

## Chapter 5

1ST CITIZEN Sir, there's a hurry in the veins of youth That makes a vice of virtue by excess. 2ND CITIZEN What if the coolness of our tardier veins Be loss of virtue? 1ST CITIZEN All things cool with time - The sun itself, they say, till heat shall find A general level, nowhere in excess. 2ND CITIZEN 'Tis a poor climax, to my weaker thought, That future middlingness.

IN the evening, when Mr Lyon was expecting the knock at the door that would announce Felix Holt, he occupied his cushionless arm-chair in the sitting-room, and was skimming rapidly, in his short-sighted way, by the light of one candle, the pages of a missionary report, emitting occasionally a slight 'Hm-m' that appeared to be expressive of criticism rather than of approbation. The room was dismally furnished, the only objects indicating an intention of ornament being a bookcase, a map of the Holy Land, an engraved portrait of Dr Doddridge, and a black bust with a coloured face, which for some reason or other was covered with green gauze. Yet any one whose attention was quite awake must have been aware, even on entering, of certain things that were incongruous with the general air of sombreness and privation. There was a delicate scent of dried rose-leaves; the light by which the minister was reading was a wax-candle in a white earthenware candlestick, and the table on the opposite side of the fireplace held a dainty work-basket frilled with blue satin.

Felix Holt, when he entered, was not in an observant mood; and when, after seating himself, at the minister's invitation, near the little table which held the work-basket, he stared at the wax-candle opposite to him, he did so without any wonder or consciousness that the candle was not of tallow. But the minister's sensitiveness gave another interpretation to the gaze which he divined rather than saw; and in alarm lest this inconsistent extravagance should obstruct his usefulness, he hastened to say -

'You are doubtless amazed to see me with a wax-light, my young friend; but this undue luxury is paid for with the earnings of my daughter, who is so delicately framed that the smell of tallow is loathsome to her.'

'I heeded not the candle, sir. I thank Heaven I am not a mouse to have a nose that takes note of wax or tallow.'

The loud abrupt tones made the old man vibrate a little. He had been stroking his chin gently before, with a sense that he must be very quiet and deliberate in his treatment of the eccentric young man; but now, quite unreflectingly, he drew forth a pair of spectacles, which he

was in the habit of using when he wanted to observe his interlocutor more closely than usual.

'And I myself, in fact, am equally indifferent,' he said, as he opened and adjusted his glasses, 'so that I have a sufficient light on my book.' Here his large eyes looked discerningly through the spectacles.

'Tis the quality of the page you care about, not of the candle,' said Felix, smiling pleasantly enough at his inspector. 'You're thinking that you have a roughly-written page before you now.'

That was true. The minister, accustomed to the respectable air of provincial townsmen, and especially to the sleek well-clipped gravity of his own male congregation, felt a slight shock as his glasses made perfectly clear to him the shaggy-headed, large-eyed, strong-limbed person of this questionable young man, without waistcoat or cravat. But the possibility, supported by some of Mrs Holt's words, that a disguised work of grace might be going forward in the son of whom she complained so bitterly, checked any hasty interpretations.

'I abstain from judging by the outward appearance only,' he answered, with his usual simplicity. 'I myself have experienced that when the spirit is much exercised it is difficult to remember neckbands and strings and such small accidents of our vesture, which are nevertheless decent and needful so long as we sojourn in the flesh. And you too, my young friend, as I gather from your mother's troubled and confused report, are undergoing some travail of mind. You will not, I trust, object to open yourself fully to me, as to an aged pastor who has himself had much inward wrestling, and has especially known much temptation from doubt.'

'As to doubt,' said Felix, loudly and brusquely as before, 'if it is those absurd medicines and gulling advertisements that my mother has been talking of to you - and I suppose it is - I've no more doubt about them than I have about pocket-picking. I know there's a stage of speculation in which a man may doubt whether a pickpocket is blame-worthy - but I'm not one of your subtle fellows who keep looking at the world through their own legs. If I allowed the sale of those medicines to go on, and my mother to live out of the proceeds when I can keep her by the honest labour of my hands, I've not the least doubt that I should be a rascal.'

