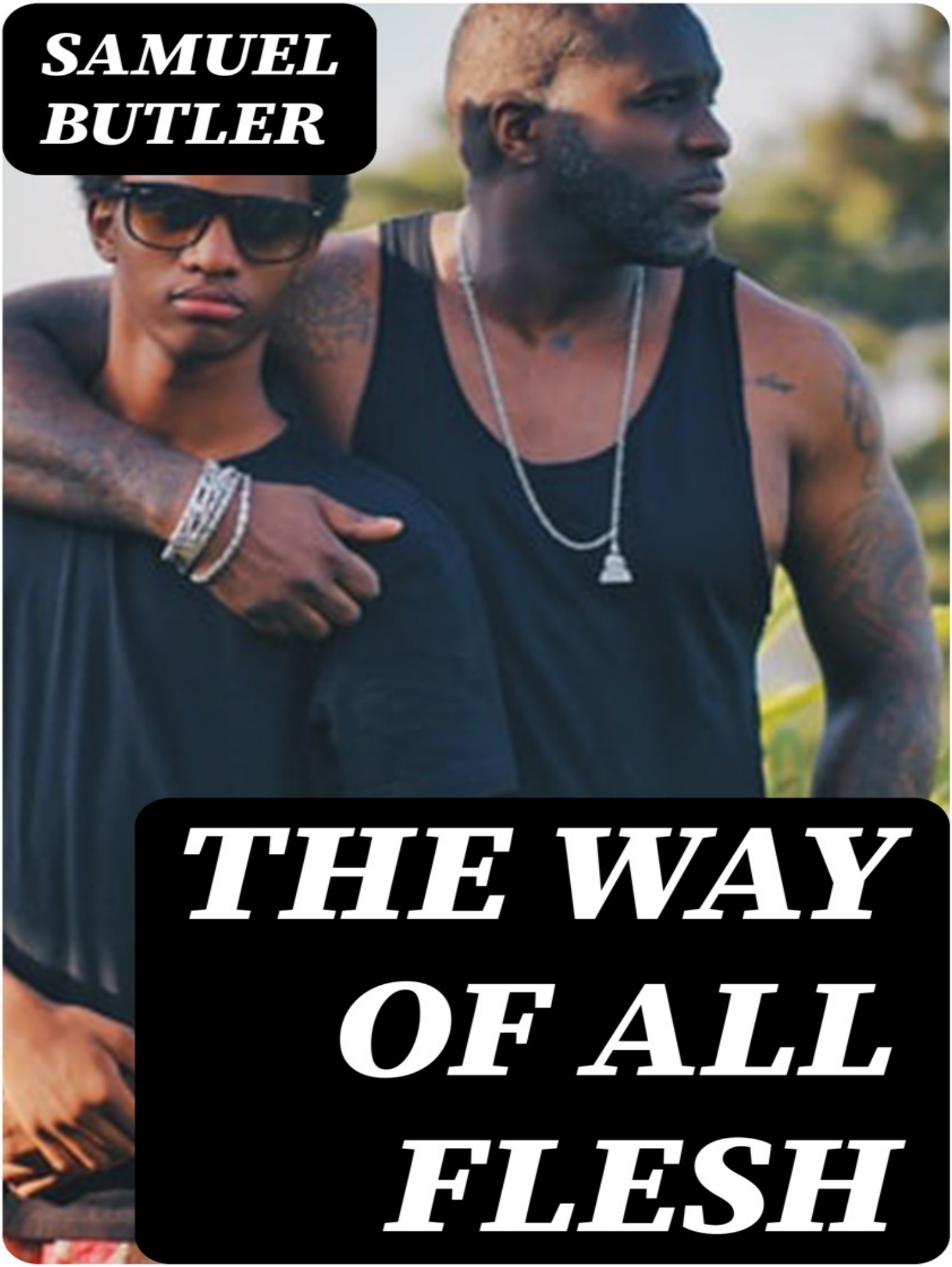
SAMUEL BUTLER



THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

Samuel Butler

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PREFACE

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Samuel Butleter began to write “The Way of All Flesh” about the year 1872, and was engaged upon it intermittently until 1884. It is therefore, to a great extent, contemporaneous with “Life and Habit,” and may be taken as a practical illustration of the theory of heredity embodied in that book. He did not work at it after 1884, but for various reasons he postponed its publication. He was occupied in other ways, and he professed himself dissatisfied with it as a whole, and always intended to rewrite or at any rate to revise it. His death in 1902 prevented him from doing this, and on his death-bed he gave me clearly to understand that he wished it to be published in its present form. I found that the MS. of the fourth and fifth chapters had disappeared, but by consulting and comparing various notes and sketches, which remained among his papers, I have been able to supply the missing chapters in a form which I believe does not differ materially from that which he finally adopted. With regard to the chronology of the events recorded, the reader will do well to bear in mind that the main body of the novel is supposed to have been written in the year 1867, and the last chapter added as a postscript in 1882.

R. A. STREATFEILD.

CHAPTER I

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When I was a small boy at the beginning of the century I remember an old man who wore knee-breeches and worsted stockings, and who used to hobble about the street of our village with the help of a stick. He must have been getting on for eighty in the year 1807, earlier than which date I suppose I can hardly remember him, for I was born in 1802. A few white locks hung about his ears, his shoulders were bent and his knees feeble, but he was still hale, and was much respected in our little world of Paleham. His name was Pontifex.

His wife was said to be his master; I have been told she brought him a little money, but it cannot have been much. She was a tall, square-shouldered person (I have heard my father call her a Gothic woman) who had insisted on being married to Mr Pontifex when he was young and too good-natured to say nay to any woman who wooed him. The pair had lived not unhappily together, for Mr Pontifex's temper was easy and he soon learned to bow before his wife's more stormy moods.

