

O M B R A

BY

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THIS book was written by the desire and at the suggestion of a dear friend, to whom it would have been dedicated had Providence permitted. But since then, all suddenly and unawares, he has been called upon to take that journey which every man must take. Upon the grave which has reunited him to his sweet wife, who went before, I lay this poor little soon-fading handful of mortal flowers. H. B. and E. B., faithful friends, where-soever you may be in His wide universe, God bless you, dear and gentle souls!

O M B R A .

CHAPTER I.

KATHERINE COURTENAY was an only child, and a great heiress; and both her parents had died before she was able to form any clear idea of them. She was brought up in total ignorance of the natural life of childhood—that world hemmed in by the dear faces of father and mother, brother and sister, which forms to most girls the introductory chapter into life. She never knew it. She lived in Langton-Courtenay—with her nurse first, and then with her governess, the centre of a throng of servants, in the immense desolate house. Even in these relationships the lonely child did not find the motherhood which lonely children so often find in the care of some pitying, tender-hearted stranger. Her guardian, who was her father's uncle, an old man of the world, was one of those who distrust old servants, and accept from their inferiors nothing more than can be paid for. He had made up his mind from the beginning that little Kate should not be eaten up by locusts, as he said—that she should have no kind of retainers about her, flattering her vanity with unnecessary affection and ostentatious zeal; but