

THE CONVENTIONALISTS

off after tea in the direction of the village; it was understood that Mr. Banister's conversation should be administered to me later. They asked questions, of course, and I answered them. I described what Algy had to eat and what his cell looked like, and how the hours of the day and night were spent. Harold heard all in silence, and his mother with an occasional gentle clicking of the tongue. I could see that it was as if I described a lunatic asylum. She was sincerely sorry for the poor boy.

"I hope he has plenty to eat," she said.

I was silent a moment; then I looked at her, and in that instant I saw real motherly tenderness and fear surge up in her eyes as she read my answer.

"They are very particular about health," I said awkwardly.

"But—but do you mean——?"

"Well; I am afraid most people would not think it sufficient. But, you know, they live to a great age generally. It seems to suit them."

She said no more; but I began to understand better how hard it is to conquer nature. I knew quite well that this motherly woman would have her bad moments as she thought of her son—of the body she had borne and nursed. . . . I was thankful that she had no great powers of imagination; and I determined I would say even less than I had intended upon the physical hardships of St. Hugh's—above all not one word of the little scourge. I wondered, too, more