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THE TWO MARYS.

BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

I. MY OWN STORY.

CHAPTER I.

My name is Mary Peveril. My father was the incumbent of a proprietary chapel in that populous region which lies between Holborn and the New Road—a space within which there is a great deal of wealth and comfort, a great deal of penury and pain, but neither grandeur nor abject misery. I like those streets, though I know there is no loveliness in them. I feel that I can breathe better when I come out into the largeness and spacious widths of the squares, and I take a pleasure which many people will laugh at in the narrow paved passages—crooked and bent like so many elbows, with their bookstalls and curious little shops. How often have I strayed about them with my father, holding on by his coat-skirts when I was little, by his arm when I grew tall, while he stood and gazed at the books which he could so seldom afford to buy. When he found a cheap one that pleased him, how his face brightened up! While he looked at them I was not often thinking what the thoughts might be in his mind. What was I thinking of—swinging by the skirts of his coat, or by his arm when I grew a great girl? How can I tell? Thinking how bright the twinkling lights were; how funny life was, so full of people passing whom we never saw again—of paving-stones and shop-windows; and droll with whispering airs that blew round the corners, and always seemed to want to tell you something; and again more lights and more faces and more shop-windows. In winter these passages always felt warm and comfortable, and I had some theory about them which I scarcely remember now—something like the theory of the poor man whom I once heard saying that he went into the streets by night because the gaslights made them so warm. The desolateness of such a forlorn being, seeking warmth in the lighted streets, did not strike me when I heard that speech; I only felt I understood him, and had frequently been conscious of the same feeling. But I remember very well how once, when I was swinging back a little upon papa's arm, clinging to him, proud of showing that I belonged to him and was old enough to take his arm, yet separate from him, as youth so often is, thinking my own thoughts, living in another world, I all at once caught the illumination on his face as he fell upon a book he wanted which was cheap enough to be bought. To think he should really care about such a trifle—he—papa, the clergyman whom everybody looked up to; that he should look as pleased about it as Ellen our servant did when she got a new dress! I was half humiliated, half sympathetic. Poor papa! What a pity he could not buy a great many books when he cared so much for them. But yet, I think, a little sense of shame on his behalf, and of humiliation, mingled with that more amiable thought; that he should care so much about anything, seemed somehow a derogation from his dignity, a descent on his part into a less lofty place.

We lived in Southampton Street, in the end where there are no shops. We had two very white steps before our front-door, which was the brightest point about us. When anyone asked in that street where the clergyman of St. Mark's lived, the house was always pointed out by this: "No. 75, the house with the white steps." I used to think for years and years that they were a natural feature, and had nothing to do with any work of man, or rather, woman. It was

a shabby house inside. There were two little kitchens in the basement, two little parlours on the ground-floor, two little bedrooms above that, and on the top storey I think there were three divisions instead of two. One of the little parlours—the back one, which looked out upon a little square yard about the same size—was papa's study. It was not a cheerful room, with that outlook upon four brick walls, and a little square bit of mouldy black soil in which flourished some poor tufts of grass, and the big water-butt in the foreground, where the water was black with soot—when there was any water at all. The room had a writing-table in it, always covered with books and papers, and papa's chair—black haircloth, beginning to wear white at the edges—between the table and the fire, and two other black chairs standing against the opposite wall. It was divided by folding doors from the parlour, in which we lived. This room was furnished with a haircloth sofa, half-a-dozen chairs, a round table with a close-fitting oilcloth cover, and, thrust up into a corner, an old piano, upon which I practised sometimes, and which on other occasions served as a sideboard. There was a short Venetian blind at the lower part of the window to keep people from seeing in, and a chair in the recess, on which I used to sit and darn papa's stockings and dream. Sometimes I read, but, generally, dreaming was more fun. I made out such nice new lives for myself and papa. Sometimes I would dream that we were quite different people from what we appeared to be—great people, rich and noble, with all kinds of grandeur belonging to us, though no one knew; and how it would be found out all of a sudden, to the confusion of everybody who had ever been uncivil. I used to trace out, as minutely as if I had seen it, every detail of what we were to do. I was Lady Mary in these visions; and if anyone had called me so I should have been, I am sure, more shocked to think that *it* had been prematurely discovered than struck by the unreality of the title. It was not unreal to me. Sometimes it would take other shapes, and my imagination would content itself with the notion of some-one dying and leaving us a fortune, and how we would wear mourning and do our very best to be sorry; but the other idea was much the favourite. It was very sweet to me to think that, for all so humble and so unknown as we were, things would appear very different *if people but knew!* The old life comes round me as I go back to it, the afternoon sounds in the street—vulgar sounds, but softened by summer air as much as if they had been the sweetest; the drowsy tinkle of the muffin-man's bell, the prolonged cry of "water-cre-e-e-sses!" the sound of children's voices and dogs barking, and distant wheels that always ground out an accompaniment; and myself in the window, poor Mr. Peveril the clergyman's daughter, to my own knowledge Lady Mary, and a very great, small person. I wonder which was the real Mary—she or I.

I have heard that in poor mamma's time we were so fine as to have a drawing-room upstairs on the first floor, like Mrs. Stephens next door; but that splendour was long, long over, for mamma died soon after I was born, and I was left all alone—a small baby, with papa on my hands to look after. I do not think, however, that I was at any time very sorry for this. I was sorry for her, who died so young, but not for myself; I felt instinctively that, had she been there, always poking between papa and me, I should not have liked it, and that on the whole things were best as they were. The room which had been the drawing-room was papa's bedroom, and I slept in the room behind, over his study. Ellen had the three little places up above all to herself, though one of them was called—I don't know why—the spare room. In this little place we lived, and never asked ourselves whether it was dingy or not. The walls were dark, with papers which had not been renewed so long as I could remember; and the curtains were dark, and always had the look of being dusty, though, thanks to Ellen, they never were so in reality.

We had no pictures, except two old prints from Raphael's cartoons. One was the "Miraculous draught of fishes," and the other "Peter and John at the beautiful gate of the Temple." How I remember those twisted pillars, and how many dreams have they twisted through! But I never admired them, though they were part of my life. I should have liked a landscape better, or some pretty faces like those one sometimes sees in the shop-windows. When the people who went to St. Mark's talked of having a lithograph of papa the thought made me wild with excitement; but the lithograph was never done.

It must not be supposed, however, that papa and I lived in that state of ecstatic delight in each other's society which one hears of often in books. There were no great demonstrations between us. I led my own life by the side of his, and he, I suppose, lived his by me, like two parallel lines which never meet whatever you may please to do. I do not know that it occurred to me to think articulately that the happiness of my life depended on him. I did not seek to sit in his study or to be near him while he worked, as I have heard of girls doing. I was quite satisfied to be in the parlour while he was busy on the other side of the closed doors; indeed, until he ceased to be all mine, I accepted papa as calmly as I did the other accessories of my life. When he went out to dinner, which was a very rare occurrence, yet happened sometimes, I would make myself very comfortable with a book over my tea. I was fond of going out with him; but then, he was the only person who ever took me out, through amusing places, where there were shop-windows and crowds of people passing. I had not been brought up to have my walk regularly every day, like well-educated children. I walked when I could. Sometimes I had an errand to do—something to buy or order, which I did by myself in one of the shops of the neighbourhood; but this was an office I hated, for I was too shy to go into a shop with any pleasure; and sometimes old Mrs. Tufnell would send for me to walk in the square, which was fine, but not very amusing. I liked the passages about Holborn with the bookstalls a great deal better. But we did not talk a great deal even in these walks. Sometimes I would be seized with a fit of inquiry, and would pester papa with a torrent of questions; but at other times I fell back into my dreams, and would be making some splendid expedition as Lady Mary all the time, while I hung, always a little behind him, on his arm, leaving him as undisturbed as, generally, he left me. I think of this calm of indifference now, when I look back upon it, with very odd feelings. Is it that one does not care so long as one has those whom one loves all to one's self? It is only, I suppose, where your rights are interfered with that you grow violent about them. I suppose it was the fact that we loved each other—I him, and he me—that made us happy; but it was so natural to love each other that we thought little about it, and I am afraid it would have surprised me a little in my secret heart if any one had told me that my happiness depended upon papa.

