

had been open to him ? She was sufficiently imbued with the ideas of her time to regard the refusal of a challenge as impossible in practice. And might not his plea be allowed weight, that his action had been forced upon him by the skill of his opponent. Yes—he may have, must have, meant to end a bloodless duel by some shift that would yield a satisfaction to honour, and even build a bridge for reconciliation. But her father's sword, and his determination, were too strong for that.

Had Oliver fallen and her father lived, to plead for pardon for the slaying of her lover, would he not have had to confess that it was he that had provoked the duel, not Oliver. It was a thought always more or less in her mind, and very strongly now as she rode away beside him, with the consciousness also upon her of the vows she had spoken to him but a month since, believing always she should never bring herself to observe them. Then, again—look at this : had Oliver but come to her with the fresh stain of blood upon his hands—had he confessed all and thrown himself on her mercy—then how infinitely stronger that plea would have been, that only a narrow chance had made him the survivor !

So long as she was in her old home, Lucinda could see nothing in this plea but a mere law quibble, an evasion. She could not split straws over her father's grave—could admit no question of his conduct. But as she and her companion drew away to the open down, and left the Old Hall and her childhood behind, she was able at least to admit the thought that she herself was answerable for his death as much as her husband. Her conduct had left him no choice, in her brother's absence. It was purely a question of honour against dishonour. And her course of action had been of her own choosing ; no compulsion had been put upon her. It was all honest, straightforward guile on Oliver's part. Things were held fair in