

## AS LONG AS SHE LIVED !\*

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## BOOK I.

## "THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE NOBLE POOR."

## CHAPTER VI.

## AN ESCORT HOME.

MABEL WESTBROOK had a strong suspicion in her mind that she was being advised for the best, although the necessity for delay in an act of charity, an act of atonement, was beyond her comprehension. The earnest face of her adviser, the depth of pity in his keen, dark eyes, the interest which he felt in her and her mission, all seriously impressed her, although they did not alter her determination. Before all and everything, her promise. There was no power in human nature to weaken that, and he who had trusted in her knew that she would not fail him at the last. He had left it to the last, and this was the result.

"Why are you very sorry for my sake?" she asked, in a wondering tone of voice.

"You have taken a hard task on yourself—you do not see the end of this so clearly as I do," was the curator's reply.

"It is impossible to see the end."

"It will end in error."

"You cannot tell—you do not know"—began Mabel, when he held up his thin hand, and she stopped at his signal before she was aware of it.

"I see disappointment and mortification of spirit; kindness wasted and zeal misplaced, unless I interfere," said Brian.

"You have no right to interfere with me," replied Mabel.

"I believe I have. But," he added, passing his hands through his long hair, in a perplexed, irritable way, "I want time to think of it all. I did not dream that you and your petty mystery were so close upon me."

"Petty mystery!" said Mabel, colouring again. "There is so little mystery in it, and to-morrow will dispel it."

"The morrow never comes to the philosopher."

"I am not a philosopher."

"I wish you were." And then Brian looked at her, and smiled at her or her obstinacy, or both, it was doubtful which.

"I have received your warning, Mr. Half-day, which after all is but a mere echo of your sister's, and I need not detain you any longer," said Mabel.

"It is getting late," he replied, by way of assent to this, or as a hint for her to go. As Mabel rose from the chair, he rose also, and took up his hat. Dorcas, who had been looking from one to the other as each spoke in turn, rose too, and all three passed out of the study, and back through the long rooms, to the hall, Brian lamp in hand again. In the hall he extinguished his lamp, opened the street door, allowed Mabel and his sister to precede him, closed the door behind him, and joined them on the narrow pavement.

"Good night," said Mabel, to him and Dorcas, but Brian did not respond with his sister.

"I will see you to the 'Mitre,' Miss Westbrook, if you will allow me," he said.

"Thank you, no," replied Mabel, "your sister has a more lonely journey."

"Don't ask him to come with me, please," cried Dorcas at once. "I don't want him; I won't have him; I shall run all the way; I would not have him with me for all the world. Good night."

Before another word could be exchanged, away ran Dorcas at the top of her speed along the middle of the road. The brother watched her thoughtfully until Mabel said—

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