

"Your father and mother?" Adair repeated questioningly. "You still think and speak of them as such?"

"They have granted me that priceless privilege," he replied, quietly, and though he intended no rebuke she accepted it as such for hazarding one doubt regarding him. "It is hardly likely I shall let it go. Need I remind you such privileges do not go begging in this life?"

"You are dreadfully serious," she said, deprecatingly. "Of course, I meant nothing. They must be immensely pleased."

"I question whether they are," he answered, and the sadness on his face was quite marked. "Will you believe me, Miss Bremner, when I say that I should have been a happier man than I am to-day if I was plain Robert Fletcher, of Spital-haugh?"

"But tell me why?" she exclaimed, in wonder. "Surely it is a great thing to know yourself so nobly born, and to step into such a heritage."

"At others' cost," he answered. "And I am one who wanted to fight my way up, taking each advantage honestly as it comes."

"There is something in that; but in politics birth hardly counts, does it? The battle is *always* to the strong there."

"Well, I should not like to accept your statement unchallenged. I believe myself that one of the secrets of our leader's power over men is his birth. He is an aristocrat to his finger tips."

Adair glanced at Parnell where he was in close talk with Aileen. Had she been less interested in him she must have observed Aileen's face—its rapt