

"So be it. But what I have to tell you from Lowood—since you will have me say something—concerns Miss D'Aston only indirectly."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Sir?"

"Oh, never frown. You know that with me your airs are of no use whatsoever. Put up with what you get at my hands being unable to return it."

"In a word, then, scarlet fever has broken out in the village, and half the infant population is down with it."

"Had your intention in informing me of this been different, Mr. Brandon, you would certainly have received my thanks expressed more warmly. Such as they are, however, I tender them."

"And in the way in which you *would* tender them but for your unfounded prejudices, do I accept them."

"Supper is ready, Sir," announced the servant.

To Brandon's surprise and secret mortification, Raymond gave no sign of discomposure or anxiety; stayed everyone out, and did not leave himself till Vere had been forced to depart. Raymond had been Harcourt's college-chum, and not unfrequently remained all night with him.

This evening—all the guests being gone—the two had a long conversation, lasting till near dawn. Raymond then left his friend and repaired directly to his own rooms, ordered his servant to prepare for a speedy journey to Lowood, and in two hours thereafter was smoking his cigar in the railway carriage.

CHAPTER III.

Raymond was a man of large independent fortune; of great natural capabilities, much improved by long and careful training; of high principles, but occasionally carried away by the violence of his passions. He was very far from being the cool, heartless being many of his acquaintances took him for; below the polished bear-