MRS. OLIPHANT

# A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN AND HIS FAMILY

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# CHAPTER I.

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Theodore Warrender was still at Oxford when his father died. He was a youth who had come up from his school with the highest hopes of what he was to do at the university. It had indeed been laid out for him by an admiring tutor with anticipations which were almost certainties: "If you will only work as well as you have done these last two years!" These years had been spent in the dignified ranks of Sixth Form, where he had done almost everything that boy can do. It was expected that the School would have had a holiday when he and Brunson went up for the scholarships in their chosen college, and everybody calculated on the "double event." Brunson got the scholarship in question, but Warrender failed, which at first astonished everybody, but was afterwards more than accounted for by the fact that his fine and fastidious mind had been carried away by the Æschylus paper, which he made into an exhaustive analysis of the famous trilogy, to the neglect of other less inviting subjects. His tutor was thus almost more proud of him for having failed than if he had succeeded, and Sixth Form in general accepted Brunson's success apologetically as that of an "all-round" man, whose triumph did not mean so much. But if there is any place where the finer scholarship ought to tell, it should be in Oxford, and his school tutor, as has been said, laid out for him a sort of little map of what he was to do. There were the Hertford and the Ireland scholarships, almost as a matter of course; a first in moderations, but that went without saying; at least one of

the Vice-Chancellor's prizes—probably the Newdigate, or some other unconsidered trifle of the kind; another first class in Greats; a fellowship. "If you don't do more than this I will be disappointed in you," the school tutor said.

The college tutors received Warrender with suppressed enthusiasm, with that excitement which the acquisition of a man who is likely to distinguish himself (and his college) naturally calls forth. It was not long before they took his measure and decided that his school tutor was right. He had it in him to bring glory and honour to their doors. They surrounded him with that genial warmth of incubation which brings a future first class tenderly to the top of the lists. Young Warrender was flattered, his heart was touched. He thought, with the credulity of youth, that the dons loved him for himself; that it was because of the attractions of his own noble nature that they vied with each other in breakfasting and dining him, in making him the companion of their refined and elevated pleasures. He thought, even, that the Rector—that name of fear—had at last found in himself the ideal which he had vainly sought in so many examples of lettered youth. He became vain, perhaps, but certainly a little self-willed, as was his nature, feeling himself to be on the top of the wave, and above those precautions for keeping himself there which had once seemed necessary. He did not, indeed, turn to any harm, for that was not in his nature; but feeling himself no longer a schoolboy, but a man, and the chosen friend of half the dons of his college, he turned aside with a fine contempt from the ordinary ways of fame-making, and betook himself to the pursuit of his own predilections in the way of learning. He had a fancy for

out-of-the-way studies, for authors who don't pay, for eccentricities in literature; in short, for having his own way and reading what he chose. Signals of danger became gradually visible upon his path, and troubled consultations were held over him in the common room. "He is paying no attention to his books," remarked one; "he is reading at large whatever pleases him." Much was to be said for this principle, but still, alas, these gentlemen were all agreed that it does not pay.

"If he does not mind, he will get nothing but a pass," the Rector said, bending his brows. The learned society shrank, as if a sentence of death had been pronounced.

"Oh no, not so bad as that!" they cried, with one voice.

"What do you call so bad as that? Is not a third worse than that? Is not a second quite as bad?" said the majestic presiding voice. "In the gulf there are no names mentioned. We are not credited with a mistake. It will be better, if he does not stick to his books, that he should drop."

Young Warrender's special tutor made frantic efforts to arrest this doom. He pointed out to the young man the evil of his ways. "In one sense all my sympathies are with you," he said; "but, my dear fellow, if you don't read your books you may be as learned as ——, and as clear-sighted as ——" (the historian, being unlearned, does not know what names were here inserted), "but you will never get to the head of the lists, where we have hoped to see you."

"What does it matter?" said Warrender, in boyish splendour. "The lists are merely symbols. You know one's capabilities without that; and as for the opinion of the common mass, of what consequence is it to me?"

