

"Oh! Cecil will never marry. Young as he is, he is marked out for a bachelor. And as for Muiraven, he will, in all probability, have to sacrifice his private instincts to public interests. Besides"—in a lowered voice—"you should never forget that, were any thing to happen to Muiraven, the hopes of the family would be set upon you."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Moxon. Muiraven's life is worth ten of mine, thank God! and Cecil and I mean to preserve our liberty intact, and leave marriage for the young and the gay: yourself, *par exemple*."

"Call a poor devil who has nothing but his own brains to look to for a subsistence, young and gay? My dear boy, you'll be a grandfather before I have succeeded in inducing any woman to accept my name and nothing a year."

"Egh!"—with a shudder—"what an awful prospect! I'd as soon hang myself."

"Well it needn't worry you just yet," says Moxon, with a laugh. "But I must not keep you any longer from your ride. Shall you be in your rooms to-morrow evening, Keir?"

"Probably—that is, I will make a point of being there, if you will come and take supper with me. And bring over Summers and Charlton with you. And look here, Moxon—stop this confounded rumor about me, at all hazards, for Heaven's sake!"

"If there is no truth in it, why should you object to its circulation?" inquires Moxon, bluntly.

"There is no truth in it. I hardly know the man by sight, or his daughters; but you are aware of my father's peculiarities, and how the least idea of such a thing would worry him."

"We should have Lord Norham down here in no time, to find out the truth for himself. So it's lucky for you, old fellow"—observing Keir's knitted brows—"that there's nothing for him to find out."

"Yes—of course; but I hate every thing in the shape of town-talk, true or otherwise."

"There shall be no more, if I can prevent it, Keir. Good-by!"

"Good-by, till to-morrow evening; and don't be later than ten."

He remains on the spot where Saville Moxon left him for a moment, and then turns, musingly, toward the court-yard of the inn again.

"What on earth can have put Fretterley into their heads," he ponders, "when I have been so scrupulously careful, that even the ostler at the village inn doesn't know me by my right name? It's an awful nuisance, and will entail a move at

the very time when I can least afford it. My usual luck!" And, with a shrug of the shoulders, Eric Keir reënters the stable-yard. The man is still waiting there with his horse, and, when the gentleman is mounted, he touches his cap and asks when he may be expected to return.

"Impossible to say," is the unsatisfactory rejoinder; and in another minute Keir has driven his spurs into the animal's sides and is galloping, to make up for lost time, along the road which leads—to Fretterley.

As he rides hurriedly and carelessly along, his thoughts are conflicting and uneasy. His impulsive and unthinking nature has led him into the commission of an act which is more than rash—which is unpardonable, and of which he already bitterly repents; and he sees the effect of this youthful folly closing about him and hedging him in, and the trouble it will probably entail, stretching out over a long vista of coming years, to end perhaps only with his life.

He knows that his father (a most loving and affectionate father, of whom he has no fear beyond that begotten by the dread of wounding his affection) cherishes high hopes for him and expects great things—greater things than Eric thinks he has the power of performing. For Lord Muiraven, though a young man of sterling merit—"the dearest fellow in the world," as his brothers will inform you—is not clever: he knows it himself, and all his friends know it, and that Eric has the advantage over him, not only in personal appearance, but in brains. And, though it would be too much to affirm that Lord Norham has ever wished his sons could change places, there is no doubt that, while he looks on Muiraven as the one who shall carry on his titles to a future generation, his pride is fixed on Eric; and the ease with which the young fellow has disposed of his university examinations, and the passport into society his agreeable manners have gained for him, are topics of unfailing interest to the earl.

And it is this knowledge, added to the remembrance of a motherless childhood sheltered by paternal care from every sorrow, that makes his own conduct smite so bitterly on the heart of Eric Keir. How could he have done it? Oh! what a fool—what an ungrateful, unpardonable fool he has made of himself! And there is no way out of the evil: he has destroyed that which will not bear patching—his self-respect! As the conviction presses home to him, tears, which do him no dishonor, rise to his eyes, yet are forced back again, as though to weep had been a sin.