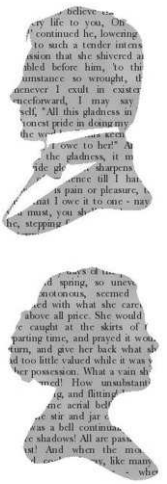
North And South

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By

Elizabeth Gaskell

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About Author:



Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810 – 1865), often referred to simply as Mrs. Gaskell, was an English novelist and short story writer during the Victorian era. She is perhaps best known for her biography of Charlotte Brontë. Her novels offer a detailed portrait of the lives of many strata of society, including the very poor, and as such are of interest to social historians as well as lovers of literature.

Other Books of Gaskell:

- *Curious, If True: Strange Tales* (1859)
- *Wives and Daughters* (1864)
- *Cranford* (1851)
- *A Dark Night's Work* (1863)
- *My Lady Ludlow* (1858)
- *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863)
- *Mary Barton* (1848)

Chapter 1
Haste to the Wedding

'Wooed and married and a'.'
'Edith!' said Margaret, gently, 'Edith!'

But, as Margaret half suspected, Edith had fallen asleep.

She lay curled up on the sofa in the back drawing-room in Harley Street, looking very lovely in her white muslin and blue ribbons. If Titania had ever been dressed in white muslin and blue ribbons, and had fallen asleep on a crimson damask sofa in a back drawing-room, Edith might have been taken for her. Margaret was struck afresh by her cousin's beauty. They had grown up together from childhood, and all along Edith had been remarked upon by every one, except Margaret, for her prettiness; but Margaret had never thought about it until the last few days, when the prospect of soon losing her companion seemed to give force to every sweet quality and charm which Edith possessed. They had been talking about wedding dresses, and wedding ceremonies; and Captain Lennox, and what he had told Edith about her future life at Corfu, where his regiment was stationed; and the difficulty of keeping a piano in good tune (a difficulty which Edith seemed to consider as one of the most formidable that could befall her in her married life), and what gowns she should want in the visits to Scotland, which would immediately succeed her marriage; but the whispered tone had latterly become more drowsy; and Margaret, after a pause of a few minutes, found, as she fancied, that in spite of the buzz in the next room, Edith had rolled herself up into a soft ball of muslin and ribbon, and silken curls, and gone off into a peaceful little after-dinner nap.

Margaret had been on the point of telling her cousin of some of the plans and visions which she entertained as to her future life in the country parsonage, where her father and mother lived; and where her bright holidays had always been passed, though for the last ten years her aunt Shaw's house had been considered as her home. But in default of a listener, she had to brood over the change in her life silently as heretofore. It was a happy brooding, although tinged with regret at being separated for an indefinite time from her gentle aunt and dear cousin. As she thought of the delight of filling the important post of only daughter in Helstone parsonage, pieces of the conversation out of the next room came upon her ears. Her aunt Shaw was talking to the five or six ladies who had been dining there, and whose husbands were still in the dining-room. They were the familiar acquaintances of the house; neighbours whom Mrs. Shaw called friends, because she happened to dine with them more frequently than with any other people, and because if she or Edith wanted anything from them, or they from her, they did not scruple to make a call at each other's houses before luncheon. These ladies and their husbands were invited, in their capacity of friends, to eat a farewell dinner in honour of Edith's approaching marriage. Edith had rather objected to this arrangement, for Captain Lennox was expected to arrive by a late train this very evening; but, although she was a spoiled child, she was too careless and idle to have a very strong will of her own, and gave way when she found that her mother had absolutely ordered those extra delicacies of the season which are always supposed to be efficacious against immoderate grief at farewell dinners. She contented herself by leaning back in her chair, merely playing with the food on her plate, and looking grave and absent; while all around her were enjoying the mots of Mr. Grey, the gentleman who always took the bottom of the table at Mrs. Shaw's dinner parties, and asked Edith to give them some music in the drawing-room. Mr. Grey was particularly agreeable over this farewell dinner, and the gentlemen staid down stairs longer than usual. It was very well

they did—to judge from the fragments of conversation which Margaret overheard.

'I suffered too much myself; not that I was not extremely happy with the poor dear General, but still disparity of age is a drawback; one that I was resolved Edith should not have to encounter. Of course, without any maternal partiality, I foresaw that the dear child was likely to marry early; indeed, I had often said that I was sure she would be married before she was nineteen. I had quite a prophetic feeling when Captain Lennox'—and here the voice dropped into a whisper, but Margaret could easily supply the blank. The course of true love in Edith's case had run remarkably smooth. Mrs. Shaw had given way to the presentiment, as she expressed it; and had rather urged on the marriage, although it was below the expectations which many of Edith's acquaintances had formed for her, a young and pretty heiress. But Mrs. Shaw said that her only child should marry for love,—and sighed emphatically, as if love had not been her motive for marrying the General. Mrs. Shaw enjoyed the romance of the present engagement rather more than her daughter. Not but that Edith was very thoroughly and properly in love; still she would certainly have preferred a good house in Belgravia, to all the picturesqueness of the life which Captain Lennox described at Corfu. The very parts which made Margaret glow as she listened, Edith pretended to shiver and shudder at; partly for the pleasure she had in being coaxed out of her dislike by her fond lover, and partly because anything of a gipsy or make-shift life was really distasteful to her. Yet had any one come with a fine house, and a fine estate, and a fine title to boot, Edith would still have clung to Captain Lennox while the temptation lasted; when it was over, it is possible she might have had little qualms of ill-concealed regret that Captain Lennox could not have united in his person everything that was desirable. In this she was but her mother's child; who, after deliberately marrying General Shaw with no warmer feeling than respect for his character and

establishment, was constantly, though quietly, bemoaning her hard lot in being united to one whom she could not love.

'I have spared no expense in her trousseau,' were the next words Margaret heard.

'She has all the beautiful Indian shawls and scarfs the General gave to me, but which I shall never wear again.'

'She is a lucky girl,' replied another voice, which Margaret knew to be that of Mrs. Gibson, a lady who was taking a double interest in the conversation, from the fact of one of her daughters having been married within the last few weeks.

'Helen had set her heart upon an Indian shawl, but really when I found what an extravagant price was asked, I was obliged to refuse her. She will be quite envious when she hears of Edith having Indian shawls. What kind are they? Delhi? with the lovely little borders?'

Margaret heard her aunt's voice again, but this time it was as if she had raised herself up from her half-recumbent position, and were looking into the more dimly lighted back drawing-room. 'Edith! Edith!' cried she; and then she sank as if wearied by the exertion. Margaret stepped forward.

'Edith is asleep, Aunt Shaw. Is it anything I can do?'

All the ladies said 'Poor child!' on receiving this distressing intelligence about Edith; and the minute lap-dog in Mrs. Shaw's arms began to bark, as if excited by the burst of pity.

'Hush, Tiny! you naughty little girl! you will waken your mistress. It was only to ask Edith if she would tell Newton to bring down her shawls: perhaps you would go, Margaret dear?'

Margaret went up into the old nursery at the very top of the house, where Newton was busy getting up some laces which were required for the wedding. While Newton went (not without a muttered grumbling) to undo the shawls, which had already been exhibited four or five times that day, Margaret looked round upon the nursery; the first room in that house with which she had become familiar nine years ago, when she was brought, all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play, and the lessons of her cousin Edith. She remembered the dark, dim

look of the London nursery, presided over by an austere and ceremonious nurse, who was terribly particular about clean hands and torn frocks. She recollected the first tea up there—separate from her father and aunt, who were dining somewhere down below an infinite depth of stairs; for unless she were up in the sky (the child thought), they must be deep down in the bowels of the earth. At home—before she came to live in Harley Street—her mother's dressing-room had been her nursery; and, as they kept early hours in the country parsonage, Margaret had always had her meals with her father and mother. Oh! well did the tall stately girl of eighteen remember the tears shed with such wild passion of grief by the little girl of nine, as she hid her face under the bed-clothes, in that first night; and how she was bidden not to cry by the nurse, because it would disturb Miss Edith; and how she had cried as bitterly, but more quietly, till her newly-seen, grand, pretty aunt had come softly upstairs with Mr. Hale to show him his little sleeping daughter. Then the little Margaret had hushed her sobs, and tried to lie quiet as if asleep, for fear of making her father unhappy by her grief, which she dared not express before her aunt, and which she rather thought it was wrong to feel at all after the long hoping, and planning, and contriving they had gone through at home, before her wardrobe could be arranged so as to suit her grander circumstances, and before papa could leave his parish to come up to London, even for a few days.

Now she had got to love the old nursery, though it was but a dismantled place; and she looked all round, with a kind of cat-like regret, at the idea of leaving it for ever in three days.

'Ah Newton!' said she, 'I think we shall all be sorry to leave this dear old room.'

'Indeed, miss, I shan't for one. My eyes are not so good as they were, and the light here is so bad that I can't see to mend laces except just at the window, where there's always a shocking draught—enough to give one one's death of cold.'

Well, I dare say you will have both good light and plenty of warmth at Naples. You must keep as much of your darning as

you can till then. Thank you, Newton, I can take them down—you're busy.'

