

Chapter 6

'Though she be dead, yet let me think she lives, And feed my mind, that dies for want of her.' MARLOWE: Tamburlaine the Great.

HARDLY any one in Treby who thought at all of Mr Lyon and his daughter had not felt the same sort of wonder about Esther as Felix felt. She was not much liked by her father's church and congregation. The less serious observed that she had too many airs and graces, and held her head much too high; the stricter sort feared greatly that Mr Lyon had not been sufficiently careful in placing his daughter among God-fearing people, and that, being led astray by the melancholy vanity of giving her exceptional accomplishments, he had sent her to a French school, and allowed her to take situations where she had contracted notions not only above her own rank, but of too worldly a kind to be safe in any rank. But no one knew what sort of woman her mother had been, for Mr Lyon never spoke of his past domesticities. When he was chosen as pastor at Treby in 1825, it was understood that he had been a widower many years, and he had no companion but the tearful and much-exercised Lyddy, his daughter being still at school. It was only two years ago that Esther had come home to live permanently with her father, and take pupils in the town. Within that time she had excited a passion in two young Dissenting breasts that were clad in the best style of Treby waistcoat - a garment which at that period displayed much design both in the stuff and the wearer; and she had secured an astonished admiration of her cleverness from the girls of various ages who were her pupils; indeed, her knowledge of French was generally held to give a distinction to Treby itself as compared with other market-towns. But she had won little regard of any other kind. Wise Dissenting matrons were divided between fear lest their sons should want to marry her and resentment that she should treat those 'undeniable' young men with a distant scorn which was hardly to be tolerated in a minister's daughter; not only because that parentage appeared to entail an obligation to show an exceptional degree of Christian humility, but because, looked at from a secular point of view, a poor minister must be below the substantial householders who kept him. For at that time the preacher who was paid under the Voluntary system was regarded by his flock with feelings not less mixed than the spiritual person who still took his tithe-pig or his modus. His gifts were admired, and tears were shed under best bonnets at his sermons; but the weaker tea was thought good enough for him; and even when he went to preach a charity sermon in a strange town, he was treated with home-made wine and the smaller bedroom. As the good churchman's reverence was often mixed with growling, and was apt to be given chiefly to an abstract parson who was what a parson ought to be, so the good Dissenter sometimes mixed his approval of ministerial gifts with considerable criticism and cheapening of the human vessel which contained these

treasures. Mrs Muscat and Mrs Nuttwood applied the principle of Christian equality by remarking that Mr Lyon had his oddities, and that he ought not to allow his daughter to indulge in such unbecoming expenditure on her gloves, shoes, and hosiery, even if she did pay for them out of her earnings. As for the Church people who engaged Miss Lyon to give lessons in their families, their imaginations were altogether prostrated by the incongruity between accomplishments and Dissent, between weekly prayer-meetings and a conversance with so lively and altogether worldly a language as the French. Esther's own mind was not free from a sense of irreconcilableness between the objects of her taste and the conditions of her lot. She knew that Dissenters were looked down upon by those whom she regarded as the most refined classes; her favourite companions, both in France and at an English school where she had been a junior teacher, had thought it quite ridiculous to have a father who was a Dissenting preacher; and when an ardently admiring schoolfellow induced her parents to take Esther as a governess to the younger children, all her native tendencies towards luxury, fastidiousness, and scorn of mock gentility, were strengthened by witnessing the habits of a well-born and wealthy family. Yet the position of servitude was irksome to her, and she was glad at last to live at home with her father; for though, throughout her girlhood, she had wished to avoid this lot, a little experience had taught her to prefer its comparative independence. But she was not contented with her life: she seemed to herself to be surrounded with ignoble, uninteresting conditions, from which there was no issue; for even if she had been unamiable enough to give her father pain deliberately, it would have been no satisfaction to her to go to Treby church, and visibly turn her back on Dissent. It was not religious differences, but social differences, that Esther was concerned about, and her ambitious taste would have been no more gratified in the society of the Waces than in that of the Muscats. The Waces spoke imperfect English and played whist; the Muscats spoke the same dialect and took in the Evangelical Magazine. Esther liked neither of these amusements. She had one of those exceptional organisations which are quick and sensitive without being in the least morbid; she was alive to the finest shades of manner, to the nicest distinctions of tone and accent; she had a little code of her own about scents and colours, textures and behaviour, by which she secretly condemned or sanctioned all things and persons. And she was well satisfied with herself for her fastidious taste, never doubting that hers was the highest standard. She was proud that the best-born and handsomest girls at school had always said that she might be taken for a born lady. Her own pretty instep, clad in a silk stocking, her little heel, just rising from a kid slipper, her irreproachable nails and delicate wrist, were the objects of delighted consciousness to her; and she felt that it was her superiority which made her unable to use without disgust any but the finest cambric handkerchiefs and freshest gloves. Her

