the foremost of all the young men in every kind of exploit, as marksman, rider, hunter, and what-not, and wanting also to be foremost in the good graces of Meg Cree, the handsome daughter of the keeper of the wayside store on the road to Sydney, where young stock-farmers were wont to meet, with the price of their wool fresh in their hands. It was the rendezvous for all that was collectively done in the district; and many were the orgies and revelries in which Harold had shared when a mere boy in all but strength and stature, and ungovernable in proportion to the growing forces within him.

Of course she accepted him, with his grand physical advantages and his good property. There was rivalry enough to excite him, her beauty was sufficient to fire his boyish fancy; and opposition only maddened his headstrong will. A loud, boisterous, self-willed boy, with already strength, courage, and power beyond those of most grown men; his inclination light and unformed, as the attachments of his age usually are, was so backed that he succeeded where failure would have been a blessing.

My poor brother Eustace! what must not Harold's marriage have been to him! Into the common home, hitherto peaceful if mournful, was brought this coarse, violent, uneducated woman, jealous of him and his family, unmeasured in rudeness, contemning all the refinements to which he clung, and which even then were second nature to the youths, boasting over him for being a convict, whereas her father was a free settler, and furious at any act of kindness or respect to him from her husband.

She must have had a sort of animal jealousy, for the birth of her first child rendered her so savagely intolerant of poor Dora's fondness for Harold, that the offer of a clergyman's wife to take charge of the little girl was thankfully accepted by her father, though it separated him from his darling by more than fifty miles.

The woman's plan seemed to be to persecute the two Eustaces out of her house, since she could not persuade Harold that it was not as much theirs as his own. They clung on, as weak men do, for want of energy to make a change, and Eustace said his father would never complain; but Harold never guessed how much she made him suffer. Home had become a wretched place to all, and Harold was more alienated from it, making long expeditions, staying out as long and as late as he could whenever business or pleasure called him away, and becoming, alas, more headlong and reckless in the pursuit of amusement. There were fierce hot words when he came home, and though a tender respect for his uncle was the one thing in which he never failed, the whole grand creature was being wrecked and ruined by the wild courses to which home misery was driving him.

After about three years of this kind of life, Meg, much against his will, went to her father's station for the birth of her second child; lingered in the congenial atmosphere there far longer than was necessary after her recovery, and roused Harold's jealousy to a violent pitch by her demeanour towards a fellow of her own rank, whom she probably would have married but for Harold's unfortunate advantages, and whom she now most perilously preferred.

The jollification after the poor child's long-deferred christening ended in furious language on both sides, Meg insisting that she would not go home while "the old man" remained at Boola Boola, Harold swearing that she should come at once, and finally forcing her into his buggy, silencing by sheer terror her parents' endeavours to keep them at least till morning, rather than drive in his half-intoxicated condition across the uncleared country in the moonlight.

In the early morning Harold stood at their door dazed and bleeding, with his eldest child crushed and moaning in his arms. Almost without a word he gave it to the grandmother, and then guided the men at hand, striding on silently before them, to the precipitous bank of a deep gulley some twelve miles off. In the bottom lay the carriage broken to pieces, and beside it, where Harold had dragged them out, Meg and her baby both quite dead—where he had driven headlong down in the darkness.

The sun was burning hot when they brought her back in the cart, Harold walking behind with the little one in his arms, and when he had laid it down at home, the elder one waited till he took it. It was a fine boy of two years old, the thing he loved best in the world; but with a broken spine there was no hope for it, and for a whole day and night he held it, pacing the room, and calling it, speaking to and noticing no one else, and touching no food, only slaking his thirst with the liquor that stood at hand, until the poor little thing died in convulsions.

Unhappily, he had scarcely laid it down beside its mother and brother, when he saw his rival in the outer room of the store, and with one deadly imprecation, and a face which Eustace could not think of without horror, challenged him to fight, and in a second or two had struck him down, with a fractured skull. But the deed was done in undoubted brain fever. That was quite established, and for ten days after he was desperately ill and in the wildest delirium, probably from some injury to the head in the fall, aggravated by all that followed.

Neiher magistrate nor doctor was called in, but Prometesky came to their help, and when he grew calmer, brought him home, where his strength rallied, but his mind was for some time astray. For weeks he alternated between moods of speechless apathy and hours of frenzy, which, from his great strength, must have been fatal to someone if he had not always known his gentle, feeble old uncle, and obeyed his entreaties, even when Prometesky lost power with him.

In this remote part of the country no one interfered; the Crees, whose presence maddened him, were afraid to approach, and only Prometesky sustained the hopes of the two Eustaces by his conviction that this was not permanent insanity, but a passing effect of the injury; and they weathered that dreadful time till the frantic fits ceased, and there was only the dull, silent, stoniness of look and manner, lasting on after his health had entirely returned, and he had begun mechanically to attend to the farm and stock, and give orders to the men.