The way in which this tranquil ease of possession was disturbed was a very gentle and gradual one—at least, so I can see now, though at the time it appeared to me most abrupt and terrible. My idea of my father was that he was old, as a child's ideas generally are; but he was not old. He was about five-and-forty when I was fifteen. He was not tall—and he stooped, which made him look still less so. At fifteen I was as tall as he was. He had a handsome, refined face, with very clear features, and a sort of ivory complexion. His hair was worn off his temples, and there were a great many lines in his face—partly with trouble, partly with work; but his smile was the sweetest smile I ever saw, and he had a way of captivating everybody. I have heard it said since that this power of fascination did not last, and that he grew melancholy and monotonous after the first few times you had seen him; and though I was very angry when I heard this first, I can with an effort believe that it might be true. I suppose

it was the same faculty which showed itself at church, where there were always new people coming, who attended closely for a few weeks and then went away. He was like a man who gives you everything he has at once, and then has nothing more for you. At home he was silent, always kind, but never saying much. I scarcely recollect ever to have been scolded by him. Ellen scolded me, and so did old Mrs. Tufnell, and even Mrs. Stephens next door; but papa only said, "Poor child!" with the air of a compassionate spectator, when I was complained of to him. Our chief conversation was at meals, when he would sometimes talk a little, and tell me of things he had seen or heard; and it was at tea one evening that he first brought forward the name of the other person who was henceforward to stand between us. No such thought was in his mind then, I am sure; but he was more communicative than usual. He told me that he had seen a young lady on one of his visits, in a very strange place for such a person to be found in—in the back parlour of a small grocer's shop which I knew quite well. He told me quite a long story about her—how she was an orphan and had been left destitute, and had been obliged to go back to her mother's family, who had been a governess in her day, and married much above her. Her father, too, was dead, having been of no use whatever in the world or to her, and there was no prospect before her but that of going out to be a governess—a thing which papa seemed to think a great hardship for her. I had been trained to believe that some such place would have to be mine as papa got older and I grew a woman; therefore I was not at all shocked by the suggestion. I said: "Has she heard of any nice situation, papa?" with the quietest matter-of-fact acceptance of his words.

"Heard of a situation! You talk very much at your ease, Mary,—if you saw this elegant, accomplished, refined girl," said my father. "Poor thing, I cannot bear to think that she should be driven to such a fate."

I did not make any answer. I was surprised. It had never occurred to me that it was "such a fate." Most girls, it seemed to me, who were not great ladies were governesses, both in the little real world with which I was acquainted and in books.

"Poor thing!" he said again. "Poor thing! how I wish there was any possible way of saving her. What a thing it is to be poor!"

"But any situation would be better than staying with the Spicers," I said. "Think, papa—the Spicers! I should not mind being a governess—I suppose I shall be, some day or other—but I should hate living in a parlour behind a shop."

"Well, Mary, I hope you will see her sometimes, and when you do see her you must be very kind to her," said my father with a sigh; and that night he drew his chair to the fire and tried to talk, which was a thing that took me very much by surprise. But, unfortunately, I had a new book which was very interesting, and instead of responding to this unusual inclination, as I ought to have done, I kept on reading, making pettish and uncertain replies, until he grew tired of the attempt and gave it up, and got a book too, as usual. He sighed a little as he did so, with a sort of disappointed air; and through my reading and my interest in the story somehow I perceived this, and felt guilty and uncomfortable all the rest of the evening. When I had finished my volume I was very conciliatory, and tried all I could to bring him back to the point where he had given it up, but it was of no use. I have always found it exactly so in my experience. If you are too stupid, or too much occupied with yourself, to take just the right moment for explanations, you never can recover the thread which you have allowed to slip through your fingers. Even to this day I often wonder what papa would have said to me that night had I let him speak. I have invented whole conversations, but they never were much satisfaction to me. To think out what perhaps some one might have said is very different from hearing them say it.

I was not at all pleased with myself that evening when I went to bed; but perhaps this was partly because I had finished my novel and it was not satisfactory, and seemed, now it was over, such a poor sort of thing to have preferred to a conversation with papa.

Nothing, however, happened for some time after this to put me on my guard. I went on in my old careless way. If he was out a little more than usual, I paid no attention. All that was quite natural. Of course he had his duties to attend to. He dined at Mrs. Tufnell's once during this time, and was very particular about his tie, and about having his coat brushed. "It is quite nice," I said; "it was well brushed on Monday morning before it was put away. Why, papa, I thought you did not like a fuss: how you laughed at me for being so particular about my sash when we went to the party at Mrs. Overend's. Shouldn't you like to have a sash too?"

He laughed, but he did not look like laughing; and I remember stopping short in the middle of my tea, and laying down my book to ask myself if anything could be the matter with him. One or two odd people whom I did not know had come to see him of late. Was it possible he could be ill? But no, he ate as usual, and he had looked quite ruddy when he went out. So I took up my novel again, and helped myself to jam, and thought no more of it. I believe the whole business was decided, or the next thing to decided, that night.

I could if I liked have heard a great deal of what was said in the study while I sat at work in the parlour, and this was a thing which Mrs. Tufnell and Mrs. Stephens had often remarked. They thought it "not quite nice," for, to be sure, people might say things to papa as their clergyman which they did not wish to be overheard. But it could not well be helped, for there was no other room where I could sit. I have said too that I could have heard if I liked; but the fact was I did not care, and I never heard. When you are perfectly indifferent and used to anything, and know there is no mystery in it, it is astonishing how little you hear. I had got accustomed to the hum of voices from the study just as I had to the cries in the streets and the muffin-man's bell. Sometimes, I suppose, a word must have caught my ear now and then, but I paid no attention, and heard as if I heard it not. I was thinking of such very different things. One day, however, I did catch a few words which surprised me. It was a summer day. The back-door into the little yard and all the windows everywhere were open. The noises in the street came into the house exactly as if we were living out of doors, but so softened by the warm air and the sunshine that they were pleasant instead of being disagreeable. The day was not hot, but only deliciously, genially warm. We had put up white curtains in the parlour, and the wind blew them softly about, flapping the wooden stretcher in the blind against the window-frame. I was in a muslin dress myself; and I was happy without any reason, not in the least knowing why. I came downstairs singing, as I had a way of doing, and went into the parlour and sat down in the window. I gave up singing when I sat down, partly because it might have disturbed papa, and partly because people stopped to listen as they were passing. I was running up the breadths of my new frock, a blue print, which was as bright and pretty as the day, and, to tell the truth, did not care in the least what the voices were saying on the other side of the folding doors. I had made noise enough to demonstrate my presence, and, as nothing was ever hid from me, it never came into my head to listen. It was Spicer the grocer's voice, I think, which attracted my ear at last. It was a strange, little, harsh, snappish voice, so unharmonious that it worried one like a dog barking; and by degrees, as he talked and talked, some sort of vague association came into my mind—something which I had half forgotten. What was it I had heard about the Spicers? I could not recollect all at once.

"Governessing ain't paradise," said

Spicer, "but it's better perhaps than other things. Marrying a man as is in poor health, and at a troublesome time o' life—and nothing to leave to them as comes after him; that ain't much, Mr. Peveril. A woman's best married, I allow; but marriage has consekenses, and when there's no money——"

I did not hear what my father said in reply, and indeed I did not care to hear. I was half annoyed, half amused, by Spicer's queer little barking voice.

"Forty-five, sir? no, it ain't old—but it ain't young neither. I've known many a man carried off at forty-five. Them things have all got to be considered; though for that matter twenty-five would make little difference. The thing is, here's a young woman as has a trade she can make her living by. A man comes in, marries her right off: they have a child or two in natural course, and then he goes and dies. Nothing more natural or more common. But then you see, Mr. Peveril, sir, here's the question: what's to become of her? And that's the question I've got to consider. I've a family myself, and I can't put myself in the way of having to support another man's family; and a woman can't go out and be a governess, it stands to reason, with two or three young uns on her hands."

My father said something here in a very earnest, low, grave voice, which really attracted my curiosity for the first time. Whatever he was saying, he was very serious about it, and his tone, though I could not hear what he said, woke me up. Perhaps he warned Spicer to talk low; but at all events I heard nothing more for some time, except the grumbling and barking of the grocer's voice, in a much subdued tone. They seemed to argue, and Spicer seemed to yield. At last he got up to go away, and then I heard him deliver his final judgment on the matter, whatever it was, standing close to the folding doors.

"You speaks fair, sir. I don't say but what you speaks fair. Granting life and health, it's a fine thing for her, and a honour for us. And taking the other side of the question, as I'm bound to take it, I wouldn't say but the insurance makes a difference. A woman with a thousand pounds and a babby is no worse off than if she hadn't neither—and Missis is better nor Miss in the way of setting up a school or such like. I may say, Mr. Peveril, as the insurance makes a great difference. A thousand pound ain't much for a dependence; and if there was a lot of little uns—but to be sure, in them matters you must go on providence to a certain extent. I'll think it over, sir—and I don't see as I've any call to make objections, if her and you's made up your minds." Then there was a step towards the door, and then Spicer came to a stand-still once more. "First thing," he said, "Mr. Peveril, is the insurance. You won't put it off, sir? I've known them as meant it every day o' their lives, and never did it when all was done; and died and left their families without e'er a ——"

"It shall be done at once," said my father peremptorily, and almost angrily; and then there was a begging of pardon, and a scraping and shuffling, and Spicer went away. I saw him go out, putting his hat on as he shut the door. I never liked Spicer—of course he was one of the parishioners, and papa could not refuse his advice to him or to any one; but I made a face at him as he went away. I felt quite sure he was the sort of man one sometimes reads of in the newspapers, who put sand in the sugar, and sell bad tea to the poor people, and have light weights. This was in my mind along with a vague, faint curiosity as to what he had been talking about, when to my surprise papa came into the parlour. He came in quickly, with a flush on his face, and the most uneasy, uncomfortable look I ever saw a man have. Was he ashamed of something? —ashamed! he—papa!

