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CHARLOTTE BRONTË

THE  
PROFESSOR



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## INTRODUCTORY

The other day, in looking over my papers, I found in my desk the following copy of a letter, sent to me a year since to an old school acquaintance:

“DEAR CHARLES,—

I think when you and I were at Eton together, we were neither of us what could be called popular characters: you were a sarcastic, observant, shrewd, cold-blooded creature: my own portrait I will not attempt to draw, but I cannot recollect that it was a strikingly attractive one—can you? What animal magnetism drew thee and me together I know not; certainly I never experienced anything like the Pylades and Orestes sentiment for you, and I have reason to believe that you, on your part, were equally free from all romantic regard to me. Still, out of school hours we walked and talked continually together; when the theme of conversation was our companions or our masters, we understood each other, and when I recurred to some sentiment of affection, some vague love of an excellent or beautiful object, whether in animate or inanimate nature, your sardonic coldness did not move me. I felt myself superior to that check *then* as I do *now*.

“It is a long time since I wrote to you, and a still longer time since I saw you. Chancing to take up a newspaper of your county the other day, my eye fell upon your name. I began to think of old times; to run over the events which have transpired since we separated; and I sat down and commenced this letter. What you have been doing I know not; but you shall hear, if you choose to listen, how the world has wagged with me.

“First, after leaving Eton, I had an interview with my maternal uncles, Lord Tynedale and the Hon. John Seacombe. They asked me if I would enter the Church, and my uncle the nobleman offered me the living of Seacombe, which is in his gift, if I would; then my other uncle, Mr. Seacombe, hinted that when I became rector of Seacombe-cum-Scaife, I might perhaps be allowed to take, as mistress of my house and head of my parish, one of my six cousins, his daughters, all whom I greatly dislike.

“I declined both the Church and matrimony. A good clergyman is a good thing, but I should have made a very bad one. As to the wife—oh, how like a nightmare is the thought of being bound for life to one of my cousins! No doubt they are accomplished and pretty; but not an accomplishment is not a charm of theirs, touches a chord in my bosom. To think of passing the winter evenings by the parlour fireside of Seacombe Rectory alone with one of them—for instance, the large and well-modelled statue, Sarah—no; I should be a bad husband, under such circumstances, as well as a bad clergyman.

“When I had declined my uncles’ offers they asked me ‘what I intended to do?’ I said I should reflect. They reminded me that I had no fortune, and no expectation of any, and, after a considerable pause, Lord Tynedale demanded sternly, ‘Whether I had thoughts of following my father’s step and engaging in trade?’ Now I had no thought of the sort. I do not think that my turn of mind qualifies me to make a good tradesman; my taste, my ambition does not lie in that way; but such

was the scorn expressed in Lord Tynedale's countenance as he pronounced the word *trade*—su—  
the contemptuous sarcasm of his tone—that I was instantly decided. My father was but a name  
me, yet that name I did not like to hear mentioned with a sneer to my very face. I answered the  
with haste and warmth, 'I cannot do better than follow in my father's steps; yes, I will be  
tradesman.' My uncles did not remonstrate; they and I parted with mutual disgust. In reviewing the  
transaction, I find that I was quite right to shake off the burden of Tynedale's patronage, but a fo  
to offer my shoulders instantly for the reception of another burden—one which might be mo  
intolerable, and which certainly was yet untried.

"I wrote instantly to Edward—you know Edward—my only brother, ten years my senior, married  
to a rich mill-owner's daughter, and now possessor of the mill and business which was my father's  
before he failed. You are aware that my father—once reckoned a Cr?sus of wealth—became  
bankrupt a short time previous to his death, and that my mother lived in destitution for some s  
months after him, unhelpt by her aristocratical brothers, whom she had mortally offended by h  
union with Crimsworth, the ——shire manufacturer. At the end of the six months she brought m  
into the world, and then herself left it, without, I should think, much regret, as it contained litt  
hope or comfort for her.

"My father's relations took charge of Edward, as they did of me, till I was nine years old. At th  
period it chanced that the representation of an important borough in our county fell vacant; M  
Seacombe stood for it. My uncle Crimsworth, an astute mercantile man, took the opportunity  
writing a fierce letter to the candidate, stating that if he and Lord Tynedale did not consent to c  
something towards the support of their sister's orphan children, he would expose their relentle  
and malignant conduct towards that sister, and do his best to turn the circumstances against M  
Seacombe's election. That gentleman and Lord T. knew well enough that the Crimsworths were a  
unscrupulous and determined race; they knew also that they had influence in the borough of X—  
and, making a virtue of necessity, they consented to defray the expenses of my education. I was se  
to Eton, where I remained ten years, during which space of time Edward and I never met. He, wh  
he grew up, entered into trade, and pursued his calling with such diligence, ability, and success, th  
now, in his thirtieth year, he was fast making a fortune. Of this I was apprised by the occasio  
short letters I received from him, some three or four times a year; which said letters nev  
concluded without some expression of determined enmity against the house of Seacombe, and som  
reproach to me for living, as he said, on the bounty of that house. At first, while still in boyhood,  
could not understand why, as I had no parents, I should not be indebted to my uncles Tynedale and  
Seacombe for my education; but as I grew up, and heard by degrees of the persevering hostility, th  
hatred till death evinced by them against my father—of the sufferings of my mother—of all th  
wrongs, in short, of our house—then did I conceive shame of the dependence in which I lived, an  
form a resolution no more to take bread from hands which had refused to minister to the necessiti  
of my dying mother. It was by these feelings I was influenced when I refused the Rectory o  
Seacombe, and the union with one of my patrician cousins.

"An irreparable breach thus being effected between my uncles and myself, I wrote to Edward  
told him what had occurred, and informed him of my intention to follow his steps and be  
tradesman. I asked, moreover, if he could give me employment. His answer expressed r  
approbation of my conduct, but he said I might come down to ——shire, if I liked, and he wou  
'see what could be done in the way of furnishing me with work.' I repressed all—even *ment*  
comment on his note—packed my trunk and carpet-bag, and started for the North directly.

"After two days' travelling (railroads were not then in existence) I arrived, one wet Octob  
afternoon, in the town of X——. I had always understood that Edward lived in this town, but o  
inquiry I found that it was only Mr. Crimsworth's mill and warehouse which were situated in th

smoky atmosphere of Bigben Close; his *residence* lay four miles out, in the country.