So Margaret went down laden with shawls, and snuffing up their spicy Eastern smell. Her aunt asked her to stand as a sort of lay figure on which to display them, as Edith was still asleep. No one thought about it; but Margaret's tall, finely made figure, in the black silk dress which she was wearing as mourning for some distant relative of her father's, set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawls that would have half-smothered Edith. Margaret stood right under the chandelier, quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjusted the draperies. Occasionally, as she was turned round, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there-the familiar features in the usual garb of a princess. She touched the shawls gently as they hung around her, and took a pleasure in their soft feel and their brilliant colours, and rather liked to be dressed in such splendour—enjoying it much as a child would do, with a quiet pleased smile on her lips. Just then the door opened, and Mr. Henry Lennox was suddenly announced. Some of the ladies started back, as if half-ashamed of their feminine interest in dress. Mrs. Shaw held out her hand to the new-comer; Margaret stood perfectly still, thinking she might be yet wanted as a sort of block for the shawls; but looking at Mr. Lennox with a bright, amused face, as if sure of his sympathy in her sense of the ludicrousness at being thus surprised.

Her aunt was so much absorbed in asking Mr. Henry Lennox—who had not been able to come to dinner—all sorts of questions about his brother the bridegroom, his sister the bridesmaid (coming with the Captain from Scotland for the occasion), and various other members of the Lennox family, that Margaret saw she was no more wanted as shawl-bearer, and devoted herself to the amusement of the other visitors, whom her aunt had for the moment forgotten. Almost immediately, Edith came in from the back drawing-room, winking and blinking her eyes at the stronger light, shaking back her

slightly-ruffled curls, and altogether looking like the Sleeping Beauty just startled from her dreams. Even in her slumber she had instinctively felt that a Lennox was worth rousing herself for; and she had a multitude of questions to ask about dear Janet, the future, unseen sister-in-law, for whom she professed so much affection, that if Margaret had not been very proud she might have almost felt jealous of the mushroom rival. As Margaret sank rather more into the background on her aunt's joining the conversation, she saw Henry Lennox directing his look towards a vacant seat near her; and she knew perfectly well that as soon as Edith released him from her questioning, he would take possession of that chair. She had not been quite sure, from her aunt's rather confused account of his engagements, whether he would come that night; it was almost a surprise to see him; and now she was sure of a pleasant evening. He liked and disliked pretty nearly the same things that she did. Margaret's face was lightened up into an honest, open brightness. By-and-by he came. She received him with a smile which had not a tinge of shyness or self-consciousness in it.

'Well, I suppose you are all in the depths of business—ladies' business, I mean. Very different to my business, which is the real true law business. Playing with shawls is very different work to drawing up settlements.

'Ah, I knew how you would be amused to find us all so occupied in admiring finery. But really Indian shawls are very perfect things of their kind.'

'I have no doubt they are. Their prices are very perfect, too. Nothing wanting.' The gentlemen came dropping in one by one, and the buzz and noise deepened in tone.

'This is your last dinner-party, is it not? There are no more before Thursday?'

'No. I think after this evening we shall feel at rest, which I am sure I have not done for many weeks; at least, that kind of rest when the hands have nothing more to do, and all the arrangements are complete for an event which must occupy

one's head and heart. I shall be glad to have time to think, and I am sure Edith will.'

'I am not so sure about her; but I can fancy that you will. Whenever I have seen you lately, you have been carried away by a whirlwind of some other person's making.'

'Yes,' said Margaret, rather sadly, remembering the never-ending commotion about trifles that had been going on for more than a month past: 'I wonder if a marriage must always be preceded by what you call a whirlwind, or whether in some cases there might not rather be a calm and peaceful time just before it.'

'Cinderella's godmother ordering the trousseau, the wedding-breakfast, writing the notes of invitation, for instance,' said Mr. Lennox, laughing.

'But are all these quite necessary troubles?' asked Margaret, looking up straight at him for an answer. A sense of indescribable weariness of all the arrangements for a pretty effect, in which Edith had been busied as supreme authority for the last six weeks, oppressed her just now; and she really wanted some one to help her to a few pleasant, quiet ideas connected with a marriage.

'Oh, of course,' he replied with a change to gravity in his tone. 'There are forms and ceremonies to be gone through, not so much to satisfy oneself, as to stop the world's mouth, without which stoppage there would be very little satisfaction in life. But how would you have a wedding arranged?'

'Oh, I have never thought much about it; only I should like it to be a very fine summer morning; and I should like to walk to church through the shade of trees; and not to have so many bridesmaids, and to have no wedding-breakfast. I dare say I am resolving against the very things that have given me the most trouble just now.'

'No, I don't think you are. The idea of stately simplicity accords well with your character.'

Margaret did not quite like this speech; she winced away from it more, from remembering former occasions on which he

had tried to lead her into a discussion (in which he took the complimentary part) about her own character and ways of going on. She cut his speech rather short by saying:

'It is natural for me to think of Helstone church, and the walk to it, rather than of driving up to a London church in the middle of a paved street.'

'Tell me about Helstone. You have never described it to me. I should like to have some idea of the place you will be living in, when ninety-six Harley Street will be looking dingy and dirty, and dull, and shut up. Is Helstone a village, or a town, in the first place?'

'Oh, only a hamlet; I don't think I could call it a village at all. There is the church and a few houses near it on the green—cottages, rather—with roses growing all over them.'

'And flowering all the year round, especially at Christmas—make your picture complete,' said he.

'No,' replied Margaret, somewhat annoyed, 'I am not making a picture. I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is. You should not have said that.'

'I am penitent,' he answered. 'Only it really sounded like a village in a tale rather than in real life.'

'And so it is,' replied Margaret, eagerly. 'All the other places in England that I have seen seem so hard and prosaic-looking, after the New Forest. Helstone is like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson's poems. But I won't try and describe it any more. You would only laugh at me if I told you what I think of it—what it really is.'

'Indeed, I would not. But I see you are going to be very resolved. Well, then, tell me that which I should like still better to know what the parsonage is like.'

'Oh, I can't describe my home. It is home, and I can't put its charm into words.'

'I submit. You are rather severe to-night, Margaret.

'How?' said she, turning her large soft eyes round full upon him. 'I did not know I was.'

'Why, because I made an unlucky remark, you will neither tell me what Helstone is like, nor will you say anything about your home, though I have told you how much I want to hear about both, the latter especially.'

'But indeed I cannot tell you about my own home. I don't quite think it is a thing to be talked about, unless you knew it.'

'Well, then'—pausing for a moment—'tell me what you do there. Here you read, or have lessons, or otherwise improve your mind, till the middle of the day; take a walk before lunch, go a drive with your aunt after, and have some kind of engagement in the evening. There, now fill up your day at Helstone. Shall you ride, drive, or walk?'

'Walk, decidedly. We have no horse, not even for papa. He walks to the very extremity of his parish. The walks are so beautiful, it would be a shame to drive—almost a shame to ride.'

'Shall you garden much? That, I believe, is a proper employment for young ladies in the country.'

'I don't know. I am afraid I shan't like such hard work.'

'Archery parties—pic-nics—race-balls—hunt-balls?'

'Oh no!' said she, laughing. 'Papa's living is very small; and even if we were near such things, I doubt if I should go to them.'

'I see, you won't tell me anything. You will only tell me that you are not going to do this and that. Before the vacation ends, I think I shall pay you a call, and see what you really do employ yourself in.'

'I hope you will. Then you will see for yourself how beautiful Helstone is. Now I must go. Edith is sitting down to play, and I just know enough of music to turn over the leaves for her; and besides, Aunt Shaw won't like us to talk.' Edith played brilliantly. In the middle of the piece the door half-opened, and Edith saw Captain Lennox hesitating whether to come in. She threw down her music, and rushed out of the room, leaving Margaret standing confused and blushing to explain to the astonished guests what vision had shown itself to cause Edith's sudden flight. Captain Lennox had come earlier than was

expected; or was it really so late? They looked at their watches, were duly shocked, and took their leave.

Then Edith came back, glowing with pleasure, half-shyly, half-proudly leading in her tall handsome Captain. His brother shook hands with him, and Mrs. Shaw welcomed him in her gentle kindly way, which had always something plaintive in it, arising from the long habit of considering herself a victim to an uncongenial marriage. Now that, the General being gone, she had every good of life, with as few drawbacks as possible, she had been rather perplexed to find an anxiety, if not a sorrow. She had, however, of late settled upon her own health as a source of apprehension; she had a nervous little cough whenever she thought about it; and some complaisant doctor ordered her just what she desired,—a winter in Italy. Mrs. Shaw had as strong wishes as most people, but she never liked to do anything from the open and acknowledged motive of her own good will and pleasure; she preferred being compelled to gratify herself by some other person's command or desire. She really did persuade herself that she was submitting to some hard external necessity; and thus she was able to moan and complain in her soft manner, all the time she was in reality doing just what she liked.

It was in this way she began to speak of her own journey to Captain Lennox, who assented, as in duty bound, to all his future mother-in-law said, while his eyes sought Edith, who was busying herself in rearranging the tea-table, and ordering up all sorts of good things, in spite of his assurances that he had dined within the last two hours.