"I suppose you have heard all that Spicer has been saying, Mary," he said to me, quite abruptly. He gave me one strange look, and then turned away, and gazed at the Beautiful gate of the Temple which hung over the mantelpiece as if he had never seen it before.

"Yes," I said; and then it suddenly

flashed upon me that Spicer's talk had not been exactly of a kind to be overheard by a girl, and that this was why poor papa looked so embarrassed and uncomfortable. He felt that it was not proper for me. "I heard a little of it," I said instantly, "but I never listen, you know, papa, and I don't know in the least what he was talking about."

Poor papa! how delicate he was; how shocked I should have heard anything I ought not to know—though it was not so dreadful after all, for of course everybody knows that when people are married they have babies. But he did not like to look me in the face; he kept his back to me, and gazed at the twisted pillars.

"Mary," he said, "I have a little explanation to make to you."

"An explanation?" I looked at him over my blue print, wondering what it could be; but it did not seem worth while to stop working, and I threaded my needle and made a knot on my thread while I waited for what he was going to say. Then suddenly my heart began to beat a little fast, and the thought crossed my mind that perhaps my dreams were about to become true, and that he knew all about it as well as I, and was just going to tell me I was Lady Mary, and he Earl of ——. I had never been able to choose a satisfactory title, and I could not invent one on the spur of the moment; but instinctively I gave a glance from the window to see whether the beautiful carriage was in sight, coming to take us to our splendid home.

"Perhaps I ought to have taken you into my confidence before," he said, "for you have been brought up a lonely girl, and ought to feel for people who are lonely. I have been very lonely myself, very desolate, ever since your poor mother died."

Here my heart gave a slight stir, and I felt angry, without knowing exactly why. Lonely? Why, he had always had me!

"When you are older," he went on nervously, "you will feel what a dreadful thing the want of companionship is. You have been a good child, Mary, and done all you could for me. I should not have been able to live without you; but when a man has been used to a companion of—of his own standing, it is a great change to him to fall back upon a child."

I grew angrier and angrier; I could scarcely tell why. A feeling of disappointment, of heart-sinking, of fury, came over me. I had never made much fuss about adoring my father, and so forth; but to find out all at once that he had never been satisfied — never happy——

"Do you mean me?" I said, quite hoarsely, feeling as if he had wronged me, deceived me, done everything that was cruel—but with no clear notion of what was coming even now.

"Whom else could I mean?" he said, quite gently. "You are a dear, good child, but you are only a child."

Oh, how my heart swelled, till I thought it would burst! but I could not say anything. I began to tap my foot on the floor in my anger and mortification, but still I was so stupid I thought of nothing more.

"Don't look as if you thought I blamed you, Mary," said my father; "on the contrary, you have been a dear little housekeeper. But—do you remember, dear," he went on, with his voice shaking a little, "that I told you once of a young lady who lived with the Spicers?"

It began to dawn upon me now. I turned round upon him, and stared at him. Oh, how pleased I was to see his eyes shrink, and to see the embarrassed look upon his face! I would not give him any quarter; I felt my own face growing crimson with shame, but I kept looking at him, compelling him to keep opposite to me, preventing him from hiding that blush. Oh, good heavens—an *old* man—a man of forty-five—a clergyman—my father! and there he sat, blushing like some ridiculous boy.

He faltered, but he kept on, not looking at me, "I see you remember," he said, with his voice shaking like a flame in a draught of air. "She has no pros-

pect but to go out as a governess, and I cannot see her do that. I have asked her to—to—share—our home. I have asked her to—to be your—best friend; that is, I mean, I have asked her to marry me, Mary. There! You must have seen that I have been disturbed of late. I am very glad there is no longer this secret between my little girl and me."

And with that he kissed me quite suddenly and trembling, and went off again to the mantelshelf, and stared up at Peter and John by the Beautiful gate.

For my part I sat quite still, as if the lightning had struck me. What ought I to do? I did not realize at first what had happened. I felt simply struck dumb. I knew that I ought to do or say something, and I could not tell what. My lips stuck together—I could not now even open my mouth; and there he stood waiting. I suppose if I had possessed my wits at that moment I would have gone and kissed him or something. Even, I suppose, if I had stormed at him it would have been less idiotic—but I could say nothing; I was bewildered. I sat staring into the air with my mouth open, over my blue print.

At last he made an impatient movement, and I think said something to me, which roused me out of my stupefaction. Then—I do not know what impulse it was that moved me—I asked all at once, frightened, feeling I ought to say something, "What is her name, papa?"

"Mary Martindale," he said.

CHAPTER II.

I REMEMBER quite distinctly how people talked. They did not think I observed or listened, for I had always been a dreamy sort of girl, and never had attended much to what was said about me. At least so everybody thought. They said I had always to be shaken or pulled when anything was wanted of me, to make me listen—which is true enough, I believe; but nevertheless I was not half so absent as people thought at any time, and heard a great deal that I was not supposed to hear. And now my senses were all shaken up and startled into being. How well I recollect hearing old Mrs. Tufnell and Mrs. Stephens talking in the quiet front drawing-room in the Square, while I was in the little room behind, taking no notice, as they thought. They had given me a book and got rid of me, and though they all pretended to deplore my dreamy ways, I think on the whole it was rather a relief to get rid of a quick, inquisitive, fifteen-year-old girl, and to be able to talk in peace. It was twilight of the summer evening and we had taken tea, and the two ladies were seated at one of the windows looking out upon the Square. The windows had long, full, white curtains, hanging and fluttering from the roof to the carpet. They were seated against that soft white background in their black silk dresses, for Mrs. Tufnell was old, and Mrs. Stephens was a widow and always wore black. It was like a picture, and I, not being so happy as I used to be, sat with my book and read and listened both together. You may think this is nonsense; but I could do it. I see them now approaching their caps to each other, with little nods and shakes of their heads, and the white curtains fluttering softly behind them. Mrs. Tufnell was a great patroness of papa's, and always went to St. Mark's regularly, and Mrs. Stephens was our very nearest neighbour, living next door.

"I hope it will turn out the best thing that could happen for *her*," said Mrs. Tufnell, nodding her head at me. They would not say any more lest they should attract my attention. "She has been greatly neglected, and left alone a great deal too much,—and I hear *she* is accomplished. Dear, dear, who would have thought that he, of all men in the world, would have taken such a step."

"I don't quite see that," said Mrs. Stephens; "he is a young man still, and nobody could suppose he would always be contented with his child's company: besides, she is so cool and indifferent; as if she never thought it

possible anything could happen, and I am sure she never did anything to make herself necessary or agreeable——"

"Poor child!"

"You may say 'poor child!' but yet I blame her. A girl of fifteen is a woman to all intents and purposes. She ought to have seen that there was a great deal in her power by way of making him comfortable and herself pleasant. It's rather hard to say the plain downright truth about it, you know, he being a clergyman and all that. Of course, when there is a young family one can say it is for them; but in this case there's no possible excuse—he only wanted a wife, that's all. I don't blame him; but it's a coming down—it's a disturbance of one's ideal——"

"I don't know much about ideals," said Mrs. Tufnell; "what surprises me is, if the man wanted to marry, why he didn't marry long ago, when the child was young and he had an excellent excuse. As for being a clergyman, that's neither here nor there. Clergymen are always marrying men, and it's no sin to marry."

"It disturbs one's ideal," said Mrs. Stephens; and, though Mrs. Tufnell shrugged her shoulders, I, sitting behind over my book, agreed with her. Oh the inward humiliation with which one sees one's father in love!—I suppose it would be still worse to see one's mother, but then, I never had a mother. I blushed for him a great deal more than he blushed for himself, and he did blush for himself too. If he was happy, it was a very uneasy, disturbed sort of happiness. He took me to see her—to Spicer's; and then he went himself and sat in the parlour behind the shop, and suffered, I am sure, as much as ever a man who is having his own way could suffer. Mrs. Tufnell, who was a thoroughly kind old lady, at length came to his aid, and invited Miss Martindale to stay with her the rest of the time, and to be married from her house, which was a thing which even I was grateful for. And the night before the wedding-day the old lady kissed me and said, "Things will turn out better than you suppose, dear. It is hard upon you, but things will turn out better than you suppose."

