

Clara Hopgood

Mark Rutherford

The Project Gutenberg EBook of Clara Hopgood, by Mark Rutherford
(#3 in our series by Mark Rutherford)

Copyright laws are changing all over the world. Be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before downloading or redistributing this or any other Project Gutenberg eBook.

This header should be the first thing seen when viewing this Project Gutenberg file. Please do not remove it. Do not change or edit the header without written permission.

Please read the "legal small print," and other information about the eBook and Project Gutenberg at the bottom of this file. Included is important information about your specific rights and restrictions in how the file may be used. You can also find out about how to make a donation to Project Gutenberg, and how to get involved.

****Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts****

****eBooks Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971****

*******These eBooks Were Prepared By Thousands of Volunteers!*******

Title: Clara Hopgood

Author: Mark Rutherford

Release Date: June, 2004 [EBook #5986]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on October 8, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, CLARA HOPGOOD *****

Transcribed from the 1907 T. Fisher Unwin edition by David Price,
email ccx074@coventry.ac.uk

Livros Grátis

<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>

Milhares de livros grátis para download.

CHAPTER I

About ten miles north-east of Eastthorpe lies the town of Fenmarket, very like Eastthorpe generally; and as we are already familiar with Eastthorpe, a particular description of Fenmarket is unnecessary. There is, however, one marked difference between them. Eastthorpe, it will be remembered, is on the border between the low uplands and the Fens, and has one side open to soft, swelling hills. Fenmarket is entirely in the Fens, and all the roads that lead out of it are alike level, monotonous, straight, and flanked by deep and stagnant ditches. The river, also, here is broader and slower; more reluctant than it is even at Eastthorpe to hasten its journey to the inevitable sea. During the greater part of the year the visitor to Fenmarket would perhaps find it dull and depressing, and at times, under a grey, wintry sky, almost unendurable; but nevertheless, for days and weeks it has a charm possessed by few other landscapes in England, provided only that behind the eye which looks there is something to which a landscape of that peculiar character answers. There is, for example, the wide, dome-like expanse of the sky, there is the distance, there is the freedom and there are the stars on a clear night. The orderly, geometrical march of the constellations from the extreme eastern horizon across the meridian and down to the west has a solemn majesty, which is only partially discernible when their course is interrupted by broken country.

On a dark afternoon in November 1844, two young women, Clara and Madge Hopgood, were playing chess in the back parlour of their mother's house at Fenmarket, just before tea. Clara, the elder, was about five-and-twenty, fair, with rather light hair worn flat at the side of her face, after the fashion of that time. Her features were tolerably regular. It is true they were somewhat marred by an uneven nasal outline, but this was redeemed by the curved lips of a mouth which was small and rather compressed, and by a definite, symmetrical and graceful figure. Her eyes were grey, with a curious peculiarity in them. Ordinarily they were steady, strong eyes, excellent and renowned optical instruments. Over and over again she had detected, along the stretch of the Eastthorpe road, approaching visitors, and had named them when her companions could see nothing but specks. Occasionally, however, these steady, strong, grey eyes utterly changed. They were the same eyes, the same colour, but they ceased to be mere optical instruments and became instruments of expression, transmissive of radiance to such a degree that the light which was reflected from them seemed insufficient to account for it. It was also curious that this change, though it must have been accompanied by some emotion, was just as often not attended by any other sign of it. Clara was, in fact, little given to any display of feeling.

Madge, four years younger than her sister, was of a different type altogether, and one more easily comprehended. She had very heavy dark hair, and she had blue eyes, a combination which fascinated Fenmarket. Fenmarket admired Madge more than it was admired by her in return, and she kept herself very much to herself, notwithstanding

what it considered to be its temptations. If she went shopping she nearly always went with her sister; she stood aloof from all the small gaieties of the town; walked swiftly through its streets, and repelled, frigidly and decisively, all offers, and they were not a few, which had been made to her by the sons of the Fenmarket tradesfolk. Fenmarket pronounced her 'stuck-up,' and having thus labelled her, considered it had exhausted her. The very important question, Whether there was anything which naturally stuck up? Fenmarket never asked. It was a great relief to that provincial little town in 1844, in this and in other cases, to find a word which released it from further mental effort and put out of sight any troublesome, straggling, indefinable qualities which it would otherwise have been forced to examine and name. Madge was certainly stuck-up, but the projection above those around her was not artificial. Both she and her sister found the ways of Fenmarket were not to their taste. The reason lay partly in their nature and partly in their history.

Mrs Hopgood was the widow of the late manager in the Fenmarket branch of the bank of Rumbold, Martin & Rumbold, and when her husband died she had of course to leave the Bank Buildings. As her income was somewhat straitened, she was obliged to take a small house, and she was now living next door to the 'Crown and Sceptre,' the principal inn in the town. There was then no fringe of villas to Fenmarket for retired quality; the private houses and shops were all mixed together, and Mrs Hopgood's cottage was squeezed in between the ironmonger's and the inn. It was very much lower than either of its big neighbours, but it had a brass knocker and a bell, and distinctly asserted and maintained a kind of aristocratic superiority.

Mr Hopgood was not a Fenmarket man. He came straight from London to be manager. He was in the bank of the London agents of Rumbold, Martin & Rumbold, and had been strongly recommended by the city firm as just the person to take charge of a branch which needed thorough reorganisation. He succeeded, and nobody in Fenmarket was more respected. He lived, however, a life apart from his neighbours, excepting so far as business was concerned. He went to church once on Sunday because the bank expected him to go, but only once, and had nothing to do with any of its dependent institutions. He was a great botanist, very fond of walking, and in the evening, when Fenmarket generally gathered itself into groups for gossip, either in the street or in back parlours, or in the 'Crown and Sceptre,' Mr Hopgood, tall, lean and stately, might be seen wandering along the solitary roads searching for flowers, which, in that part of the world, were rather scarce. He was also a great reader of the best books, English, German and French, and held high doctrine, very high for those days, on the training of girls, maintaining that they need, even more than boys, exact discipline and knowledge. Boys, he thought, find health in an occupation; but an uncultivated, unmarried girl dwells with her own untutored thoughts, which often breed disease. His two daughters, therefore, received an education much above that which was usual amongst people in their position, and each of them--an unheard of wonder in Fenmarket--had spent some time in a school in Weimar. Mr Hopgood was also peculiar in his way of dealing with his children. He talked to them and made them talk to him, and whatever they read was translated into speech; thought, in his house, was vocal.

Mrs Hopgood, too, had been the intimate friend of her husband, and

was the intimate friend of her daughters. She was now nearly sixty, but still erect and graceful, and everybody could see that the picture of a beautiful girl of one-and-twenty, which hung opposite the fireplace, had once been her portrait. She had been brought up, as thoroughly as a woman could be brought up, in those days, to be a governess. The war prevented her education abroad, but her father, who was a clergyman, not too rich, engaged a French emigrant lady to live in his house to teach her French and other accomplishments. She consequently spoke French perfectly, and she could also read and speak Spanish fairly well, for the French lady had spent some years in Spain. Mr Hopgood had never been particularly in earnest about religion, but his wife was a believer, neither High Church nor Low Church, but inclined towards a kind of quietism not uncommon in the Church of England, even during its bad time, a reaction against the formalism which generally prevailed. When she married, Mrs Hopgood did not altogether follow her husband. She never separated herself from her faith, and never would have confessed that she had separated herself from her church. But although she knew that his creed externally was not hers, her own was not sharply cut, and she persuaded herself that, in substance, his and her belief were identical. As she grew older her relationship to the Unseen became more and more intimate, but she was less and less inclined to criticise her husband's freedom, or to impose on the children a rule which they would certainly have observed, but only for her sake. Every now and then she felt a little lonely; when, for example, she read one or two books which were particularly her own; when she thought of her dead father and mother, and when she prayed her solitary prayer. Mr Hopgood took great pains never to disturb that sacred moment. Indeed, he never for an instant permitted a finger to be laid upon what she considered precious. He loved her because she had the strength to be what she was when he first knew her and she had so fascinated him. He would have been disappointed if the mistress of his youth had become some other person, although the change, in a sense, might have been development and progress. He did really love her piety, too, for its own sake. It mixed something with her behaviour to him and to the children which charmed him, and he did not know from what other existing source anything comparable to it could be supplied. Mrs Hopgood seldom went to church. The church, to be sure, was horribly dead, but she did not give that as a reason. She had, she said, an infirmity, a strange restlessness which prevented her from sitting still for an hour. She often pleaded this excuse, and her husband and daughters never, by word or smile, gave her the least reason to suppose that they did not believe her.

CHAPTER II

Both Clara and Madge went first to an English day-school, and Clara went straight from this school to Germany, but Madge's course was a little different. She was not very well, and it was decided that she should have at least a twelvemonth in a boarding-school at Brighton before going abroad. It had been very highly recommended, but the head-mistress was Low Church and aggressive. Mr Hopgood, far away from the High and Low Church controversy, came to the conclusion that, in Madge's case, the theology would have no effect on her. It

was quite impossible, moreover, to find a school which would be just what he could wish it to be. Madge, accordingly, was sent to Brighton, and was introduced into a new world. She was just beginning to ask herself WHY certain things were right and other things were wrong, and the Brighton answer was that the former were directed by revelation and the latter forbidden, and that the 'body' was an affliction to the soul, a means of 'probation,' our principal duty being to 'war' against it.

Madge's bedroom companion was a Miss Selina Fish, daughter of Barnabas Fish, Esquire, of Clapham, and merchant of the City of London. Miss Fish was not traitorous at heart, but when she found out that Madge had not been christened, she was so overcome that she was obliged to tell her mother. Miss Fish was really unhappy, and one cold night, when Madge crept into her neighbour's bed, contrary to law, but in accordance with custom when the weather was very bitter, poor Miss Fish shrank from her, half-believing that something dreadful might happen if she should by any chance touch unbaptised, naked flesh. Mrs Fish told her daughter that perhaps Miss Hopgood might be a Dissenter, and that although Dissenters were to be pitied, and even to be condemned, many of them were undoubtedly among the redeemed, as for example, that man of God, Dr Doddridge, whose Family Expositor was read systematically at home, as Selina knew. Then there were Matthew Henry, whose commentary her father preferred to any other, and the venerable saint, the Reverend William Jay of Bath, whom she was proud to call her friend. Miss Fish, therefore, made further inquiries gently and delicately, but she found to her horror that Madge had neither been sprinkled nor immersed! Perhaps she was a Jewess or a heathen! This was a happy thought, for then she might be converted. Selina knew what interest her mother took in missions to heathens and Jews; and if Madge, by the humble instrumentality of a child, could be brought to the foot of the Cross, what would her mother and father say? What would they not say? Fancy taking Madge to Clapham in a nice white dress--it should be white, thought Selina--and presenting her as a saved lamb!