Mr. Henry Lennox stood leaning against the chimney-piece, amused with the family scene. He was close by his handsome brother; he was the plain one in a singularly good-looking family; but his face was intelligent, keen, and mobile; and now and then Margaret wondered what it was that he could be thinking about, while he kept silence, but was evidently observing, with an interest that was slightly sarcastic, all that Edith and she were doing. The sarcastic feeling was called out

by Mrs. Shaw's conversation with his brother; it was separate from the interest which was excited by what he saw. He thought it a pretty sight to see the two cousins so busy in their little arrangements about the table. Edith chose to do most herself. She was in a humour to enjoy showing her lover how well she could behave as a soldier's wife. She found out that the water in the urn was cold, and ordered up the great kitchen tea-kettle; the only consequence of which was that when she met it at the door, and tried to carry it in, it was too heavy for her, and she came in pouting, with a black mark on her muslin gown, and a little round white hand indented by the handle, which she took to show to Captain Lennox, just like a hurt child, and, of course, the remedy was the same in both cases. Margaret's quickly-adjusted spirit-lamp was the most efficacious contrivance, though not so like the gypsy-encampment which Edith, in some of her moods, chose to consider the nearest resemblance to a barrack-life. After this evening all was bustle till the wedding was over.

Chapter 2
Roses and Thorns

'By the soft green light in the woody glade,
On the banks of moss where thy childhood played;
By the household tree, thro' which thine eye
First looked in love to the summer sky.'
MRS. HEMANS.

Margaret was once more in her morning dress, travelling quietly home with her father, who had come up to assist at the wedding. Her mother had been detained at home by a multitude of half-reasons, none of which anybody fully understood, except Mr. Hale, who was perfectly aware that all his arguments in favour of a grey satin gown, which was midway between oldness and newness, had proved unavailing; and that, as he had not the money to equip his wife afresh, from top to toe, she would not show herself at her only sister's only child's wedding. If Mrs. Shaw had guessed at the real reason why Mrs. Hale did not accompany her husband, she would have showered down gowns upon her; but it was nearly twenty years since Mrs. Shaw had been the poor, pretty Miss Beresford, and she had really forgotten all grievances except that of the unhappiness arising from disparity of age in married life, on which she could descant by the half-hour. Dearest Maria had married the man of her heart, only eight years older than herself, with the sweetest temper, and that blue-black hair one so seldom sees. Mr. Hale was one of the most delightful preachers she had ever heard, and a perfect model of a parish priest. Perhaps it was not quite a logical deduction from all these premises, but it was still Mrs. Shaw's characteristic conclusion, as she thought over her

sister's lot: 'Married for love, what can dearest Maria have to wish for in this world?' Mrs. Hale, if she spoke truth, might have answered with a ready-made list, 'a silver-grey glace silk, a white chip bonnet, oh! dozens of things for the wedding, and hundreds of things for the house.' Margaret only knew that her mother had not found it convenient to come, and she was not sorry to think that their meeting and greeting would take place at Helstone parsonage, rather than, during the confusion of the last two or three days, in the house in Harley Street, where she herself had had to play the part of Figaro, and was wanted everywhere at one and the same time. Her mind and body ached now with the recollection of all she had done and said within the last forty-eight hours. The farewells so hurriedly taken, amongst all the other good-byes, of those she had lived with so long, oppressed her now with a sad regret for the times that were no more; it did not signify what those times had been, they were gone never to return. Margaret's heart felt more heavy than she could ever have thought it possible in going to her own dear home, the place and the life she had longed for for years—at that time of all times for yearning and longing, just before the sharp senses lose their outlines in sleep. She took her mind away with a wrench from the recollection of the past to the bright serene contemplation of the hopeful future. Her eyes began to see, not visions of what had been, but the sight actually before her; her dear father leaning back asleep in the railway carriage. His blue-black hair was grey now, and lay thinly over his brows. The bones of his face were plainly to be seen—too plainly for beauty, if his features had been less finely cut; as it was, they had a grace if not a comeliness of their own. The face was in repose; but it was rather rest after weariness, than the serene calm of the countenance of one who led a placid, contented life. Margaret was painfully struck by the worn, anxious expression; and she went back over the open and avowed circumstances of her father's life, to find the cause for the lines that spoke so plainly of habitual distress and depression.

'Poor Frederick!' thought she, sighing. 'Oh! if Frederick had but been a clergyman, instead of going into the navy, and being lost to us all! I wish I knew all about it. I never understood it from Aunt Shaw; I only knew he could not come back to England because of that terrible affair. Poor dear papa! how sad he looks! I am so glad I am going home, to be at hand to comfort him and mamma.

She was ready with a bright smile, in which there was not a trace of fatigue, to greet her father when he awakened. He smiled back again, but faintly, as if it were an unusual exertion. His face returned into its lines of habitual anxiety. He had a trick of half-opening his mouth as if to speak, which constantly unsettled the form of the lips, and gave the face an undecided expression. But he had the same large, soft eyes as his daughter,—eyes which moved slowly and almost grandly round in their orbits, and were well veiled by their transparent white eyelids. Margaret was more like him than like her mother. Sometimes people wondered that parents so handsome should have a daughter who was so far from regularly beautiful; not beautiful at all, was occasionally said. Her mouth was wide; no rosebud that could only open just' enough to let out a 'yes' and 'no,' and 'an't please you, sir.' But the wide mouth was one soft curve of rich red lips; and the skin, if not white and fair, was of an ivory smoothness and delicacy. If the look on her face was, in general, too dignified and reserved for one so young, now, talking to her father, it was bright as the morning,—full of dimples, and glances that spoke of childish gladness, and boundless hope in the future.

It was the latter part of July when Margaret returned home. The forest trees were all one dark, full, dusky green; the fern below them caught all the slanting sunbeams; the weather was sultry and broodingly still. Margaret used to tramp along by her father's side, crushing down the fern with a cruel glee, as she felt it yield under her light foot, and send up the fragrance peculiar to it,—out on the broad commons into the warm scented light, seeing multitudes of wild, free, living creatures,

revelling in the sunshine, and the herbs and flowers it called forth. This life—at least these walks—realised all Margaret's anticipations. She took a pride in her forest. Its people were her people. She made hearty friends with them; learned and delighted in using their peculiar words; took up her freedom amongst them; nursed their babies; talked or read with slow distinctness to their old people; carried dainty messes to their sick; resolved before long to teach at the school, where her father went every day as to an appointed task, but she was continually tempted off to go and see some individual friend—man, woman, or child—in some cottage in the green shade of the forest. Her out-of-doors life was perfect. Her in-doors life had its drawbacks. With the healthy shame of a child, she blamed herself for her keenness of sight, in perceiving that all was not as it should be there. Her mother—her mother always so kind and tender towards her—seemed now and then so much discontented with their situation; thought that the bishop strangely neglected his episcopal duties, in not giving Mr. Hale a better living; and almost reproached her husband because he could not bring himself to say that he wished to leave the parish, and undertake the charge of a larger. He would sigh aloud as he answered, that if he could do what he ought in little Helstone, he should be thankful; but every day he was more overpowered; the world became more bewildering. At each repeated urgency of his wife, that he would put himself in the way of seeking some preferment, Margaret saw that her father shrank more and more; and she strove at such times to reconcile her mother to Helstone. Mrs. Hale said that the near neighbourhood of so many trees affected her health; and Margaret would try to tempt her forth on to the beautiful, broad, upland, sun-streaked, cloud-shadowed common; for she was sure that her mother had accustomed herself too much to an in-doors life, seldom extending her walks beyond the church, the school, and the neighbouring cottages. This did good for a time; but when the autumn drew on, and the weather became more changeable, her mother's idea of the unhealthiness of the

place increased; and she repined even more frequently that her husband, who was more learned than Mr. Hume, a better parish priest than Mr. Houldsworth, should not have met with the preferment that these two former neighbours of theirs had done.

This marring of the peace of home, by long hours of discontent, was what Margaret was unprepared for. She knew, and had rather revelled in the idea, that she should have to give up many luxuries, which had only been troubles and trammels to her freedom in Harley Street. Her keen enjoyment of every sensuous pleasure, was balanced finely, if not overbalanced, by her conscious pride in being able to do without them all, if need were. But the cloud never comes in that quarter of the horizon from which we watch for it. There had been slight complaints and passing regrets on her mother's part, over some trifle connected with Helstone, and her father's position there, when Margaret had been spending her holidays at home before; but in the general happiness of the recollection of those times, she had forgotten the small details which were not so pleasant. In the latter half of September, the autumnal rains and storms came on, and Margaret was obliged to remain more in the house than she had hitherto done. Helstone was at some distance from any neighbours of their own standard of cultivation.

'It is undoubtedly one of the most out-of-the-way places in England,' said Mrs. Hale, in one of her plaintive moods. 'I can't help regretting constantly that papa has really no one to associate with here; he is so thrown away; seeing no one but farmers and labourers from week's end to week's end. If we only lived at the other side of the parish, it would be something; there we should be almost within walking distance of the Stansfields; certainly the Gormans would be within a walk.'

'Gormans,' said Margaret. 'Are those the Gormans who made their fortunes in trade at Southampton? Oh! I'm glad we don't visit them. I don't like shoppy people. I think we are far better off, knowing only cottagers and labourers, and people without pretence.'