money all went in the gratification of these nice tastes, and she saved nothing from her earnings. I cannot say that she had any pangs of conscience on this score; for she felt sure that she was generous: she hated all meanness, would empty her purse impulsively on some sudden appeal to her pity, and if she found out that her father had a want, she would supply it with some pretty device of a surprise. But then the good man so seldom had a want - except the perpetual desire, which she could never gratify, of seeing her under convictions, and fit to become a member of the church.

As for little Mr Lyon, he loved and admired this unregenerate child more, he feared, than was consistent with the due preponderance of impersonal and ministerial regards: he prayed and pleaded for her with tears, humbling himself for her spiritual deficiencies in the privacy of his study; and then he came downstairs to find himself in timorous subjection to her wishes, lest, as he inwardly said, he should give his teaching an ill savour, by mingling it with outward crossing. There will be queens in spite of Salic or other laws of later date than Adam and Eve; and here, in this small dingy house of the minister in Malthouse Yard, there was a light-footed, sweet-voiced Queen Esther.

The stronger will always rule, say some, with an air of confidence which is like a lawyer's flourish, forbidding exceptions or additions. But what is strength? Is it blind wilfulness that sees no terrors, no many-linked consequences, no bruises and wounds of those whose cords it tightens? Is it the narrowness of a brain that conceives no needs differing from its own, and looks to no results beyond the bargains of to-day; that tugs with emphasis for every small purpose, and thinks it weakness to exercise the sublime power of resolved renunciation? There is a sort of subjection which is the peculiar heritage of largeness and of love; and strength is often only another name for willing bondage to irremediable weakness

Esther had affection for her father: she recognised the purity of his character, and a quickness of intellect in him which responded to her own liveliness, in spite of what seemed a dreary piety, which selected everything that was least interesting and romantic in life and history. But his old clothes had a smoky odour, and she did not like to walk with him, because, when people spoke to him in the street, it was his wont, instead of remarking on the weather and passing on, to pour forth in an absent manner some reflections that were occupying his mind about the traces of the divine government, or about a peculiar incident narrated in the life of the eminent Mr Richard Baxter. Esther had a horror of appearing ridiculous even in the eyes of vulgar Trebians. She fancied that she should have loved her mother better than she was able to love her father; and she wished she could have remembered that mother more thoroughly.

But she had no more than a broken vision of the time before she was five years old - the time when the word oftenest on her lips was 'Mamma;' when a low voice spoke caressing French words to her, and she in her turn repeated the words to her rag-doll; when a very small white hand, different from any that came after, used to pat her, and stroke her, and tie on her frock and pinafore, and when at last there was nothing but sitting with a doll on a bed where mamma was lying, till her father once carried her away. Where distinct memory began, there was no longer the low caressing voice and the small white hand. She knew that her mother was a Frenchwoman, that she had been in want and distress, and that her maiden name was Annette Ledru. Her father had told her no more than this; and once, in her childhood, when she had asked him some question, he had said, 'My Esther, until you are a woman, we will only think of your mother: when you are about to be married and leave me, we will speak of her, and I will deliver to you her ring and all that was hers; but, without a great command laid upon me, I cannot pierce my heart by speaking of that which was and is lost.' Esther had never forgotten these words, and the older she became, the more impossible she felt it that she should urge her father with questions about the past.