The very next night she began, -

'I suppose your father is a foreigner?'

'No, he is an Englishman.'

'But if he is an Englishman you must have been baptised, or sprinkled, or immersed, and your father and mother must belong to church or chapel. I know there are thousands of wicked people who belong to neither, but they are drunkards and liars and robbers, and even they have their children christened.'

'Well, he is an Englishman,' said Madge, smiling.

'Perhaps,' said Selina, timidly, 'he may be--he may be--Jewish. Mamma and papa pray for the Jews every morning. They are not like other unbelievers.'

'No, he is certainly not a Jew.'

'What is he, then?'

'He is my papa and a very honest, good man.'

'Oh, my dear Madge! honesty is a broken reed. I have heard mamma say that she is more hopeful of thieves than honest people who think they are saved by works, for the thief who was crucified went to heaven, and if he had been only an honest man he never would have found the Saviour and would have gone to hell. Your father must be something.'

'I can only tell you again that he is honest and good.'

Selina was confounded. She had heard of those people who were NOTHING, and had always considered them as so dreadful that she could not bear to think of them. The efforts of her father and mother did not extend to them; they were beyond the reach of the preacher--mere vessels of wrath. If Madge had confessed herself Roman Catholic, or idolator, Selina knew how to begin. She would have pointed out to the Catholic how unscriptural it was to suppose that anybody could forgive sins excepting God, and she would at once have been able to bring the idolator to his knees by exposing the absurdity of worshipping bits of wood and stone; but with a person who was nothing she could not tell what to do. She was puzzled to understand what right Madge had to her name. Who had any authority to say she was to be called Madge Hopgood? She determined at last to pray to God and again ask her mother's help.

She did pray earnestly that very night, and had not finished until long after Madge had said her Lord's Prayer. This was always said night and morning, both by Madge and Clara. They had been taught it by their mother. It was, by the way, one of poor Selina's troubles that Madge said nothing but the Lord's Prayer when she lay down and when she rose; of course, the Lord's Prayer was the best--how could it be otherwise, seeing that our Lord used it?--but those who supplemented it with no petitions of their own were set down as formalists, and it was always suspected that they had not received the true enlightenment from above. Selina cried to God till the counterpane was wet with her tears, but it was the answer from her mother which came first, telling her that however praiseworthy her intentions might be, argument with such a DANGEROUS infidel as Madge would be most perilous, and she was to desist from it at once. Mrs Fish had by that post written to Miss Pratt, the schoolmistress, and Selina no doubt would not be exposed to further temptation. Mrs Fish's letter to Miss Pratt was very strong, and did not mince matters. She informed Miss Pratt that a wolf was in her fold, and that if the creature were not promptly expelled, Selina must be removed into safety. Miss Pratt was astonished, and instantly, as her custom was, sought the advice of her sister, Miss Hannah Pratt, who had charge of the wardrobes and household matters generally. Miss Hannah Pratt was never in the best of tempers, and just now was a little worse than usual. It was one of the rules of the school that no tradesmen's daughters should be admitted, but it was very difficult to draw the line, and when drawn, the Misses Pratt were obliged to admit it was rather ridiculous. There was much debate over an application by an auctioneer. He was clearly not a tradesman, but he sold chairs, tables and pigs, and, as Miss Hannah said, used vulgar language in recommending them. However, his wife had money; they lived in a pleasant house in Lewes, and the line went outside him. But when a druggist, with a shop in Bond Street, proposed his daughter, Miss Hannah took a firm stand. What is the use of a principle, she inquired severely, if we do not adhere to it? On the other hand, the druggist's daughter was the eldest of six, who

might all come when they were old enough to leave home, and Miss Pratt thought there was a real difference between a druggist and, say, a bootmaker.

'Bootmaker!' said Miss Hannah with great scorn. 'I am surprised that you venture to hint the remotest possibility of such a contingency.'

At last it was settled that the line should also be drawn outside the druggist. Miss Hannah, however, had her revenge. A tanner in Bermondsey with a house in Bedford Square, had sent two of his children to Miss Pratt's seminary. Their mother found out that they had struck up a friendship with a young person whose father compounded prescriptions for her, and when she next visited Brighton she called on Miss Pratt, reminded her that it was understood that her pupils would 'all be taken from a superior class in society,' and gently hinted that she could not allow Bedford Square to be contaminated by Bond Street. Miss Pratt was most apologetic, enlarged upon the druggist's respectability, and more particularly upon his well-known piety and upon his generous contributions to the cause of religion. This, indeed, was what decided her to make an exception in his favour, and the piety also of his daughter was 'most exemplary.' However, the tanner's lady, although a shining light in the church herself, was not satisfied that a retail saint could produce a proper companion for her own offspring, and went away leaving Miss Pratt very uncomfortable.

'I warned you,' said Miss Hannah; 'I told you what would happen, and as to Mr Hopgood, I suspected him from the first. Besides, he is only a banker's clerk.'

'Well, what is to be done?'

'Put your foot down at once.' Miss Hannah suited the action to the word, and put down, with emphasis, on the hearthrug a very large, plate-shaped foot cased in a black felt shoe.

'But I cannot dismiss them. Don't you think it will be better, first of all, to talk to Miss Hopgood? Perhaps we could do her some good.'

'Good! Now, do you think we can do any good to an atheist? Besides, we have to consider our reputation. Whatever good we might do, it would be believed that the infection remained.'

'We have no excuse for dismissing the other.'

'Excuse! none is needed, nor would any be justifiable. Excuses are immoral. Say at once--of course politely and with regret--that the school is established on a certain basis. It will be an advantage to us if it is known why these girls do not remain. I will dictate the letter, if you like.'

Miss Hannah Pratt had not received the education which had been given to her younger sister, and therefore, was nominally subordinate, but really she was chief. She considered it especially her duty not only to look after the children's clothes, the servants and the accounts, but to maintain TONE everywhere in the establishment, and to stiffen her sister when necessary, and preserve in proper sharpness her orthodoxy, both in theology and morals.

Accordingly, both the girls left, and both knew the reason for leaving. The druggist's faith was sorely tried. If Miss Pratt's had been a worldly seminary he would have thought nothing of such behaviour, but he did not expect it from one of the faithful. The next Sunday morning after he received the news, he stayed at home out of his turn to make up any medicines which might be urgently required, and sent his assistant to church.

As to Madge, she enjoyed her expulsion as a great joke, and her Brighton experiences were the cause of much laughter. She had learned a good deal while she was away from home, not precisely what it was intended she should learn, and she came back with a strong, insurgent tendency, which was even more noticeable when she returned from Germany. Neither of the sisters lived at the school in Weimar, but at the house of a lady who had been recommended to Mrs Hopgood, and by this lady they were introduced to the great German classics. She herself was an enthusiast for Goethe, whom she well remembered in his old age, and Clara and Madge, each of them in turn, learned to know the poet as they would never have known him in England. Even the town taught them much about him, for in many ways it was expressive of him and seemed as if it had shaped itself for him. It was a delightful time for them. They enjoyed the society and constant mental stimulus; they loved the beautiful park; not a separate enclosure walled round like an English park, but suffering the streets to end in it, and in summer time there were excursions into the Thuringer Wald, generally to some point memorable in history, or for some literary association. The drawback was the contrast, when they went home, with Fenmarket, with its dulness and its complete isolation from the intellectual world. At Weimar, in the evening, they could see Egmont or hear Fidelio, or talk with friends about the last utterance upon the *Leben Jesu*; but the Fenmarket Egmont was a travelling wax-work show, its Fidelio psalm tunes, or at best some of Bishop's glees, performed by a few of the tradesfolk, who had never had an hour's instruction in music; and for theological criticism there were the parish church and Ram Lane Chapel. They did their best; they read their old favourites and subscribed for a German as well as an English literary weekly newspaper, but at times they were almost beaten. Madge more than Clara was liable to depression.

No Fenmarket maiden, other than the Hopgoods, was supposed to have any connection whatever, or to have any capacity for any connection with anything outside the world in which 'young ladies' dwelt, and if a Fenmarket girl read a book, a rare occurrence, for there were no circulating libraries there in those days, she never permitted herself to say anything more than that it was 'nice,' or it was 'not nice,' or she 'liked it' or did 'not like it;' and if she had ventured to say more, Fenmarket would have thought her odd, not to say a little improper. The Hopgood young women were almost entirely isolated, for the tradesfolk felt themselves uncomfortable and inferior in every way in their presence, and they were ineligible for rectory and brewery society, not only because their father was merely a manager, but because of their strange ways. Mrs Tubbs, the brewer's wife, thought they were due to Germany. From what she knew of Germany she considered it most injudicious, and even morally wrong, to send girls there. She once made the acquaintance of a German lady at an hotel at Tunbridge Wells, and was quite shocked. She could see quite plainly that the standard of female delicacy must be much lower in that country than in England. Mr Tubbs was sure Mrs

Hopgood must have been French, and said to his daughters, mysteriously, 'you never can tell who Frenchwomen are.'

'But, papa,' said Miss Tubbs, 'you know Mrs Hopgood's maiden name; we found that out. It was Molyneux.'

'Of course, my dear, of course; but if she was a Frenchwoman resident in England she would prefer to assume an English name, that is to say if she wished to be married.'

Occasionally the Miss Hopgoods were encountered, and they confounded Fenmarket sorely. On one memorable occasion there was a party at the Rectory: it was the annual party into which were swept all the unclassifiable odds-and-ends which could not be put into the two gatherings which included the aristocracy and the democracy of the place. Miss Clara Hopgood amazed everybody by 'beginning talk,' by asking Mrs Greatorex, her hostess, who had been far away to Sidmouth for a holiday, whether she had been to the place where Coleridge was born, and when the parson's wife said she had not, and that she could not be expected to make a pilgrimage to the birthplace of an infidel, Miss Hopgood expressed her surprise, and declared she would walk twenty miles any day to see Ottery St Mary. Still worse, when somebody observed that an Anti-Corn-Law lecturer was coming to Fenmarket, and the parson's daughter cried 'How horrid!' Miss Hopgood talked again, and actually told the parson that, so far as she had read upon the subject--fancy her reading about the Corn-Laws!--the argument was all one way, and that after Colonel Thompson nothing new could really be urged.