Mr Pontifex was a carpenter by trade; he was also at one time parish clerk; when I remember him, however, he had so far risen in life as to be no longer compelled to work with his own hands. In his earlier days he had taught himself to draw. I do not say he drew well, but it was surprising he should draw as well as he did. My father, who took the living of Paleham about the year 1797, became possessed of a good many of old Mr Pontifex's drawings, which were always

of local subjects, and so unaffectedly painstaking that they might have passed for the work of some good early master. I remember them as hanging up framed and glazed in the study at the Rectory, and tinted, as all else in the room was tinted, with the green reflected from the fringe of ivy leaves that grew around the windows. I wonder how they will actually cease and come to an end as drawings, and into what new phases of being they will then enter.

Not content with being an artist, Mr Pontifex must needs also be a musician. He built the organ in the church with his own hands, and made a smaller one which he kept in his own house. He could play as much as he could draw, not very well according to professional standards, but much better than could have been expected. I myself showed a taste for music at an early age, and old Mr Pontifex on finding it out, as he soon did, became partial to me in consequence.

It may be thought that with so many irons in the fire he could hardly be a very thriving man, but this was not the case. His father had been a day labourer, and he had himself begun life with no other capital than his good sense and good constitution; now, however, there was a goodly show of timber about his yard, and a look of solid comfort over his whole establishment. Towards the close of the eighteenth century and not long before my father came to Paleham, he had taken a farm of about ninety acres, thus making a considerable rise in life. Along with the farm there went an old-fashioned but comfortable house with a charming garden and an orchard. The carpenter’s business was now carried on in one of the outhouses that had once

been part of some conventual buildings, the remains of which could be seen in what was called the Abbey Close. The house itself, embosomed in honeysuckles and creeping roses, was an ornament to the whole village, nor were its internal arrangements less exemplary than its outside was ornamental. Report said that Mrs Pontifex starched the sheets for her best bed, and I can well believe it.