His inability to speak of that past to her depended on manifold causes. Partly it came from an initial concealment. He had not the courage to tell Esther that he was not really her father: he had not the courage to renounce that hold on her tenderness which the belief in his natural fatherhood must help to give him, or to incur any resentment that her quick spirit might feel at having been brought up under a false supposition. But there were other things yet more difficult for him to be quite open about - deep sorrows of his life as a Christian minister that were hardly to be told to a girl.

Twenty-two years before, when Rufus Lyon was no more than thirty-six years old, he was the admired pastor of a large Independent congregation in one of our southern seaport towns. He was unmarried, and had met all exhortations of friends who represented to him that a bishop - i.e., the overseer of an Independent church and congregation - should be the husband of one wife, by saying that St Paul meant this particular as a limitation, and not as an injunction; that a minister was permitted to have one wife, but that he, Rufus Lyon, did not wish to avail himself of that permission, finding his studies and other labours of his vocation all-absorbing, and seeing that mothers in Israel were sufficiently provided by those who had not been set apart for a more special work. His church and congregation were proud of him: he was put forward on platforms, was made a 'deputation,' and was requested to preach anniversary sermons in far-off towns. Wherever noteworthy preachers were discussed, Rufus Lyon was almost sure to be mentioned as one who did honour to the Independent body; his sermons were said to be full of study yet full of

fire; and while he had more of human knowledge than many of his brethren, he showed in an eminent degree the marks of a true ministerial vocation. But on a sudden this burning and shining light seemed to be quenched: Mr Lyon voluntarily resigned his charge and withdrew from the town.

A terrible crisis had come upon him; a moment in which religious doubt and newly-awakened passion had rushed together in a common flood, and had paralysed his ministerial gifts. His life of thirty-six years had been a story of purely religious and studious fervour; his passion had been for doctrines, for argumentative conquest on the side of right; the sins he had had chiefly to pray against had been those of personal ambition (under such forms as ambition takes in the mind of a man who has chosen the career of an Independent preacher), and those of a too restless intellect, ceaselessly urging questions concerning the mystery of that which was assuredly revealed, and thus hindering the due nourishment of the soul on the substance of the truth delivered. Even at that time of comparative youth, his unworldliness and simplicity in small matters (for he was keenly awake to the larger affairs of this world) gave a certain oddity to his manners and appearance; and though his sensitive face had much beauty, his person altogether seemed so irrelevant to a fashionable view of things, that well-dressed ladies and gentlemen usually laughed at him, as they probably did at Mr John Milton after the Restoration and ribbons had come in, and still more at that apostle, of weak bodily presence, who preached in the back streets of Ephesus and elsewhere, a new view of a new religion that hardly anybody believed in. Rufus Lyon was the singular-looking apostle of the meeting in Skipper's Lane. Was it likely that any romance should befall such a man? Perhaps not; but romance did befall him.

One winter's evening in 1812, Mr Lyon was returning from a village preaching. He walked at his usual rapid rate, with busy thoughts undistracted by any sight more distinct than the bushes and hedgerow trees, black beneath a faint moon-light, until something suggested to him that he had perhaps omitted to bring away with him a thin account-book in which he recorded certain subscriptions. He paused, unfastened his outer coat and felt in all his pockets, then he took off his hat and looked inside it. The book was not to be found, and he was about to walk on, when he was startled by hearing a low, sweet voice say, with a suong foreign accent - 'Have pity on me, sir.'

Searching with his short-sighted eyes, he perceived some one on a side-bank; and approaching, he found a young woman with a baby on her lap. She spoke again, more faintly than before -

'Sir, I die with hunger; in the name of God take the little one.'

There was no distrusting the pale face and the sweet low voice. Without pause, Mr Lyon took the baby in his arms and said, 'Can you walk by my side, young woman?'

She rose, but seemed tottering. 'Lean on me,' said Mr Lyon. And so they walked slowly on, the minister for the first time in his life carrying a baby.