—“It was late in the evening when I alighted at the gates of the habitation designated to me as my brother’s. As I advanced up the avenue, I could see through the shades of twilight, and the dark gloomy mists which deepened those shades, that the house was large, and the grounds surrounding it sufficiently spacious. I paused a moment on the lawn in front, and leaning my back against a tall tree which rose in the centre, I gazed with interest on the exterior of Crimsworth Hall.

“ ‘Edward is rich,’ thought I to myself. ‘I believed him to be doing well—but I did not know he was master of a mansion like this.’ Cutting short all marvelling, speculation, conjecture, etc., I advanced to the front door and rang. A man-servant opened it—I announced myself—he relieved me of my wet cloak and carpet-bag, and ushered me into a room furnished as a library, where there was a bright fire and candles burning on the table; he informed me that his master was not yet returned from X—— market, but that he would certainly be at home in the course of half-an-hour.

“Being left to myself, I took the stuffed easy-chair, covered with red morocco, which stood by the fireside, and while my eyes watched the flames dart from the glowing coals, and the cinders fall in intervals on the hearth, my mind busied itself in conjectures concerning the meeting about to take place. Amidst much that was doubtful in the subject of these conjectures, there was one thing tolerably certain—I was in no danger of encountering severe disappointment; from this, the moderation of my expectations guaranteed me. I anticipated no overflowings of fraternal tenderness: Edward’s letters had always been such as to prevent the engendering or harbouring of delusions of this sort. Still, as I sat awaiting his arrival, I felt eager—very eager—I cannot tell you why; my hand, so utterly a stranger to the grasp of a kindred hand, clenched itself to repress the tremor with which impatience would fain have shaken it.

“I thought of my uncles; and as I was engaged in wondering whether Edward’s indifference would equal the cold disdain I had always experienced from them, I heard the avenue gates open, wheels approached the house; Mr. Crimsworth was arrived; and after the lapse of some minutes and a brief dialogue between himself and his servant in the hall, his tread drew near the library door—that tread alone announced the master of the house.

“I still retained some confused recollection of Edward as he was ten years ago—a tall, wiry, raw youth; *now*, as I rose from my seat and turned towards the library door, I saw a fine-looking and powerful man, light-complexioned, well-made, and of athletic proportions; the first glance made me aware of an air of promptitude and sharpness, shown as well in his movements as in his port, his eye, and the general expression of his face. He greeted me with brevity, and, in the moment of shaking hands, scanned me from head to foot; he took his seat in the morocco-covered arm-chair, and motioned me to another seat.

“ ‘I expected you would have called at the counting-house in the Close,’ said he; and his voice, I noticed, had an abrupt accent, probably habitual to him; he spoke also with a guttural northern tone which sounded harsh in my ears, accustomed to the silvery utterance of the South.

“ ‘The landlord of the inn, where the coach stopped, directed me here,’ said I. ‘I doubted at first the accuracy of his information, not being aware that you had such a residence as this.’

“ ‘Oh, it is all right!’ he replied, ‘only I was kept half-an-hour behind time, waiting for you—there is all. I thought you must be coming by the eight o’clock coach.’

“I expressed regret that he had had to wait; he made no answer, but stirred the fire, as if to cover a movement of impatience; then he scanned me again.

“I felt an inward satisfaction that I had not, in the first moment of meeting, betrayed any warmth or any enthusiasm; that I had saluted this man with a quiet and steady phlegm.

“ ‘Have you quite broken with Tynedale and Seacombe?’ he asked hastily.

“ ‘I do not think I shall have any further communication with them; my refusal of their proposal

will, I fancy, operate as a barrier against all future intercourse.’

“‘Why,’ said he, ‘I may as well remind you at the very outset of our connection, that “no man can serve two masters.” Acquaintance with Lord Tynedale will be incompatible with assistance from me.’ There was a kind of gratuitous menace in his eye as he looked at me in finishing the observation.

“Feeling no disposition to reply to him, I contented myself with an inward speculation on the differences which exist in the constitution of men’s minds. I do not know what inference Mr. Crimsworth drew from my silence—whether he considered it a symptom of contumacity or a piece of evidence of my being cowed by his peremptory manner. After a long and hard stare at me, he rose sharply from his seat.

“‘To-morrow,’ said he, ‘I shall call your attention to some other points; but now it is supper-time, and Mrs. Crimsworth is probably waiting; will you come?’

“He strode from the room, and I followed. In crossing the hall, I wondered what Mrs. Crimsworth might be. ‘Is she,’ thought I, ‘as alien to what I like as Tynedale, Seacombe, the Misses Seacombe—as the affectionate relative now striding before me? or is she better than these? Shall I, in conversing with her, feel free to show something of my real nature; or——’ Further conjectures were arrested by my entrance into the dining-room.

“A lamp burning under a shade of ground-glass, showed a handsome apartment, wainscoted with oak; supper was laid on the table; by the fireplace, standing as if waiting our entrance, appeared a lady; she was young, tall, and well-shaped; her dress was handsome and fashionable; so much more than I had expected to see in a country-house. My first glance sufficed to ascertain. A gay salutation passed between her and Mr. Crimsworth; she chided him, half playfully, half poutingly, for being late; her voice (I always take voices into the account in my judging of character) was lively—it indicated, I thought, good animal spirits. Mr. Crimsworth soon checked her animated scolding with a kiss—a kiss that still told of the bridegroom (they had not yet been married a year); she took her seat at the supper-table in first-rate spirits. Perceiving me, she begged my pardon for not noticing me before, and then shook hands with me, as ladies do when in a flow of good-humour disposes them to be cheerful to all, even the most indifferent of their acquaintances. It was now further obvious to me that she had a good complexion, and features sufficiently marked but agreeable; her hair was red—quite red. She and Edward talked much together, always in a vein of playful contention; she was vexed, or pretended to be vexed, that he had that day driven a vicious horse in the gig, and he made light of her fears. Sometimes she appealed to me.

“‘Now, Mr. William, isn’t it absurd in Edward to talk so? He says he will drive Jack, and not any other horse, and the brute has thrown him twice already.’

“She spoke with a kind of lisp, not disagreeable, but childish. I soon saw also that there was more than girlish—a somewhat infantine expression in her by no means small features; this lisp and this expression were, I have no doubt, a charm in Edward’s eyes, and would be so to those of most men; but they were not to mine. I sought her eye, desirous to read there the intelligence which I could not discern in her face or hear in her conversation; it was merry, rather small; by turns I saw vivacity, vanity, coquetry, look out through its irid, but I watched in vain for a glimpse of soul. I am not an Oriental; white necks, carmine lips and cheeks, clusters of bright curls, do not suffice for me without that Promethean spark which will live after the roses and lilies are faded, the burnished hair grown grey. In sunshine, in prosperity, the flowers are very well; but how many wet days are there in life—November seasons of disaster, when a man’s hearth and home would be cold indeed without the clear, cheering gleam of intellect.