How well do I remember her parlour half filled with the organ which her husband had built, and scented with a withered apple or two from the *pyrus japonica* that grew outside the house; the picture of the prize ox over the chimney-piece, which Mr Pontifex himself had painted; the transparency of the man coming to show light to a coach upon a snowy night, also by Mr Pontifex; the little old man and little old woman who told the weather; the china shepherd and shepherdess; the jars of feathery flowering grasses with a peacock's feather or two among them to set them off, and the china bowls full of dead rose leaves dried with bay salt. All has long since vanished and become a memory, faded but still fragrant to myself.

Nay, but her kitchen—and the glimpses into a cavernous cellar beyond it, wherefrom came gleams from the pale surfaces of milk cans, or it may be of the arms and face of a milkmaid skimming the cream; or again her storeroom, where among other treasures she kept the famous lipsalve which was one of her especial glories, and of which she would present a shape yearly to those whom she delighted to honour. She wrote out the recipe for this and gave it to my mother a year or two before she died, but we could never make it as she did. When we were children she used

sometimes to send her respects to my mother, and ask leave for us to come and take tea with her. Right well she used to ply us. As for her temper, we never met such a delightful old lady in our lives; whatever Mr Pontifex may have had to put up with, we had no cause for complaint, and then Mr Pontifex would play to us upon the organ, and we would stand round him open-mouthed and think him the most wonderfully clever man that ever was born, except of course our papa.

Mrs Pontifex had no sense of humour, at least I can call to mind no signs of this, but her husband had plenty of fun in him, though few would have guessed it from his appearance. I remember my father once sent me down to his workship to get some glue, and I happened to come when old Pontifex was in the act of scolding his boy. He had got the lad—a pudding-headed fellow—by the ear and was saying, “What? Lost again—smothered o’ wit.” (I believe it was the boy who was himself supposed to be a wandering soul, and who was thus addressed as lost.) “Now, look here, my lad,” he continued, “some boys are born stupid, and thou art one of them; some achieve stupidity—that’s thee again, Jim—thou wast both born stupid and hast greatly increased thy birthright—and some” (and here came a climax during which the boy’s head and ear were swayed from side to side) “have stupidity thrust upon them, which, if it please the Lord, shall not be thy case, my lad, for I will thrust stupidity from thee, though I have to box thine ears in doing so,” but I did not see that the old man really did box Jim’s ears, or do more than pretend to frighten him, for the two understood one another perfectly well. Another time I

remember hearing him call the village rat-catcher by saying, “Come hither, thou three-days-and-three-nights, thou,” alluding, as I afterwards learned, to the rat-catcher’s periods of intoxication; but I will tell no more of such trifles. My father’s face would always brighten when old Pontifex’s name was mentioned. “I tell you, Edward,” he would say to me, “old Pontifex was not only an able man, but he was one of the very ablest men that ever I knew.”

This was more than I as a young man was prepared to stand. “My dear father,” I answered, “what did he do? He could draw a little, but could he to save his life have got a picture into the Royal Academy exhibition? He built two organs and could play the Minuet in *Samson* on one and the March in *Scipio* on the other; he was a good carpenter and a bit of a wag; he was a good old fellow enough, but why make him out so much abler than he was?”

“My boy,” returned my father, “you must not judge by the work, but by the work in connection with the surroundings. Could Giotto or Filippo Lippi, think you, have got a picture into the Exhibition? Would a single one of those frescoes we went to see when we were at Padua have the remotest chance of being hung, if it were sent in for exhibition now? Why, the Academy people would be so outraged that they would not even write to poor Giotto to tell him to come and take his fresco away. Phew!” continued he, waxing warm, “if old Pontifex had had Cromwell’s chances he would have done all that Cromwell did, and have done it better; if he had had Giotto’s chances he would have done all that Giotto did, and done it no worse; as it was, he

was a village carpenter, and I will undertake to say he never scamped a job in the whole course of his life."

"But," said I, "we cannot judge people with so many 'ifs.' If old Pontifex had lived in Giotto's time he might have been another Giotto, but he did not live in Giotto's time."