Nothing better occurred to him than to take his charge to his own house; it was the simplest way of relieving the woman's wants, and finding out how she could be helped further; and he thought of no other possibilities. She was too feeble for more words to be spoken between them till she was seated by his fireside. His elderly servant was not easily amazed at anything her master did in the way of charity, and at once took the baby, while Mr Lyon unfastened the mother's damp bonnet and shawl, and gave her something warm to drink. Then, waiting by her till it was time to offer her more, he had nothing to do but to notice the loveliness of her face, which seemed to him as that of an angel, with a benignity in its repose that carried a more assured sweetness than any smile. Gradually she revived, lifted up her delicate hands between her face and the firelight, and looked at the baby which lay opposite to her on the old servant's lap, taking in spoonfuls with much content, and stretching out naked feet towards the warmth. Then, as her consciousness of relief grew into contrasting memory, she lifted up her eyes to Mr Lyon, who stood close by her, and said, in her pretty broken way -

'I knew you had a good heart when you took your hat off. You seemed to me as the image of the bien-aime Saint Jean.'

The grateful glance of those blue-grey eyes, with their long shadow-making eyelashes, was a new kind of good to Rufus Lyon; it seemed to him as if a woman had never really looked at him before. Yet this poor thing was apparently a blind French Catholic - of delicate nurture, surely, judging from her hands. He was in a tremor; he felt that it would be rude to question her, and he only urged her now to take a little food. She accepted it with evident enjoyment, looking at the child continually, and then, with a fresh burst of gratitude, leaning forward to press the servant's hand, and say, 'O, you are good!' Then she looked up at Mr Lyon again and said, 'Is there in the world a prettier marmot?'

The evening passed; a bed was made up for the strange woman, and Mr Lyon had not asked her so much as her name. He never went to bed himself that night. He spent it in misery, enduring a horrible assault of Satan. He thought a frenzy had seized him. Wild visions of an impossible future thrust themselves upon him. He dreaded lest the woman had a husband; he wished that he might call her his own, that

he might worship her beauty, that she might love and caress him. And what to the mass of men would have been only one of many allowable follies - a transient fascination, to be dispelled by daylight and contact with those common facts of which common-sense is the reflex - was to him a spiritual convulsion. He was as one who raved, and knew that he raved. These mad wishes were irreconcilable with what he was, and must be, as a Christian minister; nay, penetrating his soul as tropic heat penetrates the frame, and changes for it all aspects and all flavours, they were irreconcilable with that conception of the world which made his faith. All the busy doubt which had before been mere impish shadows flitting around a belief that was strong with the strength of an unswerving moral bias, had now gathered blood and substance. The questioning spirit had become suddenly bold and blasphemous: it no longer insinuated scepticism - it prompted defiance; it no longer expressed cool inquisitive thought, but was the voice of a passionate mood. Yet he never ceased to regard it as the voice of the tempter: the conviction which had been the law of his better life remained within him as a conscience.

The struggle of that night was an abridgment of all the struggles that came after. Quick souls have their intensest life in the first anticipatory sketch of what may or will be, and the pursuit of their wish is the pursuit of that paradisaic vision which only impelled them, and is left farther and farther behind, vanishing for ever even out of hope in the moment which is called success.

The next morning Mr Lyon heard his guest's history. She was the daughter of a French officer of considerable rank, who had fallen in the Russian campaign. She had escaped from France to England with much difficulty in order to rejoin her husband, a young Englishman, to whom she had become attached during his detention as a prisoner of war on parole at Vesoul, where she was living under the charge of some relatives, and to whom she had been married without the consent of her family. Her husband had served in the Hanoverian army, had obtained his discharge in order to visit England on some business, with the nature of which she was not acquainted, and had been taken prisoner as a suspected spy. A short time after their marriage he and his fellow-prisoners had been moved to a town nearer the coast, and she had remained in wretched uncertainty about him, until at last a letter had come from him telling her that an exchange of prisoners had occurred, that he was in England, that she must use her utmost effort to follow him, and that on arriving on English ground she must send him word under a cover which he enclosed, bearing an address in London. Fearing the opposition of her friends, she started unknown to them, with a very small supply of money; and after enduring much discomfort and many fears in waiting for a passage, which she at last got in a small trading smack, she arrived at Southampton - ill. Before she was able to write her baby was born;