The final cure was the message that Dora was lost in the Bush. Harold had the keen sagacity of a black fellow, and he followed up the track with his unwearied strength until, on the third day, he found her, revived her with the food he had brought with him, and carried her home. There was only just nourishment enough to support her, and he took none himself, so that when he laid her down beside her father, he was so spent that, after a mouthful or two, he slept for twenty hours without moving, as he had never rested since the accident; and when he woke, and Dora ran up and stroked his face, it was the first time he had been seen to smile. Ever since he had been himself again, though changed from the boy of exuberant spirits, and the youth of ungovernable inclinations, into a grave, silent man, happier apparently in Dora's vehement affection than in anything else, and, at any rate, solaced, and soothed by the child's fondness and dependence upon him. This was two years ago, and no token of mental malady had since shown itself.

My poor brother Eustace! My heart yearned to have been able to comfort him. His tender nature had been all along the victim of others, and he was entirely shattered by these last miseries; an old man when little more than forty, and with heart disease so much accelerated by distress and agitation, that he did not live a month after Dora's adventure; but at least he had the comfort of seeing Harold's restoration, and being able to commit the other two to his charge, being no doubt aware that his son was at the best a poor weak being, and that Harold's nature would rise under responsibility which would call out its generosity.

Harold had never touched liquor since the day of his child's death, nor spoken of it; but when his dying uncle begged him to watch over his young cousins, he took up the Bible that lay on the bed, and, unsolicited, took a solemn oath to taste nothing of the kind for the rest of his life.

Afterwards the three had lived on together at Boola Boola. Then had come the tidings of the inheritance supposed to be Harold's, and with the relief of one glad to make a new beginning, to have a work to do, and leave old things behind, he had taken both the others with him.

So it was true! My noble-looking Harold had those dark lines in his spectrum. Wild ungovernable strength had whirled him in mere boyhood at the beck of his passions, and when most men are entering freshly upon life, he was already saddened and sobered by sin and suffering. The stories whispered of him were more than true. I remember I cried over them as I sat alone that evening. Eustace had not told all with the extenuations that I discovered gradually, some even then by cross-questioning, and much by the tuition of that sisterly affection that had gone out from me to Harold, and fastened on him as the one who, to me, represented family ties.

I never thought of breaking with him. No, if I had been told he might be insane that very night, it would have bound me to him the more. And when I went to bid him "Good-night" and take away Dora, and saw the massive features in their stillness light up into a good-natured smile of thanks at my inquiries, I could believe it all the less. He was lying cornerwise across the bed, with a stool beyond for his feet to rest on, and laughed a little as he said he always had to contrive thus, he never found a bed long enough; and our merriment over this seemed to render what Eustace had told me even more incongruous in one so scrupulously gentle.

That gentleness was perhaps reactionary in one who had had such lessons in keeping back his strength. He had evidently come forth a changed man. But that vow of his—was it the binding of a worse lion than that he had fought with to-day? Yet could such things be done in the might of a merely human will? And what token was there of the higher aid being invoked? My poor Harold! I could only pray for him! Alas! did he pray for himself?

I was waked in early morning by Dora's vociferous despair at the disappearance of her big patient, and then Eustace's peremptory fretful tone was heard silencing her by explaining that Harold's hurts had become so painful that he had walked off to Mycening to have the bandages loosened.

Indeed, when we met at breakfast, Eustace seemed to think himself injured by the interruption of his slumbers by Harold's coming to him for assistance in putting on his clothes, and stared at my dismay at his having permitted such an exertion. Before long, however, we saw an unmistakable doctor's gig approaching, and from it emerged Harold and Mr. Yolland. I saw now that he was a sturdy, hard-working-looking young man of seven or eight and twenty, with sandy hair, and an honest, open, weather-beaten face. He had a rather abrupt manner, but much more gentleman-like than that of the usual style of young Union doctors, who are divided between fine words and affectation and Sawbones roughness.

He said he had come in to enforce on us what he could not get his patient to believe—that it was madness to take such liberties with himself, while such serious wounds were so fresh; and certainly Harold did not seem to suppose a two mile walk more of an exertion than a turn on the terrace; indeed, but for Mr. Yolland, he would have set off again after breakfast for the interrupted quest of horses at the fair. This, however, was forbidden, with a hint about even the strongest constitution not

being able to defy tetanus. This made us all look grave, and submission being promised, the young doctor took his leave, saying he would come in the evening and dress the hands again for the night.

"Why *did* you go to that fellow?" asked Eustace. "It is the old doctor who attends *gentlemen*; he is only the partner."

"He is good enough for me," said Harold. "I was right glad to meet him."

Then it appeared that as Harold was striding into town, half distracted with the pain of his hands, in the sunrise of that April morning, he had had the good fortune to meet Mr. Yolland just coming from the cottage where the poor little boy lay who had been injured by the lion. The fright and shock had nearly killed the mother, and the young doctor had been up all night, trying to save her, while on the floor, in a drunken sleep, lay the father, a navvy, who had expended the money lavished on the child by the spectators of the accident, in a revel at the public house. If any were left, it was all in the brute's pocket, and the only hope of peace was when he should have drunk it up.