“Having perused the fair page of Mrs. Crimsworth’s face, a deep, involuntary sigh announced my disappointment; she took it as a homage to her beauty, and Edward, who was evidently proud of his rich and handsome young wife, threw on me a glance—half ridicule, half ire.



“I turned from them both, and gazing wearily round the room, I saw two pictures set in the ~~or~~ panelling—~~one on each side of the mantelpiece. Ceasing to take part in the bantering conversation~~ that flowed on between Mr. and Mrs. Crimsworth, I bent my thoughts to the examination of the pictures. They were portraits—a lady and a gentleman, both costumed in the fashion of twenty years ago. The gentleman was in the shade. I could not see him well. The lady had the benefit of a full beam from the softly shaded lamp. I presently recognised her; I had seen this picture before in childhood; it was my mother; that and the companion picture being the only heirlooms saved out of the sale of my father’s property.

“The face, I remembered, had pleased me as a boy, but *then* I did not understand it; *now* I knew how rare that class of face is in the world, and I appreciated keenly its thoughtful, yet gentle expression. The serious grey eye possessed for me a strong charm, as did certain lines in the features indicative of most true and tender feeling. I was sorry it was only a picture.

“I soon left Mr. and Mrs. Crimsworth to themselves; a servant conducted me to my bedroom; closing my chamber door, I shut out all intruders—you, Charles, as well as the rest.—Good-bye for the present.

WILLIAM CRIMSWORTH

To this letter I never got an answer; before my old friend received it, he had accepted a government appointment in one of the colonies, and was already on his way to the scene of his official labours. What has become of him since, I know not.

The leisure time I have at command, and which I intended to employ for his private benefit, I shall now dedicate to that of the public at large. My narrative is not exciting, and above all, not marvellous; but it may interest some individuals, who, having toiled in the same vocation as myself, will find in my experience frequent reflections of their own. The above letter will serve as an introduction. I now proceed.

A fine October morning succeeded to the foggy evening that had witnessed my first introduction to Crimsworth Hall. I was early up and walking in the large park-like meadow surrounding the house. The autumn sun rising over the —shire hills, disclosed a pleasant country; woods brown and mellow varied the fields from which the harvest had been lately carried; a river, gliding between the woods, caught on its surface the somewhat cold gleam of the October sun and sky; at frequent intervals along the banks of the river, tall, cylindrical chimneys, almost like slender round towers, indicated the factories which the trees half concealed; here and there mansions, similar to Crimsworth Hall, occupied agreeable sites on the hillside; the country wore, on the whole, a cheerful, active, fertile look. Steam, trade, machinery, had long banished from it all romance and seclusion. At a distance of five miles, a valley, opening between the low hills, held in its cups the great town of X—. A dense permanent vapour brooded over this locality—there lay Edward's "Concern."

I forced my eye to scrutinise this prospect, I forced my mind to dwell on it for a time, and when I found that it communicated no pleasurable emotion to my heart—that it stirred in me none of the hopes a man ought to feel, when he sees laid before him the scene of his life's career—I said to myself, "William, you are a rebel against circumstances; you are a fool, and know not what you want; you have chosen trade and you shall be a tradesman. Look!" I continued mentally—"Look at the sooty smoke in that hollow, and know that there is your post! There you cannot dream, you cannot speculate and theorise—there you shall out and work!"

Thus self-schooled, I returned to the house. My brother was in the breakfast-room. I met him collectedly—I could not meet him cheerfully; he was standing on the rug, his back to the fire—how much did I read in the expression of his eye as my glance encountered his, when I advanced to bid him good morning; how much that was contradictory to my nature! He said "Good morning" abruptly and nodded, and then he snatched, rather than took, a newspaper from the table, and began to read it with the air of a master who seizes a pretext to escape the bore of conversing with an underling. It was well I had taken a resolution to endure for a time, or his manner would have gone far to render insupportable the disgust I had just been endeavouring to subdue. I looked at him: I measured his robust frame and powerful proportions; I saw my own reflection in the mirror over the mantelpiece; I amused myself with comparing the two pictures. In face I resembled him, though I was not so handsome; my features were less regular; I had a darker eye, and a broader brow—in form I was greatly inferior—thinner, slighter, not so tall. As an animal, Edward excelled me far; should he prove as paramount in mind as in person I must be a slave—for I must expect from him no lion-like generosity to one weaker than himself; his cold, avaricious eye, his stern, forbidding manner told me he would not spare. Had I then force of mind to cope with him? I did not know; I had never been tried.

Mrs. Crimsworth's entrance diverted my thoughts for a moment. She looked well, dressed in white, her face and her attire shining in morning and bridal freshness. I addressed her with the degree of ease her last night's careless gaiety seemed to warrant, but she replied with coolness and restraint: her husband had tutored her; she was not to be too familiar with his clerk.

As soon as breakfast was over Mr. Crimsworth intimated to me that they were bringing the gig round to the door, and that in five minutes he should expect me to be ready to go down with him to X——. He did not keep him waiting; we were soon dashing at a rapid rate along the road. The horse he drove was the same vicious animal about which Mrs. Crimsworth had expressed her fears the night before. Once or twice Jack seemed disposed to turn restive, but a vigorous and determined application of the whip from the ruthless hand of his master soon compelled him to submission, and Edward's dilated nostrils expressed his triumph in the result of the contest; he scarcely spoke to me during the whole of the brief drive, only opening his lips at intervals to damn his horse.

X—— was all stir and bustle when we entered it; we left the clean streets where there were dwelling-houses and shops, churches, and public buildings; we left all these, and turned down to a region of mills and warehouses; thence we passed through two massive gates into a great paved yard, and we were in Bigben Close, and the mill was before us, vomiting soot from its long chimney, and quivering through its thick brick walls with the commotion of its iron bowels. Workpeople were passing to and fro; a waggon was being laden with pieces. Mr. Crimsworth looked from side to side, and seemed at one glance to comprehend all that was going on; he alighted, and leaving his horse and gig to the care of a man who hastened to take the reins from his hand, he bid me follow him to the counting-house. We entered it; a very different place from the parlours of Crimsworth Hall—a place for business, with a bare, planked floor, a safe, two high desks and stools, and some chairs. A person was seated at one of the desks, who took off his square cap when Mr. Crimsworth entered, and in an instant was again absorbed in his occupation of writing or calculating—I know not which.