and before her husband's answer came, she had been obliged to pawn some clothes and trinkets. He desired her to travel to London, where he would meet her at the Belle Sauvage, adding that he was himself in distress and unable to come to her: when once he was in London they would take ship and quit the country. Arrived at the Belle Sauvage, the poor thing waited three days in vain for her husband: on the fourth a letter came in a strange hand, saying that in his last moments he had desired this letter to be written to inform her of his death, and recommend her to return to her friends. She could choose no other course, but she had soon been reduced to walking, that she might save her pence to buy bread with; and on the evening when she made her appeal to Mr Lyon, she had pawned the last thing, over and above needful clothing, that she could persuade herself to part with. The things she had not borne to part with were her marriage-ring and a locket containing her husband's hair, and bearing his baptismal name. This locket, she said, exactly resembled one worn by her husband on his watch-chain, only that his bore the name Annette, and contained a lock of her hair. The precious trifle now hung round her neck by a cord, for she had sold the small gold chain which formerly held it.

The only guarantee of this story, besides the exquisite candour of her face, was a small packet of papers which she carried in her pocket, consisting of her husband's few letters, the letter which announced his death, and her marriage certificate. It was not so probable a story as that of many an inventive vagrant; but Mr Lyon did not doubt it for a moment. It was impossible to him to suspect this angelic-faced woman, but he had strong suspicions concerning her husband. He could not help being glad that she had not retained the address he had desired her to send to in London, as that removed any obvious means of learning particulars about him. But inquiries might have been made at Vesoul by letter, and her friends there might have been appealed to. A consciousness, not to be quite silenced, told Mr Lyon that this was the course he ought to take, but it would have required an energetic self-conquest, and he was excused from it by Annette's own disinclination to return to her relatives if any other acceptable possibility could be found.

He dreaded, with a violence of feeling which surmounted all struggles, lest anything should take her away, and place such barriers between them as would make it unlikely or impossible that she should ever love him well enough to become his wife. Yet he saw with perfect clearness that unless he tore up this mad passion by the roots, his ministerial usefulness would be frustrated, and the repose of his soul would be destroyed. This woman was an unregenerate Catholic; ten minutes' listening to her artless talk made that plain to him: even if her position had been less equivocal, to unite himself to such a woman was nothing less than a spiritual fall. It was already a fall that

he had wished there was no high purpose to which he owed an allegiance - that he had longed to fly to some backwoods where there was no church to reproach him, and where he might have this sweet woman to wife, and know the joys of tenderness. Those sensibilities which in most lives are diffused equally through the youthful years, were aroused suddenly in Mr Lyon, as some men have their special genius revealed to them by a tardy concurrence of conditions. His love was the first love of a fresh young heart full of wonder and worship. But what to one man is the virtue which he has sunk below the possibility of aspiring to, is to another the backsliding by which he forfeits his spiritual crown.

The end was, that Annette remained in his house. He had striven against himself so far as to represent her position to some chief matrons in his congregations, praying and yet dreading that they would so take her by the hand as to impose on him that denial of his own longing not to let her go out of his sight, which he found it too hard to impose on himself. But they regarded the case coldly: the woman was, after all, a vagrant. Mr Lyon was observed to be surprisingly weak on the subject - his eagerness seemed disproportionate and unbecoming; and this young Frenchwoman, unable to express herself very clearly, was no more interesting to those matrons and their husbands than other pretty young women suspiciously circumstanced. They were willing to subscribe something to carry her on her way, or if she took some lodgings they would give her a little sewing, and endeavour to convert her from papistry. If, however, she was a respectable person, as she said, the only proper thing for her was to go back to her own country and friends. In spite of himself, Mr Lyon exulted. There seemed a reason now that he should keep Annette under his own eyes. He told himself that no real object would be served by his providing food and lodging for her elsewhere - an expense which he could ill afford. And she was apparently so helpless, except as to the one task of attending to her baby, that it would have been folly to think of her exerting herself for her own support.