'What is so--' she was about to say 'objectionable,' but she recollected her official position and that she was bound to be politic--'so odd and unusual,' observed Mrs Greatorex to Mrs Tubbs afterwards, 'is not that Miss Hopgood should have radical views. Mrs Barker, I know, is a radical like her husband, but then she never puts herself forward, nor makes speeches. I never saw anything quite like it, except once in London at a dinner-party. Lady Montgomery then went on in much the same way, but she was a baronet's wife; the baronet was in Parliament; she received a good deal and was obliged to entertain her guests.'

Poor Clara! she was really very unobtrusive and very modest, but there had been constant sympathy between her and her father, not the dumb sympathy as between man and dog, but that which can manifest itself in human fashion.

CHAPTER III

Clara and her father were both chess-players, and at the time at which our history begins, Clara had been teaching Madge the game for about six months.

'Check!' said Clara.

'Check! after about a dozen moves. It is of no use to go on; you always beat me. I should not mind that if I were any better now than

when I started. It is not in me.'

'The reason is that you do not look two moves ahead. You never say to yourself, "Suppose I move there, what is she likely to do, and what can I do afterwards?"'

'That is just what is impossible to me. I cannot hold myself down; the moment I go beyond the next move my thoughts fly away, and I am in a muddle, and my head turns round. I was not born for it. I can do what is under my nose well enough, but nothing more.'

'The planning and the forecasting are the soul of the game. I should like to be a general, and play against armies and calculate the consequences of manoeuvres.'

'It would kill me. I should prefer the fighting. Besides, calculation is useless, for when I think that you will be sure to move such and such a piece, you generally do not.'

'Then what makes the difference between the good and the bad player?'

'It is a gift, an instinct, I suppose.'

'Which is as much as to say that you give it up. You are very fond of that word instinct; I wish you would not use it.'

'I have heard you use it, and say you instinctively like this person or that.'

'Certainly; I do not deny that sometimes I am drawn to a person or repelled from him before I can say why; but I always force myself to discover afterwards the cause of my attraction or repulsion, and I believe it is a duty to do so. If we neglect it we are little better than the brutes, and may grossly deceive ourselves.'

At this moment the sound of wheels was heard, and Madge jumped up, nearly over-setting the board, and rushed into the front room. It was the four-horse coach from London, which, once a day, passed through Fenmarket on its road to Lincoln. It was not the direct route from London to Lincoln, but the Defiance went this way to accommodate Fenmarket and other small towns. It slackened speed in order to change horses at the 'Crown and Sceptre,' and as Madge stood at the window, a gentleman on the box-seat looked at her intently as he passed. In another minute he had descended, and was welcomed by the landlord, who stood on the pavement. Clara meanwhile had taken up a book, but before she had read a page, her sister skipped into the parlour again, humming a tune.

'Let me see--check, you said, but it is not mate.'

She put her elbows on the table, rested her head between her hands, and appeared to contemplate the game profoundly.

'Now, then, what do you say to that?'

It was really a very lucky move, and Clara, whose thoughts perhaps were elsewhere, was presently most unaccountably defeated. Madge was triumphant.

'Where are all your deep-laid schemes? Baffled by a poor creature who can hardly put two and two together.'

'Perhaps your schemes were better than mine.'

'You know they were not. I saw the queen ought to take that bishop, and never bothered myself as to what would follow. Have you not lost your faith in schemes?'

'You are very much mistaken if you suppose that, because of one failure, or of twenty failures, I would give up a principle.'

'Clara, you are a strange creature. Don't let us talk any more about chess.'

Madge swept all the pieces with her hand into the box, shut it, closed the board, and put her feet on the fender.

'You never believe in impulses or in doing a thing just because here and now it appears to be the proper thing to do. Suppose anybody were to make love to you--oh! how I wish somebody would, you dear girl, for nobody deserves it more--' Madge put her head caressingly on Clara's shoulder and then raised it again. 'Suppose, I say, anybody were to make love to you, would you hold off for six months and consider, and consider, and ask yourself whether he had such and such virtues, and whether he could make you happy? Would not that stifle love altogether? Would you not rather obey your first impression and, if you felt you loved him, would you not say "Yes"?''

'Time is not everything. A man who is prompt and is therefore thought to be hasty by sluggish creatures who are never half awake, may in five minutes spend more time in consideration than his critics will spend in as many weeks. I have never had the chance, and am not likely to have it. I can only say that if it were to come to me, I should try to use the whole strength of my soul. Precisely because the question would be so important, would it be necessary to employ every faculty I have in order to decide it. I do not believe in oracles which are supposed to prove their divinity by giving no reasons for their commands.'

'Ah, well, I believe in Shakespeare. His lovers fall in love at first sight.'

'No doubt they do, but to justify yourself you have to suppose that you are a Juliet and your friend a Romeo. They may, for aught I know, be examples in my favour. However, I have to lay down a rule for my own poor, limited self, and, to speak the truth, I am afraid that great men often do harm by imposing on us that which is serviceable to themselves only; or, to put it perhaps more correctly, we mistake the real nature of their processes, just as a person who is unskilled in arithmetic would mistake the processes of anybody who is very quick at it, and would be led away by them. Shakespeare is much to me, but the more he is to me, the more careful I ought to be to discover what is the true law of my own nature, more important to me after all than Shakespeare's.'

'Exactly. I know what the law of mine is. If a man were to present himself to me, I should rely on that instinct you so much despise, and I am certain that the balancing, see-saw method would be fatal.'

It would disclose a host of reasons against any conclusion, and I should never come to any.'

Clara smiled. Although this impetuosity was foreign to her, she loved it for the good which accompanied it.

'You do not mean to say you would accept or reject him at once?'

'No, certainly not. What I mean is that in a few days, perhaps in a shorter time, something within me would tell me whether we were suited to one another, although we might not have talked upon half-a-dozen subjects.'

'I think the risk tremendous.'

'But there is just as much risk the other way. You would examine your friend, catalogue him, sum up his beliefs, note his behaviour under various experimental trials, and miserably fail, after all your scientific investigation, to ascertain just the one important point whether you loved him and could live with him. Your reason was not meant for that kind of work. If a woman trusts in such matters to the faculty by which, when she wishes to settle whether she is to take this house or that, she puts the advantages of the larger back kitchen on one side and the bigger front kitchen on the other, I pity her.'

Mrs Hopgood at this moment came downstairs and asked when in the name of fortune they meant to have the tea ready.

CHAPTER IV

Frank Palmer, the gentleman whom we saw descend from the coach, was the eldest son of a wholesale and manufacturing chemist in London. He was now about five-and-twenty, and having just been admitted as a partner, he had begun, as the custom was in those days, to travel for his firm. The elder Mr Palmer was a man of refinement, something more than a Whig in politics, and an enthusiastic member of the Broad Church party, which was then becoming a power in the country. He was well-to-do, living in a fine old red-brick house at Stoke Newington, with half-a-dozen acres of ground round it, and, if Frank had been born thirty years later, he would probably have gone to Cambridge or Oxford. In those days, however, it was not the custom to send boys to the Universities unless they were intended for the law, divinity or idleness, and Frank's training, which was begun at St Paul's school, was completed there. He lived at home, going to school in the morning and returning in the evening. He was surrounded by every influence which was pure and noble. Mr Maurice and Mr Sterling were his father's guests, and hence it may be inferred that there was an altar in the house, and that the sacred flame burnt thereon. Mr Palmer almost worshipped Mr Maurice, and his admiration was not blind, for Maurice connected the Bible with what was rational in his friend. 'What! still believable: no need then to pitch it overboard: here after all is the Eternal Word!' It can be imagined how those who dared not close their eyes to the light, and yet clung to that book which had been so much to their forefathers and

themselves, rejoiced when they were able to declare that it belonged to them more than to those who misjudged them and could deny that they were heretics. The boy's education was entirely classical and athletic, and as he was quick at learning and loved his games, he took a high position amongst his school-fellows. He was not particularly reflective, but he was generous and courageous, perfectly straightforward, a fair specimen of thousands of English public-school boys. As he grew up, he somewhat disappointed his father by a lack of any real interest in the subjects in which his father was interested. He accepted willingly, and even enthusiastically, the household conclusions on religion and politics, but they were not properly his, for he accepted them merely as conclusions and without the premisses, and it was often even a little annoying to hear him express some free opinion on religious questions in a way which showed that it was not a growth but something picked up. Mr Palmer, senior, sometimes recoiled into intolerance and orthodoxy, and bewildered his son who, to use one of his own phrases, 'hardly knew where his father was.' Partly the reaction was due to the oscillation which accompanies serious and independent thought, but mainly it was caused by Mr Palmer's discontent with Frank's appropriation of a sentiment or doctrine of which he was not the lawful owner. Frank, however, was so hearty, so affectionate, and so cheerful, that it was impossible not to love him dearly.

In his visits to Fenmarket, Frank had often noticed Madge, for the 'Crown and Sceptre' was his headquarters, and Madge was well enough aware that she had been noticed. He had inquired casually who it was who lived next door, and when the waiter told him the name, and that Mr Hopgood was formerly the bank manager, Frank remembered that he had often heard his father speak of a Mr Hopgood, a clerk in a bank in London, as one of his best friends. He did not fail to ask his father about this friend, and to obtain an introduction to the widow. He had now brought it to Fenmarket, and within half an hour after he had alighted, he had presented it.

Mrs Hopgood, of course, recollected Mr Palmer perfectly, and the welcome to Frank was naturally very warm. It was delightful to connect earlier and happier days with the present, and she was proud in the possession of a relationship which had lasted so long. Clara and Madge, too, were both excited and pleased. To say nothing of Frank's appearance, of his unsnobbish, deferential behaviour which showed that he understood who they were and that the little house made no difference to him, the girls and the mother could not resist a side glance at Fenmarket and the indulgence of a secret satisfaction that it would soon hear that the son of Mr Palmer, so well known in every town round about, was on intimate terms with them.