Eustace went off to the fair to look at horses, Harold impressing on him to do nothing final in haste; and I could see that, while proud of doing anything on his own account, he was almost afraid of the venture alone. Tired by his sleepless night and morning walk, Harold, when we went into the hall for Dora's lessons, lay down on the white bear-skin, let us build a pile of cushions for his head, and thanked us with "That's nice." I suppose he had never been waited on before, he smiled with such a grateful look, almost of surprise.

Have I not said that ours was a black oak-panelled hall, with a wide fireplace, a gallery and oriel window, matted, and so fitted up as to be a pleasant resort for summer days. Our lessons took place there, because I had found that my old schoolroom, out of sight and sound of everything, was such an intolerable prison to my little wild Bush girl, that she really could not learn there, since her very limited attention could only be secured, under the certainty that Harold did not leave the house without her.

He bade her let him hear how well she could read, but he was very soon fast asleep, and I was persuading her that the multiplication table could not disturb his slumbers, when, at the sound of horses' feet, she darted from my side, like an arrow from a bow, to the open front door, and there waved her hand in command, calling to the rider in a hushed voice, "He is asleep."

I followed, expecting to see Eustace; but the rider was instead Dermot Tracy, who in unfeigned alarm asked if he were seriously ill; and when I laughed and explained, he gave his horse, to the groom, and came quietly enough, to satisfy Dora, into the hall with us.

There he stood transfixed, gazing at the great sleeping figure with a passion of enthusiasm in his dark-grey eyes. "Glorious!" he said. "Splendid fellow! Worthy of the deed, Lucy! It was the most plucky thing I ever saw!"

"You distinguished yourself too," I said.

"I? Why, I had a rifle. I galloped down to Grice's for mine at the first, when I saw the menagerie people were cowed. What's that to going at him alone, and mastering him too, as he had done before those idiots thought proper to yell?"

Being talked about, of course, awoke Harold; his eyes opened, and he answered for himself, greeting Dermot heartily. Only then did we understand the full history of what had happened. The lion-tamer, whose part it was to exhibit the liberty he could take with the animals, was ill, and his assistant, after much bravado as to his equal power, had felt his courage quail, and tried to renew it with drink. Thus he was in no state to perceive that he had only shot-to the bolt of the door of the cage; and his behaviour had so irritated the beast that, after so dealing with him that he lay in a most dangerous state, he had dashed out at the door in rage and terror, and, after seizing the hindmost of the flying crowd, had lain down between the shafts of the waggon, as we had seen him.

The keepers had lost their heads in the panic, and no one durst go near him. The lion-tamer had to be called from his bed, in lodgings in the town, and only came on the scene just as Dermot's

rifle had finished the struggle. The master had quite seen the necessity, but was in great despair at the loss of so valuable an animal.

"I'll share in making it good to him," said Harold.

"You? You are the last to do so. If you had only been let alone, the beast would have been captured unhurt. No, no! I settled all that, as it was I who meddled in the matter when, I believe, you could have settled him yourself."

"I don't know that," said Harold. "I was glad enough to see your rifle at his ear. But I should like to have his skin, if they would sell it."

Dermot explained that he had been bargaining for the skin, and hoped Mr. Alison would accept it from him, but here Harold's resolution won the day, much as Dermot evidently longed to lay the trophy at his feet. Poor Dermot, I could see hero-worship growing in his eyes, as they talked about horses, endlessly as men can and do talk of them, and diligent inquiries elicited from Harold what things he had done with the unbroken animal in Australia.

I went off the scene at once, but when I returned to luncheon they were at it still. And Eustace's return with two steeds for Harold's judgment renewed the subject with double vigour. Dermot gave his counsel, and did not leave Arghouse without reiterating an invitation to the cousins to come to-morrow to his cottage at Biston, to be introduced to his stables, let doctors say what they might, and Eustace was in raptures at the distinguished acquaintance he fancied he had made for himself. He had learnt something of Mr. Tracy's sporting renown, and saw himself introduced to all the hunting world of the county, not to say of England.

It gave me a great deal to consider, knowing, as I did full well, that poor Dermot's acquaintance was not likely to bring him into favour with society, even if it were not dangerous in itself. And my poor mother would not have been delighted at my day, a thing I had totally forgotten in the pleasantness of having someone to talk to; for it was six weeks since I had spoken to anyone beyond the family, except Miss Woolmer. Besides, it was Dermot! And that was enough to move me in itself.

I think I have said that his father was an Irish landlord, who was shot at his own hall-door in his children's infancy. Lady Diana brought them back to her old neighbourhood, and there reigned over one of her brother's villages, with the greatest respect and admiration from all, and viewed as a pattern matron, widow, and parent. My mother was, I fancy, a little bit afraid of her, and never entirely at ease with her. I know I was not, but she was so "particular" about her children, that it was a great distinction to be allowed to be intimate with them, and my mother was proud of my being their licensed playfellow, when Horsmans and Stympsons were held aloof. But even in those days, when I heard the little Tracys spoken of as pattern children, I used to have an odd feeling of what it was to be behind the scenes, and know how much of their fame rested on Di. I gloried in the knowledge how much more charming the other two were than anyone guessed, who thought them models of propriety.