A cold perspiration came out on the tutor's brow. "It is of great consequence to—the college," he said. "My dear fellow, so long as we are merely mortal we can't despise symbols; and the Rector has set his heart on having so many first classes. He doesn't like to be disappointed. Come, after it's all over you will have plenty of time to read as you like."

"But why shouldn't I read as I like now?" said Warrender. He was very self-willed. He was apt to start off at a tangent if anybody interfered with him,—a youth full of fads and ways of his own, scorning the common path, caring nothing for results. And by what except by results is a college to be known and assert itself? The tutor whose hopes had been so high was in a state of depression for some time after. He even made an appeal to the school tutor, the enthusiast who had sent up this troublesome original with so many fine prognostications: who replied to the appeal, and descended one day upon the youth in his room, quite unexpectedly.

"Well, Theo, my fine fellow, how are you getting on? I hope you are keeping your eyes on the examination, and not neglecting your books."

"I am delighted to see you, sir," said the lad. "I was just thinking I should like to consult you upon"—and here he entered into a fine question of scholarship,—a most delicate question, which probably would be beyond the majority of readers, as it is of the writer. The face of the public-school man was a wonder to see. It was lighted up with pleasure, for he was an excellent scholar, yet clouded with alarm, for he knew the penalties of such behaviour in a "man" with an examination before him.

"My dear boy," he said, "in which of your books do you find any reference to that?"

"In none of them, I suppose," said the young scholar. "But, you don't think there is any sanctity in a set of prescribed books?"

"Oh no, no sanctity: but use," said the alarmed master. "Come, Theo, there's a good fellow, don't despise the tools we all must work with. It's your duty to the old place, you know, which all these newspaper fellows are throwing stones at whenever they have a chance: and it's your duty to your college. I know what you are worth, of course: but how can work be tested to the public eye except by the lists?"

"Why should I care for the public eye?" said the magnanimous young man. "*We* know that the lists don't mean everything. A headache might make the best scholar that ever was lose his place. A fellow that knows nothing might carry the day by a fluke. Don't you remember, sir, that time when Daws got the Lincoln because of that old examiner, who gave us all his own old fads in the papers? Every fellow that was any good was out of it, and Daws got the scholarship. I am sure you can't have forgotten that."

"Oh no, I have not forgotten it," said the master ruefully. "But that was only once in a way. Come, Theo, be reasonable. As long as you are in training, you know, you must keep in the beaten way. Think, my boy, of your school —and of me, if you care for my credit as a tutor."

"You know, sir, I care for you, and to please you," said Warrender, with feeling. "But as for your credit as a tutor, who can touch that? And even I am not unknown here," he

added, with a little boyish pride. "Everybody who is of any importance knows that the Rector himself has always treated me quite as a friend. I don't think"—this with the ineffable simple self-assurance of youth, so happy in the discrimination of those who approve of it that the gratification scarcely feels like vanity—"that I shall be misunderstood here."

"Oh, the young ass!" said the master to himself, as he went away. "Oh, the young idiot! Poor dear Theo, what will be his feelings when he finds out that all they care for is the credit of the college?" But he was not so barbarous as to say this, and Warrender was left to find out by himself, by the lessening number of the breakfasts, by the absence of his name on the lists of the Rector's dinner-parties, by the gradual cooling of the incubating warmth, what had been the foundation of all the affection shown him. It was not for some time that he perceived the change which made itself slowly apparent, the gradual loss of interest in him who had been the object of so much interest. The nest was, so to speak, left cold, no father bird lending his aid to the development; his books were no longer forced on his consideration; his tutor no longer made anxious remarks. Like other silly younglings, the lad for a while rejoiced in his freedom, and believed that he had succeeded in making his pastors and teachers aware of a better way. And it was not till there flashed upon him the awful revelation that *they were taking up Brunson*, that he began to see the real state of affairs. Brunson was the all-round man whom Sixth Form despised,—a fellow who had little or no taste for the higher scholarship, but who always knew his books by heart,