Madge was particularly gay that evening. The presence of sympathetic people was always a powerful stimulus to her, and she was often astonished at the witty things and even the wise things she said in such company, although, when she was alone, so few things wise or witty occurred to her. Like all persons who, in conversation, do not so much express the results of previous conviction obtained in silence as the inspiration of the moment, Madge dazzled everybody by a brilliancy which would have been impossible if she had communicated that which had been slowly acquired, but what she left with those who listened to her, did not always seem, on reflection, to be so much as it appeared to be while she was talking. Still she was very

charming, and it must be confessed that sometimes her spontaneity was truer than the limitations of speech more carefully weighed.

'What makes you stay in Fenmarket, Mrs Hopgood? How I wish you would come to London!'

'I do not wish to leave it now; I have become attached to it; I have very few friends in London, and lastly, perhaps the most convincing reason, I could not afford it. Rent and living are cheaper here than in town.'

'Would you not like to live in London, Miss Hopgood?'

Clara hesitated for a few seconds.

'I am not sure--certainly not by myself. I was in London once for six months as a governess in a very pleasant family, where I saw much society; but I was glad to return to Fenmarket.'

'To the scenery round Fenmarket,' interrupted Madge; 'it is so romantic, so mountainous, so interesting in every way.'

'I was thinking of people, strange as it may appear. In London nobody really cares for anybody, at least, not in the sense in which I should use the words. Men and women in London stand for certain talents, and are valued often very highly for them, but they are valued merely as representing these talents. Now, if I had a talent, I should not be satisfied with admiration or respect because of it. No matter what admiration, or respect, or even enthusiasm I might evoke, even if I were told that my services had been immense and that life had been changed through my instrumentality, I should feel the lack of quiet, personal affection, and that, I believe, is not common in London. If I were famous, I would sacrifice all the adoration of the world for the love of a brother--if I had one--or a sister, who perhaps had never heard what it was which had made me renowned.'

'Certainly,' said Madge, laughing, 'for the love of SUCH a sister. But, Mr Palmer, I like London. I like the people, just the people, although I do not know a soul, and not a soul cares a brass farthing about me. I am not half so stupid in London as in the country. I never have a thought of my own down here. How should I? But in London there is plenty of talk about all kinds of things, and I find I too have something in me. It is true, as Clara says, that nobody is anything particular to anybody, but that to me is rather pleasant. I do not want too much of profound and eternal attachments. They are rather a burden. They involve profound and eternal attachment on my part; and I have always to be at my best; such watchfulness and such jealousy! I prefer a dressing-gown and slippers and bonds which are not so tight.'

'Madge, Madge, I wish you would sometimes save me the trouble of laboriously striving to discover what you really mean.'

Mrs Hopgood bethought herself that her daughters were talking too much to one another, as they often did, even when guests were present, and she therefore interrupted them.

'Mr Palmer, you see both town and country--which do you prefer?'

'Oh! I hardly know; the country in summer-time, perhaps, and town in the winter.'

This was a safe answer, and one which was not very original; that is to say, it expressed no very distinct belief; but there was one valid reason why he liked being in London in the winter.

'Your father, I remember, loves music. I suppose you inherit his taste, and it is impossible to hear good music in the country.'

'I am very fond of music. Have you heard "St Paul?" I was at Birmingham when it was first performed in this country. Oh! it IS lovely,' and he began humming 'Be thou faithful unto death.'

Frank did really care for music. He went wherever good music was to be had; he belonged to a choral society and was in great request amongst his father's friends at evening entertainments. He could also play the piano, so far as to be able to accompany himself thereon. He sang to himself when he was travelling, and often murmured favourite airs when people around him were talking. He had lessons from an old Italian, a little, withered, shabby creature, who was not very proud of his pupil. 'He is a talent,' said the Signor, 'and he will amuse himself; good for a ballad at a party, but a musician? no!' and like all mere 'talents' Frank failed in his songs to give them just what is of most value--just that which separates an artistic performance from the vast region of well-meaning, respectable, but uninteresting commonplace. There was a curious lack in him also of correspondence between his music and the rest of himself. As music is expression, it might be supposed that something which it serves to express would always lie behind it; but this was not the case with him, although he was so attractive and delightful in many ways. There could be no doubt that his love for Beethoven was genuine, but that which was in Frank Palmer was not that of which the sonatas and symphonies of the master are the voice. He went into raptures over the slow movement in the C minor Symphony, but no C minor slow movement was discernible in his character.

'What on earth can be found in "St Paul" which can be put to music?' said Madge. 'Fancy a chapter in the Epistle to the Romans turned into a duet!'

'Madge! Madge! I am ashamed of you,' said her mother.

'Well, mother,' said Clara, 'I am sure that some of the settings by your divinity, Handel, are absurd. "For as in Adam all die" may be true enough, and the harmonies are magnificent, but I am always tempted to laugh when I hear it.'

Frank hummed the familiar apostrophe 'Be not afraid.'

'Is that a bit of "St Paul"?' said Mrs Hopgood.

'Yes, it goes like this,' and Frank went up to the little piano and sang the song through.

'There is no fault to be found with that,' said Madge, 'so far as the coincidence of sense and melody is concerned, but I do not care much for oratorios. Better subjects can be obtained outside the Bible, and the main reason for selecting the Bible is that what is called

religious music may be provided for good people. An oratorio, to me, is never quite natural. Jewish history is not a musical subject, and, besides, you cannot have proper love songs in an oratorio, and in them music is at its best.'

Mrs Hopgood was accustomed to her daughter's extravagance, but she was, nevertheless, a little uncomfortable.

'Ah!' said Frank, who had not moved from the piano, and he struck the first two bars of 'Adelaide.'

'Oh, please,' said Madge, 'go on, go on,' but Frank could not quite finish it.

She was sitting on the little sofa, and she put her feet up, lay and listened with her eyes shut. There was a vibration in Mr Palmer's voice not perceptible during his vision of the crown of life and of fidelity to death.

'Are you going to stay over Sunday?' inquired Mrs Hopgood.

'I am not quite sure; I ought to be back on Sunday evening. My father likes me to be at home on that day.'

'Is there not a Mr Maurice who is a friend of your father?'

'Oh, yes, a great friend.'

'He is not High Church nor Low Church?'

'No, not exactly.'

'What is he, then? What does he believe?'

'Well, I can hardly say; he does not believe that anybody will be burnt in a brimstone lake for ever.'

'That is what he does not believe,' interposed Clara.

'He believes that Socrates and the great Greeks and Romans who acted up to the light that was within them were not sent to hell. I think that is glorious, don't you?'

'Yes, but that also is something he does not believe. What is there in him which is positive? What has he distinctly won from the unknown?'

'Ah, Miss Hopgood, you ought to hear him yourself; he is wonderful. I do admire him so much; I am sure you would like him.'

'If you do not go home on Saturday,' said Mrs Hopgood, 'we shall be pleased if you will have dinner with us on Sunday; we generally go for a walk in the afternoon.'

Frank hesitated, but at that moment Madge rose from the sofa. Her hair was disarranged, and she pushed its thick folds backward. It grew rather low down on her forehead and stood up a little on her temples, a mystery of shadow and dark recess. If it had been electrical with the force of a strong battery and had touched him, he

could not have been more completely paralysed, and his half-erect resolution to go back on Saturday was instantly laid flat.

'Thank you, Mrs Hopgood,' looking at Madge and meeting her eyes, 'I think it very likely I shall stay, and if I do I will most certainly accept your kind invitation.'

CHAPTER V

Sunday morning came, and Frank, being in the country, considered himself absolved from the duty of going to church, and went for a long stroll. At half-past one he presented himself at Mrs Hopgood's house.

'I have had a letter from London,' said Clara to Frank, 'telling me a most extraordinary story, and I should like to know what you think of it. A man, who was left a widower, had an only child, a lovely daughter of about fourteen years old, in whose existence his own was completely wrapped up. She was subject at times to curious fits of self-absorption or absence of mind, and while she was under their influence she resembled a somnambulist rather than a sane human being awake. Her father would not take her to a physician, for he dreaded lest he should be advised to send her away from home, and he also feared the effect which any recognition of her disorder might have upon her. He believed that in obscure and half-mental diseases like hers, it was prudent to suppress all notice of them, and that if he behaved to her as if she were perfectly well, she would stand a chance of recovery. Moreover, the child was visibly improving, and it was probable that the disturbance in her health would be speedily outgrown. One hot day he went out shopping with her, and he observed that she was tired and strange in her manner, although she was not ill, or, at least, not so ill as he had often before seen her. The few purchases they had to make at the draper's were completed, and they went out into the street. He took her hand-bag, and, in doing so, it opened and he saw to his horror a white silk pocket-handkerchief crumpled up in it, which he instantly recognised as one which had been shown him five minutes before, but he had not bought. The next moment a hand was on his shoulder. It was that of an assistant, who requested that they would both return for a few minutes. As they walked the half dozen steps back, the father's resolution was taken. "I am sixty," he thought to himself, "and she is fourteen." They went into the counting-house and he confessed that he had taken the handkerchief, but that it was taken by mistake and that he was about to restore it when he was arrested. The poor girl was now herself again, but her mind was an entire blank as to what she had done, and she could not doubt her father's statement, for it was a man's handkerchief and the bag was in his hands. The draper was inexorable, and as he had suffered much from petty thefts of late, had determined to make an example of the first offender whom he could catch. The father was accordingly prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to imprisonment. When his term had expired, his daughter, who, I am glad to say, never for an instant lost her faith in him, went away with him to a distant part of the country, where they lived under an assumed name. About ten years afterwards he died and kept his secret to the last; but he had seen the complete recovery and

happy marriage of his child. It was remarkable that it never occurred to her that she might have been guilty, but her father's confession, as already stated, was apparently so sincere that she could do nothing but believe him. You will wonder how the facts were discovered. After his death a sealed paper disclosing them was found, with the inscription, "Not to be opened during my daughter's life, and if she should have children or a husband who may survive her, it is to be burnt." She had no children, and when she died as an old woman, her husband also being dead, the seal was broken.'

'Probably,' said Madge, 'nobody except his daughter believed he was not a thief. For her sake he endured the imputation of common larceny, and was content to leave the world with only a remote chance that he would ever be justified.'

'I wonder,' said Frank, 'that he did not admit that it was his daughter who had taken the handkerchief, and excuse her on the ground of her ailment.'