In truth, Dermot did not keep that reputation much longer than his petticoats. Ere long he was a pickle of the first order, equalling the sublime naughtiness of Holiday House, and was continually being sent home by private tutors, who could not manage him. All the time I had a secret conviction that, if he had been my own mother's son, she could have managed him, and he would never have even wished to do what she disapproved; but Lady Diana had no sympathy or warmth in her, and while she loved her children she fretted them, and never thawed nor unbent; and when she called in her brother's support, Dermot's nerves were driven frantic by the long harangues, and his relief was in antics which of course redoubled his offence. After he had put crackers into his uncle's boots, peppered the coachman's wig, inserted a live toad in the centre of a fortification of clear jelly at a great luncheon, and had one Christmas painted the two stone wild boars that guard the iron gates of Erymanth Castle into startling resemblance of the porkers as displayed in butchers' shops, with a little tin pail at the snout of each, labelling each sevenpence-ha'penny per pound, his uncle had little more hope of him.

Dreading his father's fate for him, Lady Diana put him into the Guards, to prevent him from living in Ireland, and there he fell into all the usual temptations of his kind, so that everybody came to look on him as a black sheep, and all the time I knew that, if any one had taken him in the right way, he might have been kept out of it. Why there was one talk that he and I had at a picnic on Kalydon Moor, which showed me how hopeless he was of ever really pleasing or satisfying his mother without being, what he could never be, like his uncle in his youth, and how knowing that I cared really might make a difference to him. But mamma and Lady Diana were both very much vexed about that talk; mamma was angry with me; and when Dermot, in a poetical game a little after, sent me some verses—well, with a little more blarney and tenderness than the case required—there was a real uproar about them. Di showed them to her mother, who apologised in her lofty way for my having been insulted. Oh! how angry it did make me; and mamma absolutely cried about it. It seems foolish to say so, but if they would have let us alone I could have done something towards inducing him to keep straight, whereas the way he was treated by his mother and Di only made him worse. Poor mamma! I don't wonder at her, when even his own mother and uncle would not stand up for him; but I knew, whenever we met afterwards at ball or party, that it was pain and grief to her for me to speak a word to him, and that she thought me wrong to exchange anything beyond bare civility. He was vexed, too, and did not try; and we heard worse and worse of him, especially when he went over to his place in Ireland.

Then came the Crimean war, and all the chances of showing what I knew he really was; but at the Alma he was wounded, not very dangerously, but just touching his lungs, and after a long illness in London, the doctors said he must not go back to Sebastopol, for to serve in the trenches would be certain death to him. He wanted to go back all the same, and had an instinct that it would be better for him, but his mother and uncle prevented him and made him sell out, and after that, when he had nothing to do—oh! there's no need to think of it.

In the course of this last year he had taken the shooting of Kalydon Moor, and a house with it, with immense stables, which one of the Horsmans had made for his hunters, and had ruined himself and died. He had not quarrelled with his mother—indeed nobody could quarrel with Dermot—and he used to go over to see her, but he would not live at home, and since he had been at Biston I had never once met him till I saw him run up to attack the lion, the only man in all the fair except Harold who had courage to do so! I could not help my heart bounding at the thought, and afterwards enjoying the talk with him that I could not help. But then it made me feel undutiful to my dear mother, and then there was the further difficulty to be faced. It would have been all very well to live with my nephews if we had been in a desert island, but I could not expect them not to make friends of their own; and if mine chose to drop me, how would it be for me, at my age, all alone in the house?

Harold was forced to confess that he had done too much that first day. His hand was inflamed, and pain and weariness forbade all thought of spending a long day from home; and, besides, there arrived letters by the morning's post which left grave lines on his brow.

So Eustace drove off alone, a good deal elated at such an expedition, and I took Harold to my own little sitting-room, so despised by Dora, for the convenience of bathing the flesh wounds on the right hand, which, though really the least injured, was a much greater torment than the broken fingers, and had allowed him very little sleep.

It was the first time he had been in the room, and on the chimney-piece stood open a miniature-case containing a portrait, by Thorburn, of my little brother Percy, in loose brown holland. Harold started as he came in, and exclaimed, "Where did that come from?" I told him, and he exclaimed, "Shut it up, please," and sat down with his back to it, resigning his hand to me, and thanking me warmly when the fomentation brought some relief, and when I asked if I could do any more for him he seemed undecided, extracted some letters from his pocket with his two-fifths of a hand, and sent Dora to his room for his writing-case. I offered to write anything for him, but he said, "Let me try," and then endeavoured; but he found that not only did the effort hurt him unbearably, but that he could

not guide the pen for more than a word or two; so he consented to make use of me, saying, however, "Dora, it is no use your staying in; you had better go out."