"I tell you, Edward," said my father with some severity, "we must judge men not so much by what they do, as by what they make us feel that they have it in them to do. If a man has done enough either in painting, music or the affairs of life, to make me feel that I might trust him in an emergency he has done enough. It is not by what a man has actually put upon his canvas, nor yet by the acts which he has set down, so to speak, upon the canvas of his life that I will judge him, but by what he makes me feel that he felt and aimed at. If he has made me feel that he felt those things to be loveable which I hold loveable myself I ask no more; his grammar may have been imperfect, but still I have understood him; he and I are *en rapport*; and I say again, Edward, that old Pontifex was not only an able man, but one of the very ablest men I ever knew."

Against this there was no more to be said, and my sisters eyed me to silence. Somehow or other my sisters always did eye me to silence when I differed from my father.

"Talk of his successful son," snorted my father, whom I had fairly roused. "He is not fit to black his father's boots. He has his thousands of pounds a year, while his father had perhaps three thousand shillings a year towards the end of his life. He *is* a successful man; but his father, hobbling about Paleham Street in his grey worsted stockings, broad brimmed hat and brown swallow-tailed coat was worth a

hundred of George Pontifexes, for all his carriages and horses and the airs he gives himself.”

“But yet,” he added, “George Pontifex is no fool either.” And this brings us to the second generation of the Pontifex family with whom we need concern ourselves.

CHAPTER II

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Old Mr Pontifex had married in the year 1750, but for fifteen years his wife bore no children. At the end of that time Mrs Pontifex astonished the whole village by showing unmistakable signs of a disposition to present her husband with an heir or heiress. Hers had long ago been considered a hopeless case, and when on consulting the doctor concerning the meaning of certain symptoms she was informed of their significance, she became very angry and abused the doctor roundly for talking nonsense. She refused to put so much as a piece of thread into a needle in anticipation of her confinement and would have been absolutely unprepared, if her neighbours had not been better judges of her condition than she was, and got things ready without telling her anything about it. Perhaps she feared Nemesis, though assuredly she knew not who or what Nemesis was; perhaps she feared the doctor had made a mistake and she should be laughed at; from whatever cause, however, her refusal to recognise the obvious arose, she certainly refused to recognise it, until one snowy night in January the doctor was sent for with all urgent speed across the rough country roads. When he arrived he found two patients, not one, in need of his assistance, for a boy had been born who was in due time christened George, in honour of his then reigning majesty.

To the best of my belief George Pontifex got the greater part of his nature from this obstinate old lady, his mother—a mother who though she loved no one else in the world

except her husband (and him only after a fashion) was most tenderly attached to the unexpected child of her old age; nevertheless she showed it little.

The boy grew up into a sturdy bright-eyed little fellow, with plenty of intelligence, and perhaps a trifle too great readiness at book learning. Being kindly treated at home, he was as fond of his father and mother as it was in his nature to be of anyone, but he was fond of no one else. He had a good healthy sense of *meum*, and as little of *tuum* as he could help. Brought up much in the open air in one of the best situated and healthiest villages in England, his little limbs had fair play, and in those days children's brains were not overtasked as they now are; perhaps it was for this very reason that the boy showed an avidity to learn. At seven or eight years old he could read, write and sum better than any other boy of his age in the village. My father was not yet rector of Paleham, and did not remember George Pontifex's childhood, but I have heard neighbours tell him that the boy was looked upon as unusually quick and forward. His father and mother were naturally proud of their offspring, and his mother was determined that he should one day become one of the kings and councillors of the earth.

