

Felix paused an instant, and then added,—

"It is very serious, Esther."

"I know it is serious," said Esther, looking up at him. "Since I have been at Transome Court I have seen many things very seriously. If I had not, I should not have left what I did leave. I made a deliberate choice."

Felix stood a moment or two, dwelling on her with a face where the gravity gathered tenderness.

"And those curls?" he said, with a sort of relenting, seating himself again, and putting his hand on them.

"They cost nothing—they are natural."

"You are such a delicate creature."

"I am very healthy. Poor women, I think, are healthier than the rich. Besides," Esther went on, with a mischievous meaning, "I think of having some wealth."

"How?" said Felix, with an anxious start. "What do you mean?"

"I think even of two pounds a week: one needn't live up to the splendor of all that, you know; we might live as simply as you liked: there would be money to spare, and you could do wonders, and be obliged to work too, only not if sickness came. And then I think of a little income for your mother, enough for her to live as she has been used to live; and a little income for my father, to save him from being dependent when he is no longer able to preach."

Esther said all this in a playful tone, but she ended with a grave look of appealing submission,—

"I mean—if you approve. I wish to do what you think it will be right to do."

Felix put his hand on her shoulder again and reflected a little while, looking on the hearth: then he said, lifting up his eyes, with a smile at her,—

"Why, I shall be able to set up a great library, and lend the books to be dog's-eared and marked with bread-crumbs."

Esther said, laughing, "You think you are to do everything. You don't know how clever I am. I mean to go on teaching a great many things."

"Teaching me?"