I am not sure that this is ever a very effectual kind of comfort, but to me it was exasperating. Had I been told that things would turn out worse than I supposed, I should have liked it. It seemed to me that nothing could be half bad enough for this overturn of all plans and thoughts and life. For you must recollect that it was my life that was chiefly to be overturned. Papa liked it, I suppose, and it was his own doing—but the change was not so great to him as to me. All the little offices of authority I used to have were taken from me—my keys, which I was proud of keeping—my bills and tradesmen's books, which I had summed up since ever I can remember. I was turned out of my room, and sent upstairs to the spare room beside Ellen. In the parlour I was never alone any more, and not even my favourite corner was mine any longer. I had no more walks with papa, swinging back from his arm. She had his arm now. She made the tea, and even darned his stockings. I was nothing in the house, and she everything. If you suppose that a girl bears this sort of dethronement easily, I am here to witness to the contrary. I did not take it easily; but the thing that went to my heart most was, I think, that she was called Mary, like me. For the first few days when I heard papa call Mary I used to run to him and find her before me, and get sent away, sometimes hastily (that time I ran in and found them sitting together, he with his arm round her waist. I wonder he was not ashamed of himself, at his age!); and another time with a joke which made me furious: "It was my other Mary I wanted," he said, looking as vain and foolish as—as—. I never saw anybody look so foolish. *My* father! How it humbled me to the very ground. But then I took to never answering to the name at all, which sometimes made papa angry when it was really me he wanted. I soon came to know very well which of us he meant

by the sound of his voice, but I never let him know that I did. His voice grew soft and round as if he were singing when he called her. When he called me, it was just, I suppose, as it always had been; but I had learned the other something now, the different accentuation, and I resented the want of it, though I knew that it never had belonged to me.

All this time I have not spoken of her, though she was the cause of all. When I saw her first, in the grocer's back shop, working at frocks for the little Spicers, I could not believe my eyes. Though I had already begun to hate her as supplanting me with my father, I could not but acknowledge how very strange it was to see her there. She had on a very plain black alpaca dress, and she sat in the back parlour, amid all that smell of hams and cheese, with a sewing-machine before her; and yet she looked like a princess. She was tall and very slight, like a flower, and her head bowed a little on its stem like the head of a lily. She was pale, with dark eyes and dark hair. I believe she was very handsome—not pretty, but very handsome, almost beautiful, I have heard papa say. I allow this, to be honest, though I cannot say I ever saw it. She had a pathetic look in her eyes which sometimes felt as if it might go to one's heart. But, fortunately, she always looked happy when I saw her —absurdly happy, just as my poor foolish father did—and so I never was tempted to sympathize with her. I do not understand how anybody but an angel could sympathize with another person who was very happy and comfortable while she (or he) was in trouble. This was our situation now. She had driven me out of everything, and she was pleased; but I was cross from morning till night, and miserable, feeling that I scarcely minded whether I lived or died. Her smiles seemed to insult me when we sat at table together. She looked so much at her ease; she talked so calmly, she even laughed and joked, and sometimes said such merry, witty things, that it was all I could do to keep from laughing too. It is painful to be tempted to laugh when you are very much injured and in a bad temper. Reading was forbidden now at meals, and neither papa nor I ever ventured to prop up a book beside us while we ate. I suppose it was a bad custom; yet my very heart revolted at the idea of changing anything because she wished it. And then she tried to be "of use" to me, as people said. She made me practise every day. She gave me books to read, getting them from the library, and taking a great deal of trouble. She tried to make me talk French with her; but to talk is a thing one cannot be compelled to do, and I always had it in my power to balk that endeavour by answering *Oui* or *Non* to all her questions. But the worst of it all was that I had no power to affect either her or papa, whatever I might do to make myself disagreeable. I suppose they were too happy to mind. When I was sulky, it was only myself I made miserable, and there is very little satisfaction in that.

I cannot but say, however, looking back, that she was kind to me, in her way. She was always good-natured, and put up with me and tried to make me talk. She was kind: but *they* were not kind. As soon as my father and she got together they forgot everything. They sat and talked together, forgetting my very existence. They went out walking together. Sometimes even he would kiss her, without minding that I was there; and all this filled me with contempt for his weakness. I could not support such nonsense—at his age, too! I remember one day rushing to Mrs. Stephens' to get rid of them and their happiness. She was well off, and I don't really know why she lived in such a street as ours. She kept two servants all for herself, and had a nice drawing-room on the first-floor very beautifully furnished, as I then thought, where she sat and saw all that was going on. Without Mrs. Stephens I think I should have died. I used to rush to her when I could bear it no longer.

"What is the matter, Mary?" she would say, looking up from her Berlin work. She had a daughter who was married—and she was always working chairs for her, and footstools, and I don't know what.

"Nothing," said I, sitting down on the stool by her wool-basket and turning over the pretty colours; and then, after I had been silent for a minute, I said, "They have gone out for a walk."

"It is very natural, my dear; you must not be jealous. It might be a question, you know, whether you liked your papa to marry; but now that he is married, it is his duty to be attentive to his wife."

"He had me before he had a wife," cried I; "why should he love her better than me? Why should he be so much happier with her than with me? He has always something to say to her: he is always smiling and pleasant. Sometimes with me he will be a whole day and never say a word. Why should he be more happy with her than with me?"

Mrs. Stephens laughed. "I can't tell you how it is, Mary, but so it is," she said; "and by and by, when you are older, you will have somebody whom you will be happier with than you ever were with your papa. That is the best of being young. When my Sophy married, it was very hard upon me to see her happier with her husband than she had been with her mother, and to know that all that sort of thing was over for me, and that I must be content with my worsted-work. But you will have a happiness of your own by and by, when you are older; so you must not grudge it so much to your poor papa. I think he is looking pale. I thought he coughed a great deal on Sunday. Is she doing anything for that cough of his, do you know?"

"I never noticed that he had a cough."

"Well, I hope *she* does," said Mrs. Stephens, with a strange look, as if she meant something. "Your papa never was strong. He has not health to be going out of nights, and to all those concerts and things. She ought to look after his cough, Mary. If she does not, it will be she who will suffer the most."

I did not in the least understand what this meant; I had never remarked papa's cough. Yes, to be sure, he always had a little cough—nothing to speak of. I had been used to it all my life, and it was not any worse than usual—it was nothing. I told Mrs. Stephens so, and then we talked of other things.

What a long year that was! When the wedding-day came round again they had a party, and were quite gay. It was a very odd thing to see a party in our house; but, though I would not have owned this for the world, I almost think I half enjoyed it. I had got used to papa's foolish happiness, and to Mrs. Peveril's ways. By mere use and wont I had got more indifferent; and then there began to be some talk of getting a situation for me as a governess. Papa did not like the idea, but I pressed it on myself, with a feeling that something new would be pleasant. I took most of my ideas of life from novels; and if you will think of it, young ladies who are governesses in novels generally come to promotion in the end, though they may have to suffer a great deal first. I did not much mind the suffering. Whatever it may be that makes one superior to other people, one can bear it. I made up my mind to a great deal of trouble, and even persecution, and all kinds of annoyances, feeling that all this would come to something in the end. All my dreams about being Lady Mary, and a great personage, had been dispersed by my father's marriage. But now I began to dream in another way; and by degrees the old nonsense would steal in. I used to sit with a book in my hand, and see myself working in a schoolroom with the children; and then some one would come to the door, and I would be called to a beautiful drawing-room, and the lady of the house would take me in her arms and kiss me, and say, "Why did not you tell me who you were!" and there would be a lawyer in black who had come with the news.

All this I am sure is intensely silly, but so was I at the time; and that is exactly how my mind used to go on. Sometimes a gentleman would come into it, who would be intensely respectful and reverential, and whom I would always refuse, saying, "No; I will allow no one to descend from their proper rank for me!" until that glorious moment came when I was found out to be as elevated in rank as in principles. Oh, how absurd it all was! and how I liked it! and what a refuge to me was that secret world which no one ever entered but myself, and yet where so many delightful people lived whom I knew by their names, and could talk to for hours together! Sitting there under Mrs. Peveril's very nose, I would have long argumentations with my lover, and he would kiss my hand, and lay himself at my feet, and tell me that he cared for no one in the world but me; and the scene of the discovery was enacted over and over again while papa was talking of parish matters, quite unaware that by some mysterious imbroglio of affairs he was really the Earl of —— So and So—(I never could hit upon a sufficiently pretty name). Thus, instead of weeping over my hard fate and thinking it dreadful to have to go out as a governess, I looked forward to it, feeling that somehow the discovery of the true state of affairs concerning us was involved in it, and that, without that probation, Fate would certainly never restore me to my due and native eminence in the world.