mastering everything that would "pay" with a determined practical faculty fertile of results. There is no one for whom the dilettante mind has a greater contempt; and when Warrender saw that Brunson figured at the Rector's dinner-parties as he himself had once done, that it was Brunson who went on the river with parties of young dons and walked out of college arm in arm with his tutor, the whole meaning of his own brief advancement burst upon him. Not for himself, as he had supposed in the youthful simplicity which he called vanity now, and characterised by strong adjectives; not in the least for him, Theo Warrender, scholar and gentleman, but for what he might bring to the college, —the honours, the scholarships, the credit to everybody concerned in producing a successful student. That he became angry, scornful, and Byronic on the spot need surprise nobody. Brunson! who never had come within a hundred miles of him or of his set at school; did not even understand the fine problems which the initiated love to discuss; was nothing but a plodding fellow, who stuck to his work, and cared no more for the real soul of Greek literature or philosophy than the scout did. Warrender laughed aloud, —that hollow laugh, which was once so grand an exponent of feeling, and which, though the Byronic mood has gone out of fashion, will never go out of fashion so long as there is youthful pride to be wounded, and patient merit has to accept the spurns of the unworthy. No, perhaps the adjective is mistaken, if Shakespeare ever was mistaken; not patient, but exasperated merit, conscious to the very finger points of its own deserts.

Warrender was well enough aware that he could, if he chose, make up the lost way and leave Brunson "nowhere" in the race for honours; but it was his first disenchantment, and he felt it deeply. Letters are dear and honours sweet, but our own beloved personality is dearer still; and there is no one who does not feel humbled and wounded when he finds out that he is esteemed, not for himself, but for what he can do,—and poor Theo was only twenty, and had been made much of all his life. He began to ask himself, too, whether his past popularity, the pleasant things that had been always said of him, the pleasant way in which his friendship had been sought, were perhaps all inspired by the same motive,—because he was likely to do credit to his belongings and friends. It is a fine thing to do credit to your belongings, to be the pride of your community, to be quoted to future generations as the hero of the past. This was what had occurred to him at school, and he had liked it immensely. Warrender had been a word to conjure withal, named by lower boys with awe, fondly cherished in the records of Sixth Form. But the glimmer in the Head Master's eye as he said good-bye, the little falter in his tutor's voice,—did these mean no more than an appreciation of his progress, and an anticipation of the honour and glory he was to bring them at the university, a name to fling in the teeth of the newspaper fellows next time they demanded what were the results of the famous public school system? This thought had a sort of maddening effect upon the fastidious, hot-headed, impatient young man. He flung his books into a corner of the room, and covered them over with a yellow cairn of railway novels. If that was all, there let

them lie. He resolved that nothing would induce him to touch them more.

The result was—but why should we dwell upon the result? It sent a shiver through the college, where there were some faithful souls who still believed that Warrender could pick up even at the last moment, if he liked. It produced such a sensation in his old school as relaxed discipline entirely, and confounded masters and scholars in one dark discouragement. "Warrender has only got a —— in Mods." We decline to place any number where that blank is; it filled every division (except the lowest) with consternation and dismay. Warrender! who was as sure of a first as—why, there was nobody who was so sure as Warrender! The masters who were Cambridge men recovered their courage after a little, and said, "I told you so! That was a boy who ought to have gone to Cambridge, where individual characteristics are taken into consideration." Warrender's tutor took to his bed, and was not visible for a week, after which only the most unsympathetic, not to say brutal, of his colleagues would have mentioned before him Warrender's name. However, time reconciles all things, and after a while the catastrophe was forgotten and everything was as before.

But not to Warrender himself. He smiled, poor boy, a Byronic smile, with a curl of the upper lip such as suited the part, and saw himself abandoned by the authorities with what he felt to be a lofty disdain; and he relapsed into such studies as pleased him most, and set prescribed books and lectures at defiance. What was worst to bear was that other classes of "men" made up to him, after the men of

