

HIS FATHER'S WIFE

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BY

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TO JOHN GIDLEY WITHYCOMBE:

MY DEAR W.—

It is with extreme pleasure that I inscribe to you this island chronicle, wherein you will, I think, see—not in my work, but in the lives of these islanders—a certain likeness to that phase of art in which your sympathies lie so deep, and whereof you are so much more excellent a painter than I am a novelist.

J. E. P.

LEIGH-ON-SEA,

May, 1915.

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CHAPTER I

"YES, it's a hard case, my lad, an' a sad one, both for you an' the children—worse for you now, worse for them altogether," Aaron's father remarked, as the wind shrieked in from seaward, making the window-sashes rattle in their casements, and threatening to unroof the sheds and barns of the farmstead.

"Ay, that it is," said the son gloomily. "I'm a man, and can bear what the Almighty sends—anyway, I hope so. But they're kiddies and don't know what trouble is yet; and the worst will be in bringing them up—that's where they'll miss her most, though they won't know it till the harm's done."

"Well, as for that, it seems to me we shall get along pretty fairly, so long as Margaret stays on."

"M'm, yes, she'll be all right, I dare say. I was forgetting *her*; but *she* won't be a mother, all the same."

"No, she can't be, of course, because she isn't their mother; but she'll be a mighty long way better than most women in her place." Aaron agreed to that. "An' if she shows signs of