'I would fain inquire more particularly into your objection to these medicines,' said Mr Lyon, gravely. Notwithstanding his conscientiousness and a certain originality in his own mental disposition, he was too little used to high principle quite dissociated from sectarian phraseology to be as immediately in sympathy with it as he would otherwise have been. 'I know they have been well reported

of, and many wise persons have tried remedies providentially discovered by those who are not regular physicians, and have found a blessing in the use of them. I may mention the eminent Mr Wesley, who, though I hold not altogether with his Arminian doctrine, nor with the usages of his institution, was nevertheless a man of God; and the journals of various Christians whose names have left a sweet savour might be cited in the same sense. Moreover, your father, who originally concocted these medicines and left them as a provision for your mother, was, as I understand, a man whose walk was not unfaithful.'

'My father was ignorant,' said Felix, bluntly. 'He knew neither the complication of the human system, nor the way in which drugs counteract each other. Ignorance is not so damnable as humbug, but when it prescribes pills it may happen to do more harm. I know something about these things. I was 'prentice for five miserable years to a stupid brute of a country apothecary - my poor father left money for that - he thought nothing could be finer for me. No matter: I know that the Cathartic Pills are a drastic compound which may be as bad as poison to half the people who swallow them - that the Elixir is an absurd farrago of a dozen incompatible things; and that the Cancer Cure might as well be bottled ditch-water.'

Mr Lyon rose and walked up and down the room. His simplicity was strongly mixed with sagacity as well as sectarian prejudice, and he did not rely at once on a loud-spoken integrity - Satan might have flavoured it with ostentation. Presently he asked in a rapid low tone, 'How long have you known this, young man?'

'Well put, sir,' said Felix. 'I've known it a good deal longer than I've acted on it, like plenty of other things. But you believe in conversion?'

'Yea, verily.'

'So do I. I was converted by six weeks' debauchery.'

The minister started. 'Young man,' he said, solemnly, going up close to Felix and laying a hand on his shoulder, 'speak not lightly of the divine operations, and restrain unseemly words.'

'I'm not speaking lightly,' said Felix. 'If I had not seen that I was making a hog of myself very fast, and that pig wash, even if could have got plenty of it, was a poor sort of thing, I should never have looked life fairly in the face to see what was to be done with it. I laughed out loud at last to think of a poor devil like me, in a Scotch garret, with my stockings out at heel and a shilling or two to be dissipated upon, with a smell of raw haggis mounting from below, and old women breathing gin as they passed me on the stairs - wanting to turn my life

into easy pleasure. Then I began to see what else it could be turned into. Not much, perhaps. This world is not a very fine place for a good many of the people in it. But I've made up my mind it shan't be the worse for me, if I can help it. They may tell me I can't alter the world - that there must be a certain number of sneaks and robbers in it, and if I don't lie and filch somebody else will. Well, then, somebody else shall, for I won't. That's the upshot of my conversion, Mr Lyon, if you want to know it.'

Mr Lyon removed his hand from Felix's shoulder and walked about again. 'Did you sit under any preacher at Glasgow, young man?'

'No: I heard most of the preachers once, but I never wanted to hear them twice.'

The good Rufus was not without a slight rising of resentment at this young man's want of reverence. It was not yet plain whether he wanted to hear twice the preacher in Malthouse Yard. But the resentful feeling was carefully repressed: a soul in so peculiar a condition must be dealt with delicately.

'And now, may I ask,' he said, 'what course you mean to take, after hindering your mother from making and selling these drugs? I speak no more in their favour after what you have said. God forbid that I should strive to hinder you from seeking whatsoever things are honest and honourable. But your mother is advanced in years; she needs comfortable sustenance; you have doubtless considered how you may make her amends? 'He that provideth not for his own -' I trust you respect the authority that so speaks. And I will not suppose that, after being tender of conscience towards strangers, you will be careless towards your mother. There be indeed some who, taking a mighty charge on their shoulders, must perforce leave their households to Providence, and to the care of humbler brethren, but in such a case the call must be clear.'

'I shall keep my mother as well - nay, better - than she has kept herself. She has always been frugal. With my watch and clock cleaning, and teaching one or two little chaps that I've got to come to me, I can earn enough. As for me, I can live on bran porridge. I have the stomach of a rhinoceros.'