But this course of his was severely disapproved by his church. There were various signs that the minister was under some evil influence: his preaching wanted its old fervour, he seemed to shun the intercourse of his brethren, and very mournful suspicions were entertained. A formal remonstrance was presented to him, but he met it as if he had already determined to act in anticipation of it. He admitted that external circumstances, conjoined with a peculiar state of mind, were likely to hinder the fruitful exercise of his ministry, and he resigned it. There was much sorrowing, much expostulation, but he declared that for the present he was unable to unfold himself more fully; he only wished to state solemnly that Annette Ledru, though blind in spiritual things, was in a worldly sense a pure and virtuous

woman. No more was to be said, and he departed to a distant town. Here he maintained himself, Annette, and the child, with the remainder of his stipend, and with the wages he earned as a printer's reader. Annette was one of those angelic-faced helpless women who take all things as manna from heaven: the good image of the well-beloved Saint John wished her to stay with him, and there was nothing else that she wished for except the unattainable. Yet for a whole year Mr Lyon never dared to tell Annette that he loved her: he trembled before this woman; he saw that the idea of his being her lover was too remote from her mind for her to have any idea that she ought not to live with him. She had never known, never asked the reason why he gave up his ministry. She seemed to entertain as little concern about the strange world in which she lived as a bird in its nest: an avalanche had fallen over the past, but she sat warm and uncrushed - there was food for many morrows, and her baby flourished. She did not seem even to care about a priest, or about having her child baptised; and on the subject of religion Mr Lyon was as timid, and shrank as much from speaking to her, as on the subject of his love. He dreaded anything that might cause her to feel a sudden repulsion towards him. He dreaded disturbing her simple gratitude and content. In these days his religious faith was not slumbering; it was awake and achingly conscious of having fallen in a struggle. He had had a great treasure committed to him, and had flung it away: he held himself a backslider. His unbelieving thoughts never gained the full ear and consent of his soul. His prayers had been stifled by the sense that there was something he preferred to complete obedience: they had ceased to be anything but intermittent cries and confessions, and a submissive presentiment, rising at times even to an entreaty, that some great discipline might come, that the dulled spiritual sense might be roused to full vision and hearing as of old, and the supreme facts become again supreme in his soul. Mr Lyon will perhaps seem a very simple personage, with pitifully narrow theories; but none of our theories are quite large enough for all the disclosures of time, and to the end of men's struggles a penalty will remain for those who sink from the ranks of the heroes into the crowd for whom the heroes fight and die.

One day, however, Annette learned Mr Lyon's secret. The baby had a tooth coming, and being large and strong now, was noisily fretful. Mr Lyon, though he had been working extra hours and was much in need of repose, took the child from its mother immediately on entering the house and walked about with it, patting and talking soothingly to it. The stronger grasp, the new sensations, were a successful anodyne, and baby went to sleep on his shoulder. But fearful lest any movement should disturb it, he sat down, and endured the bondage of holding it still against his shoulder.

'You do nurse baby well,' said Annette, approvingly. 'Yet you never nursed before I came?'

'No,' said Mr Lyon. 'I had no brothers and sisters.'

'Why were you not married?' Annette had never thought of asking that question before.

'Because I never loved any woman - till now. I thought I should never marry. Now I wish to marry.'

Annette started. She did not see at once that she was the woman he wanted to marry; what had flashed on her mind was, that there might be a great change in Mr Lyon's life. It was as if the lightning had entered into her dream, and half awakened her.

'Do you think it foolish, Annette, that I should wish to marry?'

'I did not expect it,' she said, doubtfully. 'I did not know you thought about it.'

'You know the woman I should like to marry?'

'I know her?' she said, interrogatively, blushing deeply.

'It is you, Annette - you whom I have loved better than my duty. I forsook everything for you.'

Mr Lyon paused: he was about to do what he felt would be ignoble - to urge what seemed like a claim.

'Can you love me, Annette? Will you be my wife?' Annette trembled and looked miserable.

'Do not speak - forget it,' said Mr Lyon, rising suddenly and speaking with loud energy. 'No, no - I do not want it - I do not wish it.'

The baby awoke as he started up; he gave the child into Annette's arms, and left her.

His work took him away early the next morning and the next again. They did not need to speak much to each other. The third day Mr Lyon was too ill to go to work. His frame had been overwrought; he had been too poor to have sufficiently nourishing food, and under the shattering of his long-deferred hope his health had given way. They had no regular servant - only occasional help from an old woman, who lit the fires and put on the kettles. Annette was forced to be the sick-nurse, and this sudden demand on her shook away some of her

torpor. The illness was a serious one, and the medical man one day hearing Mr Lyon in his delirium raving with an astonishing fluency in Biblical language, suddenly looked round with increased curiosity at Annette, and asked if she were the sick man's wife, or some other relative.