But, however, I must come back to the night of the anniversary, and to our party. I had on a pretty new white frock—my first long one, and I half, or more than half, enjoyed myself. Everybody was very kind to me, everybody said I was looking well; and Mrs. Tufnell and Mrs. Stephens petted me a good deal behind backs, and said "poor child!" And then papa's curate, who was one of the guests, kept following me about and trying to talk to me; whenever I looked up I met his eyes. I did not admire him in the least, but it amused me very much, and pleased me, to see that he admired me. When I wanted anything he rushed to get it for me. It was very odd, but not at all disagreeable, and gave me a comfortable feeling about myself. When the people went away, papa stood a long time in the hall between the open doors, saying good-night to everybody. He went back into the parlour after they were all gone; he went up to the fireplace, I don't know why, and stood there for a moment as if there had been a fire in the grate. Then he called "Mary!" I might have known it was not me he wanted. He held out his hand without turning round. "I never thought I could be happier than I was this day last year," he said, "and yet I am happier to-night. What a delightful year you have given me, my darling—— Oh, is it you? What did you mean by not telling me it was you, when you must have perceived that I thought I was talking to my wife?"

"There was no time to tell you," I said. It gave me a pang I can scarcely describe when he thrust my hand away which I had held out to him. He was ashamed; he sat down suddenly in the big chair, and then all at once a fit of coughing came on, such a fit of coughing as I never saw before. It frightened me; and he looked so pale, and with such circles round his eyes! When he could speak he said, hurriedly, panting for his breath, "Be sure you do not tell her of this——." That was all he thought of. It did not matter for me.

But, as it happened, it was not long possible to keep it from *her*. When I look back upon that evening, with its little follies, and the laughter, and the curate, and my new dress! Oh, how little one knows! That very night papa was taken ill. He had caught cold in the draught as he shook hands with the people. It was congestion of the lungs, and from the first the doctor looked very serious. The house changed in that night. The study and the parlour and the whole place turned into a vestibule to the sick room, which was the centre of everything. The very atmosphere was darkened; the sun did

not seem to shine; the sounds outside came to us dulled and heavy. I was not allowed to be very much in the room. She took her place there and never left him, day or night; and if I were to spend pages in describing it I could not give you any idea of my dreariness, left alone down below, not allowed to help him or be near him while my father lay between living and dying. I could not do anything. I tried to read, but I could not read. To take up a novel, which was the only thing I could possibly have given my attention to, would have seemed like profanation at such a time. It would have been worse than reading a novel on Sunday, which I had always been brought up to think very wicked; and as for my dreams, they were worse even than the novels. I dared not carry them on while papa was so ill. I felt that if I allowed my thoughts to float away on such useless currents, I never could expect God to listen to my prayers. For this reason I made a dreadful effort to think "as one ought to think,"—to think of religious things always and all day long—and this was very difficult; but I made the effort, because I thought God was more likely to listen to me if I showed that I wanted to do well.

But, oh the dreary days and the dreary nights! The three last nights I sat up in my dressing-gown, and dozed drearily and woke still more drearily, after dreaming the strangest dreams. Sometimes I thought it was the wedding-day again, and he was standing with her hand on his arm; sometimes it was the anniversary, and he was saying how happy he was; sometimes it was a funeral. I dreamed always about him, and always in different aspects. One morning I woke up suddenly and found Ellen standing by me in the grey dawning. She did not say anything; the tears were running down her face. But I got up and followed her quite silent, knowing what it was.

He died, after a week's illness, in the morning, leaving us a whole horrible, light, bright day to get through with what patience we could; and then there was a dreary interval of silence, and he was carried away from us for ever and ever; and she and I, two creatures of different minds as ever were born, with but this one link of union between us, were left in the house alone.

CHAPTER III.

She and I alone in the house! I do not think that I could express our desolation more fully were I to write a whole book. He who had brought us together was gone. The link between us was broken—we were two strangers, rather hostile to each other than otherwise. No pretence of love had ever existed between us. She had never had any occasion to be jealous of me; but she had known and must have felt that I was jealous of her, and grudged her her position, her happiness, her very name. She knew this, and it had not mattered to her so long as he was alive; but now that he was gone, now that she and I, bearing the same name, supposed to belong to each other, were left within our dismal house alone——

We went together to the funeral. I was too much absorbed in my own feelings, I believe, to think of her; and yet I noticed everything, as people do when they are deeply excited. She walked by herself, and so did I. There was no one to support either of us, and we did not cling to each other. The churchwardens were there, and Spicer the grocer, to my annoyance. When I saw him all the conversation which I had once overheard came to my mind. Even as I stood by my father's grave it came back to me. I understood it only partially, but it seemed to me as if the time had come on which he calculated, and which he had spoken of. I do not think it had ever recurred to me till that moment. She would be better off with a thousand pounds than with nothing. A thousand pounds —— and ——— what had he said? I thought my heart had been too faint to feel at all, and yet it began to quicken now

with excitement. I looked at her as she walked before me. What was to become of her? What was to become of me? But I did not think of myself.

When we got back to the house Spicer came in and the churchwardens with him; they came into the parlour. When I was going away Mr. Turnham, who was one of them, called me back. "Miss Mary," he said, "wait a little. It is hard upon you, but there is some business to be settled. Pray come back."

I went, of course. She had dropped into the chair my father used to sit in. He had given it up to her when they were married, but now death had unmarried them, and I could not bear to see her there. Spicer had gone to sit by her; they were at one side of the room, Mr. Turnham and I at the other, as if we were opposite sides. The other churchwarden had shaken hands with us all and gone away.

"In the present melancholy circumstances it is our duty," said Mr. Turnham, "to inquire into our late dear friend's monetary arrangements; there must have been some settlement or other—some explanation at least, as he married so short a time ago."

Then Spicer cleared his throat, and edged still more on to the edge of his chair. Oh, heaven knows! I was as miserable as a girl could be—but yet I noticed all this as if I did not care.

"There was no settlement," he said, "reason good, there wasn't nothing to settle as was worth the while; but being Mrs. Peveril's only relation, and responsible like, he spoke very clear and honourable about his means to un. 'I ain't got no money, Mr. Spicer,' he said, 'but I've insured my life for my daughter, and I'll do as much for her. They'll have a thousand pounds apiece, and that's better than nothing,' he said; 'it will get them into some snug little way of business or something.' He was a sensible man, Mr. Peveril, and spoke up handsome when he saw as nothing was exacted of him. I don't know what office it's in, but I believe as what he said must be true."

"Perhaps if we were to adjourn into the study, and if one of the ladies would get the keys, we might look in his desk if there was a will," said Mr. Turnham. "I am very sorry that our late lamented friend had so short an illness, and therefore was unable to say anything as to what he wished."

"Stop, please," Mrs. Peveril said all at once. "Stop: neither of us is able to give you any help to-day; and afterwards we will try to manage for ourselves. We thank you very much, but it is best to leave us to ourselves. I speak for Mary too."

"But, my dear Mrs. Peveril, you will want some one to manage for you; it is painful, I know, but it is best to do it at once; you will want some one to manage —— "

"I do not see the necessity," she said. She was dreadfully pale; I never saw any one so pale; and it went to my heart to be obliged to side with her, and acquiesce in what she said; but I could not help it, I was obliged to give in. She spoke for me too.

"As long as there's me, you may make your mind easy," said Spicer. "A relation; and on the premises, so to speak. I'll do for 'em all as is necessary; you may make your mind quite easy, Mr. Turnham—you trust to me."

Then she got up; her head drooped in her great heavy black bonnet and veil. She was not like a lily now, in all that crape; but I could not keep my eyes from her. She was not afraid of these men, as I was. She held out her hand first to the one, then to the other. "Good-bye," she said. "We thank you very much for taking so much interest, but we would like to be alone to-day. Good-bye."

Mr. Turnham got up not quite pleased, but he shook hands with her and then with me, and said "Good-bye and God bless you" to us both. "If you want me, you know where I am to be found," he said, with a little look of offence. Spicer stayed behind him, as if he belonged to us.

"I agree with you," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder. "Them as

is strangers has no business with your affairs. Trust 'em to me, my dear; trust 'em to me. When your money's safe in a good snug little business you won't be so badly off; at least it's always something to fall back upon;—don't you be downhearted, my dear. I don't see as you will be so badly off."

"Good-bye, Mr. Spicer," she said. She pushed past him and left the room with an impatience which I understood. He and I were left standing together, looking at each other. Nobody considered me much. It was the wife who was thought of—not the daughter. He shook his head as he looked after her.

"Bless us all! bless us all!" he said. "That's what comes of turning a woman's head. Miss Mary, I ain't going to forsake you, though she's far from civil. I'll stand by you, never fear. If the money's well invested you'll both get something 'andsome. Nothing pays like business; and as there ain't no babby—which was what I always feared——"

"I don't want to talk about Mrs. Peveril," I said.