'But for a young man so well furnished as you, who can questionless write a good hand and keep books, were it not well to seek some higher situation as clerk or assistant? I could speak to Brother Muscat, who is well acquainted with all such openings. Any place in Pendrell's Bank, I fear, is now closed against such as are not Churchmen. It used not to be so, but a year ago he discharged Brother Bodkin, although he was a valuable servant. Still, something

might be found. There are ranks and degrees - and those who can serve in the higher must not unadvisedly change what seems to be a providential appointment. Your poor mother is not altogether -'

'Excuse me, Mr Lyon; I've had all that out with my mother, and I may as well save you any trouble by telling you that my mind has been made up about that a long while ago. I'll take no employment that obliges me to prop up my chin with a high cravat, and wear straps, and pass the live-long day with a set of fellows who spend their spare money on shirt-pins. That sort of work is really lower than many handicrafts; it only happens to be paid out of proportion. That's why I set myself to learn the watchmaking trade. My father was a weaver first of all. It would have been better for him if he had remained a weaver. I came home through Lancashire and saw an uncle of mine who is a weaver still. I mean to stick to the class I belong to - people who don't follow the fashions.'

Mr Lyon was silent a few moments. This dialogue was far from plain sailing; he was not certain of his latitude and longitude. If the despiser of Glasgow preachers had been arguing in favour of gin and Sabbath-breaking, Mr Lyon's course would have been clearer. 'Well, well,' he said, deliberately, 'it is true that St Paul exercised the trade of tent-making, though he was learned in all the wisdom of the Rabbis.'

'St Paul was a wise man,' said Felix. 'Why should I want to get into the middle class because I have some learning? The most of the middle class are as ignorant as the working people about everything that doesn't belong to their own Brummagem life. That's how the working men are left to foolish devices and keep worsening themselves: the best heads among them forsake their born comrades, and go in for a house with a high door-step and a brass knocker.'

Mr Lyon stroked his mouth and chin, perhaps because he felt some disposition to smile; and it would not be well to smile too readily at what seemed but a weedy resemblance of Christian unworldliness. On the contrary, there might be a dangerous snare in an unsanctified outstepping of average Christian practice.

'Nevertheless,' he observed, gravely, 'it is by such self-advancement that many have been enabled to do good service to the cause of liberty and to the public wellbeing. The ring and the robe of Joseph were no objects for a good man's ambition, but they were the signs of that credit which he won by his divinely-inspired skill, and which enabled him to act as a saviour to his brethren.'

'O yes, your ringed and scented men of the people! - I won't be one of them. Let a man once throttle himself with a satin stock, and he'll get new wants and new motives. Metamorphosis will have begun at his

neck-joint, and it will go on till it has changed his likings first and then his reasoning, which will follow his likings as the feet of a hungry dog follow his nose. I'll have none of your clerkly gentility. I might end by collecting greasy pence from poor men to buy myself a fine coat and a glutton's dinner, on pretence of serving the poor men. I'd sooner be Paley's fat pigeon than a demagogue all tongue and stomach, though' - here Felix changed his voice a little - 'I should like well enough to be another sort of demagogue, if I could.'

'Then you have a strong interest in the great political movements of these times?' said Mr Lyon, with a perceptible flashing of the eyes.

'I should think so. I despise every man who has not - or, having it, doesn't try to rouse it in other men.'

'Right, my young friend, right,' said the minister, in a deep cordial tone. Inevitably his mind was drawn aside from the immediate consideration of Felix Holt's spiritual interest by the prospect of political sympathy. In those days so many instruments of God's cause in the fight for religious and political liberty held creeds that were painfully wrong, and, indeed, irreconcilable with salvation ! 'That is my own view, which I maintain in the face of some opposition from brethren who contend that a share in public movements is a hindrance to the closer walk, and that the pulpit is no place for teaching men their duties as members of the common-wealth. I have had much puerile blame cast upon me because I have uttered such names as Brougham and Wellington in the pulpit. Why not Wellington as well as Rabshakeh? and why not Brougham as well as Balaam?' Does God know less of men than He did in the days of Hezekiah and Moses? - is His arm shortened, and is the world become too wide for His providence? But, they say, there are no politics in the New Testament -'

'Well, they're right enough there,' said Felix, with his usual unceremoniousness.