'You must not be so fastidious, Margaret, dear!' said her mother, secretly thinking of a young and handsome Mr. Gorman whom she had once met at Mr. Hume's.

'No! I call mine a very comprehensive taste; I like all people whose occupations have to do with land; I like soldiers and sailors, and the three learned professions, as they call them. I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers, do you, mamma?'

'But the Gormans were neither butchers nor bakers, but very respectable coach-builders.'

'Very well. Coach-building is a trade all the same, and I think a much more useless one than that of butchers or bakers. Oh! how tired I used to be of the drives every day in Aunt Shaw's carriage, and how I longed to walk!'

And walk Margaret did, in spite of the weather. She was so happy out of doors, at her father's side, that she almost danced; and with the soft violence of the west wind behind her, as she crossed some heath, she seemed to be borne onwards, as lightly and easily as the fallen leaf that was wafted along by the autumnal breeze. But the evenings were rather difficult to fill up agreeably. Immediately after tea her father withdrew into his small library, and she and her mother were left alone. Mrs. Hale had never cared much for books, and had discouraged her husband, very early in their married life, in his desire of reading aloud to her, while she worked. At one time they had tried backgammon as a resource; but as Mr. Hale grew to take an increasing interest in his school and his parishioners, he found that the interruptions which arose out of these duties were regarded as hardships by his wife, not to be accepted as the natural conditions of his profession, but to be regretted and struggled against by her as they severally arose. So he withdrew, while the children were yet young, into his library, to spend his evenings (if he were at home), in reading the speculative and metaphysical books which were his delight.

When Margaret had been here before, she had brought down with her a great box of books, recommended by masters or

governess, and had found the summer's day all too short to get through the reading she had to do before her return to town. Now there were only the well-bound little-read English Classics, which were weeded out of her father's library to fill up the small book-shelves in the drawing-room. Thomson's Seasons, Hayley's Cowper, Middleton's Cicero, were by far the lightest, newest, and most amusing. The book-shelves did not afford much resource. Margaret told her mother every particular of her London life, to all of which Mrs. Hale listened with interest, sometimes amused and questioning, at others a little inclined to compare her sister's circumstances of ease and comfort with the narrower means at Helstone vicarage. On such evenings Margaret was apt to stop talking rather abruptly, and listen to the drip-drip of the rain upon the leads of the little bow-window. Once or twice Margaret found herself mechanically counting the repetition of the monotonous sound, while she wondered if she might venture to put a question on a subject very near to her heart, and ask where Frederick was now; what he was doing; how long it was since they had heard from him. But a consciousness that her mother's delicate health, and positive dislike to Helstone, all dated from the time of the mutiny in which Frederick had been engaged,—the full account of which Margaret had never heard, and which now seemed doomed to be buried in sad oblivion,—made her pause and turn away from the subject each time she approached it. When she was with her mother, her father seemed the best person to apply to for information; and when with him, she thought that she could speak more easily to her mother. Probably there was nothing much to be heard that was new. In one of the letters she had received before leaving Harley Street, her father had told her that they had heard from Frederick; he was still at Rio, and very well in health, and sent his best love to her; which was dry bones, but not the living intelligence she longed for. Frederick was always spoken of, in the rare times when his name was mentioned, as 'Poor Frederick.' His room was kept exactly as he had left it; and was regularly dusted,

and put into order by Dixon, Mrs. Hale's maid, who touched no other part of the household work, but always remembered the day when she had been engaged by Lady Beresford as ladies' maid to Sir John's wards, the pretty Miss Beresfords, the belles of Rutlandshire. Dixon had always considered Mr. Hale as the blight which had fallen upon her young lady's prospects in life. If Miss Beresford had not been in such a hurry to marry a poor country clergyman, there was no knowing what she might not have become. But Dixon was too loyal to desert her in her affliction and downfall (alias her married life). She remained with her, and was devoted to her interests; always considering herself as the good and protecting fairy, whose duty it was to baffle the malignant giant, Mr. Hale. Master Frederick had been her favorite and pride; and it was with a little softening of her dignified look and manner, that she went in weekly to arrange the chamber as carefully as if he might be coming home that very evening. Margaret could not help believing that there had been some late intelligence of Frederick, unknown to her mother, which was making her father anxious and uneasy. Mrs. Hale did not seem to perceive any alteration in her husband's looks or ways. His spirits were always tender and gentle, readily affected by any small piece of intelligence concerning the welfare of others. He would be depressed for many days after witnessing a death-bed, or hearing of any crime. But now Margaret noticed an absence of mind, as if his thoughts were pre-occupied by some subject, the oppression of which could not be relieved by any daily action, such as comforting the survivors, or teaching at the school in hope of lessening the evils in the generation to come. Mr. Hale did not go out among his parishioners as much as usual; he was more shut up in his study; was anxious for the village postman, whose summons to the house-hold was a rap on the back-kitchen window-shutter—a signal which at one time had often to be repeated before any one was sufficiently alive to the hour of the day to understand what it was, and attend to him. Now Mr. Hale loitered about the garden if the morning was fine, and if not, stood dreamily

by the study window until the postman had called, or gone down the lane, giving a half-respectful, half-confidential shake of the head to the parson, who watched him away beyond the sweet-briar hedge, and past the great arbutus, before he turned into the room to begin his day's work, with all the signs of a heavy heart and an occupied mind.

But Margaret was at an age when any apprehension, not absolutely based on a knowledge of facts, is easily banished for a time by a bright sunny day, or some happy outward circumstance. And when the brilliant fourteen fine days of October came on, her cares were all blown away as lightly as thistledown, and she thought of nothing but the glories of the forest. The fern-harvest was over, and now that the rain was gone, many a deep glade was accessible, into which Margaret had only peeped in July and August weather. She had learnt drawing with Edith; and she had sufficiently regretted, during the gloom of the bad weather, her idle revelling in the beauty of the woodlands while it had yet been fine, to make her determined to sketch what she could before winter fairly set in. Accordingly, she was busy preparing her board one morning, when Sarah, the housemaid, threw wide open the drawing-room door and announced, 'Mr. Henry Lennox.'

Chapter 3
The More Haste the Worse Speed

'Learn to win a lady's faith
Nobly, as the thing is high;
Bravely, as for life and death—
With a loyal gravity.

Lead her from the festive boards,
Point her to the starry skies,
Guard her, by your truthful words,
Pure from courtship's flatteries.'
MRS. BROWNING.

'Mr. Henry Lennox.' Margaret had been thinking of him only a moment before, and remembering his inquiry into her probable occupations at home. It was 'parler du soleil et l'on en voit les rayons;' and the brightness of the sun came over Margaret's face as she put down her board, and went forward to shake hands with him. 'Tell mamma, Sarah,' said she. 'Mamma and I want to ask you so many questions about Edith; I am so much obliged to you for coming.'

'Did not I say that I should?' asked he, in a lower tone than that in which she had spoken.

'But I heard of you so far away in the Highlands that I never thought Hampshire could come in.

'Oh!' said he, more lightly, 'our young couple were playing such foolish pranks, running all sorts of risks, climbing this mountain, sailing on that lake, that I really thought they

needed a Mentor to take care of them. And indeed they did; they were quite beyond my uncle's management, and kept the old gentleman in a panic for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four. Indeed, when I once saw how unfit they were to be trusted alone, I thought it my duty not to leave them till I had seen them safely embarked at Plymouth.'

'Have you been at Plymouth? Oh! Edith never named that. To be sure, she has written in such a hurry lately. Did they really sail on Tuesday?'

'Really sailed, and relieved me from many responsibilities. Edith gave me all sorts of messages for you. I believe I have a little diminutive note somewhere; yes, here it is.'

'Oh! thank you,' exclaimed Margaret; and then, half wishing to read it alone and unwatched, she made the excuse of going to tell her mother again (Sarah surely had made some mistake) that Mr. Lennox was there.

When she had left the room, he began in his scrutinising way to look about him. The little drawing-room was looking its best in the streaming light of the morning sun. The middle window in the bow was opened, and clustering roses and the scarlet honeysuckle came peeping round the corner; the small lawn was gorgeous with verbenas and geraniums of all bright colours. But the very brightness outside made the colours within seem poor and faded. The carpet was far from new; the chintz had been often washed; the whole apartment was smaller and shabbier than he had expected, as back-ground and frame-work for Margaret, herself so queenly. He took up one of the books lying on the table; it was the Paradiso of Dante, in the proper old Italian binding of white vellum and gold; by it lay a dictionary, and some words copied out in Margaret's hand-writing. They were a dull list of words, but somehow he liked looking at them. He put them down with a sigh.

'The living is evidently as small as she said. It seems strange, for the Beresfords belong to a good family.'

Margaret meanwhile had found her mother. It was one of Mrs. Hale's fitful days, when everything was a difficulty and a

hardship; and Mr. Lennox's appearance took this shape, although secretly she felt complimented by his thinking it worth while to call.