Mr. Crimsworth, having removed his mackintosh, sat down by the fire. I remained standing near the hearth; he said presently:

“Steighton, you may leave the room; I have some business to transact with this gentleman. Come back when you hear the bell.”

The individual at the desk rose and departed, closing the door as he went out. Mr. Crimsworth stirred the fire, then folded his arms, and sat a moment thinking, his lips compressed, his brow knit. I had nothing to do but to watch him—how well his features were cut! what a handsome man he was! Whence, then, came that air of contraction—that now narrow and hard aspect on his forehead, in all his lineaments?

Turning to me he began abruptly:

“You are come down to ——shire to learn to be a tradesman?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Have you made up your mind on the point? Let me know that at once.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I am not bound to help you, but I have a place here vacant, if you are qualified for it. I will take you on trial. What can you do? Do you know anything besides that useless trash of college learning—Greek, Latin, and so forth?”

“I have studied mathematics.”

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“Stuff! I dare say you have.”

“I can read and write French and German.”

“Hum!” He reflected a moment, then opening a drawer in a desk near him took out a letter, and gave to me.

“Can you read that?” he asked.

It was a German commercial letter; I translated it; I could not tell whether he was gratified or not—his countenance remained fixed.

“It is well,” he said, after a pause, “that you are acquainted with something useful, something that may enable you to earn your board and lodging: since you know French and German, I will take you as second clerk to manage the foreign correspondence of the house. I shall give you a good salary—£90 a year—and now,” he continued, raising his voice, “hear once for all what I have to say about our relationship, and all that sort of humbug! I must have no nonsense on that point; it would never suit me. I shall excuse you nothing on the plea of being my brother; if I find you stupid, negligent, dissipated, idle, or possessed of any faults detrimental to the interests of the house, I shall dismiss you as I would any other clerk. Ninety pounds a year are good wages, and I expect to have the full value of my money out of you; remember, too, that things are on a practical footing in my establishment—business-like habits, feelings, and ideas, suit me best. Do you understand?”

“Partly,” I replied. “I suppose you mean that I am to do my work for my wages; not to expect favour from you, and not to depend on you for any help but what I earn; that suits me exactly, and on these terms I will consent to be your clerk.”

I turned on my heel, and walked to the window; this time I did not consult his face to learn his opinion: what it was I did not know, nor did I then care. After a silence of some minutes he recommenced:

“You perhaps expect to be accommodated with apartments at Crimsworth Hall, and to go and come with me in the gig. I wish you, however, to be aware that such an arrangement would be quite inconvenient to me. I like to have the seat in my gig at liberty for any gentleman whom for business reasons I may wish to take down to the hall for a night or so. You will seek out lodgings in X——.”

Quitting the window, I walked back to the hearth.

“Of course I shall seek out lodgings in X——,” I answered. “It would not suit me either to lodge at Crimsworth Hall.”

My tone was quiet. I always speak quietly. Yet Mr. Crimsworth’s blue eye became incensed; he took his revenge rather oddly. Turning to me he said bluntly:

“You are poor enough, I suppose; how do you expect to live till your quarter’s salary becomes due?”

“I shall get on,” said I.

“How do you expect to live?” he repeated in a louder voice.

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“As I can, Mr. Crimsworth.”

“Get into debt at your peril! that’s all,” he answered. “For aught I know you may have extravagant aristocratic habits: if you have, drop them; I tolerate nothing of the sort here, and I will never give you a shilling extra, whatever liabilities you may incur—mind that.”

“Yes, Mr. Crimsworth, you will find I have a good memory.”

I said no more. I did not think the time was come for much parley. I had an instinctive feeling that it would be folly to let one’s temper effervesce often with such a man as Edward. I said to myself, “I will place my cup under this continual dropping; it shall stand there still and steady; when full, it will run over of itself—meantime patience. Two things are certain. I am capable of performing the work Mr. Crimsworth has set me; I can earn my wages conscientiously, and those wages are sufficient to enable me to live. As to the fact of my brother assuming towards me the bearing of a proud, harsh master, the fault is his, not mine; and shall his injustice, his bad feeling, turn me at once aside from the path I have chosen? No; at least, ere I deviate, I will advance far enough to see whither my career tends. As yet I am only pressing in at the entrance—a strait gate enough; it ought to have a good terminus.” While I thus reasoned, Mr. Crimsworth rang a bell; his first clerk, the individual dismissed previously to our conference, re-entered.

“Mr. Steighton,” said he, “show Mr. William the letters from Voss Brothers, and give him English copies of the answers; he will translate them.”

Mr. Steighton, a man of about thirty-five, with a face at once sly and heavy, hastened to execute this order; he laid the letters on the desk, and I was soon seated at it, and engaged in rendering the English answers into German. A sentiment of keen pleasure accompanied this first effort to earn my own living—a sentiment neither poisoned nor weakened by the presence of the taskmaster, who stood and watched me for some time as I wrote. I thought he was trying to read my character, but I felt as secure against his scrutiny as if I had had on a casque with the visor down—or rather I showed him my countenance with the confidence that one would show an unlearned man a letter written in Greek; he might see lines, and trace characters, but he could make nothing of them; my nature was not his nature, and its signs were to him like the words of an unknown tongue. Ere long he turned away abruptly, as if baffled, and left the counting-house; he returned to it but twice in the course of that day; each time he mixed and swallowed a glass of brandy-and-water, the materials for making which he extracted from a cupboard on one side of the fireplace; having glanced at my translations—he could read both French and German—he went out again in silence.