'What ! you are of those who hold that a Christian minister should not meddle with public matters in the pulpit?' said Mr Lyon, colouring. 'I am ready to join issue on that point.'

'Not I, sir,' said Felix; 'I should say, teach any truth you can, whether it's in the Testament or out of it. It's little enough anybody can get hold of, and still less what he can drive into the skulls of a pence-counting, parcel-tying generation, such as mostly fill your chapels.'

'Young man,' said Mr Lyon, pausing in front of Felix. He spoke rapidly, as he always did, except when his words were specially weighted with emotion: he overflowed with matter, and in his mind matter was

always completely organised into words. 'I speak not on my own behalf, for not only have I no desire that any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, but I am aware of much that should make me patient under a disesteem resting even on too hasty a construction. I speak not as claiming reverence for my own age and office - not to shame you, but to warn you. It is good that you should use plainness of speech, and I am not of those who would enforce a submissive silence on the young, that they themselves, being elders, may be heard at large; for Elihu was the youngest of Job's friends, yet was there a wise rebuke in his words; and the aged Eli was taught by a revelation to the boy Samuel. I have to keep a special watch over myself in this matter, inasmuch as I have a need of utterance which makes the thought within me seem as a pent-up fire, until I have shot it forth, as it were, in arrowy words, each one hitting its mark. Therefore I pray for a listening spirit, which is a great mark of grace. Nevertheless, my young friend, I am bound, as I said, to warn you. The temptations that most beset those who have great natural gifts, and are wise after the flesh, are pride and scorn, more particularly towards those weak things of the world which have been chosen to confound the things which are mighty. The scornful nostril and the high head gather not the odours that lie on the track of truth. The mind that is too ready at contempt and reprobation is -'

Here the door opened, and Mr Lyon paused to look round, but seeing only Lyddy with the tea-tray, he went on:

'Is, I may say, as a clenched fist that can give blows, but is shut up from receiving and holding ought that is precious - though it were heaven-sent manna.'

'I understand you, sir,' said Felix, good-humouredly, putting out his hand to the little man, who had come close to him as he delivered the last sentence with sudden emphasis and slowness. 'But I'm not inclined to clench my fist at you.' 'Well, well,' said Mr Lyon, shaking the proffered hand, 'we shall see more of each other, and I trust shall have much profitable communing. You will stay and have a dish of tea with us: we take the meal late on Thursdays, because my daughter is detained by giving a lesson in the French tongue. But she is doubtless returned now, and will presently come and pour out tea for us.'

'Thank you; I'll stay,' said Felix, not from any curiosity to see the minister's daughter, but from a liking for the society of the minister himself - for his quaint looks and ways, and the transparency of his talk, which gave a charm even to his weaknesses. The daughter was probably some prim Miss, neat, sensible, pious, but all in a small feminine way, in which Felix was no more interested than in Dorcas meetings, biographies of devout women, and that amount of

ornamental knitting which was not inconsistent with Nonconforming seriousness.

'I'm perhaps a little too fond of banging and smashing,' he went on; 'a phrenologist at Glasgow told me I had large veneration; another man there, who knew me, laughed out and said I was the most blasphemous iconoclast living. 'That,' says my phrenologist, 'is because of his large Ideality, which prevents him from finding anything perfect enough to be venerated.' Of course I put my ears down and wagged my tail at that stroking.'

'Yes, yes; I have had my own head explored with somewhat similar results. It is, I fear, but a vain show of fulfilling the heathen precept, 'Know thyself', and too often leads to a self-estimate which will subsist in the absence of that fruit by which alone the quality of the tree is made evident. Nevertheless - Esther, my dear, this is Mr Holt, whose acquaintance I have even now been making with more than ordinary interest. He will take tea with us.'

Esther bowed slightly as she walked across the room to fetch the candle and place it near her tray. Felix rose and bowed, also with an air of indifference, which was perhaps exaggerated by the fact that he was inwardly surprised. The minister's daughter was not the sort of person he expected. She was quite incongruous with his notion of ministers' daughters in general; and though he had expected something nowise delightful, the incongruity repelled him. A very delicate scent, the faint suggestion of a garden, was wafted as she went. He would not observe her, but he had a sense of an elastic walk, the tread of small feet, a long neck and a high crown of shining brown plaits with curls that floated backward - things, in short, that suggested a fine lady to him, and determined him to notice her as little as possible. A fine lady was always a sort of spun-glass affair - not natural, and with no beauty for him as art; but a fine lady as the daughter of this rusty old Puritan was especially offensive.