'No - no relation,' said Annette, shaking her head. 'He has been good to me.'

'How long have you lived with him?'

'More than a year.'

'Was he a preacher once?'

'Yes.'

'When did he leave off being a preacher?'

'Soon after he took care of me.'

'Is that his child?'

'Sir,' said Annette, colouring indignantly. 'I am a widow.'

The doctor, she thought, looked at her oddly, but he asked no more questions.

When the sick man was getting better, and able to enjoy invalid's food, he observed one day, while he was taking some broth, that Annette was looking at him; he paused to look at her in return, and was struck with a new expression in her face, quite distinct from the merely passive sweetness which usually characterised it. She laid her little hand on his, which was now transparently thin, and said, 'I am getting very wise; I have sold some of the books to make money - the doctor told me where; and I have looked into the shops where they sell caps and bonnets and pretty things, and I can do all that, and get more money to keep us. And when you are well enough to get up, we will go out and be married - shall we not? See! and la petite (the baby had never been named anything else) shall call you papa - and then we shall never part.'

Mr Lyon trembled. This illness - something else, perhaps - had made a great change in Annette. A fortnight after that they were married. The day before, he had ventured to ask her if she felt any difficulty about her religion, and if she would consent to have la petite baptised and brought up as a Protestant. She shook her head and said very simply

-

'No: in France, in other days, I would have minded; but all is changed. I never was fond of religion, but I knew it was right. J'aimais les fleurs, les bals, la musique, et mon mari qui etait beau. But all that is gone away. There is nothing of my religion in this country. But the good God must be here, for you are good; I leave all to you.'

It was clear that Annette regarded her present life as a sort of death to the world - an existence on a remote island where she had been saved from wreck. She was too indolent mentally, too little interested, to acquaint herself with any secrets of the isle. The transient energy, the more vivid consciousness and sympathy which had been stirred in her during Mr Lyon's illness, had soon subsided into the old apathy to everything except her child. She withered like a plant in strange air, and the three years of life that remained were but a slow and gentle death. Those three years were to Mr Lyon a period of such self-suppression and life in another as few men know. Strange I that the passion for this woman, which he felt to have drawn him aside from the right as much as if he had broken the most solemn vows - for that only was right to him which he held the best and highest - the passion for a being who had no glimpse of his thoughts induced a more thorough renunciation than he had ever known in the time of his complete devotion to his ministerial career. He had no flattery now, either from himself or the world; he knew that he had fallen, and his world had forgotten him, or shook their heads at his memory. The only satisfaction he had was the satisfaction of his tenderness - which meant untiring work, untiring patience, untiring wakefulness even to the dumb signs of feeling in a creature whom he alone cared for.

The day of parting came, and he was left with little Esther as the one visible sign of that four years' break in his life. A year afterwards he entered the ministry again, and lived with the utmost sparingness that Esther might be so educated as to be able to get her own bread in case of his death. Her probable facility in acquiring French naturally suggested his sending her to a French school, which would give her a special advantage as a teacher. It was a Protestant school, and French Protestantism had the high recommendation of being non-prelatical. It was understood that Esther would contract no papistical superstitions; and this was perfectly true; but she contracted, as we see, a good deal of non-papistical vanity.

Mr Lyon's reputation as a teacher and devoted pastor had revived; but some dissatisfaction beginning to be felt by his congregation at a certain laxity detected by them in his views as to the limits of salvation, which he had in one sermon even hinted might extend to unconscious recipients of mercy, he had found it desirable seven years ago to quit this ten years' pastorate and accept a call from the less important church in Malthouse Yard, Treby Magna.

This was Rufus Lyon's history, at that time unknown in its fulness to any human being besides himself. We can perhaps guess what memories they were that relaxed the stringency of his doctrine on the point of salvation. In the deepest of all senses his heart said - 'Though she be dead, yet let me think she lives, And feed my mind, that dies for want of her '