'He could not do that,' replied Madge. 'The object of his life was to make as little of the ailment as possible. What would have been the effect on her if she had been made aware of its fearful consequences? Furthermore, would he have been believed? And then--awful thought, the child might have suspected him of attempting to shield himself at her expense! Do you think you could be capable of such sacrifice, Mr Palmer?'

Frank hesitated. 'It would--'

'The question is not fair, Madge,' said Mrs Hopgood, interrupting him. 'You are asking for a decision when all the materials to make up a decision are not present. It is wrong to question ourselves in cold blood as to what we should do in a great strait; for the emergency brings the insight and the power necessary to deal with it. I often fear lest, if such-and-such a trial were to befall me, I should miserably fail. So I should, furnished as I now am, but not as I should be under stress of the trial.'

'What is the use,' said Clara, 'of speculating whether we can, or cannot, do this or that? It IS now an interesting subject for discussion whether the lie was a sin.'

'No,' said Madge, 'a thousand times no.'

'Brief and decisive. Well, Mr Palmer, what do you say?'

'That is rather an awkward question. A lie is a lie.'

'But not,' broke in Madge, vehemently, 'to save anybody whom you love. Is a contemptible little two-foot measuring-tape to be applied to such an action as that?'

'The consequences of such a philosophy, though, my dear,' said Mrs Hopgood, 'are rather serious. The moment you dispense with a fixed standard, you cannot refuse permission to other people to dispense with it also.'

'Ah, yes, I know all about that, but I am not going to give up my

instinct for the sake of a rule. Do what you feel to be right, and let the rule go hang. Somebody, cleverer in logic than we are, will come along afterwards and find a higher rule which we have obeyed, and will formulate it concisely.'

'As for my poor self,' said Clara, 'I do not profess to know, without the rule, what is right and what is not. We are always trying to transcend the rule by some special pleading, and often in virtue of some fancied superiority. Generally speaking, the attempt is fatal.'

'Madge,' said Mrs Hopgood, 'your dogmatic decision may have been interesting, but it prevented the expression of Mr Palmer's opinion.'

Madge bent forward and politely inclined her head to the embarrassed Frank.

'I do not know what to say. I have never thought much about such matters. Is not what they call casuistry a science among Roman Catholics? If I were in a difficulty and could not tell right from wrong, I should turn Catholic, and come to you as my priest, Mrs Hopgood.'

'Then you would do, not what you thought right yourself, but what I thought right. The worth of the right to you is that it is your right, and that you arrive at it in your own way. Besides, you might not have time to consult anybody. Were you never compelled to settle promptly a case of this kind?'

'I remember once at school, when the mathematical master was out of the class-room, a boy named Carpenter ran up to the blackboard and wrote "Carrots" on it. That was the master's nickname, for he was red-haired. Scarcely was the word finished, when Carpenter heard him coming along the passage. There was just time partially to rub out some of the big letters, but CAR remained, and Carpenter was standing at the board when "Carrots" came in. He was an excitable man, and he knew very well what the boys called him.

"What have you been writing on the board, sir?"

"Carpenter, sir."

'The master examined the board. The upper half of the second R was plainly perceptible, but it might possibly have been a P. He turned round, looked steadily at Carpenter for a moment, and then looked at us. Carpenter was no favourite, but not a soul spoke.

"Go to your place, sir."

'Carpenter went to his place, the letters were erased and the lesson was resumed. I was greatly perplexed; I had acquiesced in a cowardly falsehood. Carrots was a great friend of mine, and I could not bear to feel that he was humbugged, so when we were outside I went up to Carpenter and told him he was an infernal sneak, and we had a desperate fight, and I licked him, and blacked both his eyes. I did not know what else to do.'

The company laughed.

'We cannot,' said Madge, 'all of us come to terms after this fashion

with our consciences, but we have had enough of these discussions on morality. Let us go out.'

They went out, and, as some relief from the straight road, they turned into a field as they came home, and walked along a footpath which crossed the broad, deep ditches by planks. They were within about fifty yards of the last and broadest ditch, more a dyke than a ditch, when Frank, turning round, saw an ox which they had not noticed, galloping after them.

'Go on, go on,' he cried, 'make for the plank.'

He discerned in an instant that unless the course of the animal could be checked it would overtake them before the bridge could be reached. The women fled, but Frank remained. He was in the habit of carrying a heavy walking-stick, the end of which he had hollowed out in his schooldays and had filled up with lead. Just as the ox came upon him, it laid its head to the ground, and Frank, springing aside, dealt it a tremendous, two-handed blow on the forehead with his knobbed weapon. The creature was dazed, it stopped and staggered, and in another instant Frank was across the bridge in safety. There was a little hysterical sobbing, but it was soon over.

'Oh, Mr Palmer,' said Mrs Hopgood, 'what presence of mind and what courage! We should have been killed without you.'

'The feat is not original, Mrs Hopgood. I saw it done by a tough little farmer last summer on a bull that was really mad. There was no ditch for him though, poor fellow, and he had to jump a hedge.'

'You did not find it difficult,' said Madge, 'to settle your problem when it came to you in the shape of a wild ox.'

'Because there was nothing to settle,' said Frank, laughing; 'there was only one thing to be done.'

'So you believed, or rather, so you saw,' said Clara. 'I should have seen half-a-dozen things at once--that is to say, nothing.'

'And I,' said Madge, 'should have settled it the wrong way: I am sure I should, even if I had been a man. I should have bolted.'

Frank stayed to tea, and the evening was musical. He left about ten, but just as the door had shut he remembered he had forgotten his stick. He gave a gentle rap and Madge appeared. She gave him his stick.

'Good-bye again. Thanks for my life.'

Frank cursed himself that he could not find the proper word. He knew there was something which might be said and ought to be said, but he could not say it. Madge held out her hand to him, he raised it to his lips and kissed it, and then, astonished at his boldness, he instantly retreated. He went to the 'Crown and Sceptre' and was soon in bed, but not to sleep. Strange, that the moment we lie down in the dark, images, which were half obscured, should become so intensely luminous! Madge hovered before Frank with almost tangible distinctness, and he felt his fingers moving in her heavy, voluptuous tresses. Her picture at last became almost painful to him and shamed

him, so that he turned over from side to side to avoid it. He had never been thrown into the society of women of his own age, for he had no sister, and a fire was kindled within him which burnt with a heat all the greater because his life had been so pure. At last he fell asleep and did not wake till late in the morning. He had just time to eat his breakfast, pay one more business visit in the town, and catch the coach due at eleven o'clock from Lincoln to London. As the horses were being changed, he walked as near as he dared venture to the windows of the cottage next door, but he could see nobody. When the coach, however, began to move, he turned round and looked behind him, and a hand was waved to him. He took off his hat, and in five minutes he was clear of the town. It was in sight a long way, but when, at last, it disappeared, a cloud of wretchedness swept over him as the vapour sweeps up from the sea. What was she doing? talking to other people, existing for others, laughing with others! There were miles between himself and Fenmarket. Life! what was life? A few moments of living and long, dreary gaps between. All this, however, is a vain attempt to delineate what was shapeless. It was an intolerable, unvanquishable oppression. This was Love; this was the blessing which the god with the ruddy wings had bestowed on him. It was a relief to him when the coach rattled through Islington, and in a few minutes had landed him at the 'Angel.'

CHAPTER VI

There was to be a grand entertainment in the assembly room of the 'Crown and Sceptre' in aid of the County Hospital. Mrs Martin, widow of one of the late partners in the bank, lived in a large house near Fenmarket, and still had an interest in the business. She was distinctly above anybody who lived in the town, and she knew how to show her superiority by venturing sometimes to do what her urban neighbours could not possibly do. She had been known to carry through the street a quart bottle of horse physic although it was wrapped up in nothing but brown paper. On her way she met the brewer's wife, who was more aggrieved than she was when Mrs Martin's carriage swept past her in the dusty, narrow lane which led to the Hall. Mrs Martin could also afford to recognise in a measure the claims of education and talent. A gentleman came from London to lecture in the town, and showed astonished Fenmarket an orrery and a magic lantern with dissolving views of the Holy Land. The exhibition had been provided in order to extinguish a debt incurred in repairing the church, but the rector's wife, and the brewer's wife, after consultation, decided that they must leave the lecturer to return to his inn. Mrs Martin, however, invited him to supper. Of course she knew Mr Hopgood well, and knew that he was no ordinary man. She knew also something of Mrs Hopgood and the daughters, and that they were no ordinary women. She had been heard to say that they were ladies, and that Mr Hopgood was a gentleman; and she kept up a distant kind of intimacy with them, always nodded to them whenever she met them, and every now and then sent them grapes and flowers. She had observed once or twice to Mrs Tubbs that Mr Hopgood was a remarkable person, who was quite scientific and therefore did not associate with the rest of the Fenmarket folk; and Mrs Tubbs was much annoyed, particularly by a slight emphasis which she thought she detected in the 'therefore,' for Mr Tubbs had told her that one of the smaller

London brewers, who had only about fifty public-houses, had refused to meet at dinner a learned French chemist who had written books. Mrs Martin could not make friends with the Hopgoods, nor enter the cottage. It would have been a transgression of that infinitely fine and tortuous line whose inexplicable convolutions mark off what is forbidden to a society lady. Clearly, however, the Hopgoods could be requested to co-operate at the 'Crown and Sceptre;' in fact, it would be impolitic not to put some of the townsfolk on the list of patrons. So it came about that Mrs Hopgood was included, and that she was made responsible for the provision of one song and one recitation. For the song it was settled that Frank Palmer should be asked, as he would be in Fenmarket. Usually he came but once every half year, but he had not been able, so he said, to finish all his work the last time. The recitation Madge undertook.