Dora, of course, wanted to stay; but I devised that she should go, under the escort of one of the maids, to carry some broth to the wounded boy, an expedition which would last her some time, and which Harold enforced with all his might as a personal favour, till she complied.

"Thank you," said Harold; "you see this must be done at once, or we shall have them coming over here."

He gave me the sheet he had begun with "Dear Mother," and went on dictating. It was not at all after Julius Caesar's fashion of dictating. He sat with his eyes on his own letter, and uttered one brief but ponderous sentence after another, each complete in all its parts, and quite unhesitating, though slowly uttered. I gathered it up, wrote it down, said "Well," and waited for more in silence, till, after I had looked at him once or twice to see whether he were asleep or in a reverie, another such sentence followed, and I began to know him very much better.

After saying "My hands have been lamed for a few days, and my aunt is so good as to write for me," he went on to say, in forcible and not very affectionate terms, that "Smith must not think of coming home; Eustace could do nothing for him there, but as long as the family remained at Nelson their allowance should be increased by one hundred pounds a year." I filled up an order, which he signed on a Sydney bank for the first quarter. "It must not be more," he said, as he told me the sum, "or they will be taking their passage with it."

"No more?" I asked, when he prepared to conclude this short letter.

"No. Smith reads all her letters."

"That is very hard on you."

"She meant to do well for me, but it was a great mistake. If Smith comes home to prey upon Eustace, it will be a bad business."

"But he has no claim on Eustace, whatever he may think he has on you."

"He is more likely to come now. He knows he can get nothing out of me—" Then, as I looked at the order, he added, "Beyond my mother's rights. Poor mother!"

I found that the schoolmaster had been induced to marry Alice Alison in the expectation that her share in the proceeds of Boola Boola would be much larger than it proved to be. He had fawned on the two Eustaces, and obtained all he could from the elder, but, going too far at last, had been detected by the Sydney bank in what amounted to an embezzlement. Prosecution was waived, and he was assisted to leave Australia and make a fresh start in New Zealand, whence he had never ceased to endeavour to gain whatever he could from Boola Boola. He could twist Eustace round his finger, and Harold, though loathing and despising him, would do anything for his mother, but was resolved, for Eustace's sake, to keep them at a distance, as could only be done by never allowing them a sufficient sum at once to obtain a passage home, and he knew the habits of Smith and his sons too well to expect them to save it. In fact, the letter before him, which he ended by giving me to read, had been written by the poor woman at her husband's dictation, in the belief that Harold was the heir, to demand their passage-money from him, and that there was a sad little postscript put in afterwards, unknown to her tyrant. "My boy, don't do it. It will be much better for you not;" and, brave woman as she was, she added no entreaty that his refusal might be softened. I asked if she had had any more children. "No, happily," was Harold's answer. "If I might only wring that fellow's neck, I could take care of her." In fact, I should think, when he wanted to come within Harold's grasp, he hardly knew what he asked.

This finished, it appeared that Harold wanted to have a letter finished to Prometesky which he had begun some days before. This astonished me more, both by the questions Prometesky had been asking, and the answers Harold was returning, as to the state of the country and the condition of the people. They did much to relieve my mind of the fears I had sometimes entertained of Harold's being a ferocious demagogue incited thereto by his friend.

Who would have thought there was so much depth in his brain? He ended by saying, "Eustace takes kindly to his new position, and is gone today to see Mr. Tracy, nephew to Lord Erymanth, but who does not appear disposed to carry on the same hostility to us."

I exclaimed at his having said nothing of the lion either to his mother or his friend, and asked leave to add it, which he did not refuse, though saying there was no use in it, and that he wanted me to do one thing more for him—namely, to write to his agent in Sydney an order which he signed for the transmission of some money to England. He had learnt from Mr. Yolland that morning that the "Dragon's Head" and some adjoining houses at Mycening were for sale, and that the purchaser could have immediate possession.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Shut it up."

"You can't do much good by shutting up one public-house."

"Eustace will do the same with those on his property."

"I am very much afraid your crusade will not succeed, unless you can put something better into people's minds."

"I shall see about that," he answered, thinking, I believe, that I was going to suggest religion, from all mention of which he shrank, as if it touched a wound. "Smith talked of religion," he once said, with a shudder. Besides, he was a creature in the superabundance of all human faculties to whom their exercise seemed for a time all-sufficient, and the dark shade of horror and remorse in the depths of his heart made him unwilling to look back or think. At any rate, he silenced me on that head; but, thinking, perhaps, that he had been unkindly blunt, he resumed, "There is no risk for Eustace in this acquaintance?"

In spite of the pang that smote me, I felt that this was the only time I might have for that word of warning which seemed incumbent on me. "I do not think there is danger in his going to-day, but it does seem right to tell you that poor Dermot Tracy is said to be very extravagant, and to lead a wild life. And Harold, though I have known him all my life, I have been thinking that it will not do for me to be here, if this should become a resort of the set of people he has made friends of."

