

but it was not necessarily a girl that he need to know anything about. The squire had been called "gay" when he was young, and he was not inclined to be severe on his son in such a matter, for in his father's opinion the fifth commandment governed all the rest.

Hugh's marriage, however, began to loom dimly up to him as a thing which it would be well to attend to as soon as possible. But he considered his son's choice to lie between his cousin in Manchester and the daughter of his neighbour Strickland, of Strickland Hollow. The first had money, the second was pure Saxon with a genealogy. In the meantime Hugh had arranged his own marriage, and was boldly facing and preparing for the results of it. For that his choice would ever have his father's sanction he had not the slightest hope; it was, therefore, necessary that he should in some way provide for Alice's comfort.

All his knowledge lay in the direction of sheep and wool; he had no other knowledge that could put bread into his mouth. The machine-like Latin poetry he had spent his college days in making, the hours he had wasted scanning with his fingers dactyls and spondees and looking for a short or a long to finish a pentameter with, struck him now as a pitiful way to arm young men to fight.

In the very first hours of Hugh's engagement to Alice the sheepwalks of Australia had persistently forced themselves on his conviction as the only place where he could make a living. Neither of them had, however, spoken to Mr. Atherton on the subject, for his health was rapidly failing, and it was now an imperative necessity to prevent any more excitement than that which invariably followed his preaching. So for nearly two years their secret was well kept, and Squire Pierson, well pleased with his son's attention to the farm and flocks, thought it no great matter to wink at what he called his "Penrith folly."

But changes come though we do not call them, and from their pleasant love-dream Hugh and Alice were sadly awakened. In an hour, almost in a moment, Alice was left fatherless. While pronouncing the benediction, after a most exciting service among the men of the Keswick lead-mines, Mr. Atherton stopped, looked down on the crowd at his feet, and then, pointing upward, fell backward into the strong and loving arms stretched out to receive him. For a minute the gray shadow of death strove with the light of heaven on his weary, placid face; then the preacher knew in all its fulness the joy whose earnest had loosed the silver cord and broken the golden bowl of life.

Alice was now in a condition of absolute dependence and poverty, and it seemed to Hugh that if ever his love was to be her shield, she had now a right to demand its immediate protection. With careful tenderness, and expressions of the most loyal respect, he confessed his love to his father. He spoke of Alice's great beauty and worth, of their patient waiting, and of the circumstances which he conceived made it simply honourable for him to fulfil his promise at once.