'It is most unfortunate! We are dining early to-day, and having nothing but cold meat, in order that the servants may get on with their ironing; and yet, of course, we must ask him to dinner—Edith's brother-in-law and all. And your papa is in such low spirits this morning about something—I don't know what. I went into the study just now, and he had his face on the table, covering it with his hands. I told him I was sure Helstone air did not agree with him any more than with me, and he suddenly lifted up his head, and begged me not to speak a word more against Helstone, he could not bear it; if there was one place he loved on earth it was Helstone. But I am sure, for all that, it is the damp and relaxing air.'

Margaret felt as if a thin cold cloud had come between her and the sun. She had listened patiently, in hopes that it might be some relief to her mother to unburden herself; but now it was time to draw her back to Mr. Lennox.

'Papa likes Mr. Lennox; they got on together famously at the wedding breakfast. I dare say his coming will do papa good. And never mind the dinner, dear mamma. Cold meat will do capitally for a lunch, which is the light in which Mr. Lennox will most likely look upon a two o'clock dinner.'

'But what are we to do with him till then? It is only half-past ten now.'

'I'll ask him to go out sketching with me. I know he draws, and that will take him out of your way, mamma. Only do come in now; he will think it so strange if you don't.'

Mrs. Hale took off her black silk apron, and smoothed her face. She looked a very pretty lady-like woman, as she greeted Mr. Lennox with the cordiality due to one who was almost a relation. He evidently expected to be asked to spend the day, and accepted the invitation with a glad readiness that made Mrs. Hale wish she could add something to the cold beef. He was pleased with everything; delighted with Margaret's idea of

going out sketching together; would not have Mr. Hale disturbed for the world, with the prospect of so soon meeting him at dinner. Margaret brought out her drawing materials for him to choose from; and after the paper and brushes had been duly selected, the two set out in the merriest spirits in the world.

'Now, please, just stop here for a minute or two, said Margaret. 'These are the cottages that haunted me so during the rainy fortnight, reproaching me for not having sketched them.'

'Before they tumbled down and were no more seen. Truly, if they are to be sketched—and they are very picturesque—we had better not put it off till next year. But where shall we sit?'

'Oh! You might have come straight from chambers in the Temple,' instead of having been two months in the Highlands! Look at this beautiful trunk of a tree, which the wood-cutters have left just in the right place for the light. I will put my plaid over it, and it will be a regular forest throne.'

'With your feet in that puddle for a regal footstool! Stay, I will move, and then you can come nearer this way. Who lives in these cottages?'

'They were built by squatters fifty or sixty years ago. One is uninhabited; the foresters are going to take it down, as soon as the old man who lives in the other is dead, poor old fellow! Look—there he is—I must go and speak to him. He is so deaf you will hear all our secrets.'

The old man stood bareheaded in the sun, leaning on his stick at the front of his cottage. His stiff features relaxed into a slow smile as Margaret went up and spoke to him. Mr. Lennox hastily introduced the two figures into his sketch, and finished up the landscape with a subordinate reference to them—as Margaret perceived, when the time came for getting up, putting away water, and scraps of paper, and exhibiting to each other their sketches. She laughed and blushed Mr. Lennox watched her countenance.

'Now, I call that treacherous,' said she. 'I little thought you were making old Isaac and me into subjects, when you told me to ask him the history of these cottages.'

'It was irresistible. You can't know how strong a temptation it was. I hardly dare tell you how much I shall like this sketch.'

He was not quite sure whether she heard this latter sentence before she went to the brook to wash her palette. She came back rather flushed, but looking perfectly innocent and unconscious. He was glad of it, for the speech had slipped from him unawares—a rare thing in the case of a man who premeditated his actions so much as Henry Lennox.

The aspect of home was all right and bright when they reached it. The clouds on her mother's brow had cleared off under the propitious influence of a brace of carp, most opportunely presented by a neighbour. Mr. Hale had returned from his morning's round, and was awaiting his visitor just outside the wicket gate that led into the garden. He looked a complete gentleman in his rather threadbare coat and well-worn hat.

Margaret was proud of her father; she had always a fresh and tender pride in seeing how favourably he impressed every stranger; still her quick eye sought over his face and found there traces of some unusual disturbance, which was only put aside, not cleared away.

Mr. Hale asked to look at their sketches.

'I think you have made the tints on the thatch too dark, have you not?' as he returned Margaret's to her, and held out his hand for Mr. Lennox's, which was withheld from him one moment, no more.

'No, papa! I don't think I have. The house-leek and stone-crop have grown so much darker in the rain. Is it not like, papa?' said she, peeping over his shoulder, as he looked at the figures in Mr. Lennox's drawing.

'Yes, very like. Your figure and way of holding yourself is capital. And it is just poor old Isaac's stiff way of stooping his

long rheumatic back. What is this hanging from the branch of the tree? Not a bird's nest, surely.'

'Oh no! that is my bonnet. I never can draw with my bonnet on; it makes my head so hot. I wonder if I could manage figures. There are so many people about here whom I should like to sketch.'

'I should say that a likeness you very much wish to take you would always succeed in,' said Mr. Lennox. 'I have great faith in the power of will. I think myself I have succeeded pretty well in yours.' Mr. Hale had preceded them into the house, while Margaret was lingering to pluck some roses, with which to adorn her morning gown for dinner.

'A regular London girl would understand the implied meaning of that speech,' thought Mr. Lennox. 'She would be up to looking through every speech that a young man made her for the arriere-pensee of a compliment. But I don't believe Margaret,—Stay!' exclaimed he, 'Let me help you;' and he gathered for her some velvety cramoisy roses that were above her reach, and then dividing the spoil he placed two in his button-hole, and sent her in, pleased and happy, to arrange her flowers.

The conversation at dinner flowed on quietly and agreeably. There were plenty of questions to be asked on both sides—the latest intelligence which each could give of Mrs. Shaw's movements in Italy to be exchanged; and in the interest of what was said, the unpretending simplicity of the parsonage-ways—above all, in the neighbourhood of Margaret, Mr. Lennox forgot the little feeling of disappointment with which he had at first perceived that she had spoken but the simple truth when she had described her father's living as very small.

'Margaret, my child, you might have gathered us some pears for our dessert,' said Mr. Hale, as the hospitable luxury of a freshly-decanted bottle of wine was placed on the table.

Mrs. Hale was hurried. It seemed as if desserts were impromptu and unusual things at the parsonage; whereas, if Mr. Hale would only have looked behind him, he would have

seen biscuits and marmalade, and what not, all arranged in formal order on the sideboard. But the idea of pears had taken possession of Mr. Hale's mind, and was not to be got rid of.

'There are a few brown beurres against the south wall which are worth all foreign fruits and preserves. Run, Margaret, and gather us some.'

'I propose that we adjourn into the garden, and eat them there' said Mr. Lennox.

'Nothing is so delicious as to set one's teeth into the crisp, juicy fruit, warm and scented by the sun. The worst is, the wasps are impudent enough to dispute it with one, even at the very crisis and summit of enjoyment.

He rose, as if to follow Margaret, who had disappeared through the window he only awaited Mrs. Hale's permission. She would rather have wound up the dinner in the proper way, and with all the ceremonies which had gone on so smoothly hitherto, especially as she and Dixon had got out the finger-glasses from the store-room on purpose to be as correct as became General Shaw's widow's sister, but as Mr. Hale got up directly, and prepared to accompany his guest, she could only submit.

'I shall arm myself with a knife,' said Mr. Hale: 'the days of eating fruit so primitively as you describe are over with me. I must pare it and quarter it before I can enjoy it.'

Margaret made a plate for the pears out of a beetroot leaf, which threw up their brown gold colour admirably. Mr. Lennox looked more at her than at the pears; but her father, inclined to cull fastidiously the very zest and perfection of the hour he had stolen from his anxiety, chose daintily the ripest fruit, and sat down on the garden bench to enjoy it at his leisure. Margaret and Mr. Lennox strolled along the little terrace-walk under the south wall, where the bees still hummed and worked busily in their hives.

'What a perfect life you seem to live here! I have always felt rather contemptuously towards the poets before, with their wishes, "Mine be a cot beside a hill," and that sort of thing:

but now I am afraid that the truth is, I have been nothing better than a cockney. Just now I feel as if twenty years' hard study of law would be amply rewarded by one year of such an exquisite serene life as this—such skies!' looking up—'such crimson and amber foliage, so perfectly motionless as that!' pointing to some of the great forest trees which shut in the garden as if it were a nest.

'You must please to remember that our skies are not always as deep a blue as they are now. We have rain, and our leaves do fall, and get sodden: though I think Helstone is about as perfect a place as any in the world. Recollect how you rather scorned my description of it one evening in Harley Street: "a village in a tale."'

'Scorned, Margaret That is rather a hard word.'

'Perhaps it is. Only I know I should have liked to have talked to you of what I was very full at the time, and you—what must I call it, then?—spoke disrespectfully of Helstone as a mere village in a tale.'

'I will never do so again,' said he, warmly. They turned the corner of the walk.

'I could almost wish, Margaret——' he stopped and hesitated. It was so unusual for the fluent lawyer to hesitate that Margaret looked up at him, in a little state of questioning wonder; but in an instant—from what about him she could not tell—she wished herself back with her mother—her father—anywhere away from him, for she was sure he was going to say something to which she should not know what to reply. In another moment the strong pride that was in her came to conquer her sudden agitation, which she hoped he had not perceived. Of course she could answer, and answer the right thing; and it was poor and despicable of her to shrink from hearing any speech, as if she had not power to put an end to it with her high maidenly dignity.