It is one thing however to resolve that one's son shall win some of life's larger prizes, and another to square matters with fortune in this respect. George Pontifex might have been brought up as a carpenter and succeeded in no other way than as succeeding his father as one of the minor magnates of Paleham, and yet have been a more truly successful man than he actually was—for I take it there is

not much more solid success in this world than what fell to the lot of old Mr and Mrs Pontifex; it happened, however, that about the year 1780, when George was a boy of fifteen, a sister of Mrs Pontifex's, who had married a Mr Fairlie, came to pay a few days' visit at Paleham. Mr Fairlie was a publisher, chiefly of religious works, and had an establishment in Paternoster Row; he had risen in life, and his wife had risen with him. No very close relations had been maintained between the sisters for some years, and I forget exactly how it came about that Mr and Mrs Fairlie were guests in the quiet but exceedingly comfortable house of their sister and brother-in-law; but for some reason or other the visit was paid, and little George soon succeeded in making his way into his uncle and aunt's good graces. A quick, intelligent boy with a good address, a sound constitution, and coming of respectable parents, has a potential value which a practised business man who has need of many subordinates is little likely to overlook. Before his visit was over Mr Fairlie proposed to the lad's father and mother that he should put him into his own business, at the same time promising that if the boy did well he should not want some one to bring him forward. Mrs Pontifex had her son's interest too much at heart to refuse such an offer, so the matter was soon arranged, and about a fortnight after the Fairlies had left, George was sent up by coach to London, where he was met by his uncle and aunt, with whom it was arranged that he should live.

This was George's great start in life. He now wore more fashionable clothes than he had yet been accustomed to, and any little rusticity of gait or pronunciation which he had

brought from Paleham, was so quickly and completely lost that it was ere long impossible to detect that he had not been born and bred among people of what is commonly called education. The boy paid great attention to his work, and more than justified the favourable opinion which Mr Fairlie had formed concerning him. Sometimes Mr Fairlie would send him down to Paleham for a few days' holiday, and ere long his parents perceived that he had acquired an air and manner of talking different from any that he had taken with him from Paleham. They were proud of him, and soon fell into their proper places, resigning all appearance of a parental control, for which indeed there was no kind of necessity. In return, George was always kindly to them, and to the end of his life retained a more affectionate feeling towards his father and mother than I imagine him ever to have felt again for man, woman, or child.

George's visits to Paleham were never long, for the distance from London was under fifty miles and there was a direct coach, so that the journey was easy; there was not time, therefore, for the novelty to wear off either on the part of the young man or of his parents. George liked the fresh country air and green fields after the darkness to which he had been so long accustomed in Paternoster Row, which then, as now, was a narrow gloomy lane rather than a street. Independently of the pleasure of seeing the familiar faces of the farmers and villagers, he liked also being seen and being congratulated on growing up such a fine-looking and fortunate young fellow, for he was not the youth to hide his light under a bushel. His uncle had had him taught Latin and Greek of an evening; he had taken kindly to these

languages and had rapidly and easily mastered what many boys take years in acquiring. I suppose his knowledge gave him a self-confidence which made itself felt whether he intended it or not; at any rate, he soon began to pose as a judge of literature, and from this to being a judge of art, architecture, music and everything else, the path was easy. Like his father, he knew the value of money, but he was at once more ostentatious and less liberal than his father; while yet a boy he was a thorough little man of the world, and did well rather upon principles which he had tested by personal experiment, and recognised as principles, than from those profounder convictions which in his father were so instinctive that he could give no account concerning them.

His father, as I have said, wondered at him and let him alone. His son had fairly distanced him, and in an inarticulate way the father knew it perfectly well. After a few years he took to wearing his best clothes whenever his son came to stay with him, nor would he discard them for his ordinary ones till the young man had returned to London. I believe old Mr Pontifex, along with his pride and affection, felt also a certain fear of his son, as though of something which he could not thoroughly understand, and whose ways, notwithstanding outward agreement, were nevertheless not as his ways. Mrs Pontifex felt nothing of this; to her George was pure and absolute perfection, and she saw, or thought she saw, with pleasure, that he resembled her and her family in feature as well as in disposition rather than her husband and his.

When George was about twenty-five years old his uncle took him into partnership on very liberal terms. He had little cause to regret this step. The young man infused fresh vigour into a concern that was already vigorous, and by the time he was thirty found himself in the receipt of not less than £1500 a year as his share of the profits. Two years later he married a lady about seven years younger than himself, who brought him a handsome dowry. She died in 1805, when her youngest child Alethea was born, and her husband did not marry again.

