

opinion ; and that hence grew his earnest desire to impress upon me a strong sense of justice, and a broad comprehensive tenderness for those who did wrong, as the victims of temptations, generally unknown to those who readily condemn their shortcomings. The virtues thus inculcated were not undesirable ones at whose shrine to kneel ; but, perhaps, my devotion to them was a little too exclusive.

Such were the circumstances and surroundings of my childhood, and they require to be described at some length if the strange drama of my future career is to be placed in right perspective. An impetuous fearless freedom-loving nature, set in an environment of dull decorous propriety, artificial refinement, and superficial polish, in which the conventional rules of society were of equal importance with the decalogue, if indeed they did not take rank above it ; and with the two-virtues of self-sacrifice, and the charity that thinketh no evil, exalted as objects of worship without any very accurate perception of their exact scope and limits, or of the boundary lines beyond which they would become unwarrantable intruders on the domains of other virtues.

The 'Aunt Marion,' whom I have mentioned, was Mrs. L'Estrange, the wife of Colonel L'Estrange, of Wichborough Court, and my father's sister. She was a few years younger than my father, but whereas he had married rather late in life, she had done so young, and her eldest son, and only surviving child, Conrad L'Estrange, was about eighteen years older than I was. He had been a sad disappointment to his parents, though through no fault of his own. He had early shown promise of great ability ; but the development, almost in childhood, of chronic asthma, had blighted all chance of any distinguished career, and doomed him to the life of a student. Like many asthmatic subjects he had always found himself particularly well in London, and up to the time when most men leave the universities he had carried on his studies at the house of a private tutor in London, an apparently unimportant fact destined to form one of the links in the chain of my future fate. As long as I could remember he had been living at Wichborough Court, generally occupied in