distinction, those whom the dons considered the best men, had withdrawn and left him to pursue his own way. The men who loafed considered him their natural prey; the æsthetic men who wrote bad verses opened their arms, and were ready to welcome him as their own. And perhaps among these classes he might have found disinterested friendship, for nobody any longer sought Warrender on account of what he could do. But he did not make the trial, wrapping himself up in a Childe-Harold-like superiority to all those who would consort with him, now that he had lost his hold of those with whom only he desired to consort. His mother and sisters felt a little surprised, when they came up to Commemoration, to find that they were not overwhelmed by invitations from Theo's friends. Other ladies had not a spare moment: they were lost in a turmoil of breakfasts, luncheons, water-parties, concerts, flower-shows, and knew the interior of half the rooms in half the colleges. But with the Miss Warrenders this was not so. They were asked to luncheon by Brunson, indeed, and had tea in the rooms of a young Cavendish, who had been at school with Theo. But that was all, and it mortified the girls, who were not prepared to find themselves so much at a disadvantage. This was the only notice that was taken of his downfall at home, where there was no academical ambition, and where everybody was quite satisfied so long as he kept his health and did not get into any scrape. Perhaps this made him feel it all the more, that his disappointment and disenchantment were entirely shut up in his own bosom, and that he could not confide to any one the terrible disillusionment that had befallen him on the very threshold of his life. That the Rector should pass

him with the slightest possible nod, and his tutor say "How d'ye do, Warrender?" without even a smile when they met, was nothing to anybody except himself. Arm in arm with Brunson, the don would give him that salutation. Brunson, who had got his first in Mods, and was going on placidly, admired of all, to another first in the final schools.

But if there was any one who understood Warrender's feelings it was this same Brunson, who was in his way an honest fellow, and understood the situation. "It is all pot-hunting, you know," this youth said. "They don't care for me any more than they care for Jenkinson. It's all for what I bring to the college, just as it was for what they expected you were going to bring to the college; only I understood it, and you didn't. I don't care for them any more than they do for me. Why, they might see, if they had any sense, that to work at you, who care for that sort of thing, would be far better than to bother me, who only care for what it will bring. If they had stuck to you they might have done a deal with you, Warrender: whereas I should have done just the same whether they took any notice of me or not."

"You mean to say I'm an empty-headed fool that could be cajoled into anything!" cried the other angrily.

"I mean nothing of the sort. I mean that I'm going to be a schoolmaster, and that first classes, etc., are my stock in trade. You don't suppose I work to please the Rector? And I know, and he knows, and you know, that I don't know a tenth part so much as you do. If they had held on at you, Theo, they might have got a great scholar out of you. But that's not what they want. They want so many firsts, and the Hertford, and the Ireland, and all the rest of it. It's all

pot-hunting," Mr. Brunson said. But this did not lessen the effect of the disenchantment, the first disappointment of life. Poor Theo became prone to suspect everybody after that first proof that no one was above suspicion,—not even the greatly respected head of one of the first colleges in the world.

After that dreadful fiasco in the schools, Warrender continued to keep his terms very quietly; seeing very few people, making very few friends, reading after his own fashion with an obstinate indifference to all systems of study, and shutting his eyes persistently to the near approach of the final ordeal. Things were in this condition when he received a sudden telegram calling him home. "Come at once, or you will be too late," was the message. The Rector, to whom he rushed at once, looked at it coldly. He was not fond of giving an undergraduate leave in the middle of the term. "The college could have wished for a more definite message," he said. "Too late for what, Mr. Warrender?" "Too late to see my father alive, sir!" cried the young man; and as this had all the definiteness that the college required he was allowed to go. This was how his studies were broken up just as they approached their conclusion, although, as he had been so capricious and self-willed, nobody expected that in any circumstances it could have been a very satisfactory close.

# CHAPTER II.

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The elder Mr. Warrender was a country gentleman of an undistinguished kind. The county gentry of England is a very comprehensive class. It includes the very best and most delightful of English men and English women, the truest nobility, the finest gentlemen; but it also includes a number of beings the most limited, dull, and commonplace that human experience knows. In some cases they are people who do well to be proud of the generation of gentlefolk through whom they trace their line, and who have transmitted to them not only the habit of command, but the habit of protection, and that easy grace of living which is not to be acquired at first hand; and there are some whose forefathers have handed down nothing but so many farms and fields, and various traditions, in which father and son follow each other, each smaller and more petty of soul than he that went before. The family at the Warren were of this class. They were acknowledged gentry, beyond all question, but their estates and means were small and their souls smaller. Their income never reached a higher level than about fifteen hundred a year. Their paternal home was a house of rather mean appearance, rebuilt on the ruins of the old one in the end of last century, and consequently as ugly as four square walls could be. The woods had grown up about it, and hid it almost entirely from sight, which was an advantage, perhaps, to the landscape, but not to those who were condemned to dwell in the house, which was without light and air and everything that was cheering. The name of