'Margaret,' said he, taking her by surprise, and getting sudden possession of her hand, so that she was forced to stand still and listen, despising herself for the fluttering at her heart

all the time; 'Margaret, I wish you did not like Helstone so much—did not seem so perfectly calm and happy here. I have been hoping for these three months past to find you regretting London—and London friends, a little—enough to make you listen more kindly' (for she was quietly, but firmly, striving to extricate her hand from his grasp) 'to one who has not much to offer, it is true—nothing but prospects in the future—but who does love you, Margaret, almost in spite of himself. Margaret, have I startled you too much? Speak!' For he saw her lips quivering almost as if she were going to cry. She made a strong effort to be calm; she would not speak till she had succeeded in mastering her voice, and then she said:

'I was startled. I did not know that you cared for me in that way. I have always thought of you as a friend; and, please, I would rather go on thinking of you so. I don't like to be spoken to as you have been doing. I cannot answer you as you want me to do, and yet I should feel so sorry if I vexed you.'

'Margaret,' said he, looking into her eyes, which met his with their open, straight look, expressive of the utmost good faith and reluctance to give pain.

'Do you'—he was going to say—'love any one else?' But it seemed as if this question would be an insult to the pure serenity of those eyes. 'Forgive me I have been too abrupt. I am punished. Only let me hope. Give me the poor comfort of telling me you have never seen any one whom you could——' Again a pause. He could not end his sentence. Margaret reproached herself acutely as the cause of his distress.

'Ah! if you had but never got this fancy into your head! It was such a pleasure to think of you as a friend.'

'But I may hope, may I not, Margaret, that some time you will think of me as a lover? Not yet, I see—there is no hurry—but some time——' She was silent for a minute or two, trying to discover the truth as it was in her own heart, before replying; then she said:

'I have never thought of—you, but as a friend. I like to think of you so; but I am sure I could never think of you as anything

else. Pray, let us both forget that all this' ('disagreeable,' she was going to say, but stopped short) 'conversation has taken place.'

He paused before he replied. Then, in his habitual coldness of tone, he answered:

'Of course, as your feelings are so decided, and as this conversation has been so evidently unpleasant to you, it had better not be remembered. That is all very fine in theory, that plan of forgetting whatever is painful, but it will be somewhat difficult for me, at least, to carry it into execution.'

'You are vexed,' said she, sadly; 'yet how can I help it?'

She looked so truly grieved as she said this, that he struggled for a moment with his real disappointment, and then answered more cheerfully, but still with a little hardness in his tone:

'You should make allowances for the mortification, not only of a lover, Margaret, but of a man not given to romance in general—prudent, worldly, as some people call me—who has been carried out of his usual habits by the force of a passion—well, we will say no more of that; but in the one outlet which he has formed for the deeper and better feelings of his nature, he meets with rejection and repulse. I shall have to console myself with scorning my own folly. A struggling barrister to think of matrimony!'

Margaret could not answer this. The whole tone of it annoyed her. It seemed to touch on and call out all the points of difference which had often repelled her in him; while yet he was the pleasantest man, the most sympathising friend, the person of all others who understood her best in Harley Street. She felt a tinge of contempt mingle itself with her pain at having refused him. Her beautiful lip curled in a slight disdain. It was well that, having made the round of the garden, they came suddenly upon Mr. Hale, whose whereabouts had been quite forgotten by them. He had not yet finished the pear, which he had delicately peeled in one long strip of silver-paper thinness, and which he was enjoying in a deliberate manner. It was like the story of the eastern king, who dipped his head into a basin

of water, at the magician's command, and ere he instantly took it out went through the experience of a lifetime. I Margaret felt stunned, and unable to recover her self-possession enough to join in the trivial conversation that ensued between her father and Mr. Lennox. She was grave, and little disposed to speak; full of wonder when Mr. Lennox would go, and allow her to relax into thought on the events of the last quarter of an hour. He was almost as anxious to take his departure as she was for him to leave; but a few minutes light and careless talking, carried on at whatever effort, was a sacrifice which he owed to his mortified vanity, or his self-respect. He glanced from time to time at her sad and pensive face.

'I am not so indifferent to her as she believes,' thought he to himself. 'I do not give up hope.'

Before a quarter of an hour was over, he had fallen into a way of conversing with quiet sarcasm; speaking of life in London and life in the country, as if he were conscious of his second mocking self, and afraid of his own satire. Mr. Hale was puzzled. His visitor was a different man to what he had seen him before at the wedding-breakfast, and at dinner to-day; a lighter, cleverer, more worldly man, and, as such, dissonant to Mr. Hale. It was a relief to all three when Mr. Lennox said that he must go directly if he meant to catch the five o'clock train. They proceeded to the house to find Mrs. Hale, and wish her good-bye. At the last moment, Henry Lennox's real self broke through the crust.

'Margaret, don't despise me; I have a heart, notwithstanding all this good-for-nothing way of talking. As a proof of it, I believe I love you more than ever—if I do not hate you—for the disdain with which you have listened to me during this last half-hour. Good-bye, Margaret—Margaret!'

Chapter 4
Doubts and Difficulties

'Cast me upon some naked shore,
Where I may tracke
Only the print of some sad wracke,
If thou be there, though the seas roare,
I shall no gentler calm implore.'
HABINGTON.

He was gone. The house was shut up for the evening. No more deep blue skies or crimson and amber tints. Margaret went up to dress for the early tea, finding Dixon in a pretty temper from the interruption which a visitor had naturally occasioned on a busy day. She showed it by brushing away viciously at Margaret's hair, under pretence of being in a great hurry to go to Mrs. Hale. Yet, after all, Margaret had to wait a long time in the drawing-room before her mother came down. She sat by herself at the fire, with unlighted candles on the table behind her, thinking over the day, the happy walk, happy sketching, cheerful pleasant dinner, and the uncomfortable, miserable walk in the garden.

How different men were to women! Here was she disturbed and unhappy, because her instinct had made anything but a refusal impossible; while he, not many minutes after he had met with a rejection of what ought to have been the deepest, holiest proposal of his life, could speak as if briefs, success, and all its superficial consequences of a good house, clever and agreeable society, were the sole avowed objects of his desires. Oh dear! how she could have loved him if he had but been different, with a difference which she felt, on reflection, to be

one that went low—deep down. Then she took it into her head that, after all, his lightness might be but assumed, to cover a bitterness of disappointment which would have been stamped on her own heart if she had loved and been rejected.

Her mother came into the room before this whirl of thoughts was adjusted into anything like order. Margaret had to shake off the recollections of what had been done and said through the day, and turn a sympathising listener to the account of how Dixon had complained that the ironing-blanket had been burnt again; and how Susan Lightfoot had been seen with artificial flowers in her bonnet, thereby giving evidence of a vain and giddy character. Mr. Hale sipped his tea in abstracted silence; Margaret had the responses all to herself. She wondered how her father and mother could be so forgetful, so regardless of their companion through the day, as never to mention his name. She forgot that he had not made them an offer.

After tea Mr. Hale got up, and stood with his elbow on the chimney-piece, leaning his head on his hand, musing over something, and from time to time sighing deeply. Mrs. Hale went out to consult with Dixon about some winter clothing for the poor. Margaret was preparing her mother's worsted work, and rather shrinking from the thought of the long evening, and wishing bed-time were come that she might go over the events of the day again.

'Margaret!' said Mr. Hale, at last, in a sort of sudden desperate way, that made her start. 'Is that tapestry thing of immediate consequence? I mean, can you leave it and come into my study? I want to speak to you about something very serious to us all.'

'Very serious to us all.' Mr. Lennox had never had the opportunity of having any private conversation with her father after her refusal, or else that would indeed be a very serious affair. In the first place, Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage; and secondly, she did not know if her father might not be displeased that she had taken upon herself to decline Mr.

Lennox's proposal. But she soon felt it was not about anything, which having only lately and suddenly occurred, could have given rise to any complicated thoughts, that her father wished to speak to her. He made her take a chair by him; he stirred the fire, snuffed the candles, and sighed once or twice before he could make up his mind to say—and it came out with a jerk after all—'Margaret! I am going to leave Helstone.'

'Leave Helstone, papa! But why?'

Mr. Hale did not answer for a minute or two. He played with some papers on the table in a nervous and confused manner, opening his lips to speak several times, but closing them again without having the courage to utter a word. Margaret could not bear the sight of the suspense, which was even more distressing to her father than to herself.

'But why, dear papa? Do tell me!'

He looked up at her suddenly, and then said with a slow and enforced calmness:

'Because I must no longer be a minister in the Church of England.'