The evening arrived, the room was crowded and a dozen private carriages stood in the 'Crown and Sceptre' courtyard. Frank called for the Hopgoods. Mrs Hopgood and Clara sat with presentation tickets in the second row, amongst the fashionable folk; Frank and Madge were upon the platform. Frank was loudly applauded in 'Il Mio Tesoro,' but the loudest applause of the evening was reserved for Madge, who declaimed Byron's 'Destruction of Sennacherib' with much energy. She certainly looked very charming in her red gown, harmonising with her black hair. The men in the audience were vociferous for something more, and would not be contented until she again came forward. The truth is, that the wily young woman had prepared herself beforehand for possibilities, but she artfully concealed her preparation. Looking on the ground and hesitating, she suddenly raised her head as if she had just remembered something, and then repeated Sir Henry Wotton's 'Happy Life.' She was again greeted with cheers, subdued so as to be in accordance with the character of the poem, but none the less sincere, and in the midst of them she gracefully bowed and retired. Mrs Martin complimented her warmly at the end of the performance, and inwardly debated whether Madge could be asked to enliven one of the parties at the Hall, and how it could, at the same time, be made clear to the guests that she and her mother, who must come with her, were not even acquaintances, properly so called, but were patronised as persons of merit living in the town which the Hall protected. Mrs Martin was obliged to be very careful. She certainly was on the list at the Lord Lieutenant's, but she was in the outer ring, and she was not asked to those small and select little dinners which were given to Sir Egerton, the Dean of Peterborough, Lord Francis, and his brother, the county member. She decided, however, that she could make perfectly plain the conditions upon which the Hopgoods would be present, and the next day she sent Madge a little note asking her if she would 'assist in some festivities' at the Hall in about two months' time, which were to be given in celebration of the twenty-first birthday of Mrs Martin's third son. The scene from the 'Tempest,' where Ferdinand and Miranda are discovered playing chess, was suggested, and it was proposed that Madge should be Miranda, and Mr Palmer Ferdinand. Mrs Martin concluded with a hope that Mrs Hopgood and her eldest daughter would 'witness the performance.'

Frank joyously consented, for amateur theatricals had always attracted him, and in a few short weeks he was again at Fenmarket. He was obliged to be there for three or four days before the entertainment, in order to attend the rehearsals, which Mrs Martin had put under the control of a professional gentleman from London,

and Madge and he were consequently compelled to make frequent journeys to the Hall.

At last the eventful night arrived, and a carriage was hired next door to take the party. They drove up to the grand entrance and were met by a footman, who directed Madge and Frank to their dressing-rooms, and escorted Mrs Hopgood and Clara to their places in the theatre. They had gone early in order to accommodate Frank and Madge, and they found themselves alone. They were surprised that there was nobody to welcome them, and a little more surprised when they found that the places allotted to them were rather in the rear. Presently two or three fiddlers were seen, who began to tune their instruments. Then some Fenmarket folk and some of the well-to-do tenants on the estate made their appearance, and took seats on either side of Mrs Hopgood and Clara. Quite at the back were the servants. At five minutes to eight the band struck up the overture to 'Zampa,' and in the midst of it in sailed Mrs Martin and a score or two of fashionably-dressed people, male and female. The curtain ascended and Prospero's cell was seen. Alonso and his companions were properly grouped, and Prospero began, -

'Behold, Sir King,
The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero.'

The audience applauded him vigorously when he came to the end of his speech, but there was an instantaneous cry of 'hush!' when Prospero disclosed the lovers. It was really very pretty. Miranda wore a loose, simple, white robe, and her wonderful hair was partly twisted into a knot, and partly strayed down to her waist. The dialogue between the two was spoken with much dramatic feeling, and when Ferdinand came to the lines -

'Sir, she is mortal,
But by immortal Providence she's mine,'

old Boston, a worthy and wealthy farmer, who sat next to Mrs Hopgood, cried out 'hear, hear!' but was instantly suppressed.

He put his head down behind the people in front of him, rubbed his knees, grinned, and then turned to Mrs Hopgood, whom he knew, and whispered, with his hand to his mouth, -

'And a precious lucky chap he is.'

Mrs Hopgood watched intently, and when Gonzalo invoked the gods to drop a blessed crown on the couple, and the applause was renewed, and Boston again cried 'hear, hear!' without fear of check, she did not applaud, for something told her that behind this stage show a drama was being played of far more serious importance.

The curtain fell, but there were loud calls for the performers. It rose, and they presented themselves, Alonso still holding the hands of the happy pair. The cheering now was vociferous, more

particularly when a wreath was flung at the feet of the young princess, and Ferdinand, stooping, placed it on her head.

Again the curtain fell, the band struck up some dance music and the audience were treated to 'something light,' and roared with laughter at a pretty chambermaid at an inn who captivated and bamboozled a young booby who was staying there, pitched him overboard; 'wondered what he meant;' sang an audacious song recounting her many exploits, and finished with a pas-seul.

The performers and their friends were invited to a sumptuous supper, and the Fenmarket folk were not at home until half-past two in the morning. On their way back, Clara broke out against the juxtaposition of Shakespeare and such vulgarity.

'Much better,' she said, 'to have left the Shakespeare out altogether. The lesson of the sequence is that each is good in its way, a perfectly hateful doctrine to me.'

Frank and Madge were, however, in the best of humours, especially Frank, who had taken a glass of wine beyond his customary very temperate allowance.

'But, Miss Hopgood, Mrs Martin had to suit all tastes; we must not be too severe upon her.'

There was something in this remark most irritating to Clara; the word 'tastes,' for example, as if the difference between Miranda and the chambermaid were a matter of 'taste.' She was annoyed too with Frank's easy, cheery tones for she felt deeply what she said, and his mitigation and smiling latitudinarianism were more exasperating than direct opposition.

'I am sure,' continued Frank, 'that if we were to take the votes of the audience, Miranda would be the queen of the evening;' and he put the crown which he had brought away with him on her head again.

Clara was silent. In a few moments they were at the door of their house. It had begun to rain, and Madge, stepping out of the carriage in a hurry, threw a shawl over her head, forgetting the wreath. It fell into the gutter and was splashed with mud. Frank picked it up, wiped it as well as he could with his pocket-handkerchief, took it into the parlour and laid it on a chair.

CHAPTER VII

The next morning it still rained, a cold rain from the north-east, a very disagreeable type of weather on the Fenmarket flats. Madge was not awake until late, and when she caught sight of the grey sky and saw her finery tumbled on the floor--no further use for it in any shape save as rags--and the dirty crown, which she had brought upstairs, lying on the heap, the leaves already fading, she felt depressed and miserable. The breakfast was dull, and for the most part all three were silent. Mrs Hopgood and Clara went away to begin their housework, leaving Madge alone.

'Madge,' cried Mrs Hopgood, 'what am I to do with this thing? It is of no use to preserve it; it is dead and covered with dirt.'

'Throw it down here.'

She took it and rammed it into the fire. At that moment she saw Frank pass. He was evidently about to knock, but she ran to the door and opened it.

'I did not wish to keep you waiting in the wet.'

'I am just off but I could not help calling to see how you are. What! burning your laurels, the testimony to your triumph?'

'Triumph! rather transitory; finishes in smoke,' and she pushed two or three of the unburnt leaves amongst the ashes and covered them over. He stooped down, picked up a leaf, smoothed it between his fingers, and then raised his eyes. They met hers at that instant, as she lifted them and looked in his face. They were near one another, and his hands strayed towards hers till they touched. She did not withdraw; he clasped the hand, she not resisting; in another moment his arms were round her, his face was on hers, and he was swept into self-forgetfulness. Suddenly the horn of the coach about to start awoke him, and he murmured the line from one of his speeches of the night before -

'But by immortal Providence she's mine.'

She released herself a trifle, held her head back as if she desired to survey him apart from her, so that the ecstasy of union might be renewed, and then fell on his neck.

The horn once more sounded, she let him out silently, and he was off. Mrs Hopgood and Clara presently came downstairs.

'Mr Palmer came in to bid you good-bye, but he heard the coach and was obliged to rush away.'

'What a pity,' said Mrs Hopgood, 'that you did not call us.'

'I thought he would be able to stay longer.'

The lines which followed Frank's quotation came into her head, -

'Sweet lord, you play me false.'

'No, my dearest love,
I would not for the world.'

'An omen,' she said to herself; "'he would not for the world.'"

She was in the best of spirits all day long. When the housework was over and they were quiet together, she said, -

'Now, my dear mother and sister, I want to know how the performance

pleased you.'

'It was as good as it could be,' replied her mother, 'but I cannot think why all plays should turn upon lovemaking. I wonder whether the time will ever come when we shall care for a play in which there is no courtship.'

'What a horrible heresy, mother,' said Madge.

'It may be so; it may be that I am growing old, but it seems astonishing to me sometimes that the world does not grow a little weary of endless variations on the same theme.'

'Never,' said Madge, 'as long as it does not weary of the thing itself, and it is not likely to do that. Fancy a young man and a young woman stopping short and exclaiming, "This is just what every son of Adam and daughter of Eve has gone through before; why should we proceed?" Besides, it is the one emotion common to the whole world; we can all comprehend it. Once more, it reveals character. In Hamlet and Othello, for example, what is interesting is not solely the bare love. The natures of Hamlet and Othello are brought to light through it as they would not have been through any other stimulus. I am sure that no ordinary woman ever shows what she really is, except when she is in love. Can you tell what she is from what she calls her religion, or from her friends, or even from her husband?'

'Would it not be equally just to say women are more alike in love than in anything else? Mind, I do not say alike, but more alike. Is it not the passion which levels us all?'

'Oh, mother, mother! did one ever hear such dreadful blasphemy? That the loves, for example, of two such cultivated, exquisite creatures as Clara and myself would be nothing different from those of the barmaids next door?'

'Well, at anyrate, I do not want to see MY children in love to understand what they are--to me at least.'

'Then, if you comprehend us so completely--and let us have no more philosophy--just tell me, should I make a good actress? Oh! to be able to sway a thousand human beings into tears or laughter! It must be divine.'

'No, I do not think you would,' replied Clara.

'Why not, miss? YOUR opinion, mind, was not asked. Did I not act to perfection last night?'

'Yes.'

'Then why are you so decisive?'

'Try a different part some day. I may be mistaken.'

'You are very oracular.'

She turned to the piano, played a few chords, closed the instrument, swung herself round on the music stool, and said she should go for a

walk.

CHAPTER VIII

It was Mr Palmer's design to send Frank abroad as soon as he understood the home trade. It was thought it would be an advantage to him to learn something of foreign manufacturing processes. Frank had gladly agreed to go, but he was now rather in the mood for delay. Mr Palmer conjectured a reason for it, and the conjecture was confirmed when, after two or three more visits to Fenmarket, perfectly causeless, so far as business was concerned, Frank asked for the paternal sanction to his engagement with Madge. Consent was willingly given, for Mr Palmer knew the family well; letters passed between him and Mrs Hopgood, and it was arranged that Frank's visit to Germany should be postponed till the summer. He was now frequently at Fenmarket as Madge's accepted suitor, and, as the spring advanced, their evenings were mostly spent by themselves out of doors. One afternoon they went for a long walk, and on their return they rested by a stile. Those were the days when Tennyson was beginning to stir the hearts of the young people in England, and the two little green volumes had just become a treasure in the Hopgood household. Mr Palmer, senior, knew them well, and Frank, hearing his father speak so enthusiastically about them, thought Madge would like them, and had presented them to her. He had heard one or two read aloud at home, and had looked at one or two himself, but had gone no further. Madge, her mother, and her sister had read and re-read them.