the Warren was very well adapted to the place, which, except one corner of the old house which had stood fast when the rest was pulled down, might almost have been a burrow in the soft green earth, damp and warm and full of the mould of ages, though it was a mere new-comer in the world. Its furniture was almost entirely of the same date as the house, which means dingy carpets, curtains of harsh and unpliable stuff, and immense catafalques of mahogany in the shape of sideboards, arm-chairs, and beds. A four-poster of mahogany, with hangings of red moreen, as stiff as a board and much less soft,—that was the kind of furnishing; to be sure, it was full of feather-beds and pillows, warm blankets and fresh linen, which some people thought made amends.

The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Warrender, two daughters, and the son, with whom the reader has already made acquaintance. How he had found his way into such a nest was one of those problems which the prudent evolutionist scarcely cares to tackle. The others were in their natural place: the father a Warrender like the last dozen Warrenders who had gone before him, and the girls cast exactly in the mould of all the previous Minnies and Chattys of the family. They were all dull, blameless, and good—to a certain extent; perfectly satisfied to live in the Warren all the year long, to spend every evening of their lives round the same hearth, to do the same thing to-day as they had done yesterday and should do to-morrow. To be so easily contented, to accommodate one's self with such philosophy to one's circumstances,—what an advantage that is! But it required no philosophy on the part of the girls,

who had not imagination enough to think of anything different, and who devoutly believed that nothing on earth was so virtuous, so dignified, so praiseworthy, as to keep the linen in order, and make your own underclothing, and sit round the fire at home. When any one would read aloud to them they wanted no better paradise; but they were not very exacting even in the matter of reading aloud. However exciting the book might be, they were quite willing that it should be put away at a quarter to ten, with a book-marker in it to keep the place. Once Chatty had been known to take it up clandestinely after prayers, to see whether the true murderer was found out; but Minnie waited quite decorously till eight o'clock next evening, which was the right hour for resuming the reading. Happy girls! They thus had in their limited little world quite a happy life, expecting nothing, growing no older from year to year. Minnie was twenty-five, Chatty twenty-three: they were good-looking enough in their quiet way, very neat and tidy, with brown hair so well brushed that it reflected the light. Theodore was the youngest, and he had been very welcome when he came; for otherwise the property would have gone to a distant heir of entail, which would not have been pleasant for any of the family. He had been a very quiet boy so long as he was at home, though not perhaps in the same manner of quietness as that of the girls; but since he was thirteen he had been away for the greater part of the years, appearing only in the holidays, when he was always reading for something or other,—so that nobody was aware how great was the difference between the fastidious young scholar and the rest of his belongings.

Mr. Warrender himself was not a scholar. He had got through life very well without ever being at the university. In his day it was not considered such a necessity as now. And he was not at all critical of his son. So long as the boy got into no scrapes he asked no more of him. He was quite complacent when Theo brought home his school prizes, and used to point them out to visitors. "This is for his Latin verses," he would say. "I don't know where the boy got a turn for poetry. I am sure it was not from me." The beautiful smooth binding and the school arms on the side gave him great gratification. He had a faint notion that as Theo brought home no prizes from Oxford he was not perhaps getting on so well; but naturally he knew nothing of his son's experiences with the Rector and the dons. And by that time he was ill and feverish, and far more taken up about his beef-tea than about anything else in the world. They did not make it half strong enough. If they only would make it strong he felt sure he would soon regain his strength. But how could a man pick up, who was allowed nothing but slops, when his beef-tea was like water? This was the matter that occupied him most, while his son was going through the ordeal above described,—there never was any taste in the beef-tea. Mr. Warrender thought the cook must make away with the meat; or else send the best of the infusion to some of her people in the village, and give it to him watered. When it was made over the fire in his room he said his wife had no skill; she let all the goodness evaporate. He never could be satisfied with his beef-tea; and so, grumbling and indignant, finding no savour in anything, but thoroughly convinced that this was "their" fault, and that they could

make it better if they were to try, he dwindled and faded away.