I served Edward as his second clerk faithfully, punctually, diligently. What was given me to do I had the power and the determination to do well. Mr. Crimsworth watched sharply for defects, but found none; he set Timothy Steighton, his favourite and head man, to watch also. Tim was baffled; I was as exact as himself, and quicker. Mr. Crimsworth made inquiries as to how I lived, whether I got into debt—no, my accounts with my landlady were always straight. I had hired small lodgings, which I contrived to pay for out of a slender fund—the accumulated savings of my Eton pocket-money; for it had ever been abhorrent to my nature to ask pecuniary assistance, I had early acquired habits of self-denying economy; husbanding my monthly allowance with anxious care, in order to obviate the danger of being forced, in some moment of future exigency, to beg additional aid. I remember many called me miser at the time, and I used to couple the reproach with this consolation—better to be misunderstood now than repulsed hereafter. At this day I had my reward; I had had it before, when departing with my irritated uncles one of them threw down on the table before me a £5 note, which I was able to leave there, saying that my travelling expenses were already provided for. Mr. Crimsworth employed Tim to find out whether my landlady had any complaint to make on the score of my morals; she answered that she believed I was a very religious man, and asked him, in her turn, if he thought I had any intention of going into the Church some day; for, she said, she had had young curates to lodge in her house who were nothing equal to me for steadiness and quietness. Tim was “a religious man himself; indeed, he was “a joined Methodist,” which did not (be it understood) prevent him from being at the same time an engrained rascal, and he came away much posed at hearing this account of my piety. Having imparted it to Mr. Crimsworth, that gentleman who himself frequented no place of worship, and owned no God but Mammon, turned the information into a weapon of attack against the equability of my temper. He commenced a series of covert sneers, of which I did not at first perceive the drift, till my landlady happened to relate the conversation she had had with Mr. Steighton; this enlightened me; afterwards I came to the counting-house prepared, and managed to receive the mill owner’s blasphemous sarcasms, when next levelled at me, on a buckler of impenetrable indifference. Ere long he tired of wasting his ammunition on a statue, but he did not throw away the shafts—he only kept them quiet in his quiver.

Once during my clerkship I had an invitation to Crimsworth Hall; it was on the occasion of a large party given in honour of the master’s birthday; he had always been accustomed to invite his clerks on similar anniversaries, and could not well pass me over; I was, however, kept strictly in the background. Mrs. Crimsworth, elegantly dressed in satin and lace, blooming in youth and health, vouchsafed me no more notice than was expressed by a distant move; Crimsworth, of course, never spoke to me; I was introduced to none of the band of young ladies, who, enveloped in silvery clouds of white gauze and muslin, sat in array against me on the opposite side of a long and large room; in fact I was fairly isolated, and could but contemplate the shining ones from afar, and when weary of such a dazzling scene, turn for a change to the consideration of the carpet pattern. Mr. Crimsworth, standing on the rug, his elbow supported by the marble mantelpiece, and about him a group of very pretty girls with whom he conversed gaily—Mr. Crimsworth, thus placed, glanced at me; I looked weary, solitary, kept down like some desolate tutor or governess; he was satisfied.

Dancing began; I should have liked well enough to be introduced to some pleasing and intelligent girl and to have freedom and opportunity to show that I could both feel and communicate the pleasure of social intercourse—that I was not, in short, a block, or a piece of furniture, but an acting, thinking, sentient man. Many smiling faces and graceful figures glided past me, but the smiles were lavished on other eyes, the figures sustained by other hands than mine. I turned away tantalised, left the dancers, and wandered into the oak-panelled dining-room. No fibre of sympathy united me to any living thing in this house; I looked for and found my mother's picture. I took a wax-taper from a stand, and held it up. I gazed long, earnestly; my heart grew to the image. My mother, I perceived, had bequeathed to me much of her features and countenance—her forehead, her eyes, her complexion. No regular beauties please egotistical human beings so much as a softened and refined likeness of themselves; for this reason, fathers regard with complacency the lineaments of their daughters' faces, where frequently their own similitude is found flatteringly associated with softness of hue and delicacy of outline. I was just wondering how that picture, to me so interesting, would strike an impartial spectator, when a voice close behind me pronounced the words:

“Humph! there's some sense in that face.”

I turned; at my elbow stood a tall man, young, though probably five or six years older than I—in other respects of an appearance the opposite to commonplace; though just now, as I am not disposed to paint his portrait in detail, the reader must be content with the silhouette I have just thrown off; it was all I myself saw of him for the moment. I did not investigate the colour of his eyebrows, nor of his eyes either; I saw his stature, and the outline of his shape; I saw, too, his fastidious-looking *retroussé* nose; these observations, few in number, and general in character (the last excepted), sufficed, for they enabled me to recognise him.

“Good evening, Mr. Hunsden,” muttered I with a bow, and then, like a shy noodle as I was, I began moving away—and why? Simply because Mr. Hunsden was a manufacturer and a mill-owner, and I was only a clerk, and my instinct propelled me from my superior. I had frequently seen Hunsden in Bigben Close, where he came almost weekly to transact business with Mr. Crimsworth, but I had never spoken to him, nor he to me, and I owed him a sort of involuntary grudge, because he had more than once been the tacit witness of insults offered by Edward to me. I had the conviction that he could only regard me as a poor-spirited slave, wherefore I now went about to shun his presence and eschew his conversation.

“Where are you going?” asked he, as I edged off sideways. I had already noticed that Mr. Hunsden indulged in abrupt forms of speech, and I perversely said to myself:

“He thinks he may speak as he likes to a poor clerk; but my mood is not, perhaps, so supple as he deems it, and his rough freedom pleases me not at all.”

I made some slight reply, rather indifferent than courteous, and continued to move away. He coolly planted himself in my path.

“Stay here awhile,” said he: “it is so hot in the dancing-room; besides, you don't dance; you have not had a partner to-night.”

He was right, and as he spoke neither his look, tone, nor manner displeased me; my *amour-propre* was propitiated; he had not addressed me out of condescension, but because, having repaired to the cool

dining-room for refreshment, he now wanted some one to talk to, by way of temporary amusement. I hate to be condescended to, but I like well enough to oblige; I stayed.

“That is a good picture,” he continued, recurring to the portrait.

“Do you consider the face pretty?” I asked.

“Pretty! no—how can it be pretty, with sunk eyes and hollow cheeks? but it is peculiar; it seems to think. You could have a talk with that woman, if she were alive, on other subjects than dress, visiting and compliments.”

I agreed with him, but did not say so. He went on.

“Not that I admire a head of that sort; it wants character and force; there’s too much of the sensitive (so he articulated it, curling his lip at the same time) in that mouth; besides, there is Aristocrat written on the brow and defined in the figure; I hate your aristocrats.”

“You think, then, Mr. Hunsden, that patrician descent may be read in a distinctive cast of form and features?”

“Patrician descent be hanged! Who doubts that your lordlings may have their ‘distinctive cast of form and features’ as much as we——shire tradesmen have ours? But which is the best? Not theirs assuredly. As to their women, it is a little different: they cultivate beauty from childhood upwards, and may by care and training attain to a certain degree of excellence in that point, just like the Oriental Odaliskes. Yet even this superiority is doubtful. Compare the figure in that frame with Mrs. Edward Crimsworth—which is the finer animal?”

I replied quietly: “Compare yourself and Mr. Edward Crimsworth, Mr. Hunsden.”

