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IN THAT STATE OF LIFE BY H. AÏDE.

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IN THAT STATE OF LIFE.

BY

HAMILTON AÏDÉ.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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IN THAT STATE OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

IN one of the fairest districts of England, on the borders of Devon and Somerset, and hard by the sea, lies the noble estate of Mortlands. It is noble, but gloomier than words can paint. In the winter the sun does not rise upon the narrow valley overshadowed by dark wooded hills till near noon, and leaves it before three o'clock. The sea-winds rush up this narrow gully from a rocky shore, and whistle among the chimneys of the great house, built of hard grey stone—an uninteresting, uncompromising structure, which has scarcely submitted to take a lichen unto itself in the course of fifty years. The chief windows face the north, and within view of them is no flower or fountain, or other sight than a great sea of shaven lawn, with a broad, flat shore of gravel, unbroken by balustrade or vase. The vast gardens are half a mile away: there are orchid-houses, and fernries, and acres of glass devoted to all sorts of

rare plants, in which the head-gardener feels a just pride, and which visitors at Mortlands are taken to see; but for any living delight to the eyes of its inmates, these things might as well be in the tropics. To right and left, upon the hills for many a mile, stretch broad oak-woods and rich farm-lands. Sir Andrew Herriesson owns the property here, far as the eye can reach; and his ancestors, for some hundred years, have owned it before him. They are well-known in the county as a wealthy race, and proud—not too proud to have added to their original wealth by intermarriage with heiresses of a plebeian stock—but too proud ever to have permitted such marriages, minus money plus love; too proud ever to associate on terms of equality with their poorer neighbours; too proud to be popular with any sort or condition of people.

Sir Andrew, however, as every one knows, married for love, or for something which, in his nature, was understood to represent that sentiment; in other words, he married a poor woman. But then, though poor, she was well born, and well widowed, her late husband being a scion of the noble house of Pomeroy, and her own family “curiously old,” as they say of wine. Instead of money, Mrs. Pomeroy brought for her portion good looks, graceful manners, a weak brain, a weaker will, and a stepdaughter. This step-