It was a long illness; a family gets used to a long illness, and after a while accepts it as the natural course of events. And the doctor had assured them all that no sudden "change" was to be looked for. Nevertheless, there was a sudden change. It had become the routine of the house that each of the ladies should spend so many hours with papa. Mrs. Warrender was with him, of course, the greater part of the day, and went out and in to see if he was comfortable every hour or two during the night; but one of the girls always sat with him in the evening, bringing her needlework upstairs, and feeling that she was doing her duty in giving up the reading just when the book was at its most interesting point. It was after Chatty had fulfilled this duty, and everybody was serenely preparing to go to bed, that the change came. "How is he?" Mrs. Warrender had said, as they got out the Prayer-Book which was used at family prayers. "Just as usual, mamma: quite quiet and comfortable. I think he was asleep, for he took no notice when I bade him good-night," Chatty said; and then the servants came in, and the little rites were accomplished. Mrs. Warrender then went upstairs, and received the same report from her maid, who sat with the patient in the intervals when the ladies were at prayers. "Quite comfortable, ma'am, and I think he is asleep." Mrs. Warrender went to the bedside and drew back the curtain softly,—the red moreen curtain which was like a board suspended by the head of the bed,—and lo, while they all had been so calm, the change had come.

The girls thought their mother made a great deal more fuss than was necessary; for what could be done? It might be right to send for the doctor, who is an official whose presence is essential at the last act of life; but what was the good of sending a man on horseback into Highcombe, on the chance of the telegraph office being still open? Of course it was not open; and if it had been, Theo could not possibly leave Oxford till next morning. But then it was a well-known fact that mamma was excitable, and often did things without thought. He lingered all night, "just alive, and that is all," the doctor said. It was Chatty who sent for the rector, who came and read the prayers for the sick at the bedside, but agreed with Dr. Durant that it was of no use attempting to rouse the departing soul from the lethargy in which he lay. And before Theodore arrived all was over. He knew it before he entered the house by the sight of the drawn blinds, which received him with a blank whiteness of woe as soon as he caught sight of the windows. They had not sent to meet him at the station, thinking he would not come till the later train.

"Try and get mamma to lie down," Minnie said, as she kissed her brother. "She is going on exciting herself for nothing. I am sure everything was done that could be done, and we can do him no good by making ourselves more miserable now."

Minnie had cried in the early morning as much as was right and natural,—her eyes were still a little red; but she did not think it necessary to begin over again, as Chatty did, who had a tendency to overdo everything, like mamma. As for Theodore, he did not cry at all, but grew very pale, and

did not say a word when he was taken into the chamber of death. The sight of that marble, or rather waxen, figure lying there had a greater effect upon his imagination than upon that of either of the girls, who perhaps had not got much imagination to be affected. He was overawed and silenced by that presence, which he had never met before so near. When his mother threw herself into his arms, with that excess of emotion which was peculiar to her, he held her close to him with a throb of answering feeling. The sensation of standing beside that which was not, although it was, his father, went through and through the being of the sensitive young man. Death is always most impressive in the case of a commonplace person, with whom we have no associations but the most ordinary ones of life. What had come to him?—to the mind which had been so much occupied with the quality of his beef-tea? Was it possible that he could have leaped all at once into the contemplation of the highest subjects, or must there not be something intermediate between the beef-tea and the *Gloria in Excelsis*? This was the thought, inappropriate, unnatural, as he felt it, which came into his mind as he stood by the bed upon which lay that which had been the master of the Warren yesterday, and now was "the body"; a solemn, inanimate thing arranged with dreadful neatness, presently to be taken away and hid out of sight of the living. Tears did not come even when he took his mother into his arms, but only a dumb awe not unmixed with horror, and even that sense of repulsion with which some minds regard the dead.