“Oh, Crimsworth is better filled up than I am, I know; besides, he has a straight nose, arched eyebrows, and all that: but these advantages—if they are advantages—he did not inherit from his mother, the patrician, but from his father, old Crimsworth, who, *my father says*, was as veritable a——shire blue-dyer as ever put indigo in a vat; yet withal the handsomest man in the three Ridings. I am I, William, who are the aristocrat of your family, and you are not as fine a fellow as your plebeian brother by a long chalk.”

There was something in Mr. Hunsden’s point-blank mode of speech which rather pleased me than otherwise, because it set me at my ease. I continued the conversation with a degree of interest.

“How do you happen to know that I am Mr. Crimsworth’s brother? I thought you and everybody else looked upon me only in the light of a poor clerk.”

“Well, and so we do; and what are you but a poor clerk? You do Crimsworth’s work, and he gives you wages—shabby wages they are, too.”

I was silent. Hunsden’s language now bordered on the impertinent, still his manner did not offend me in the least—it only piqued my curiosity; I wanted him to go on, which he did in a little while.

“This world is an absurd one,” said he.



“Why so, Mr. Hunsden?”

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“I wonder you should ask: you are yourself a strong proof of the absurdity I allude to.”

I was determined he should explain himself of his own accord, without my pressing him so to do—so I resumed my silence.

“Is it your intention to become a tradesman?” he inquired presently.

“It was my serious intention three months ago.”

“Humph! the more fool you—you look like a tradesman! What a practical business-like face you have!”

“My face is as the Lord made it, Mr. Hunsden.”

“The Lord never made either your face or head for X——. What good can your bumps of ideality, comparison, self-esteem, conscientiousness, do you here? But if you like Bigben Close, stay there; it is your own affair, not mine.”

“Perhaps I have no choice.”

“Well I care nought about it—it will make little difference to me what you do or where you go; but I’m cool now—I want to dance again; and I see such a fine girl sitting in the corner of the sofa there by her mamma; see if I don’t get her for a partner in a jiffy! There’s Waddy—Sam Waddy, making up to her; won’t I cut him out?”

And Mr. Hunsden strode away. I watched him through the open folding-doors; he outstripped Waddy, applied for the hand of the fine girl, and led her off triumphant. She was a tall, well-made, full-formed, dashing-dressed young woman, much in the style of Mrs. E. Crimsworth; Hunsden whirled her through the waltz with spirit; he kept at her side during the remainder of the evening, and I read in her animated and gratified countenance that he succeeded in making himself perfectly agreeable. The mamma too (a stout person in a turban—Mrs. Lupton by name) looked well pleased; prophetic vision probably flattered her inward eye. The Hunsdens were of an old stem; and scornful as Yorke (such was my late interlocutor’s name) professed to be of the advantages of birth, in his secret heart he well knew and fully appreciated the distinction his ancient, if not high lineage, conferred on him in a mushroom-place like X——, concerning whose inhabitants it was proverbially said, that not one in a thousand knew his own grandfather. Moreover, the Hunsdens, once rich, were still independent; and report affirmed that Yorke bade fair, by his success in business, to restore to pristine prosperity the partially decayed fortunes of his house. These circumstances considered, Mrs. Lupton’s broad face might well wear a smile of complacency as she contemplated the heir of Hunsden Wood occupied in paying assiduous court to her darling Sarah Martha. I, however, whose observations being less anxious, were likely to be more accurate, soon saw that the grounds for maternal self-congratulation were slight indeed; the gentleman appeared to me much more desirous of making, than susceptible of receiving an impression. I know not what it was in Mr. Hunsden that, as I watched him (I had nothing better to do), suggested to me, every now and then, the idea of a foreigner. In form and features he might be pronounced English, though even there one caught a dash of something Gallic; but he had not English shyness: he had learnt somewhere, somehow, the art of setting himself quite at his ease, and

of allowing no insular timidity to intervene as a barrier between him and his convenience or pleasure. Refinement he did not affect, yet vulgar he could not be called; he was not odd—no quiz—yet he resembled no one else I had ever seen before; his general bearing intimated complete, sovereign satisfaction with himself; yet, at times, an indescribable shade passed like an eclipse over his countenance, and seemed to me like the sign of a sudden and strong inward doubt of himself, his words and actions—an energetic discontent at his life or his social position, his future prospects or his mental attainments—I know not which; perhaps after all it might only be a bilious caprice.

No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of his profession, and even a man, worthy of the name, will row long against wind and tide before he allows himself to cry out, "I am baffled!" and submits to be floated passively back to land. From the first week of my residence at X—— I felt my occupation irksome. The thing itself—the work of copying and translating business letters—was a dry and tedious task enough, but had that been all, I should long have borne with the nuisance; I am not of an impatient nature, and influenced by the double desire of getting my living and justifying to myself and others the resolution I had taken to become a tradesman, I should have endured in silence the rust and cramp of my best faculties; I should not have whispered, even inwardly, that I longed for liberty; I should have pent in every sigh by which my heart might have ventured to intimate its distress under the closeness, smoke, monotony, and joyless tumult of Bigben Close, and its panting desire for freer and fresher scenes; I should have set up the image of Duty, the fetish of Perseverance, in my small bedroom at Mrs. King's lodgings, and they two should have been my household gods, from which my darling, my cherished-in-secret Imagination, the tender and the mighty, should never, either by softness or strength, have severed me. But this was not all; the antipathy which had sprung up between myself and my employer striking deeper root and spreading denser shade daily, excluded me from every glimpse of the sunshine of life; and I began to feel like a plant growing in humid darkness out of the slimy walls of a well.

Antipathy is the only word which can express the feeling Edward Crimsworth had for me—a feeling, in a great measure, involuntary, and which was liable to be excited by even the most trifling movement, look, or word of mine. My southern accent annoyed him; the degree of education evinced in my language irritated him; my punctuality, industry, and accuracy, fixed his dislike, and gave it the high flavour and poignant relish of envy; he feared that I too should one day make a successful tradesman. Had I been in anything inferior to him, he would not have hated me so thoroughly, but I knew all that he knew, and, what was worse, he suspected that I kept the padlock of silence on mental wealth in which he was no sharer. If he could have once placed me in a ridiculous or mortifying position, he would have forgiven me much, but I was guarded by three faculties—Caution, Tact, Observation; and prowling and prying as was Edward's malignity, it could never baffle the lynx-eyes of these, my natural sentinels. Day by day did his malice watch my tact, hoping it would sleep, and prepared to steal snake-like on its slumber; but tact, if it be genuine, never sleeps.