CHAPTER III

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In the early years of the century five little children and a couple of nurses began to make periodical visits to Paleham. It is needless to say they were a rising generation of Pontifexes, towards whom the old couple, their grandparents, were as tenderly deferential as they would have been to the children of the Lord Lieutenant of the County. Their names were Eliza, Maria, John, Theobald (who like myself was born in 1802), and Alethea. Mr Pontifex always put the prefix “master” or “miss” before the names of his grandchildren, except in the case of Alethea, who was his favourite. To have resisted his grandchildren would have been as impossible for him as to have resisted his wife; even old Mrs Pontifex yielded before her son’s children, and gave them all manner of licence which she would never have allowed even to my sisters and myself, who stood next in her regard. Two regulations only they must attend to; they must wipe their shoes well on coming into the house, and they must not overfeed Mr Pontifex’s organ with wind, nor take the pipes out.

By us at the Rectory there was no time so much looked forward to as the annual visit of the little Pontifexes to Paleham. We came in for some of the prevailing licence; we went to tea with Mrs Pontifex to meet her grandchildren, and then our young friends were asked to the Rectory to have tea with us, and we had what we considered great times. I fell desperately in love with Alethea, indeed we all fell in love with each other, plurality and exchange whether

of wives or husbands being openly and unblushingly advocated in the very presence of our nurses. We were very merry, but it is so long ago that I have forgotten nearly everything save that we *were* very merry. Almost the only thing that remains with me as a permanent impression was the fact that Theobald one day beat his nurse and teased her, and when she said she should go away cried out, “You shan’t go away—I’ll keep you on purpose to torment you.”

One winter’s morning, however, in the year 1811, we heard the church bell tolling while we were dressing in the back nursery and were told it was for old Mrs Pontifex. Our man-servant John told us and added with grim levity that they were ringing the bell to come and take her away. She had had a fit of paralysis which had carried her off quite suddenly. It was very shocking, the more so because our nurse assured us that if God chose we might all have fits of paralysis ourselves that very day and be taken straight off to the Day of Judgement. The Day of Judgement indeed, according to the opinion of those who were most likely to know, would not under any circumstances be delayed more than a few years longer, and then the whole world would be burned, and we ourselves be consigned to an eternity of torture, unless we mended our ways more than we at present seemed at all likely to do. All this was so alarming that we fell to screaming and made such a hullabaloo that the nurse was obliged for her own peace to reassure us. Then we wept, but more composedly, as we remembered that there would be no more tea and cakes for us now at old Mrs Pontifex’s.

On the day of the funeral, however, we had a great excitement; old Mr Pontifex sent round a penny loaf to every inhabitant of the village according to a custom still not uncommon at the beginning of the century; the loaf was called a dole. We had never heard of this custom before, besides, though we had often heard of penny loaves, we had never before seen one; moreover, they were presents to us as inhabitants of the village, and we were treated as grown up people, for our father and mother and the servants had each one loaf sent them, but only one. We had never yet suspected that we were inhabitants at all; finally, the little loaves were new, and we were passionately fond of new bread, which we were seldom or never allowed to have, as it was supposed not to be good for us. Our affection, therefore, for our old friend had to stand against the combined attacks of archæological interest, the rights of citizenship and property, the pleasantness to the eye and goodness for food of the little loaves themselves, and the sense of importance which was given us by our having been intimate with someone who had actually died. It seemed upon further inquiry that there was little reason to anticipate an early death for anyone of ourselves, and this being so, we rather liked the idea of someone else's being put away into the churchyard; we passed, therefore, in a short time from extreme depression to a no less extreme exultation; a new heaven and a new earth had been revealed to us in our perception of the possibility of benefiting by the death of our friends, and I fear that for some time we took an interest in the health of everyone in the village whose position rendered a repetition of the dole in the least likely.