"Oh, you don't want to talk about her; nor me neither. She's very flighty and hoity-toighty. I remember when she was at least glad to get a corner at my table. She thinks she's set up now, with her thousand pounds. It's a blessing as there's no family. Miss Mary, I'll take your instructions next time as I comes if you'll put yourself in my hands. I've come to think on you as a relation too; but bless you, my dear, I know as you can't be cheerful with visitors not just the first day. Don't stand upon no ceremony with me."

He wanted me to leave him, I thought, that he might examine everything, and perhaps get at poor papa's papers; but I would not do that. I stayed, though my heart was bursting, until he went away. What an afternoon that was! it was summer, but it rained all day. It rained and rained into the smoky street, and upon papa's grave, which I seemed to see before me wet and cold and sodden, with little pools of water about. How heartless it seemed, how terrible, to have come into shelter ourselves and to have left him there alone in the wet, and the cold, and the misery! If one could but have gone back there and sat down by him and got one's death, it would have been some consolation. I went up to my room and sat there drearily, watching the drops that chased each other down the window-panes. It was so wet that the street was quite silent outside, nobody coming or going, except the milkman with his pails making a clank at every area. There were no cries in the street, no sound of children playing, nothing but the rain pattering, pattering, upon the roofs and the pavement, and in every little hollow on both. The house, too, was perfectly still; there was no dinner, nothing to break the long monotony. Ellen came up in her new black gown, with tears on her cheeks, to bring me a glass of wine and a sandwich. I could not eat, but I drank the wine. "Oh, Miss Mary," said Ellen, "won't you go to her now? There's only you two. It ain't a time, Miss—oh, it ain't a time to think on things as may have been unpleasant. And she's a taking on so, shut up in that room, as I think she'll die."

Why should she die any more than me? Why should she be more pitied than I was? I had lost as much, more than she had. She had known him but a short time, not two years; but he had been mine all my life. I turned my back upon Ellen's appeal, and she went away crying, shaking her head and saying I was unkind, I was not feeling. Oh, was not I feeling? How my head ached, how my heart swelled, how the sobs rose into my throat; I should have been glad could I have felt that it was likely I should die.

"Will you go down to tea, Miss Mary," Ellen said, coming back as the night began to fall. I was weary, weary of sitting and crying by myself; any change looked as if it must be better. I was cold and faint and miserable; and then there was in my mind a sort of curiosity to see how she looked, and if she would say anything—even to know what were to be the relations between

us now. I went down accordingly, down to the dark little parlour which, during all papa's illness, I had lived in alone. She was there, scarcely visible in the dark, crouching over a little fire which Ellen had lighted. It was very well-meant on Ellen's part, but the wood was damp, and the coals black, and I think it made the place look almost more wretched. *She* sat holding out her thin hands to it. The tea was on the table, and after I went in Ellen brought the candles. We did not say anything to each other. After a while she gave me some tea and I took it. She seemed to try to speak two or three times. I waited for her to begin. I could not say a word; and we had been thus for a long time mournfully seated together before she at last broke the silence. "Mary," she said, and then paused. I suppose it was because I was younger than she that I had more command of myself, and felt able to observe every little movement she made and every tone. I was so curious about her—anxious, I could not tell why, as to what she would do and say.

"Mary," she repeated, "we have never been very good friends, you and I; I don't know why this has been. I have not wished it—but we have not been very good friends."

"No."

"No; that is all you say? Could we not do any better now? When I came here first, I did not think I was doing you any wrong. I did not mean it as a wrong to you. Now we are two left alone in the world. I have no one, and you have no one. Could we not do any better? Mary, I think it would please *him*, perhaps, if we tried to be friends."

My heart was quite full. I could have thrown myself upon her and kissed her. I could have killed her. I did not know what to do.

"We have never been enemies," I said.

"No. But friends—that is different. There never were two so lonely. If we stayed together we might get to be fond of each other, Mary; we might keep together out of the cold world. Two together are stronger than one alone. You don't know how cold the world is, you are so young. If we were to keep together we might stay—at home."

Some evil spirit moved me, I cannot tell how; it seemed to me that I had found her out, that it was this she wanted. I got up from my chair flaming with the momentary hot passion of grief. "If there is any money for me, and if you want that, you can have it," I cried, and tried to go away.

She gave a little moaning cry, as if I had struck her. "Oh, Mary, Mary!" she cried, with a wailing voice more of sorrow than of indignation; and then she put out her hand and caught my dress. I could not have got away if I had wished, and I did not wish it, for I was devoured by curiosity about what she would do and say. This curiosity was the beginning of interest, though I did not know it; it fascinated me to her. She caught my dress and drew me closer. She put her other hand on mine, and drew me down to her, so that my face approached hers. She put up her white cheek, her eyes all hollowed out with crying, to mine: "Mary," she said, in a heartrending tone, "do not go away from me. I have nobody but you in the world." Then she paused. "I am going to have a baby," she said all at once, with a low, sharp cry.

I was confounded. I do not know what I said or did. Shame, wonder, pity, emotion—all mingled in me. I was very young, younger in heart than I was in years; and to have such a thing told to me overwhelmed me with shame and awe. It was so wonderful, so mysterious, so terrible. I dropped on my knees beside her, and covered my face with my hands, and cried. I could not resist any longer, or shut myself up. We cried together, clinging to each other, weeping over our secret. *He* had not known. At the last, when she was aware herself, she would not tell him to add to his pains. "He will know in heaven, Mary," she said, winding her arms round me, weeping on my shoulder, shaking me, frail support as I was, with her sobs. This was how the other

Mary and I became one. We were not without comfort as we crept upstairs, with our pale faces. She went with me to my room; she would not let me go. I had to hold her hand even when we went to sleep. "Do not leave me, Mary; stay with me, Mary," she moaned, whenever I stirred. And we slept by snatches, in our weariness; slept and woke to sob, and then slept again.

CHAPTER IV.

THIS union, following so close upon our complete severance from each other, astonished everybody. We frightened Ellen. When she came to call me next morning, and saw the other sleeping by me, she thought it was witchcraft; but I did not mind that. I rose, and dressed very quietly, not to wake *her*. She was sleeping deeply at last, the sleep of exhaustion. During all papa's illness she had not rested at all, and at last sorrow and watching had worn her out. But I need not go over at length everything that happened. We told kind Mrs. Tufnell and Mrs. Stephens, our nearest neighbours; and I believe they told it to many in the parish; but Mary and I neither knew nor heard what went on out of our house. I had got to call her Mary, as he did; I liked it now—it no longer seemed to interfere with me. I thought my voice sounded round and soft like his when I said her name—Mary. It is a pleasant name to say, though it is my own. I got to admire it, being hers—I, who had hated her for being so called. But all that was changed now.

I do not quite know how our business was settled, for I know nothing about business. This I know, that she managed it all herself, as she had said; she would not let Spicer have anything to do with it. She wrote about the money to an old friend of papa's, and got it invested and all settled. Half was for her and half for me. It brought us in about 85*l.* a year. We settled to let the first floor, two rooms furnished as a sitting-room and bed-room, which would pay our rent; and we got three or four little pupils, who came every day, and whom we taught. Everything was very closely calculated, but we decided that we could manage it. We had never been used to be rich, neither one nor the other; and though when all was well I had dreamed of going away among strangers, yet now I could not help chiming in with that desperate desire of hers to avoid separation and remain together. She used to tell me stories of how she had been when she was a governess. How she had lived upstairs in a schoolroom alone in the midst of a great houseful of people; how when she came downstairs she was in the society without belonging to it; and how when any one in the family was kind to her they got into trouble. What she said was quite vague, but it was not comfortable; and by degrees my dreams and ideas were modified by her experience. But I could not be cured of my follies all in a moment, even by grief. After a while I began to dream again; and now my dreams were of my high estate being discovered somehow when I was seated lonely in that schoolroom, trying to get through the weary evening. I used to make a picture to myself of how the lady of the house would come penitent and ashamed, and make a hundred apologies; and how I would say to her, that though her other governesses might not turn out to be Lady Marys, yet did not she think it would be best to be kind and make friends of them? Lady Mary! I clung to my absurdity, though I began to be old enough to see how ridiculous it was. How could I ever turn out to be anybody now—now that papa was gone? But when a girl is but sixteen there are often a great many follies in her head which she would be deeply ashamed of if any one knew them, but which please her in secret as she dreams over them. My life was altogether changed by papa's death. It is dreadful to say so, but it was not changed for the worse. Perhaps I had been happier in the old days before Mary was ever heard of,

when he and I used to sit together, not talking much, and walk together, thinking our own thoughts—together, yet without much intercourse. I had been quite content then, having enough to amuse me in my own fancies, as he, I supposed, had in his. But now I began to be able to understand why he had wearied for real companionship, now that I knew what real companionship was. We lived together, Mary and I, in a different way. We talked over everything together; the smallest matter that occurred, we discussed it, she and I. She had the art of working everything that happened, into our life, so that the smallest incident was of importance. Even in those very first days, though her heart was broken, she soothed me. "Mary," she said, with her lips trembling, "we cannot be always crying; we must think of something else whenever we can; we must *try* to think of other things. God help us; we must live, we cannot die." And then she would break down; and then dry her eyes, and talk of something, of anything. When we got our little pupils, that was a relief. She went into her work with all her heart. Her attention never seemed to wander from the business, as mine constantly did. We had four little girls; they came for two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. When they went away we had our walk. In the evening we did our needlework, and she made me read aloud, or sometimes play, and she taught me to sing. We used to stop and cry at every second bar when we began, but by degrees that hysterical feeling passed off. I was never away from her. I had constant companionship, communion,—talk that kept me interested, and even amused. I got to be—I am almost ashamed to confess it —happier than I had been for a long time, perhaps than I had ever been in my life.

