

"But Adam Halfday lies there in his coffin," he added, "and I am not afraid of him. Good night."

Brian made another bow, and walked briskly from the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN ON THE DOWNS.

BRIAN HALFDAY lingered under the ivy-covered porch of the inn at Datchet Bridge, as though loth to exchange its friendly shelter for that of his own cottage on the Downs. It was a fine summer evening in June, and there was every temptation to a man city born and city bred, for a ramble under the bright stars, but Brian hesitated on the threshold. It was striking nine by the clock in the old church as he stood there. The scanty life of the village had died out, and the lights were few behind the window blinds. Even the inn was destitute of customers, and the waiter was reading the "Penton Guardian" in the best seat of the bar-parlour without a dream of business.

"Poor woman," was Brian's sudden comment upon something that was oppressing his mind, as he stepped at last with evident reluctance into the roadway, but whether his sister, or the lady whom he had recently quitted, was the object of this sympathetic outburst, was not clearly apparent.

Having once started, Brian seemed disposed to make up for lost time by his rapid strides in the direction of home. A short cut across a meadow, and the churchyard, taken anglewise, would lead at once to the Downs, and then the flinty, broken road, or the close, green turf would become a matter of choice to the pedestrian. At the churchyard gate, with her arms folded across in such a manner that her figure swayed with it as it swung backwards and forwards with her weight, was Dorcas Halfday, uncloaked and unbonneted as we have seen her last in Mabel's room. She had been waiting for her brother, and he was not surprised in any great degree to find her there. She stood erect as he advanced.

"I thought you would come this way," Dorcas said.

"I was told you were not in the house," answered Brian.

"I have been waiting here lest you should think I had been listening," said Dorcas. "It struck me that I had better get out into the air away from you both. We can speak in this place, too, without much chance of being overheard ourselves, although there are queer customers abroad to-night."

"Queer customers?" repeated Brian.

"A man asked me five minutes since where the path over the Downs would take him to if he kept to the right. I said it would lead him to my dead grandfather," Dorcas remarked.

"Not a wise answer," said Brian.

"Ah, but I am not wise, Brian, and you know that as well as anybody," was the reply.

"You have not been waiting here, Dorcas, to talk like this to me?" asked her brother.

"No."

"I thought you and I were learning to become better friends at last," he said, more gently.

"Oh! the less we see of each other, the better friends we shall be," replied Dorcas recklessly.

"I am sorry to hear that."

"I can't forget, and I can't forgive!" she added passionately.

"There is nothing to forgive, nothing for me to ask forgiveness for. You know that as well as I do," said Brian.

"I know how you have stood between me and the one hope of my life," she cried. "How you had no mercy, how you might have saved him, and would not move."

"He was a scamp."

"He was the man I loved."

"Yes, unfortunately," said Brian; "that is the whole misery of it, and we need not discuss the question again."

"I have been waiting to ask if you have told Miss Westbrook anything about me," said Dorcas; "that is why I speak of it to-night."

"I have not told Miss Westbrook."

"Have you heard that she has offered me a home?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"That she had better reconsider the idea; that you were not fit for her friendship or