Those were the days in which all great things seemed far off, and we were astonished to find that Napoleon Buonaparte was an actually living person. We had thought such a great man could only have lived a very long time ago, and here he was after all almost as it were at our own doors. This lent colour to the view that the Day of Judgement might indeed be nearer than we had thought, but nurse said that was all right now, and she knew. In those days the snow lay longer and drifted deeper in the lanes than it does now, and the milk was sometimes brought in frozen in winter, and we were taken down into the back kitchen to see it. I suppose there are rectories up and down the country now where the milk comes in frozen sometimes in winter, and the children go down to wonder at it, but I never see any frozen milk in London, so I suppose the winters are warmer than they used to be.

About one year after his wife's death Mr Pontifex also was gathered to his fathers. My father saw him the day before he died. The old man had a theory about sunsets, and had had two steps built up against a wall in the kitchen garden on which he used to stand and watch the sun go down whenever it was clear. My father came on him in the afternoon, just as the sun was setting, and saw him with his arms resting on the top of the wall looking towards the sun over a field through which there was a path on which my father was. My father heard him say "Good-bye, sun; good-bye, sun," as the sun sank, and saw by his tone and manner that he was feeling very feeble. Before the next sunset he was gone.

There was no dole. Some of his grandchildren were brought to the funeral and we remonstrated with them, but did not take much by doing so. John Pontifex, who was a year older than I was, sneered at penny loaves, and intimated that if I wanted one it must be because my papa and mamma could not afford to buy me one, whereon I believe we did something like fighting, and I rather think John Pontifex got the worst of it, but it may have been the other way. I remember my sister's nurse, for I was just outgrowing nurses myself, reported the matter to higher quarters, and we were all of us put to some ignominy, but we had been thoroughly awakened from our dream, and it was long enough before we could hear the words "penny loaf" mentioned without our ears tingling with shame. If there had been a dozen doles afterwards we should not have deigned to touch one of them.

George Pontifex put up a monument to his parents, a plain slab in Paleham church, inscribed with the following epitaph:—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
JOHN PONTIFEX
WHO WAS BORN AUGUST 16TH,
1727, AND DIED FEBRUARY 8, 1812,
IN HIS 85TH YEAR,
AND OF
RUTH PONTIFEX, HIS WIFE,
WHO WAS BORN OCTOBER 13, 1727, AND DIED JANUARY 10, 1811,
IN HER 84TH YEAR.

THEY WERE UNOSTENTATIOUS BUT EXEMPLARY
IN THE DISCHARGE OF THEIR
RELIGIOUS, MORAL, AND SOCIAL DUTIES.
THIS MONUMENT WAS PLACED
BY THEIR ONLY SON.

CHAPTER IV

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In a year or two more came Waterloo and the European peace. Then Mr George Pontifex went abroad more than once. I remember seeing at Battersby in after years the diary which he kept on the first of these occasions. It is a characteristic document. I felt as I read it that the author before starting had made up his mind to admire only what he thought it would be creditable in him to admire, to look at nature and art only through the spectacles that had been handed down to him by generation after generation of prigs and impostors. The first glimpse of Mont Blanc threw Mr Pontifex into a conventional ecstasy. “My feelings I cannot express. I gasped, yet hardly dared to breathe, as I viewed for the first time the monarch of the mountains. I seemed to fancy the genius seated on his stupendous throne far above his aspiring brethren and in his solitary might defying the universe. I was so overcome by my feelings that I was almost bereft of my faculties, and would not for worlds have spoken after my first exclamation till I found some relief in a gush of tears. With pain I tore myself from contemplating for the first time ‘at distance dimly seen’ (though I felt as if I had sent my soul and eyes after it), this sublime spectacle.” After a nearer view of the Alps from above Geneva he walked nine out of the twelve miles of the descent: “My mind and heart were too full to sit still, and I found some relief by exhausting my feelings through exercise.” In the course of time he reached Chamonix and went on a Sunday to the Montanvert to see the Mer de Glace. There he wrote

the following verses for the visitors' book, which he considered, so he says, "suitable to the day and scene":—

Lord, while these wonders of thy hand I see,
My soul in holy reverence bends to thee.
These awful solitudes, this dread repose,
Yon pyramid sublime of spotless snows,
These spiry pinnacles, those smiling plains,
This sea where one eternal winter reigns,
These are thy works, and while on them I gaze
I hear a silent tongue that speaks thy praise.