We had lived like this for about three months, and had got used to it, when something came to make a little change. Mary and I rarely spoke of our secret. It seemed to be my secret as well as hers, and I tried all I could to take care of her, with a secret awe which I never expressed. I could not have spoken of it; I should have been ashamed; but the mysterious sense of what was coming was always in my mind. The needlework which we used to do in the evenings filled me with strange feelings. I never dared ask what this or that was for. I was afraid and abashed at the very sight of the little things when they happened to be spread out and showed their form. It was making them which made me a good needlewoman: perhaps you will think that is of no great importance in these days of sewing-machines; but oh, to have let a sewing-machine, or even a stranger's hand, touch those dearest little scraps of linen and muslin! Nothing but the finest work, the daintiest little stitches, would do for them. I used to kiss them sometimes in my awe, but I would not have asked questions for the world. This is a digression, however; for what I was going to say had nothing to do either with our work or our secret. All this time we had not let our first floor—and it was with great satisfaction in her looks that Mrs. Stephens came in one day and told us that she had heard of a lodger for us. "He is a gentleman, my dears," she said, "*quite* a gentleman, and therefore you may be sure he will give no trouble that he can help. He is an engineer, and has something to do, I believe, about the new railway; otherwise he lives at home somewhere about Hyde Park, and moves in the very best society. When I say an 'engineer,' I mean a 'civil' one, you know, which is, I am told, quite the profession of a gentleman. He will want the rooms for six months, or perhaps more. His name is Durham; he is cousin to the Pophams, great friends of mine, and if the lodgings suit him he would like to come in at once."

Mary had given a little start, I could not tell why. There seemed no reason for it. Her work had fallen out of her hands; but she picked it up again and went on. "His name is—— What

did you say, Mrs. Stephens?—a civil engineer?"

"Yes, my love, a civil engineer—Durham, his name is. He will come with me to-morrow, if you are agreeable, to see the rooms."

Mary made a visible pause. She looked at me as if she were consulting me; it was a curious, appealing sort of look. I looked back at her, but I could not understand her. What did I know about Mr. Durham, the civil engineer? Mrs. Stephens was not so observant as I was, and probably she never noticed this look. And then Mary said, "Very well. If they suit him, we ought to be very thankful. I should have preferred a lady——"

"My dear, a lady is a great deal more at home than a man, and gives more trouble," said Mrs. Stephens; "very different from a man who is out all day. And then, probably he will dine almost always at his West-end home."

The idea was funny, and I laughed. The notion of the West-end home amused me; but I could not help observing that Mary, who was always ready to sympathize with me, did not smile. Her head was bent over her work. She did not even say anything more on the subject, but let Mrs. Stephens go on and make all the arrangements for coming next day. I thought of this after; and even at the time I noticed it, and with some surprise.

Next day, just as we were going out for our walk, Mary, who had been at the window, started back, and went hurriedly into the little room behind, which had once been papa's study. "Mary," she said, "there is Mrs. Stephens and——her friend. Go with them, please, to see the rooms. I am not quite well: I would rather not appear."

"I am so stupid; I shall not know what to say," I began.

"You will do very well," said Mary, and disappeared and shut the door. I had no time to think more of this, for the stranger came in directly with Mrs. Stephens; and in my shyness I blushed and stammered while I explained. "She is not very well," I said; "I am to show you. Will you please—sit down; will you come upstairs?"

"You will do very well," said Mrs. Stephens, patting me on the shoulder. "This is Mr. Durham, Mary, and I don't think he will eat any of us. It is a nice light, airy staircase," she said, as she went up, not to lose any opportunity of commending the house. "A capital staircase," said Mr. Durham, with a cheery laugh. I had scarcely ventured to look at him yet, but somehow there was a feeling of satisfactoriness diffused through the air about him. I cannot explain quite what I mean, but I am sure others must have felt the same thing. Some people seem to make the very air pleasant: they give you a sense that all is well, that there is nothing but what is good and honest in the place where they are. This is what I felt now; and when we got upstairs I ventured to look at him. He was tall and strong and ruddy, not at all like any hero whom I had ever read of or imagined. There was nothing "interesting" about him. He looked "a good fellow," cheery, and smiling, and active, and kind. He settled at once about the rooms. He laughed out when Mrs. Stephens said something about their homeliness. "They are as good as a palace," he said; "I don't see what a man could want more." The sitting-room was the room papa died in, and it cost me a little pang to see them walking about and looking at the furniture; but when people are poor they cannot indulge such feelings. We learn to say nothing about them, and perhaps that helps to subdue them. At all events, I made no show of what I was thinking, and it was all settled in a few minutes. He was to come in on Saturday, and Ellen was to work for him and wait upon him. I could not help thinking it would be pleasant to have him in the house.

And thus there commenced another period of my life, which I must speak of very briefly,—which indeed I do not

care to speak of at all, but which I will think about as long as I live. I did not see very much of him at first. I was nearly seventeen now, and very shy; and Mary watched over me, and took great pains not to expose me to chance meetings with the stranger, or any unnecessary trouble. Ellen managed everything between us. She was a good, trustworthy woman, and we did not require to interfere; she was full of praises of Mr. Durham, who never gave any trouble he could help. But one night, when I was taking tea with Mrs. Stephens, he happened to come in, and we had the pleasantest evening. He knew a song I had just learned, and sang a second to it in the most delightful deep voice. He talked and rattled about everything, He made Mrs. Stephens laugh and he made me laugh, and he told us his adventures abroad till we were nearly crying. When it was time for me to go, he got up too, and said he would go with me. "Oh, it is only next door; I can go alone," I said, in my shyness. "It is only next door, but I live there too, and I am going to work now," he said. "To work! when all the rest of the world are going to bed?" said Mrs. Stephens; "you will make yourself ill." How he laughed at that! his laugh sounded like a cheery trumpet. He did not mean to kill himself with work. "But I hope you will let me come to tea again," he said. How pleased Mrs. Stephens was! She always says she likes young people, and we had spent such a pleasant night.

Many more of these pleasant evenings followed. Sometimes when we were sitting quiet after tea, she would send for me suddenly; sometimes she would write a little note in the afternoon. This expectation filled my life with something quite new. I had never had many invitations or pleasures before: I had never expected them. When we sat down to work after tea I had known that it was for the whole evening, and that no pleasant interruption would disturb us. But now a little thrill of excitement ran through my whole life. I wondered, would a note come in the afternoon? If it did not come, I wondered whether the bell would ring after tea, and Ellen come in saying, "If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Stephens's compliments, and would Miss Mary go in, and take her music?" Mary never interfered; never said "Don't go." She looked at me sometimes very wistfully; sometimes she smiled and shook her head at me, and said I was getting dissipated. Once or twice she looked anxious, and told me a story, which I only half understood, of girls who met with people they liked, and were very happy, and then lost sight of them ever after. Mary was very clever at telling stories, and I was fond of listening; but she did it so well and delicately that I fear I never thought of the moral —never, at least, till all the harm was done and it was too late.

I would not have any one think, however, that Mr. Durham either meant or did any harm. To say so would be very wrong. It was as imperceptible with him as with me. He went quite innocently, as I did, to cheer up Mrs. Stephens, and because an evening's chatter with a little music was pleasant; and by degrees we thought less and less of Mrs. Stephens and more and more of each other. If any one meant anything beyond this, it was she who was the guilty person. She would nod off to sleep in her easy-chair while we were talking. She would say with a sleepy smile, "Don't mind me, my dears. The light is a little strong for my eyes. That is why I close them—but I like the sound of your voices even when I don't hear what you say." Alas, if she had heard everything that had been said it might have been better. After a while he began to say strange things to me while she had her doze. He talked about his family to me. He said he hoped I should know them some day. He said his mother was very kind and wise— "a wise woman." These were the very words he used. And then he said—— other things; but that was not till the very, very last.