Margaret had imagined nothing less than that some of the preferments which her mother so much desired had befallen her father at last—something that would force him to leave beautiful, beloved Helstone, and perhaps compel him to go and live in some of the stately and silent Closes which Margaret had seen from time to time in cathedral towns. They were grand and imposing places, but if, to go there, it was necessary to leave Helstone as a home for ever, that would have been a sad, long, lingering pain. But nothing to the shock she received from Mr. Hale's last speech. What could he mean? It was all the worse for being so mysterious. The aspect of piteous distress on his face, almost as imploring a merciful and kind judgment from his child, gave her a sudden sickening. Could he have become implicated in anything Frederick had done? Frederick was an outlaw. Had her father, out of a natural love for his son, connived at any—

'Oh! what is it? do speak, papa! tell me all! Why can you no longer be a clergyman? Surely, if the bishop were told all we know about Frederick, and the hard, unjust—'

'It is nothing about Frederick; the bishop would have nothing to do with that. It is all myself. Margaret, I will tell you about it. I will answer any questions this once, but after to-night let us never speak of it again. I can meet the consequences of my painful, miserable doubts; but it is an effort beyond me to speak of what has caused me so much suffering.'

'Doubts, papa! Doubts as to religion?' asked Margaret, more shocked than ever.

'No! not doubts as to religion; not the slightest injury to that.' He paused. Margaret sighed, as if standing on the verge of some new horror. He began again, speaking rapidly, as if to get over a set task:

'You could not understand it all, if I told you—my anxiety, for years past, to know whether I had any right to hold my living—my efforts to quench my smouldering doubts by the authority of the Church. Oh! Margaret, how I love the holy Church from which I am to be shut out!' He could not go on for a moment or two. Margaret could not tell what to say; it seemed to her as terribly mysterious as if her father were about to turn Mahometan.

'I have been reading to-day of the two thousand who were ejected from their churches,'—continued Mr. Hale, smiling faintly,—'trying to steal some of their bravery; but it is of no use—no use—I cannot help feeling it acutely.'

'But, papa, have you well considered? Oh! it seems so terrible, so shocking,' said Margaret, suddenly bursting into tears. The one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking. What could she say? What was to be done? The sight of her distress made Mr. Hale nerve himself, in order to try and comfort her. He swallowed down the dry choking sobs which had been heaving up from his heart hitherto, and going to his bookcase he took down a volume, which he had often been reading lately, and from which he

thought he had derived strength to enter upon the course in which he was now embarked.

'Listen, dear Margaret,' said he, putting one arm round her waist. She took his hand in hers and grasped it tight, but she could not lift up her head; nor indeed could she attend to what he read, so great was her internal agitation.

'This is the soliloquy of one who was once a clergyman in a country parish, like me; it was written by a Mr. Oldfield, minister of Carsington, in Derbyshire, a hundred and sixty years ago, or more. His trials are over. He fought the good fight.' These last two sentences he spoke low, as if to himself. Then he read aloud,—

'When thou canst no longer continue in thy work without dishonour to God, discredit to religion, foregoing thy integrity, wounding conscience, spoiling thy peace, and hazarding the loss of thy salvation; in a word, when the conditions upon which thou must continue (if thou wilt continue) in thy employments are sinful, and unwarranted by the word of God, thou mayest, yea, thou must believe that God will turn thy very silence, suspension, deprivation, and laying aside, to His glory, and the advancement of the Gospel's interest. When God will not use thee in one kind, yet He will in another. A soul that desires to serve and honour Him shall never want opportunity to do it; nor must thou so limit the Holy One of Israel as to think He hath but one way in which He can glorify Himself by thee. He can do it by thy silence as well as by thy preaching; thy laying aside as well as thy continuance in thy work. It is not pretence of doing God the greatest service, or performing the weightiest duty, that will excuse the least sin, though that sin capacitated or gave us the opportunity for doing that duty. Thou wilt have little thanks, O my soul! if, when thou art charged with corrupting God's worship, falsifying thy vows, thou pretendest a necessity for it in order to a continuance in the ministry. As he read this, and glanced at much more which he did not read, he gained resolution for himself, and felt as if he too could be brave and firm in doing what he believed to be right; but as he ceased

he heard Margaret's low convulsive sob; and his courage sank down under the keen sense of suffering.

'Margaret, dear!' said he, drawing her closer, 'think of the early martyrs; think of the thousands who have suffered.'

'But, father,' said she, suddenly lifting up her flushed, tear-wet face, 'the early martyrs suffered for the truth, while you—oh! dear, dear papa!'

'I suffer for conscience' sake, my child,' said he, with a dignity that was only tremulous from the acute sensitiveness of his character; 'I must do what my conscience bids. I have borne long with self-reproach that would have roused any mind less torpid and cowardly than mine.' He shook his head as he went on. 'Your poor mother's fond wish, gratified at last in the mocking way in which over-fond wishes are too often fulfilled—Sodom apples as they are—has brought on this crisis, for which I ought to be, and I hope I am thankful. It is not a month since the bishop offered me another living; if I had accepted it, I should have had to make a fresh declaration of conformity to the Liturgy at my institution. Margaret, I tried to do it; I tried to content myself with simply refusing the additional preferment, and stopping quietly here,—strangling my conscience now, as I had strained it before. God forgive me!'

He rose and walked up and down the room, speaking low words of self-reproach and humiliation, of which Margaret was thankful to hear but few. At last he said,

'Margaret, I return to the old sad burden we must leave Helstone.'

'Yes! I see. But when?'

'I have written to the bishop—I dare say I have told you so, but I forget things just now,' said Mr. Hale, collapsing into his depressed manner as soon as he came to talk of hard matter-of-fact details, 'informing him of my intention to resign this vicarage. He has been most kind; he has used arguments and expostulations, all in vain—in vain. They are but what I have tried upon myself, without avail. I shall have to take my deed of resignation, and wait upon the bishop myself, to bid him

farewell. That will be a trial, but worse, far worse, will be the parting from my dear people. There is a curate appointed to read prayers—a Mr. Brown. He will come to stay with us to-morrow. Next Sunday I preach my farewell sermon.'

Was it to be so sudden then? thought Margaret; and yet perhaps it was as well. Lingering would only add stings to the pain; it was better to be stunned into numbness by hearing of all these arrangements, which seemed to be nearly completed before she had been told. 'What does mamma say?' asked she, with a deep sigh.

To her surprise, her father began to walk about again before he answered. At length he stopped and replied:

'Margaret, I am a poor coward after all. I cannot bear to give pain. I know so well your mother's married life has not been all she hoped—all she had a right to expect—and this will be such a blow to her, that I have never had the heart, the power to tell her. She must be told though, now,' said he, looking wistfully at his daughter. Margaret was almost overpowered with the idea that her mother knew nothing of it all, and yet the affair was so far advanced!

'Yes, indeed she must,' said Margaret. 'Perhaps, after all, she may not—Oh yes! she will, she must be shocked'—as the force of the blow returned upon herself in trying to realise how another would take it. 'Where are we to go to?' said she at last, struck with a fresh wonder as to their future plans, if plans indeed her father had.

'To Milton-Northern,' he answered, with a dull indifference, for he had perceived that, although his daughter's love had made her cling to him, and for a moment strive to soothe him with her love, yet the keenness of the pain was as fresh as ever in her mind.

'Milton-Northern! The manufacturing town in Darkshire?'

'Yes,' said he, in the same despondent, indifferent way.

'Why there, papa?' asked she.

'Because there I can earn bread for my family. Because I know no one there, and no one knows Helstone, or can ever talk to me about it.'

'Bread for your family! I thought you and mamma had'—and then she stopped, checking her natural interest regarding their future life, as she saw the gathering gloom on her father's brow. But he, with his quick intuitive sympathy, read in her face, as in a mirror, the reflections of his own moody depression, and turned it off with an effort.

'You shall be told all, Margaret. Only help me to tell your mother. I think I could do anything but that: the idea of her distress turns me sick with dread. If I tell you all, perhaps you could break it to her to-morrow. I am going out for the day, to bid Farmer Dobson and the poor people on Bracy Common good-bye. Would you dislike breaking it to her very much, Margaret?'

Margaret did dislike it, did shrink from it more than from anything she had ever had to do in her life before. She could not speak, all at once. Her father said, 'You dislike it very much, don't you, Margaret?' Then she conquered herself, and said, with a bright strong look on her face:

'It is a painful thing, but it must be done, and I will do it as well as ever I can. You must have many painful things to do.'

Mr. Hale shook his head despondingly: he pressed her hand in token of gratitude. Margaret was nearly upset again into a burst of crying. To turn her thoughts, she said: 'Now tell me, papa, what our plans are. You and mamma have some money, independent of the income from the living, have not you? Aunt Shaw has, I know.'

'Yes. I suppose we have about a hundred and seventy pounds a year of our own. Seventy of that has always gone to Frederick, since he has been abroad. I don't know if he wants it all,' he continued in a hesitating manner. 'He must have some pay for serving with the Spanish army.'

'Frederick must not suffer,' said Margaret, decidedly; 'in a foreign country; so unjustly treated by his own. A hundred is left Could not you, and I, and mamma live on a hundred a year

in some very cheap—very quiet part of England? Oh! I think we could.'