'Oh,' said Madge, 'for that Vale in Ida. Here in these fens how I long for something that is not level! Oh, for the roar of -

"The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea."

Go on with it, Frank.'

'I cannot.'

'But you know OEnone?'

'I cannot say I do. I began it--'

'Frank, how could you begin it and lay it down unfinished? Besides, those lines are some of the first; you MUST remember -

"Behind the valley topmost Gargarus
Stands up and takes the morning."

'No, I do not recollect, but I will learn them; learn them for your sake.'

'I do not want you to learn them for my sake.'

'But I shall.'

She had taken off her hat and his hand strayed to her neck. Her head fell on his shoulder and she had forgotten his ignorance of OEnone. Presently she awoke from her delicious trance and they moved homewards in silence. Frank was a little uneasy.

'I do greatly admire Tennyson,' he said.

'What do you admire? You have hardly looked at him.'

'I saw a very good review of him. I will look that review up, by the way, before I come down again. Mr Maurice was talking about it.'

Madge had a desire to say something, but she did not know what to say, a burden lay upon her chest. It was that weight which presses there when we are alone with those with whom we are not strangers, but with whom we are not completely at home, and she actually found herself impatient and half-desirous of solitude. This must be criminal or disease, she thought to herself, and she forcibly recalled Frank's virtues. She was so far successful that when they parted and he kissed her, she was more than usually caressing, and her ardent embrace, at least for the moment, relieved that unpleasant sensation in the region of the heart. When he had gone she reasoned with herself. What a miserable counterfeit of love, she argued, is mere intellectual sympathy, a sympathy based on books! What did Miranda know about Ferdinand's 'views' on this or that subject? Love is something independent of 'views.' It is an attraction which has always been held to be inexplicable, but whatever it may be it is not 'views.' She was becoming a little weary, she thought, of what was called 'culture.' These creatures whom we know through Shakespeare and Goethe are ghostly. What have we to do with them? It is idle work to read or even to talk fine things about them. It ends in nothing. What we really have to go through and that which goes through it are interesting, but not circumstances and character impossible to us. When Frank spoke of his business, which he understood, he was wise, and some observations which he made the other day, on the management of his workpeople, would have been thought original if they had been printed. The true artist knows that his hero must be a character shaping events and shaped by them, and not a babbler about literature. Frank, also, was so susceptible. He liked to hear her read to him, and her enthusiasm would soon be his. Moreover, how gifted he was, unconsciously, with all that makes a man admirable, with courage, with perfect unselfishness! How handsome he was, and then his passion for her! She had read something of passion, but she never knew till now what the white intensity of its flame in a man could be. She was committed, too, happily committed; it was an engagement.

Thus, whenever doubt obtruded itself, she poured a self-raised tide over it and concealed it. Alas! it could not be washed away; it was a little sharp rock based beneath the ocean's depths, and when the water ran low its dark point reappeared. She was more successful, however, than many women would have been, for, although her interest in ideas was deep, there was fire in her blood, and Frank's arm around her made the world well nigh disappear; her surrender was entire, and if Sinai had thundered in her ears she would not have

heard. She was destitute of that power, which her sister possessed, of surveying herself from a distance. On the contrary, her emotion enveloped her, and the safeguard of reflection on it was impossible to her.

As to Frank, no doubt ever approached him. He was intoxicated, and beside himself. He had been brought up in a clean household, knowing nothing of the vice by which so many young men are overcome, and woman hitherto had been a mystery to him. Suddenly he found himself the possessor of a beautiful creature, whose lips it was lawful to touch and whose heartbeats he could feel as he pressed her to his breast. It was permitted him to be alone with her, to sit on the floor and rest his head on her knees, and he had ventured to capture one of her slippers and carry it off to London, where he kept it locked up amongst his treasures. If he had been drawn over Fenmarket sluice in a winter flood he would not have been more incapable of resistance.

Every now and then Clara thought she discerned in Madge that she was not entirely content, but the cloud-shadows swept past so rapidly and were followed by such dazzling sunshine that she was perplexed and hoped that her sister's occasional moodiness might be due to parting and absence, or the anticipation of them. She never ventured to say anything about Frank to Madge, for there was something in her which forbade all approach from that side. Once when he had shown his ignorance of what was so familiar to the Hopgoods, and Clara had expected some sign of dissatisfaction from her sister, she appeared ostentatiously to champion him against anticipated criticism. Clara interpreted the warning and was silent, but, after she had left the room with her mother in order that the lovers might be alone, she went upstairs and wept many tears. Ah! it is a sad experience when the nearest and dearest suspects that we are aware of secret disapproval, knows that it is justifiable, throws up a rampart and becomes defensively belligerent. From that moment all confidence is at an end. Without a word, perhaps, the love and friendship of years disappear, and in the place of two human beings transparent to each other, there are two who are opaque and indifferent. Bitter, bitter! If the cause of separation were definite disagreement upon conduct or belief, we could pluck up courage, approach and come to an understanding, but it is impossible to bring to speech anything which is so close to the heart, and there is, therefore, nothing left for us but to submit and be dumb.

CHAPTER IX

It was now far into June, and Madge and Frank extended their walks and returned later. He had come down to spend his last Sunday with the Hopgoods before starting with his father for Germany, and on the Monday they were to leave London.

Wordsworth was one of the divinities at Stoke Newington, and just before Frank visited Fenmarket that week, he had heard the *Intimations of Immortality* read with great fervour. Thinking that Madge would be pleased with him if she found that he knew something about that famous Ode, and being really smitten with some of the

passages in it, he learnt it, and just as they were about to turn homewards one sultry evening he suddenly began to repeat it, and declaimed it to the end with much rhetorical power.

'Bravo!' said Madge, 'but, of all Wordsworth's poems, that is the one for which I believe I care the least.'

Frank's countenance fell.

'Oh, me! I thought it was just what would suit you.'

'No, not particularly. There are some noble lines in it; for example

-

"And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!"

But the very title--Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood--is unmeaning to me, and as for the verse which is in everybody's mouth -

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;"

and still worse the vision of "that immortal sea," and of the children who "sport upon the shore," they convey nothing whatever to me. I find though they are much admired by the clergy of the better sort, and by certain religiously-disposed people, to whom thinking is distasteful or impossible. Because they cannot definitely believe, they fling themselves with all the more fervour upon these cloudy Wordsworthian phrases, and imagine they see something solid in the coloured fog.'

It was now growing dark and a few heavy drops of rain began to fall, but in a minute or two they ceased. Frank, contrary to his usual wont, was silent. There was something undiscovered in Madge, a region which he had not visited and perhaps could not enter. She discerned in an instant what she had done, and in an instant repented. He had taken so much pains with a long piece of poetry for her sake: was not that better than agreement in a set of propositions? Scores of persons might think as she thought about the ode, who would not spend a moment in doing anything to gratify her. It was delightful also to reflect that Frank imagined she would sympathise with anything written in that temper. She recalled what she herself had said when somebody gave Clara a copy in 'Parian' of a Greek statue, a thing coarse in outline and vulgar. Clara was about to put it in a cupboard in the attic, but Madge had pleaded so pathetically that the donor had in a measure divined what her sister loved, and had done her best, although she had made a mistake, that finally the statue was placed on the bedroom mantelpiece. Madge's heart overflowed, and Frank had never attracted her so powerfully as at that moment. She took his hand softly in hers.

'Frank,' she murmured, as she bent her head towards him, 'it is really a lovely poem.'

Suddenly there was a flash of forked lightning at some distance, followed in a few seconds by a roll of thunder increasing in intensity until the last reverberation seemed to shake the ground. They took refuge in a little barn and sat down. Madge, who was timid and excited in a thunderstorm, closed her eyes to shield herself from the glare.

The tumult in the heavens lasted for nearly two hours and, when it was over, Madge and Frank walked homewards without speaking a word for a good part of the way.

'I cannot, cannot go to-morrow,' he suddenly cried, as they neared the town.

'You SHALL go,' she replied calmly.

'But, Madge, think of me in Germany, think what my dreams and thoughts will be--you here--hundreds of miles between us.'

She had never seen him so shaken with terror.

'You SHALL go; not another word.'

'I must say something--what can I say? My God, my God, have mercy on me!'

'Mercy! mercy!' she repeated, half unconsciously, and then rousing herself, exclaimed, 'You shall not say it; I will not hear; now, good-bye.'

They had come to the door; he went inside; she took his face between her hands, left one kiss on his forehead, led him back to the doorway and he heard the bolts drawn. When he recovered himself he went to the 'Crown and Sceptre' and tried to write a letter to her, but the words looked hateful, horrible on the paper, and they were not the words he wanted. He dared not go near the house the next morning, but as he passed it on the coach he looked at the windows. Nobody was to be seen, and that night he left England.

'Did you hear,' said Clara to her mother at breakfast, 'that the lightning struck one of the elms in the avenue at Mrs Martin's yesterday evening and splintered it to the ground?'

CHAPTER X

In a few days Madge received the following letter:-

'FRANKFORT, O. M.,
HOTEL WAIDENBUSCH.

'My dearest Madge,--I do not know how to write to you. I have begun a dozen letters but I cannot bring myself to speak of what lies before me, hiding the whole world from me. Forgiveness! how is any forgiveness possible? But Madge, my dearest Madge, remember that my

love is intenser than ever. What has happened has bound you closer to me. I IMPLORÉ you to let me come back. I will find a thousand excuses for returning, and we will marry. We had vowed marriage to each other and why should not our vows be fulfilled? Marriage, marriage AT ONCE. You will not, you CANNOT, no, you CANNOT, you must see you cannot refuse. My father wishes to make this town his headquarters for ten days. Write by return for mercy's sake.--Your ever devoted

'FRANK.'

The reply came only a day late.