Harold answered in his steady, grave way, "I see. But, Lucy, I suppose none of them have been so bad as I have been?"—rather as if he were wondering over the matter.

"But you belong to me," I answered, and I saw a look of real pleasure meet my smile.

"I wish I knew what was best for Eustace," he said, after a few more moments' thought. "Is it doing him harm for me to be here? I could go back to New South Wales at once, only in some ways I don't think the old fellow could get on without me, till he is more used to it all, and in safe hands."

I had no hesitation in answering that Eustace would be much worse off without his cousin, and that the treatment we were receiving was chiefly on account of the fathers of both, not personal to Harold.

"Then you think it would not help him for me to leave him?"

"I think he is far more likely to live it down with you to help him."

"But, Lucy, are you being given up by all your friends for our sakes? We did not know it meant that when we asked you to stay with us!"

"No more did I. But don't be uneasy about that, Harold dear. Don't you think one's own flesh and blood is more than all such friends?"

"I should not have thought two fellows like us could have been worth much to you," said Harold, gravely pondering. "That pretty little thing who was with you the night we came; she has never been here again. Don't you miss her?"

"It is not her fault," I said. "Besides, nothing is like the tie of blood."

I shall never forget the look that was in Harold's eyes. I was standing over him, putting some fresh warm water on his hand. He put back his head and looked up earnestly in my face, as if to see whether I meant it, then said, "We are very thankful to you for thinking so."

I could not help bending and touching his forehead with my lips. His eyes glistened and twinkled, but he said nothing for a little space, and then it was, "If any one like you had been out there—"

I don't think I ever had a compliment that gave me more pleasure, for there was somehow an infinite sense of meaning in whatever Harold said, however short it might be, as if his words had as much force in them as his muscles.

After a good deal more of silent sponging and some knitting of his brows, either from thought or from pain, he said, "Then, as I understand, you cast in your lot with us, and give us the blessing of your presence and care of poor little Dora, to help to set Eustace in his proper place in society. I see then that it is your due that we should bring no one here of whom you do not fully approve."

"It is not only a matter of approval," I explained. "There are many with whom I could freely associate in general society, or if I had any lady with me, whom I ought not to have constantly here with only you two."

"England is different from the Bush," he answered, and meditated for ten minutes more, for no doubt it was the Australian practice to offer free quarters to all comers without Mrs. Grundy, who had hardly yet had her free passage. My heart smote me lest I were acting unkindly for her sake, but then surely I was saving my allegiance to my dead mother, and while I was still thinking it over, Harold said:

"You are more to us than any one could be; Eustace shall see the thing rightly, and while you are good enough to make this our home, I promise you that no one shall be invited here but as you like."

It was a bold promise, especially as it turned out that Eustace had been making large invitations to the Arghouse fishing to Dermot Tracy and some officer friends whom he had found at Biston, and who seemed to have made themselves very pleasant. I bade Harold never mind about that sort of invitation, as it need not affect Dora or me, since we could keep out of the way of it, being unconcerned with gentlemen's parties. Miss Woolmer said I had done right, and gave us a general invitation to spend the evening with her if Eustace wished to entertain his friends, though she hinted, "Don't be too ready to leave the coast clear. Remember that you are a wholesome check."

CHAPTER III
THE "DRAGON'S HEAD."

Harold's right hand healed quickly, and was free in a few days, but the left had to be kept for some time in a sling, and be daily attended to, though he heeded it but little, walking miles to look at horses and to try them, for he could manage them perfectly with one hand, and in this way he saw a good deal of Dermot Tracy, who exerted himself to find a horse to carry the mighty frame.

The catastrophe at the fair had gained him two friends, entirely unlike one another—Dermot, who thenceforward viewed him with unvarying hero-worship, and accepted Eustace as his appendage; and George Yolland, the very reverse of all Dermot's high-bred form of Irishism, and careless, easy self-indulgence.

A rough-hewn, rugged young man, intensely in earnest, and therefore neither popular nor successful was that young partner of Dr. Kingston. Had Harold been squire, the resignation of the patient into his hands would have been less facile; but as a mere Australian visitor, he was no prize, and might follow his own taste if he preferred the practitioner to whom club, cottage, and union patients were abandoned.

By him Harold was let into those secrets of the lower stratum of society he had longed to understand. Attention to the poor boy who had been torn by the lion brought him into the great village of workmen's huts, that had risen up round the Hydriot clay works on the Lerne.

These had been set up by a company about eighteen years before, much against all our wills. With Lord Erymanth at our head, we had opposed with all our might the breaking up of the beautiful moorland that ran right down into Mycening, and the defilement of our pure and rapid Lerne; but modern progress had been too strong for us. Huge brick inclosures with unpleasant smoky chimneys had arisen, and around them a whole colony of bare, ugly little houses, filled with squalid women and children, little the better for the men's wages when they were high, and now that the Company was in a languishing state, miserable beyond description. We county people had simply viewed ourselves as the injured parties by this importation, bemoaned the ugliness of the erections, were furious at the interruptions to our country walks, prophesied the total collapse of the Company, and never suspected that we had any duties towards the potters. The works were lingering on, only just not perishing; the wages that the men did get, such as they were, went in drink; the town in that quarter was really unsafe in the evening; and the most ardent hope of all the neighbourhood was, that the total ruin constantly expected would lead to the migration of all the wretched population.