'No!' said Mr. Hale. 'That would not answer. I must do something. I must make myself busy, to keep off morbid thoughts. Besides, in a country parish I should be so painfully reminded of Helstone, and my duties here. I could not bear it, Margaret. And a hundred a year would go a very little way, after the necessary wants of housekeeping are met, towards providing your mother with all the comforts she has been accustomed to, and ought to have. No: we must go to Milton. That is settled. I can always decide better by myself, and not influenced by those whom I love,' said he, as a half apology for having arranged so much before he had told any one of his family of his intentions. 'I cannot stand objections. They make me so undecided.'

Margaret resolved to keep silence. After all, what did it signify where they went, compared to the one terrible change?

Mr. Hale continued: 'A few months ago, when my misery of doubt became more than I could bear without speaking, I wrote to Mr. Bell—you remember Mr. Bell, Margaret?'

'No; I never saw him, I think. But I know who he is. Frederick's godfather—your old tutor at Oxford, don't you mean?'

'Yes. He is a Fellow of Plymouth College there. He is a native of Milton-Northern, I believe. At any rate, he has property there, which has very much increased in value since Milton has become such a large manufacturing town. Well, I had reason to suspect—to imagine—I had better say nothing about it, however. But I felt sure of sympathy from Mr. Bell. I don't know that he gave me much strength. He has lived an easy life in his college all his days. But he has been as kind as can be. And it is owing to him we are going to Milton.'

'How?' said Margaret.

'Why he has tenants, and houses, and mills there; so, though he dislikes the place—too bustling for one of his habits—he is

obliged to keep up some sort of connection; and he tells me that he hears there is a good opening for a private tutor there.'

'A private tutor!' said Margaret, looking scornful: 'What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?'

'Oh,' said her father, 'some of them really seem to be fine fellows, conscious of their own deficiencies, which is more than many a man at Oxford is. Some want resolutely to learn, though they have come to man's estate. Some want their children to be better instructed than they themselves have been. At any rate, there is an opening, as I have said, for a private tutor. Mr. Bell has recommended me to a Mr. Thornton, a tenant of his, and a very intelligent man, as far as I can judge from his letters. And in Milton, Margaret, I shall find a busy life, if not a happy one, and people and scenes so different that I shall never be reminded of Helstone.'

There was the secret motive, as Margaret knew from her own feelings. It would be different. Discordant as it was—with almost a detestation for all she had ever heard of the North of England, the manufacturers, the people, the wild and bleak country—there was this one recommendation—it would be different from Helstone, and could never remind them of that beloved place.

'When do we go?' asked Margaret, after a short silence.

'I do not know exactly. I wanted to talk it over with you. You see, your mother knows nothing about it yet: but I think, in a fortnight;—after my deed of resignation is sent in, I shall have no right to remain.

Margaret was almost stunned.

'In a fortnight!'

'No—no, not exactly to a day. Nothing is fixed,' said her father, with anxious hesitation, as he noticed the filmy sorrow that came over her eyes, and the sudden change in her complexion. But she recovered herself immediately.

'Yes, papa, it had better be fixed soon and decidedly, as you say. Only mamma to know nothing about it! It is that that is the great perplexity.'

'Poor Maria!' replied Mr. Hale, tenderly. 'Poor, poor Maria! Oh, if I were not married—if I were but myself in the world, how easy it would be! As it is—Margaret, I dare not tell her!'

'No,' said Margaret, sadly, 'I will do it. Give me till to-morrow evening to choose my time Oh, papa,' cried she, with sudden passionate entreaty, 'say—tell me it is a night-mare—a horrid dream—not the real waking truth! You cannot mean that you are really going to leave the Church—to give up Helstone—to be for ever separate from me, from mamma—led away by some delusion—some temptation! You do not really mean it!'

Mr. Hale sat in rigid stillness while she spoke.

Then he looked her in the face, and said in a slow, hoarse, measured way—'I do mean it, Margaret. You must not deceive yourself into doubting the reality of my words—my fixed intention and resolve.' He looked at her in the same steady, stony manner, for some moments after he had done speaking. She, too, gazed back with pleading eyes before she would believe that it was irrevocable. Then she arose and went, without another word or look, towards the door. As her fingers were on the handle he called her back. He was standing by the fireplace, shrunk and stooping; but as she came near he drew himself up to his full height, and, placing his hands on her head, he said, solemnly:

'The blessing of God be upon thee, my child!'

'And may He restore you to His Church,' responded she, out of the fulness of her heart. The next moment she feared lest this answer to his blessing might be irreverent, wrong—might hurt him as coming from his daughter, and she threw her arms round his neck. He held her to him for a minute or two. She heard him murmur to himself, 'The martyrs and confessors had even more pain to bear—I will not shrink.'

They were startled by hearing Mrs. Hale inquiring for her daughter. They started asunder in the full consciousness of all

that was before them. Mr. Hale hurriedly said—'Go, Margaret, go. I shall be out all to-morrow. Before night you will have told your mother.'

'Yes,' she replied, and she returned to the drawing-room in a stunned and dizzy state.

Chapter 5
Decision

'I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And to wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.'
A. L. WARING.

Margaret made a good listener to all her mother's little plans for adding some small comforts to the lot of the poorer parishioners. She could not help listening, though each new project was a stab to her heart. By the time the frost had set in, they should be far away from Helstone. Old Simon's rheumatism might be bad and his eyesight worse; there would be no one to go and read to him, and comfort him with little porringers of broth and good red flannel: or if there was, it would be a stranger, and the old man would watch in vain for her. Mary Domville's little crippled boy would crawl in vain to the door and look for her coming through the forest. These poor friends would never understand why she had forsaken them; and there were many others besides. 'Papa has always spent the income he derived from his living in the parish. I am, perhaps, encroaching upon the next dues, but the winter is likely to be severe, and our poor old people must be helped.'

'Oh, mamma, let us do all we can,' said Margaret eagerly, not seeing the prudential side of the question, only grasping at the idea that they were rendering such help for the last time; 'we may not be here long.'

'Do you feel ill, my darling?' asked Mrs. Hale, anxiously, misunderstanding Margaret's hint of the uncertainty of their stay at Helstone. 'You look pale and tired. It is this soft, damp, unhealthy air.'

'No—no, mamma, it is not that: it is delicious air. It smells of the freshest, purest fragrance, after the smokiness of Harley Street. But I am tired: it surely must be near bedtime.'

'Not far off—it is half-past nine. You had better go to bed at dear. Ask Dixon for some gruel. I will come and see you as soon as you are in bed. I am afraid you have taken cold; or the bad air from some of the stagnant ponds—'

'Oh, mamma,' said Margaret, faintly smiling as she kissed her mother, 'I am quite well—don't alarm yourself about me; I am only tired.'

Margaret went upstairs. To soothe her mother's anxiety she submitted to a basin of gruel. She was lying languidly in bed when Mrs. Hale came up to make some last inquiries and kiss her before going to her own room for the night. But the instant she heard her mother's door locked, she sprang out of bed, and throwing her dressing-gown on, she began to pace up and down the room, until the creaking of one of the boards reminded her that she must make no noise. She went and curled herself up on the window-seat in the small, deeply-recessed window. That morning when she had looked out, her heart had danced at seeing the bright clear lights on the church tower, which foretold a fine and sunny day. This evening—sixteen hours at most had past by—she sat down, too full of sorrow to cry, but with a dull cold pain, which seemed to have pressed the youth and buoyancy out of her heart, never to return. Mr. Henry Lennox's visit—his offer—was like a dream, a thing beside her actual life. The hard reality was, that her father had so admitted tempting doubts into his mind as to become a schismatic—an outcast; all the changes consequent upon this grouped themselves around that one great blighting fact.

She looked out upon the dark-gray lines of the church tower, square and straight in the centre of the view, cutting against

the deep blue transparent depths beyond, into which she gazed, and felt that she might gaze for ever, seeing at every moment some farther distance, and yet no sign of God! It seemed to her at the moment, as if the earth was more utterly desolate than if girt in by an iron dome, behind which there might be the ineffaceable peace and glory of the Almighty: those never-ending depths of space, in their still serenity, were more mocking to her than any material bounds could be—shutting in the cries of earth's sufferers, which now might ascend into that infinite splendour of vastness and be lost—lost for ever, before they reached His throne. In this mood her father came in unheard. The moonlight was strong enough to let him see his daughter in her unusual place and attitude. He came to her and touched her shoulder before she was aware that he was there.

'Margaret, I heard you were up. I could not help coming in to ask you to pray with me—to say the Lord's Prayer; that will do good to both of us.'

Mr. Hale and Margaret knelt by the window-seat—he looking up, she bowed down in humble shame. God was there, close around them, hearing her father's whispered words. Her father might be a heretic; but had not she, in her despairing doubts not five minutes before, shown herself a far more utter sceptic? She spoke not a word, but stole to bed after her father had left her, like a child ashamed of its fault. If the world was full of perplexing problems she would trust, and only ask to see the one step needful for the hour. Mr. Lennox—his visit, his proposal—the remembrance of which had been so rudely pushed aside by the subsequent events of the day—haunted her dreams that night. He was climbing up some tree of fabulous height to reach the branch whereon was slung her bonnet: he was falling, and she was struggling to save him, but held back by some invisible powerful hand. He was dead. And yet, with a shifting of the scene, she was once more in the Harley Street drawing-room, talking to him as of old, and still with a consciousness all the time that she had seen him killed by that terrible fall.