It was the height of summer, the time at which the Warren looked its best. The sunshine, which scarcely got

near it in the darker part of the year, now penetrated the trees on every side, and rushed in as if for a wager, every ray trying how far it could reach into the depths of the shade. It poured full into the drawing-room by one window, so that Minnie was mindful at all times to draw down that blind, that the carpet might not be spoiled; and of course all the blinds were down now. It touched the front of the house in the afternoon, and blazed upon the lawn, making all the flowers wink. Inside, to people who had come out of the heat and scorching of other places more open to the influences of the skies, the coolness of the Warren in June was delightful. The windows stood open, the hum of bees came in, the birds made an unceasing chorus in the trees. Neither birds nor bees took the least notice of the fact that there was death in the house. They carried on their jubilation, their hum of business, their love-making and nursery talk, all the same, and made the house sound not like a house of mourning, but a house of rejoicing; all this harmonious noise being doubly audible in the increased stillness of the place, where Minnie thought it right to speak in a whisper, and Chatty was afraid to go beyond the example of her sister. Mrs. Warrender kept her room, except in the evening, when she would go out with Theo for a little air. Only in the grounds! no farther,—through the woods, which the moonlight pierced with arrows of silver, as far as the pond, which shone like a white mirror with all the great leaves of the water-lilies black upon its surface. But the girls thought that even this was too much. They could not think how she could feel able for it before the funeral. They sat with one shaded lamp and the shutters all closed, "reading a

book," which was their severest estimate of gravity. That is to say, each had a book: one a volume of sermons, the other *Paradise Lost*, which had always been considered Sunday reading by the Warrenders, and came in very conveniently at this moment. They had been busy all day with the maid and the dressmaker from the village, getting their mourning ready. There were serious doubts in their minds how high the crape ought to come on their skirts, and whether a cuff of that material would be enough without other trimmings on the sleeves; but as it was very trying to the eyes to work at black in candlelight, they had laid it all aside out of sight, and so far as was possible out of thought, and composed themselves to read as a suitable occupation for the evening, less cheerful than either coloured or white needlework, and more appropriate. It was very difficult, especially for Minnie, upon whom the chief responsibility would rest, to put that question of the crape out of her thoughts; but she read on in a very determined manner, and it is to be hoped that she succeeded. She felt very deeply the impropriety of her mother's proceedings. She had never herself stirred out-of-doors since her father's death, and would not till after the funeral, should the interests of nations hang on it. She, at least, knew what her duty was, and would do it. Chatty was not so sure on this subject, but she had been more used to follow Minnie than to follow mamma, and she was loyal to her traditions. One window was open a little behind the half-closed shutters, and let in something of the sounds and odours of the night. Chatty was aware that the moon was at the full, and would have

liked to stretch her young limbs with a run; but she dared not even think of such a thing in sight of Minnie's face.

"I wonder how long mamma means to stay. One would think she was *enjoying* it," Minnie said, with a little emphasis on the word. As she used it, it seemed the most reprehensible verb in the world.

"She likes to be with Theo," said Chatty; "and she is always such a one for the air."

"Likes!" said her sister. "Is this a time to think of what one likes, with poor dear papa in his coffin?"

"She never left him as long as he wanted her," said the apologetic sister.

"No, indeed, I should hope not; that would have been criminal. Poor dear mamma would never do anything really bad; but she does not mind if she does a thing that is unusual. It is *very* unusual to go out before the funeral; it is a thing that is never done, especially by the ladies of the house."

"Shall we be able to go out on Friday, Minnie?" Friday was the funeral day.

"It would be very bad taste, I think. Of course, if it does not prove too much for us, we ought to go to church to meet the procession. Often it is thought to be too much for the ladies of a family."

"I am sure it would not be too much for me. Oh, I shall go as far as we can go with him—to the grave, Minnie."

"You had better wait till you see whether it will not be too much for you," said the elder sister, while Chatty dried her eyes. Minnie's eyes had no need of drying. She had cried at the right time, but it was little more than levity to be always

crying. It was nearly as bad as enjoying anything. She did not like extravagance of any kind.