Mr. Yolland, who attended most of their sicknesses, used to tell fearful things of the misery, vice, and hardness, and did acts of almost heroic kindness among them, which did not seem consistent with what, to my grief and dismay, was reported of this chosen companion of Harold—that physical science had conducted him into materialism. The chief comfort I had was that Miss Woolmer liked him and opened her house to him. She was one of the large-hearted women who can see the good through the evil, and was interested by contact with all phases of thought; and, moreover, the lad should not be lost for want of the entree to something like a home, because the upper crust of Mycening considered him as "only Dr. Kingston's partner," and the Kingstons themselves had the sort of sense that he was too much for them which makes a spider dislike to have a bluebottle in his web.

She was interested, too, rather sadly in the crusade without the cross that the two young men were trying to undertake against the wretchedness of those potters.

It was much in their favour that the landlord, who was also the owner of the "Dragon's Head," was invited to join a brother in America without loss of time, and was ready to sell and give immediate possession; so that Harry actually owned it in a fortnight from first hearing of the offer, having, of course, given a heavy price for it.

The evening it came into his possession he went down, and, standing at the door, tried to explain why he had closed it, and why he could not bear to see its frequenters spending their wages on degrading themselves and making their homes miserable. In no mood for a temperance harangue, the men drowned, or would have drowned aught but his short incisive sentences, in clamours for their beer, and one big bully pushed forward to attack him. His left hand was still in the sling, but with the other he caught hold of the fellow by the collar, and swung him over the side of the stone steps as helpless as a puppy dog, shaking him till his teeth chattered ere setting him on his feet. "If you wish for any more," he said, "we'll have it out as soon as this hand is well."

That made them cheer him, and the fellow slunk away; while Harold, having gained a hearing, told them that he meant to make the former "Dragon's Head" a place where they might smoke, read the papers, play games, and have any refreshment such as coffee, tea, or ginger-beer, at which they hissed, and only one or two observed, "I am sure you wishes us well, sir."

It was a good-sized house, and he meant to put in a steady couple to keep it, giving up two upper rooms to make a laboratory for Mr. Yolland, whose soul was much set on experiments for which his lodgings gave him no space; but the very day when Harold opened his coffee-rooms, as he went down the street, an "Original Dragon's Head" and a "Genuine Dragon's Head" grinned defiance at him, in the full glory of teeth, fiery breath, and gilded scales, on the other side of the way. I believe they had been beershops before; but, be that as it may, they devoured quite as many as their predecessor, and though newspapers and draught-boards lay all about the place, they attracted only two clients!

And the intended closing of all the beer-houses on the Arghouse property, except the time-honoured "Blue Boar" on the village green, seemed likely to have the same effect; for the notices to their holders, grimly resisted by Bullock, seemed only to cause dozens of householders to represent the absolute need of such houses whenever they did not belong to us.

"To destroy one is to produce two," sighed Harold.

"There's nothing to be done but to strike at the root," I said.

"What's that?" said Harold.

"Man's evil propensities," I said.

"Humph," said Harold. "If I could manage the works now! They say the shares are to be had for an old song."

"Oh, Harry, don't have anything to do with them," I entreated. "They have ruined every creature who has meddled with them, and done unmitigated mischief."

Harold made no answer, but the next day he was greatly stimulated by a letter from Prometesky, part of which he read to me, in its perfect English, yet foreign idiom.

"I long to hear of the field of combat we had to quit, because one party was too stolid, the other too ardent. I see it all before me with the two new champions freshly girded for the strife, but a peaceful strife, my friend. Let our experience be at least profitable to you, and let it be a peaceful contention of emulation such as is alone suited to that insular nation which finds its strongest stimulus in domestic comfort and wealth. Apropos, has some one pursued a small discovery of mine, that, had I not been a stranger of a proscribed nation, and had not your English earl and the esquires been hostile to all save the hereditary plough, might have found employment for thousands and prevented the history of your fathers and of myself? That bed of argillaceous deposit around the course of your Lerne, which I found to be of the same quality as the porcelain clay of Meissen, does it still merely bear a few scanty blades of corn, or is its value appreciated, and is it occupying hundreds of those who starved and were discontented, to the great surprise of their respectable landlords? I wonder whether a few little figures that I modelled in the clay for specimens, and baked in my hostess's oven, are still in existence. The forms of clay were there. Alas! I asked in vain of your English magnates for the fire from heaven to animate the earth, or rather I would have brought it, and I suffered."

It was amusing to see how much delighted honest Harold was with this letter, and how much honoured he seemed by his dear old Prometesky having spent so much time and thought upon writing

to him. It fired him with doubled ardour to investigate the Hydriot Company, and he could hardly wait till a reasonable hour the next day. Then he took Eustace down with him and returned quite talkative (for him) with the discoveries he had made, from one of the oldest workmen who had become disabled from the damp of working in the clay.