'Nevertheless,' continued Mr Lyon, who rarely let drop any thread of discourse, 'that phrenological science is not irreconcilable with the revealed dispensations. And it is undeniable that we have our varying native dispositions which even grace will not obliterate. I myself, from my youth up, have been given to question too curiously concerning the truth - to examine and sift the medicine of the soul rather than to apply it.'

'If your truth happens to be such medicine as Holt's Pills and Elixir, the less you swallow of it the better,' said Felix. 'But truth-vendors and medicine-vendors usually recommend swallowing. When a man sees his livelihood in a pill or a proposition, he likes to have orders for the dose, and not curious inquiries.'



This speech verged on rudeness, but it was delivered with a brusque openness that implied the absence of any personal intention. The minister's daughter was now for the first time startled into looking at Felix. But her survey of this unusual speaker was soon made, and she relieved her father from the need to reply by saying -

'The tea is poured out, father.'

That was the signal for Mr Lyon to advance towards the table, raise his right hand, and ask a blessing at sufficient length for Esther to glance at the visitor again. There seemed to be no danger of his looking at her; he was observing her father. She had time to remark that he was a peculiar-looking person, but not insignificant, which was the quality that most hopelessly consigned a man to perdition. He was massively built. The striking points in his face were large clear grey eyes and full lips. 'Will you draw up to the table, Mr Holt?' said the minister.

In the act of rising, Felix pushed back his chair too suddenly against the rickety table close by him, and down went the blue-frilled work-basket, flying open, and dispersing on the floor reels, thimble, muslin work, a small sealed bottle of atta of rose, and something heavier than these - a duodecimo volume which fell close to him between the table and the fender.

'O my stars !' said Felix, 'I beg your pardon.' Esther had already started up, and with wonderful quickness had picked up half the small rolling things while Felix was lifting the basket and the book. This last had opened, and had its leaves crushed in falling; and, with the instinct of a bookish man, he saw nothing more pressing to be done than to flatten the corners of the leaves.

'Byron's Poems!' he said, in a tone of disgust, while Esther was recovering all the other articles. 'The Dream' - he'd better have been asleep and snoring. What! do you stuff your memory with Byron, Miss Lyon?'

Felix, on his side, was led at last to look straight at Esther, but it was with a strong denunciatory and pedagogic intention. Of course he saw more clearly than ever that she was a fine lady.

She reddened, drew up her long neck, and said, as she retreated to her chair again -

'I have a great admiration for Byron.'

Mr Lyon had paused in the act of drawing his chair to the tea-table, and was looking on at this scene, wrinkling the corners of his eyes

with a perplexed smile. Esther would not have wished him to know anything about the volume of Byron, but she was too proud to show any concern.

'He is a worldly and vain writer, I fear,' said Mr Lyon. He knew scarcely anything of the poet, whose books embodied the faith and ritual of many young ladies and gentlemen.

'A misanthropic debauchee,' said Felix, lifting a chair with one hand, and holding the book open in the other, 'whose notion of a hero was that he should disorder his stomach and despise mankind. His corsairs and renegades, his Alps and Manfreds, are the most paltry puppets that were ever pulled by the strings of lust and pride.'

'Hand the book to me,' said Mr Lyon.

'Let me beg of you to put it aside till after tea, father,' said Esther. 'However objectionable Mr Holt may find its pages, they would certainly be made worse by being greased with bread-and-butter.'

'That is true, my dear,' said Mr Lyon, laying down the book on the small table behind him. He saw that his daughter was angry.

'Ho, ho!' thought Felix, 'her father is frightened at her. How came he to have such a nice-stepping, long-necked peacock for his daughter? but she shall see that I am not frightened.' Then he said aloud, 'I should like to know how you will justify your admiration for such a writer, Miss Lyon.'

'I should not attempt it with you, Mr Holt,' said Esther. 'You have such strong words at command, that they make the smallest argument seem formidable. If I had ever met the giant Cormoran, I should have made a point of agreeing with him in his literary opinions.'