I had received my first quarter's wages, and was returning to my lodgings, possessed heart and soul with the pleasant feeling that the master who had paid me grudged every penny of that hard-earned pittance—I had long ceased to regard Mr. Crimsworth as my brother—he was a hard, grinding master; he wished to be an inexorable tyrant: that was all). Thoughts, not varied but strong, occupied my mind; two voices spoke within me; again and again they uttered the same monotonous phrases. One said: "William, your life is intolerable." The other: "What can you do to alter it?" I walked fast, for it was a cold, frosty night in January; as I approached my lodgings, I turned from a general view of my affairs to the particular speculation as to whether my fire would be out; looking towards the window of my sitting-room, I saw no cheering red gleam.

“That slut of a servant has neglected it as usual,” said I, “and I shall see nothing but pale ashes if I go in; it is a fine starlight night—I will walk a little farther.”

It was a fine night, and the streets were dry and even clean for X——; there was a crescent curve of moonlight to be seen by the parish church tower, and hundreds of stars shone keenly bright in all quarters of the sky.

Unconsciously I steered my course towards the country; I had got into Grove Street, and began to feel the pleasure of seeing dim trees at the extremity, round a suburban house, when a person leaning over the iron gate of one of the small gardens which front the neat dwelling-houses in this street, addressed me as I was hurrying with quick stride past.

“What the deuce is the hurry? Just so must Lot have left Sodom, when he expected fire to pour down upon it out of burning brass clouds.”

I stopped short, and looked towards the speaker. I smelt the fragrance, and saw the red spark of a cigar; the dusk outline of a man, too, bent towards me over the wicket.

“You see I am meditating in the field at eventide,” continued this shade. “God knows it’s cool work! especially as instead of Rebecca on a camel’s hump, with bracelets on her arms and a ring in her nose, Fate sends me only a counting-house clerk, in a grey tweed wrapper.”

The voice was familiar to me—its second utterance enabled me to seize the speaker’s identity.

“Mr. Hunsden! good evening.”

“Good evening, indeed! yes, but you would have passed me without recognition if I had not been so civil as to speak first.”

“I did not know you.”

“A famous excuse! You ought to have known me; I knew you, though you were going ahead like a steam-engine. Are the police after you?”

“It wouldn’t be worth their while; I’m not of consequence enough to attract them.”

“Alas, poor shepherd! Alack and well-a-day! What a theme for regret, and how down in the mouth you must be, judging from the sound of your voice! But since you’re not running from the police, from whom are you running? the devil?”

“On the contrary, I am going post to him.”

“That is well—you’re just in luck: this is Tuesday evening; there are scores of market gigs and carts returning to Dinneford to-night; and he, or some of his, have a seat in all regularly; so, if you’ll step in and sit half-an-hour in my bachelor’s parlour, you may catch him as he passes without much trouble. think though you’d better let him alone to-night, he’ll have so many customers to serve; Tuesday is his busy day in X—— and Dinneford; come in, at all events.”

He swung the wicket open as he spoke.

“Do you really wish me to go in?” I asked.

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“As you please—I’m alone; your company for an hour or two would be agreeable to me; but, if you don’t choose to favour me so far, I’ll not press the point. I hate to bore any one.”

It suited me to accept the invitation as it suited Hunsden to give it. I passed through the gate, and followed him to the front door, which he opened; thence we traversed a passage, and entered his parlour; the door being shut, he pointed me to an arm-chair by the hearth; I sat down, and glanced round me.

It was a comfortable room, at once snug and handsome; the bright grate was filled with a genuine——shire fire, red, clear, and generous, no penurious South-of-England embers heaped in the corner of a grate. On the table a shaded lamp diffused around a soft, pleasant, and equal light; the furniture was almost luxurious for a young bachelor, comprising a couch and two very easy chairs; bookshelves filled the recesses on each side of the mantelpiece; they were well furnished, and arranged with perfect order. The neatness of the room suited my taste; I hate irregular and slovenly habits. From what I saw I concluded that Hunsden’s ideas on that point corresponded with my own. While he removed from the centre-table to the sideboard a few pamphlets and periodicals, I ran my eye along the shelves of the book-case nearest me. French and German works predominated, the old French dramatists, sundry modern authors, Thiers, Villemain, Paul de Kock, George Sand, Eugène Sue; in German—Goethe, Schiller, Zschokke, Jean Paul Richter; in English there were works on Political Economy. I examined no further, for Mr. Hunsden himself recalled my attention.

“You shall have something,” said he, “for you ought to feel disposed for refreshment after walking nobody knows how far on such a Canadian night as this; but it shall not be brandy-and-water, and it shall not be a bottle of port, nor ditto of sherry. I keep no such poison. I have Rheinwein for my own drinking, and you may choose between that and coffee.”

Here again Hunsden suited me: if there was one generally received practice I abhorred more than another, it was the habitual imbibing of spirits and strong wines. I had, however, no fancy for his acid German nectar, but I liked coffee, so I responded:

“Give me some coffee, Mr. Hunsden.”

I perceived my answer pleased him; he had doubtless expected to see a chilling effect produced by his steady announcement that he would give me neither wine nor spirits; he just shot one searching glance at my face to ascertain whether my cordiality was genuine or a mere feint of politeness. I smiled, because I quite understood him; and while I honoured his conscientious firmness, I was amused at his mistrust; he seemed satisfied, rang the bell, and ordered coffee, which was presently brought; for himself, a bunch of grapes and half a pint of something sour sufficed. My coffee was excellent; I told him so, and expressed the shuddering pity with which his anchorite fare inspired me. He did not answer, and I scarcely think heard my remark. At that moment one of those momentary eclipses I before alluded to had come over his face, extinguishing his smile, and replacing, by an abstracted and alienated look, the customarily shrewd, bantering glance of his eye. I employed the interval of silence in a rapid scrutiny of his physiognomy. I had never observed him closely before; and, as my sight is very short, I had gathered only a vague, general idea of his appearance; I was surprised now, on examination, to perceive how small, and even feminine, were his lineaments; his tall figure, long and dark locks, his voice and general bearing, had impressed me with the notion of something powerful

and massive; not at all:—my own features were cast in a harsher and squarer mould than his. I discerned that there would be contrasts between his inward and outward man; contentions, too; for I suspected his soul had more of will and ambition than his body had of fibre and muscle. Perhaps, in these incompatibilities of the “physique” with the “morale,” lay the secret of that fitful gloom; he *would* but *could* not, and the athletic mind scowled scorn on its more fragile companion. As to his good looks, I should have liked to have a woman’s opinion on that subject; it seemed to me that his face might produce the same effect on a lady that a very piquant and interesting, though scarcely pretty, female face would on a man. I have mentioned his dark locks—they were brushed sideways above a white and sufficiently expansive forehead; his cheek had a rather hectic freshness; his features might have done well on canvas, but indifferently in marble: they were plastic; character had set a stamp upon each; expression re-cast them at her pleasure, and strange metamorphoses she wrought, giving him now the mien of a morose bull, and anon that of an arch and mischievous girl; more frequently, the two semblances were blent, and a queer, composite countenance they made.