'My dear Frank,--Forgiveness! Who is to be forgiven? Not you. You believed you loved me, but I doubted my love, and I know now that no true love for you exists. We must part, and part forever. Whatever wrong may have been done, marriage to avoid disgrace would be a wrong to both of us infinitely greater. I owe you an expiation; your release is all I can offer, and it is insufficient. I can only plead that I was deaf and blind. By some miracle, I cannot tell how, my ears and eyes are opened, and I hear and see. It is not the first time in my life that the truth has been revealed to me suddenly, supernaturally, I may say, as if in a vision, and I know the revelation is authentic. There must be no wavering, no half-measures, and I absolutely forbid another letter from you. If one arrives I must, for the sake of my own peace and resolution, refuse to read it. You have simply to announce to your father that the engagement is at an end, and give no reasons.--Your faithful friend

'MADGE HOPGOOD.'

Another letter did come, but Madge was true to her word, and it was returned unopened.

For a long time Frank was almost incapable of reflection. He dwelt on an event which might happen, but which he dared not name; and if it should happen! Pictures of his father, his home his father's friends, Fenmarket, the Hopgood household, passed before him with such wild rapidity and intermingled complexity that it seemed as if the reins had dropped out of his hands and he was being hurried away to madness.

He resisted with all his might this dreadful sweep of the imagination, tried to bring himself back into sanity and to devise schemes by which, although he was prohibited from writing to Madge, he might obtain news of her. Her injunction might not be final. There was but one hope for him, one possibility of extrication, one necessity--their marriage. It MUST be. He dared not think of what might be the consequences if they did not marry.

Hitherto Madge had given no explanation to her mother or sister of the rupture, but one morning--nearly two months had now passed--Clara did not appear at breakfast.

'Clara is not here,' said Mrs Hopgood; 'she was very tired last night, perhaps it is better not to disturb her.'

'Oh, no! please let her alone. I will see if she still sleeps.'

Madge went upstairs, opened her sister's door noiselessly, saw that she was not awake, and returned. When breakfast was over she rose, and after walking up and down the room once or twice, seated herself in the armchair by her mother's side. Her mother drew herself a little nearer, and took Madge's hand gently in her own.

'Madge, my child, have you nothing to say to your mother?'

'Nothing.'

'Cannot you tell me why Frank and you have parted? Do you not think I ought to know something about such an event in the life of one so close to me?'

'I broke off the engagement: we were not suited to one another.'

'I thought as much; I honour you; a thousand times better that you should separate now than find out your mistake afterwards when it is irrevocable. Thank God, He has given you such courage! But you must have suffered--I know you must;' and she tenderly kissed her daughter.

'Oh, mother! mother!' cried Madge, 'what is the worst--at least to--you--the worst that can happen to a woman?'

Mrs Hopgood did not speak; something presented itself which she refused to recognise, but she shuddered. Before she could recover herself Madge broke out again, -

'It has happened to me; mother, your daughter has wrecked your peace for ever!'

'And he has abandoned you?'

'No, no; I told you it was I who left him.'

It was Mrs Hopgood's custom, when any evil news was suddenly communicated to her, to withdraw at once if possible to her own room. She detached herself from Madge, rose, and, without a word, went upstairs and locked her door. The struggle was terrible. So much thought, so much care, such an education, such noble qualities, and they had not accomplished what ordinary ignorant Fenmarket mothers and daughters were able to achieve! This fine life, then, was a failure, and a perfect example of literary and artistic training had gone the way of the common wenches whose affiliation cases figured in the county newspaper. She was shaken and bewildered. She was neither orthodox nor secular. She was too strong to be afraid that what she disbelieved could be true, and yet a fatal weakness had been disclosed in what had been set up as its substitute. She could not treat her child as a sinner who was to be tortured into something like madness by immitigable punishment, but, on the other hand, she felt that this sorrow was unlike other sorrows and that it could never be healed. For some time she was powerless, blown this way and that way by contradictory storms, and unable to determine herself to any point whatever. She was not, however, new to the tempest. She had lived and had survived when she thought she must have gone down.

She had learned the wisdom which the passage through desperate straits can bring. At last she prayed and in a few minutes a message was whispered to her. She went into the breakfast-room and seated herself again by Madge. Neither uttered a word, but Madge fell down before her, and, with a great cry, buried her face in her mother's lap. She remained kneeling for some time waiting for a rebuke, but none came. Presently she felt smoothing hands on her head and the soft impress of lips. So was she judged.

CHAPTER XI

It was settled that they should leave Fenmarket. Their departure caused but little surprise. They had scarcely any friends, and it was always conjectured that people so peculiar would ultimately find their way to London. They were particularly desirous to conceal their movements, and therefore determined to warehouse their furniture in town, to take furnished apartments there for three months, and then to move elsewhere. Any letters which might arrive at Fenmarket for them during these three months would be sent to them at their new address; nothing probably would come afterwards, and as nobody in Fenmarket would care to take any trouble about them, their trace would become obliterated. They found some rooms near Myddelton Square, Pentonville, not a particularly cheerful place, but they wished to avoid a more distant suburb, and Pentonville was cheap. Fortunately for them they had no difficulty whatever in getting rid of the Fenmarket house for the remainder of their term.

For a little while London diverted them after a fashion, but the absence of household cares told upon them. They had nothing to do but to read and to take dismal walks through Islington and Barnsbury, and the gloom of the outlook thickened as the days became shorter and the smoke began to darken the air. Madge was naturally more oppressed than the others, not only by reason of her temperament, but because she was the author of the trouble which had befallen them. Her mother and Clara did everything to sustain and to cheer her. They possessed the rare virtue of continuous tenderness. The love, which with many is an inspiration, was with them their own selves, from which they could not be separated; a harsh word could not therefore escape from them. It was as impossible as that there should be any failure in the pressure with which the rocks press towards the earth's centre. Madge at times was very far gone in melancholy. How different this thing looked when it was close at hand; when she personally was to be the victim! She had read about it in history, the surface of which it seemed scarcely to ripple; it had been turned to music in some of her favourite poems and had lent a charm to innumerable mythologies, but the actual fact was nothing like the poetry or mythology, and threatened to ruin her own history altogether. Nor would it be her own history solely, but more or less that of her mother and sister.

Had she believed in the common creed, her attention would have been concentrated on the salvation of her own soul; she would have found her Redeemer and would have been comparatively at peace; she would have acknowledged herself convicted of infinite sin, and hell would have been opened before her, but above the sin and the hell she would

have seen the distinct image of the Mediator abolishing both. Popular theology makes personal salvation of such immense importance that, in comparison therewith, we lose sight of the consequences to others of our misdeeds. The sense of cruel injustice to those who loved her remained with Madge perpetually.

To obtain relief she often went out of London for the day; sometimes her mother and sister went with her; sometimes she insisted on going alone. One autumn morning, she found herself at Letherhead, the longest trip she had undertaken, for there were scarcely any railways then. She wandered about till she discovered a footpath which took her to a mill-pond, which spread itself out into a little lake. It was fed by springs which burst up through the ground. She watched at one particular point, and saw the water boil up with such force that it cleared a space of a dozen yards in diameter from every weed, and formed a transparent pool just tinted with that pale azure which is peculiar to the living fountains which break out from the bottom of the chalk. She was fascinated for a moment by the spectacle, and reflected upon it, but she passed on. In about three-quarters of an hour she found herself near a church, larger than an ordinary village church, and, as she was tired, and the gate of the church porch was open, she entered and sat down. The sun streamed in upon her, and some sheep which had strayed into the churchyard from the adjoining open field came almost close to her, unalarmed, and looked in her face. The quiet was complete, and the air so still, that a yellow leaf dropping here and there from the churchyard elms--just beginning to turn--fell quiveringly in a straight path to the earth. Sick at heart and despairing, she could not help being touched, and she thought to herself how strange the world is--so transcendent both in glory and horror; a world capable of such scenes as those before her, and a world in which such suffering as hers could be; a world infinite both ways. The porch gate was open because the organist was about to practise, and in another instant she was listening to the Kyrie from Beethoven's Mass in C. She knew it; Frank had tried to give her some notion of it on the piano, and since she had been in London she had heard it at St Mary's, Moorfields. She broke down and wept, but there was something new in her sorrow, and it seemed as if a certain Pity overshadowed her.

She had barely recovered herself when she saw a woman, apparently about fifty, coming towards her with a wicker basket on her arm. She sat down beside Madge, put her basket on the ground, and wiped her face with her apron.

'Marnin' miss! its rayther hot walkin', isn't it? I've come all the way from Darkin, and I'm goin' to Great Oakhurst. That's a longish step there and back again; not that this is the nearest way, but I don't like climbing them hills, and then when I get to Letherhead I shall have a lift in a cart.'

Madge felt bound to say something as the sunburnt face looked kind and motherly.

'I suppose you live at Great Oakhurst?'

'Yes. I do: my husband, God bless him! he was a kind of foreman at The Towers, and when he died I was left alone and didn't know what to be at, as both my daughters were out and one married; so I took the general shop at Great Oakhurst, as Longwood used to have, but it

don't pay for I ain't used to it, and the house is too big for me,
and there isn't nobody proper to mind it when I goes over to Darkin
for anything.'

'Are you goi

Livros Grátis

(<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

[Baixar livros de Administração](#)

[Baixar livros de Agronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Arquitetura](#)

[Baixar livros de Artes](#)

[Baixar livros de Astronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Biologia Geral](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência Política](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde](#)

[Baixar livros de Comunicação](#)

[Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE](#)

[Baixar livros de Defesa civil](#)

[Baixar livros de Direito](#)

[Baixar livros de Direitos humanos](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial](#)

[Baixar livros de Farmácia](#)

[Baixar livros de Filosofia](#)

[Baixar livros de Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Geociências](#)

[Baixar livros de Geografia](#)

[Baixar livros de História](#)

[Baixar livros de Línguas](#)

[Baixar livros de Literatura](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil](#)
[Baixar livros de Matemática](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária](#)
[Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente](#)
[Baixar livros de Meteorologia](#)
[Baixar Monografias e TCC](#)
[Baixar livros Multidisciplinar](#)
[Baixar livros de Música](#)
[Baixar livros de Psicologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Química](#)
[Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva](#)
[Baixar livros de Serviço Social](#)
[Baixar livros de Sociologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Teologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Trabalho](#)
[Baixar livros de Turismo](#)