Esther had that excellent thing in woman, a soft voice with a clear fluent utterance. Her sauciness was always charming, because it was without emphasis, and was accompanied with graceful little turns of the head.

Felix laughed at her thrust with young heartiness.

'My daughter is a critic of words, Mr Holt,' said the minister, smiling complacently, 'and often corrects mine on the ground of niceties, which I profess are as dark to me as if

they were the reports of a sixth sense which I possess not. I am an eager seeker for precision, and would fain find language subtle

enough to follow the utmost intricacies of the soul's pathways, but I see not why a round word that means some object, made and blessed by the Creator, should be branded and banished as a malefactor.'

'O, your niceties - I know what they are,' said Felix, in his usual fortissimo. 'They all go on your system of make-believe. 'Rottenness' may suggest what is unpleasant, so you'd better say 'sugar-plums', or something else such a long way off the fact that nobody is obliged to think of it. Those are your round-about euphuisms that dress up swindling till it looks as well as honesty, and shoot with boiled pease instead of bullets. I hate your gentlemanly speakers.'

'Then you would not like Mr Jermyn, I think,' said Esther. 'That reminds me, father, that to-day, when I was giving Miss Louisa Jermyn her lesson, Mr Jermyn came in and spoke to me with grand politeness, and asked me at what times you were likely to be disengaged, because he wished to make your better acquaintance, and consult you on matters of importance. He never took the least notice of me before. Can you guess the reason of his sudden ceremoniousness?'

'Nay, child,' said the minister, ponderingly.

'Politics, of course,' said Felix. 'He's on some committee. An election is coming. Universal peace is declared, and the foxes have a sincere interest in prolonging the lives of the poultry. Eh, Mr Lyon? Isn't that it?'

'Nay, not so. He is the close ally of the Transome family, who are blind hereditary Tories like the Debarrys, and will drive their tenants to the poll as if they were sheep. And it has even been hinted that the heir who is coming from the East may be another Tory candidate, and coalesce with the younger Debarry. It is said that he has enormous wealth, and could purchase every vote in the county that has a price.'

'He is come,' said Esther. 'I heard Miss Jermyn tell her sister that she had seen him going out of her father's room.'

' 'Tis strange,' said Mr Lyon.

'Something extraordinary must have happened,' said Esther, 'for Mr Jermyn to intend courting us. Miss Jermyn said to me only the other day that she could not think how I came to be so well educated and ladylike. She always thought Dissenters were ignorant, vulgar people. I said, so they were, usually, and Church people also in small towns. She considers herself a judge of what is ladylike, and she is vulgarity personified - with large feet, and the most odious scent on her

handkerchief, and a bonnet that looks like 'The Fashion' printed in capital letters.'

'One sort of fine ladyism is as good as another,' said Felix.

'No, indeed. Pardon me,' said Esther. 'A real fine-lady does not wear clothes that flare in people's eyes, or use importunate scents, or make a noise as she moves: she is something refined, and graceful, and charming, and never obtrusive.'

'O yes,' said Felix, contemptuously. 'And she reads Byron also, and admires Childe Harold - gentlemen of unspeakable woes, who employ a hairdresser, and look seriously at themselves in the glass.'

Esther reddened, and gave a little toss. Felix went on triumphantly. 'A fine lady is a squirrel-headed thing, with small airs and small notions, about as applicable to the business of life as a pair of tweezers to the clearing of a forest. Ask your father what those old persecuted emigrant Puritans would have done with fine-lady wives and daughters.'

'O there is no danger of such misalliances,' said Esther. 'Men who are unpleasant companions and make frights of themselves, are sure to get wives tasteless enough to suit them.'

'Esther, my dear,' said Mr Lyon, 'let not your playfulness betray you into disrespect towards those venerable pilgrims. They struggled and endured in order to cherish and plant anew the seeds of scriptural doctrine and of a pure discipline.'

'Yes, I know,' said Esther, hastily, dreading a discourse on the pilgrim fathers.

'O they were an ugly lot!' Felix burst in, making Mr Lyon start. 'Miss Medora wouldn't have minded if they had all been put into the pillory and lost their ears. She would have said, 'Their ears did stick out so.' I shouldn't wonder if that's a bust of one of them.' Here Felix, with sudden keenness of observation, nodded at the black bust with the gauze over its coloured face.