The Company had been set up by a clever speculating young attorney, but the old man remembered that "that there foreign gentleman, the same as was sent to foreign parts with the poor young squires," was "always a-puddling about in it; and they did say as how he tried to get my lord, and Squire Horsman, and Squire Stympson to see to setting up summut there; but they wasn't never for 'speriments, and there was no more talk of it not till that there young Crabbe got hold, they say, of some little images as he had made, and never rested till he had got up the Company, and begun the works, having drawn in by his enthusiasm half the tradesmen and a few of the gentlemen of the place."

Three years of success; then came a bad manager; young Crabbe struggled in vain to set things right, broke down, and died of the struggle; and ever since the unhappy affair had lingered on, starving its workmen, and just keeping alive by making common garden pots and pans and drain-tiles. Most people who could had sold out of it, thanking the Limited Liabilities for its doing them no further harm; and the small remnant only hung on because no one could be found to give them even the absurdly small amount that was still said to be the value of their shares.

That they would find now Harold had fallen in with young Yolland, who had been singing the old song, first of Prometesky, then of Crabbe, and had made him listen to it. Five pounds would now buy a share that used to be worth a hundred, and that with thanks from the seller that he got anything from what had long ceased to pay the ghost of a dividend. And loose cash was not scarce with Harold; he was able to buy up an amount which perfectly terrified me, and made me augur that the Hydriot would swallow all Boola Boola, and more too; and as to Mr. Yolland's promises of improvements, no one, after past experience, could believe in them.

"Now, Harold, you know nothing of all this intricate business; and as to these chemical agencies, I am sure you know nothing about them."

"I shall learn."

"You will only be taken in," I went on in my character as good aunt, "and utterly ruined."

"No matter if I am."

"Only please, at least, don't drag in Eustace and Arghouse."

"Eustace will only have five shares standing in his name to enable him to be chairman."

"Five too many! Harold! I cannot see why you involve yourself in all this. You are well off! You don't care for these foolish hopes of gain."

"I can't see things go so stupidly to wrack."

The truth was that he saw in it a continuation of Prometesky's work and his father's, so expostulations were vain. He had been thoroughly bitten, and was the more excited at finding that Dermot and Viola Tracy were both shareholders. Their father had been a believer in Crabbe, and had taken a good many shares, and these had been divided between them at his death. They could not be sold till they were of age, and by the time Dermot was twenty-one, no one would buy them; and now, when they were recalled to his mind, he would gladly have made Harold a present of them, but Harold would not even buy them; he declared that he wanted Dermot's vote, as a shareholder, to help in the majority; and, in fact, the effective male shareholders on the spot were only just sufficient to furnish directors. Mr. Yolland bought two shares that he might have a voice; Eustace was voted into the chair, and the minority was left to consist of the greatly-soured representative of the original Crabbe, and one other tradesman, who held on for the sake, as it seemed, of maintaining adherence to the red pots and pans, as, at any rate, risking nothing.

Of course I hated and dreaded it all, and it was only by that power which made it so hard to say nay to Harold, that he got me down to look at the very lair of the Hydriot Company. It was a

melancholy place; the buildings were so much larger, and the apparatus so much more elaborate than there was any use for; and there were so few workmen, and those so unhealthy and sinister-looking.

I remember the great red central chimney with underground furnaces all round, which opened like the fiery graves where Dante placed the bad Popes; and how dreadfully afraid I was that Dora would tumble into one of them, so that I was glad to see her held fast by the fascination of the never-superseded potter and his wheel fashioning the clay, while Mr. Yolland discoursed and Harold muttered assents to some wonderful scheme that was to economise fuel—the rock on which this furnace had split.

It has been explained to me over and over again, and I never did more than understand it for one moment, and if I did recollect all about it, like a scientific dialogue, nobody would thank me for putting it in here, so it will be enough to say that it sounded to me very bewildering and horribly dangerous, not so much to the body as to the pocket, and I thought the Hydriot bade fair to devour Boola Boola and Harold, if not Arghouse and Eustace into the bargain.

They meant to have a Staffordshire man down to act as foreman and put things on a better footing.

"I'll write to my brother to send one," said Mr. Yolland. "He's a curate in the potteries; has a wonderful turn for this sort of thing."

"Have you a brother a clergyman?" I said, rather surprised, and to fill up Harold's silence.

"Yes, my brother Ben. It's his first curacy, and his two years are all but up. I don't know if he will stay on. He's a right down jolly good fellow is Ben, and I wish he would come down here."

Neither of us echoed the wish. Harold had no turn for clergymen after the specimen of Mr. Smith; and Mr. Yolland, though I could specify nothing against him but that he was rough and easy, had offended me by joining us, when I wanted Harold all to myself. Besides, was he not deluding my nephews into this horrid Hydriot Company, of which they would be the certain victims?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.