

cated state of affairs. Four years before the date at which this history begins, an event had occurred to which the family still looked back with a sort of superstition,—a mingled feeling of awe, regret, and pride, such as might move the descendants of some hero who had abdicated a throne at the call of duty. The year in which Frederick took his degree, and left Oxford, Mrs. Eastwood had *put down her carriage*. I dare not print such words in ordinary type. She said very little about the reasons for this very serious proceeding; but it cannot be denied that there was a grandeur and pathos in the incident, which gave it a place in what may be called the mythology of the family. Nobody attempted to explain how it was, or why it was. It gave a touch of elevating tragedy and mystery to the comfortable home-life, which was so pleasant and free from care. When now and then a sympathizing friend would say, "You must miss your carriage," Mrs. Eastwood was always prompt to disclaim any need for pity. "I have always been an excellent walker," she said cheerily. She would not receive any condolences, and yet even she got a certain subtle pleasure, without knowing it, out of the renunciation. It was the hardest thing she had ever been called upon to do in her life, and how could she help being a little, a very little, proud of it? But, to be sure, this sentiment was quite unconscious. It was the only unexplained event in her innocent life. Ellinor, of course, half by instinct, half by reason of that ineffable communion between a mother and an only daughter, which makes the one conscious of all that passes within and without the other almost without words, knew exactly how this great family event had come about; but no one else knew, not even the most intimate friends of the house.

The cause, however, was nothing much out of the course of nature. Frederick, the eldest son and hope, he of whom everybody declared that he was his mother's stay and support, as good as the head of the family, had suddenly burst into her room one morning before she was up, like a sudden avalanche. He came to tell her, in the first place, that he had made up his mind not to go into the Church, for which he had been educated, and in which he had the best of prospects; and in the second place, that he was deeply in debt, and was going out to Australia by the next ship to repent and make up his deficiencies. Fancy having all this poured into your ears of a cold spring morning in your peaceful bed, when you woke up with the consciousness that to-day would be as yesterday, and, perhaps, still more tranquil and pleasant. Mrs. Eastwood was stricken dumb with consternation. It was the first time that trouble in this shape had ever visited her. Grief she had known—but that curtain of gentle goodness and well-seeming which covers the surface of life had never before been rudely rent before her eyes, revealing the abyss below. And the shock was all the greater that it was Frederick who gave it; he who had been her innocent child