

"Does she not draw her allowance?"

"Not regularly. And she refused her address when she last appeared at Kirby's. I suppose she wants to keep the child away from me. She need not trouble. The last thing I want is her brat to bring up."

"Wyvis!"

But to his mother's remonstrating exclamation Wyvis paid no attention in the least: his mood was fitful, and he was glad to step out of the ill-lighted room into the hall, and thence to the silence and solitude of the grounds about the house.

Brand Hall had been practically deserted for the last few years. A tenant or two had occupied it for a little time soon after its late master's withdrawal from the country; but the house was inconvenient and remote from towns, and it was said, moreover, to be damp and unhealthy. A caretaker and his wife had, therefore, been its only inhabitants of late, and a great deal of preparation had been required to make it fit for its owner when he at last wrote to his agents in Beaminster to intimate his intention of settling at the Hall.

The Brands had for many a long year been renowned as the most unlucky family in the neighborhood. They had once possessed a great property in the county; but gambling losses and speculation had greatly reduced their wealth, and even in the time of Wyvis Brand's grandfather the prestige of the family had sunk very low. In the days of Mark Brand, the father of Wyvis, it sank lower still. Mark Brand was not only "wild," but weak: not only weak, but wicked. His career was one of riotous dissipation, culminating in what was generally spoken of as "a low marriage" —with the barmaid of a Beaminster public-house. Mary Wyvis had never been at all like the typical barmaid of fiction or real life: she was always pale, quiet, and refined-looking, and it was not difficult to see how she had developed into the sorrowful, careworn woman whom Wyvis Brand called mother; but she came of a thoroughly bad stock, and was not untouched in reputation. The county people cut Mark Brand after his marriage, and never took any notice of his wife; and they were horrified when he insisted on naming his eldest son after his wife's family, as if he gloried in the lowliness of her origin. But when Wyvis was a small boy, his father resolved that neither he nor his children should be flouted and jeered at by county magnates any longer. He went abroad, and remained abroad until his death, when Wyvis was twenty years of age and Cuthbert, the younger son, was barely twelve. Some people said that the discovery of some particularly disgraceful deed was imminent when he left his native shores, and that it was for this reason that he had never returned to England; but Mark Brand himself always spoke as if his health were too weak, his nerves too delicate, to bear the rough breezes of his own country and the brusque manners of his compatriots. He had brought up his son according to his own ideas; and the result did not seem entirely satisfactory. Vague rumors occasionally