Starting from his silent fit, he began:

“William! what a fool you are to live in those dismal lodgings of Mrs. King’s, when you might take rooms here in Grove Street, and have a garden like me!”

“I should be too far from the mill.”

“What of that? It would do you good to walk there and back two or three times a day; besides, are you such a fossil that you never wish to see a flower or a green leaf?”

“I am no fossil.”

“What are you then? You sit at that desk in Crimsworth’s counting-house day by day and week by week, scraping with a pen on paper, just like an automaton; you never get up; you never say you are tired; you never ask for a holiday; you never take change or relaxation; you give way to no excess of an evening; you neither keep wild company, nor indulge in strong drink.”

“Do you, Mr. Hunsden?”

“Don’t think to pose me with short questions; your case and mine are diametrically different, and it is nonsense attempting to draw a parallel. I say, that when a man endures patiently what ought to be unendurable, he is a fossil.”

“Whence do you acquire a knowledge of my patience?”

“Why, man, do you suppose you are a mystery! The other night you seemed surprised at my knowing to what family you belonged; now you find subject for wonderment in my calling you patient. What do you think I do with my eyes and ears? I’ve been in your counting-house more than once when Crimsworth has treated you like a dog; called for a book, for instance, and when you gave him the wrong one, or what he chose to consider the wrong one, flung it back almost in your face; desired you to shut or open the door as if you had been his flunkey; to say nothing of your position at the party about a month ago, where you had neither place nor partner, but hovered about like a poor, shabby hanger-on; and how patient you were under each and all of these circumstances!”

“Well, Mr. Hunsden, what then?”

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“I can hardly tell you what then; the conclusion to be drawn as to your character depends upon the nature of the motives which guide your conduct; if you are patient because you expect to make something eventually out of Crimsworth, notwithstanding his tyranny, or perhaps by means of it, you are what the world calls an interested and mercenary, but may be a very wise fellow; if you are patient because you think it a duty to meet insult with submission, you are an essential sap, and in no shape the man for my money; if you are patient because your nature is phlegmatic, flat, inexcitable, and that you cannot get up to the pitch of resistance, why, God made you to be crushed; and lie down by all means, and lie flat, and let Juggernaut ride well over you.”

Mr. Hunsden’s eloquence was not, it will be perceived, of the smooth and oily order. As he spoke, he pleased me ill. I seemed to recognise in him one of those characters who, sensitive enough themselves, are selfishly relentless towards the sensitiveness of others. Moreover, though he was neither like Crimsworth nor Lord Tynedale, yet he was acrid, and, I suspected, overbearing in his way; there was a tone of despotism in the urgency of the very reproaches by which he aimed at goading the oppressed into rebellion against the oppressor. Looking at him still more fixedly than I had yet done, I saw written in his eye and mien a resolution to arrogate to himself a freedom so unlimited that it might often trench on the just liberty of his neighbours. I rapidly ran over these thoughts, and then I laughed a low and involuntary laugh, moved thereto by a slight inward revelation of the inconsistency of man. It was as I thought: Hunsden had expected me to take with calm his incorrect and offensive surmises, his bitter and haughty taunts; and himself was chafed by a laugh, scarce louder than a whisper.

His brow darkened, his thin nostril dilated a little.

“Yes,” he began, “I told you that you were an aristocrat, and who but an aristocrat would laugh such a laugh as that, and look such a look? A laugh frigidly jeering; a look lazily mutinous; gentlemanlike irony, patrician resentment. What a nobleman you would have made, William Crimsworth! You are cut out for one; pity Fortune has baulked Nature! Look at the features, figure, even to the hands—distinction all over—ugly distinction! Now, if you’d only an estate and a mansion, and a park, and a title, how you could play the exclusive, maintain the rights of your class, train your tenantry in habits of respect to the peerage, oppose at every step the advancing power of the people, support your rotten order, and be ready for its sake to wade knee-deep in churls’ blood; as it is, you’ve no power; you can do nothing; you’re wrecked and stranded on the shores of commerce; forced into collision with practical men, with whom you cannot cope, for *you’ll never be a tradesman.*”

The first part of Hunsden’s speech moved me not at all, or, if it did, it was only to wonder at the perversion into which prejudice had twisted his judgment of my character; the concluding sentence, however, not only moved, but shook me; the blow it gave was a severe one, because Truth wielded the weapon. If I smiled now, it was only in disdain of myself.

Hunsden saw his advantage; he followed it up.

“You’ll make nothing by trade,” continued he; “nothing more than the crust of dry bread and the draught of fair water on which you now live; your only chance of getting a competency lies in marrying a rich widow, or running away with an heiress.”

“I leave such shifts to be put in practice by those who devise them,” said I, rising.

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“And even that is hopeless,” he went on coolly. “What widow would have you? Much less, what heiress? You’re not bold and venturesome enough for the one, nor handsome and fascinating enough for the other. You think perhaps you look intelligent and polished; carry your intellect and refinement to market, and tell me in a private note what price is bid for them.”

Mr. Hunsden had taken his tone for the night; the string he struck was out of tune, he would finger no other. Averse to discord, of which I had enough every day and all day long, I concluded, at last, that silence and solitude were preferable to jarring converse; I bade him good-night.

“What! Are you going, lad? Well, good-night: you’ll find the door.” And he sat still in front of the fire, while I left the room and the house. I had got a good way on my return to my lodgings before I found out that I was walking very fast, and breathing very hard, and that my nails were almost stuck into the palms of my clenched hands, and that my teeth were set fast; on making this discovery, I relaxed both my pace, fists, and jaws, but I could not so soon cause the regrets rushing rapidly through my mind to slacken their tide. Why did I make myself a tradesman? Why did I enter Hunsden’s house this evening? Why, at dawn tomorrow, must I repair to Crimsworth’s mill? All that night did I ask myself these questions, and all that night fiercely demanded of my soul an answer. I got no sleep; my head burned, my feet froze; at last the factory bells rang, and I sprang from my bed with other slaves



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