And then they turned to their reading again, and felt that, whatever mamma might think herself at liberty to do, they, at least, were paying that respect to their father's memory which young women in a well-regulated household should always be the first to pay.

# CHAPTER III.

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Meanwhile the mother and son took their walk. It was a very silent walk, without much outward trace of that enjoyment which Minnie had felt so cruelly out of place: but no doubt to both there was a certain pleasure in it. Mr. Warrender had now been lying in that silent state which the most insignificant person holds immediately after death, for three days, and there was still another to come before he could be laid away in the dark and noisome bed in the family vault, where all the Warrenders made their last assertion of superiority to common clay. This long and awful pause in the affairs of life was intolerable to the two people now walking softly through the paths of the little wood, where the moonbeams shone through the trees; to the son, because he was of an impatient nature, and could not endure the artificial gloom which was thus forced upon him. He had felt keenly all those natural sensations which the loss of a father calls forth: the breaking of an old tie, the oldest in the world; the breach of all the habits of his life; the absence of the familiar greeting, which had always been kind enough, if never enthusiastic; the general overturn and loss of the usual equilibrium in his little world. It was no blame to Theo if his feelings went little further than this. His father had been no active influence in his life. His love had been passive, expressing itself in few words, without sympathy in any of the young man's pursuits, or knowledge of them, or desire to know,—a dull affection because the boy belonged to him, and satisfaction in that he had never

got into any scrapes or given any trouble. And the return which the son made was in the same kind. Theo had felt the natural pang of disruption very warmly at the moment; he had felt a great awe and wonder at sight of the mystery of that pale and solemn thing which had lately been so unmysterious and unsolemn. But even these pangs of natural sensation had fallen into a little ache and weariness of custom, and his fastidious soul grew tired of the bonds that kept him, or would have kept him, precisely at the same point of feeling for so many hours and days. This is not possible for any one, above all for a being of his temper, and he was restless beyond measure, and eager to get over this enforced pause, and emerge into the common life and daylight beyond. The drawn blinds somehow created a stifling atmosphere in his very soul.

Mrs. Warrender felt it was indecorous to begin to speak of plans and what was to be done afterwards, so long as her dead husband was still master of the oppressed and melancholy house; but her mind, as may be supposed, was occupied by them in the intervals of other thoughts. She was not of the Warrender breed, but a woman of lively feelings; and as soon as the partner of her life was out of her reach she had begun to torment herself with fears that she had not been so good to him as she ought. There was no truth, at least no fact, in this, for there could have been no better wife or more careful nurse. But yet, as every individual knows more of his or her self than all the rest of the world knows, Mrs. Warrender was aware that there were many things lacking in her conjugal devotion. She had not been the wife she knew how to be; in her heart she had

never given herself credit for fulfilling her duty. Oh yes, she had fulfilled all her duties. She had been everything to him that he wanted, that he expected, that he was capable of understanding. But she knew very well that when all is said, that is not everything that can be said; and now that he was dead, and could no longer look in her face with lack-lustre eyes, wondering what the deuce the woman meant, she threw herself back upon her own standard, and knew that she had not come up to it. Even now she could not come up to it. Her heart ought to be desolate; life ought to hold nothing for her but perhaps resignation, perhaps despair. She ought to be beyond all feeling for what was to come. Yet she was not so. On the contrary, new ideas, new plans, had welled up into her mind,—how many, how few hours after she had laid down the charge, in which outwardly she had been so faithful, but inwardly so full of shortcomings? These plans filled her mind now as she went by her son's side through the mossy paths where, even in the height of summer, it was always a little cold. She could not speak of them, feeling a horror of herself, an ashamed sense that to betray the revulsion of her thoughts to her boy would be to put her down from her position in his respect for ever. Between these mutual reluctances to betray what was really in them the two went along very silently, as if they were counting their steps, their heads a little bowed down, the sound of their feet making far more commotion than was necessary in the stillness of the place. To be out-of-doors was something for both of them. They could breathe more freely, and if they could not talk could at least think, without