'No,' said Mr Lyon; 'that is the eminent George Whitfield, who, you well know, had a gift of oratory as of one on whom the tongue of flame had rested visibly. But Providence - doubtless for wise ends in relation to the inner man, for I would not inquire too closely into minutiae which carry too many plausible interpretations for any one of them to be stable - Providence, I say, ordained that the good man should squint; and my daughter has not yet learned to bear with this infirmity.'

'So she has put a veil over it. Suppose you had squinted yourself?' said Felix, looking at Esther.

'Then, doubtless, you could have been more polite to me, Mr Holt,' said Esther, rising and placing herself at her worktable. 'You seem to prefer what is unusual and ugly.'

'A peacock!' thought Felix. 'I should like to come and scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off.'

Felix rose to go, and said, 'I will not take up more of your valuable time, Mr Lyon. I know that you have not many spare evenings.'

'That is true, my young friend; for I now go to Sproxton one evening in the week. I do not despair that we may some day need a chapel there, though the hearers do not multiply save among the women, and there is no work as yet begun among the miners themselves. I shall be glad of your company in my walk thither to-morrow at five o'clock, if you would like to see how that population has grown of late years.'

'O, I've been to Sproxton already several times. I had a congregation of my own there last Sunday evening.'

'What! do you preach?' said Mr Lyon, with a brightened glance

'Not exactly. I went to the ale-house.'

Mr Lyon started. 'I trust you are putting a riddle to me, young man, even as Samson did to his companions. From what you said but lately, it cannot be that you are given to tippling and to taverns.'

'O, I don't drink much. I order a pint of beer, and I get into talk with the fellows over their pots and pipes. Somebody must take a little knowledge and common sense to them in this way, else how are they to get it? I go for educating the non-electors, so I put myself in the way of my pupils - my academy is the beer-house. I'll walk with you to-morrow with great pleasure.'

'Do so, do so,' said Mr Lyon, shaking hands with his old acquaintance. 'We shall understand each other better by-and-by, I doubt not.'

'I wish you good-evening, Miss Lyon.'

Esther bowed very slightly, without speaking.

'That is a singular young man, Esther,' said the minister, walking about after Felix was gone. 'I discern in him a love for whatsoever things are honest and true, which I would fain believe to be an earnest

of further endowment with the wisdom that is from on high. It is true that, as the traveller in the desert is often lured, by a false vision of water and freshness, to turn aside from the track which leads to the tried and established fountains, so the Evil One will take advantage of a natural yearning towards the better, to delude the soul with a self-flattering belief in a visionary virtue, higher than the ordinary fruits of the Spirit. But I trust it is not so here. I feel a great enlargement in this young man's presence, notwithstanding a certain licence in his language, which I shall use my efforts to correct.'

'I think he is very coarse and rude,' said Esther, with a touch of temper in her voice. 'But he speaks better English than most of our visitors. What is his occupation?'

'Watch and clock making, by which, together with a little teaching, as I understand, he hopes to maintain his mother, not thinking it right that she should live by the sale of medicines whose virtues he distrusts. It is no common scruple.'

'Dear me,' said Esther, 'I thought he was something higher than that.' She was disappointed.

Felix, on his side, as he strolled out in the evening air, said to himself: 'Now by what fine meshes of circumstance did that queer devout old man, with his awful creed, which makes this world a vestibule with double doors to hell, and a narrow stair on one side whereby the thinner sort may mount to heaven - by what subtle play of flesh and spirit did he come to have a daughter so little in his own likeness? Married foolishly, I suppose. I'll never marry, though I should have to live on raw turnips to subdue my flesh. I'll never look back and say, 'I had a fine purpose once - I meant to keep my hands clean, and my soul upright, and to look truth in the face; but pray excuse me, I have a wife and children - I must lie and simper a little, else they'll starve ! ' or, 'My wife is nice, she must have her bread well buttered, and her feelings will be hurt if she is not thought genteel.' That is the lot Miss Esther is preparing for some man or other. I could grind my teeth at such self-satisfied minxes, who think they can tell everybody what is the correct thing, and the utmost stretch of their ideas will not place them on a level with the intelligent fleas. I should like to see if she could be made ashamed of herself.'