Some poets always begin to get groggy about the knees after running for seven or eight lines. Mr Pontifex's last couplet gave him a lot of trouble, and nearly every word has been erased and rewritten once at least. In the visitors' book at the Montanvert, however, he must have been obliged to commit himself definitely to one reading or another. Taking the verses all round, I should say that Mr Pontifex was right in considering them suitable to the day; I don't like being too hard even on the Mer de Glace, so will give no opinion as to whether they are suitable to the scene also.

Mr Pontifex went on to the Great St Bernard and there he wrote some more verses, this time I am afraid in Latin. He also took good care to be properly impressed by the Hospice and its situation. "The whole of this most extraordinary journey seemed like a dream, its conclusion especially, in gentlemanly society, with every comfort and accommodation amidst the rudest rocks and in the region of perpetual snow. The thought that I was sleeping in a

convent and occupied the bed of no less a person than Napoleon, that I was in the highest inhabited spot in the old world and in a place celebrated in every part of it, kept me awake some time.” As a contrast to this, I may quote here an extract from a letter written to me last year by his grandson Ernest, of whom the reader will hear more presently. The passage runs: “I went up to the Great St Bernard and saw the dogs.” In due course Mr Pontifex found his way into Italy, where the pictures and other works of art —those, at least, which were fashionable at that time— threw him into genteel paroxysms of admiration. Of the Uffizi Gallery at Florence he writes: “I have spent three hours this morning in the gallery and I have made up my mind that if of all the treasures I have seen in Italy I were to choose one room it would be the Tribune of this gallery. It contains the Venus de’ Medici, the Explorator, the Pancratist, the Dancing Faun and a fine Apollo. These more than outweigh the Laocoon and the Belvedere Apollo at Rome. It contains, besides, the St John of Raphael and many other *chefs-d’oeuvre* of the greatest masters in the world.” It is interesting to compare Mr Pontifex’s effusions with the rhapsodies of critics in our own times. Not long ago a much esteemed writer informed the world that he felt “disposed to cry out with delight” before a figure by Michael Angelo. I wonder whether he would feel disposed to cry out before a real Michael Angelo, if the critics had decided that it was not genuine, or before a reputed Michael Angelo which was really by someone else. But I suppose that a prig with more money than brains was much the same sixty or seventy years ago as he is now.

Look at Mendelssohn again about this same Tribune on which Mr Pontifex felt so safe in staking his reputation as a man of taste and culture. He feels no less safe and writes, “I then went to the Tribune. This room is so delightfully small you can traverse it in fifteen paces, yet it contains a world of art. I again sought out my favourite arm chair which stands under the statue of the ‘Slave whetting his knife’ (L’Arrotino), and taking possession of it I enjoyed myself for a couple of hours; for here at one glance I had the ‘Madonna del Cardellino,’ Pope Julius II., a female portrait by Raphael, and above it a lovely Holy Family by Perugino; and so close to me that I could have touched it with my hand the Venus de’ Medici; beyond, that of Titian . . . The space between is occupied by other pictures of Raphael’s, a portrait by Titian, a Domenichino, etc., etc., all these within the circumference of a small semi-circle no larger than one of your own rooms. This is a spot where a man feels his own insignificance and may well learn to be humble.” The Tribune is a slippery place for people like Mendelssohn to study humility in. They generally take two steps away from it for one they take towards it. I wonder how many chalks Mendelssohn gave himself for having sat two hours on that chair. I wonder how often he looked at his watch to see if his two hours were up. I wonder how often he told himself that he was quite as big a gun, if the truth were known, as any of the men whose works he saw before him, how often he wondered whether any of the visitors were recognizing him and admiring him for sitting such a long time in the same chair, and how often he was vexed at seeing them pass him by and take no