One morning we met in the little

hall. It was raining, and it was a holiday, and when he insisted on following me into the schoolroom, what could I do—I could not shut him out. He seemed to fill the whole room, and make it warm and bright. I do not think we had ever been quite alone before. He came to the window and stood there looking out upon the bare bit of smoky grass and the water-butt. And then all at once he came to me and took my hand. "If I had a nice little house out in the country, with flowers and trees about it, a bright little house —Mary—would you come and be my little wife, and take care of it and me?"

Oh, what a thing to have said to you, all at once, without warning, in the heart of your own dull little life, when you thought you were to work, and pinch, and put up with things, for ever! It was different from my old fancy. But how poor a thing to have been found out to be Lady Mary in comparison with this! What I said is neither here nor there. We stood together in the little old study, among the forms where we had our little scholars, as if we had been in a fairy palace. I was not seventeen. I had no experience. I thought of nothing but him, and what he said. It was not my part to think of his father and mother, and what he would do, and what he wouldn't do. He was a great deal older than I was; about thirty, I believe. Of course, I thought of nothing but him.

"Do you know," he said after a long time, "I have never seen your stepmother, Mary? I have been three months in the house, and I have never seen her. I must go and see her now."

"Oh, wait a little," I said; "wait a day. Let us have a secret all to ourselves one day." How foolish I was! —but how was I to know?

He consented after a while; and then he made me promise to bring her out at a certain hour in the afternoon, that he might meet us at the door and see her. I made all the arrangements for this with a light heart. Though it was very difficult to hide from her what had happened, I did so with a great effort. I persuaded her to come out earlier than usual. She did not resist me. She was kinder, more tender, than I had ever known. She began to say something of a story she had to tell me as we went out. I went first and opened the door, and stood aside on the white steps to let her go out. Her crape veil was thrown back. Though she was still pale, there was a tint of life upon her cheeks. She was more like herself in her refined, delicate beauty, more like a lily, my favourite image of her, than she had been for ever so long.

I had begun to smile to myself at the success of our trick, when suddenly I got frightened, I could scarcely tell how. Looking up, I saw him standing on the pavement gazing at her, confounded. I can use no other word. He looked bewildered, confused, half wild with amazement. As for Mary, she had stopped short on the step. She was taken strangely by surprise too; for the first moment she only gazed as he did. Then she dropped her veil, and stepped back into the house. "I have forgotten something," she said; and turned round and went upstairs to her room. He came in, too, and went upstairs after her, passing without looking at me. His under lip seemed to have dropped; his cheerful face had lost all its animation; his eyes had a wild, bewildered stare in them. What did it mean? oh! what did it mean?

I did not know what to do. I wondered if he had followed her to speak to her, or what was the meaning of those strange looks. I lingered in the hall holding the handle of the door, feeling miserable, but not knowing why. In two or three minutes she came downstairs. "I had forgotten my handkerchief," she said; and we went out together as if nothing had happened. But something had happened, that was certain. She did not talk very much that day. When we were coming home she said to me, quite suddenly, "Was it your doing, Mary, that I met Mr. Durham so at the door?"

"He said it was so strange he had never seen you," I said.

"Yes, but you should have known I

would not do that for nothing. You should not have been the one to betray me, Mary. I knew Mr. Durham once. He is associated with one of the most painful portions of my life."

"Oh, Mary dear! I did not know—"

"You did not know, and I did not want you to find out; but never mind, it is done. It need not, I hope, do any harm to you."

That was a very strange day: the excitement of the morning, and then the other excitement; and to feel that I had a secret from her, and that he was seated upstairs giving no sign, taking no notice of our existence all day long. I was so agitated and disturbed that I did not know what to do. At last I settled myself in the schoolroom to do some translations. When one has been looking for a long time for a holiday, and something happens to spoil the holiday when it comes, it is worse even than if that something had happened on an ordinary day. I think Mary was glad to be left to herself, for instead of our ordinary companionship, she sat in the parlour at work all the long afternoon, and I in the schoolroom. One of the doors was half opened between us. She could hear my pen scratching on the paper, and the rustling of the leaves of my dictionary—and I could hear her moving softly over her work. It was autumn by this time, and the days were growing short, and neither of us cared to ring for tea; and I think Ellen was cooking dinner for Mr. Durham and forgot us at the usual hour. We still sat as we had been all the afternoon when the twilight came on. I laid down my pen, having no light to write by, when I heard some one knock softly at the parlour door.

Mary made no reply. She sat quite still, never stirring. The knock came again; then I, too, put my paper away from me and listened. The door opened, and some one came into the parlour. How well I knew who it was! I listened now so intently that nothing escaped me. How could it be wrong? He must have come to talk to her of me.

"Mary!" he said. I rose up softly in my excitement, thinking it was me he was calling; but before I could move further a strange consciousness came over me that it was not me he meant. The old feeling with which I had heard my father call Mary came into my very soul—but worse, a hundred times worse. Oh, had he too another Mary besides me?

"Mary!" he said, breathless, and then paused. "How has all this come about? Why do I find you here? What does it mean? There are many explanations which I have a right to ask. You disappear from me—sent away—I know not how; and then—not to count the years that have passed—after these three months, in which you must have known me, I find you by chance——"

She knew that I was within hearing, and that whatever she said to him must be to me too. If that was a restraint upon her, I cannot tell. I felt sorry for her vaguely in my mind; but yet I did not move.

"I did not wish you to find me at all," she said, very low. "Mr. Durham, there is and can be nothing between you and me."

"Nothing!" he said; "what do you mean, Mary? Why there is all the past between us—a hundred things that cannot be undone by anything in the future. You know how many things there are connected with you which are a mystery to me—things not affecting you alone, but others. How you went away, for instance? and what became of you, and how much my mother had to do with it? You must have known the moment I found you that all these questions remained to be asked."

"All these questions," she said, "are made quite unimportant by two things. First, that I am the wife, though now the widow, of a man I loved dearly—and that you have begun to love, begun to think of some one very different from me."

"Ah!" he said, with a strange brief utterance of distress. Whether he was grieved to think of the wrong he was doing me, or whether the strange posi-

tion he stood in troubled him, I cannot tell; but there was pain in the cry he gave—"ah!" with a little shiver. "You have abundance of power to pain me," he said, very low, "but it seems strange you should upbraid me. Yes, I have begun to think of some one else; but that does not prevent me from being deeply startled, deeply moved, by the sight of you."

There was a little silence then, and I came to myself slowly. I woke as it were out of a trance. She knew I was there, but he did not. I had no right to hear his secrets without warning him. I tried to get up, but could not at first. I felt stiff and weary, as if I had been travelling for days together. I could scarcely drag myself up from my chair. The sound I made in rising might have warned him, but I do not think he heard. Before I could drag myself to the door and show I was there, he had begun again.

"Mary," he said, lingering upon the name as if he loved it, "this is not a time for recrimination. Tell me how you left Chester-street, and what my mother had to do with it? and then, if you choose, I will never see you again."

"Is it for your mother, or for me?"

I did not hear the answer. I could not stay longer. I got to the door somehow, and threw it open. I was too much bewildered to know what I was doing, or to think. I came out with a little rush as feeble creatures do. "I want to get away. I want to go out. I cannot stay there all day and hear you talking," I said. I was not addressing either her or him. The sound of my voice must have been very piteous, for I remember it even now.

"Mary!" he said.

Oh, what a difference in the sound! This time his voice was startled, pained, almost harsh, with a kind of reproof in it: not as he said Mary to her. Oh, papa, papa! it was you first who taught me the difference. I gave a hoarse little cry. I could not speak. Millions of words seemed to rush to my lips, but I could not say any of them. "I have been here long enough," I managed to stammer out. "Let me go—let me go!" Next moment I was in the dark, in the silence, in my own little room, kneeling down by the bedside, crying and moaning to myself. I did not know why. I had heard nothing wrong; but it seemed to me that all my life was over, and that it did not matter what came next.

And, indeed, I cannot tell what came next. She came up to me, and told me the whole story, and in a vague sort of way I understood it. She was not to blame. He had been fond of her (everybody was fond of her) when she was the governess in his mother's house; and it had been found out, and his mother was harsh, and she had gone suddenly away. There was nothing in this which need have made me unhappy, perhaps—so people have said to me since—but then I was very young; and I had been happy—and now I was miserable. I listened to her, and made no answer, but only moaned. The night passed, I cannot tell how. I did not sleep till late in the morning; and then I fell asleep and did not wake till noon. Then what was the use of going downstairs? I stayed in my room, feeling so weary, so worn out. It was Saturday, a half-holiday, and there was nothing to do. She came to me and spoke to me again, and again; but I gave her very little answer. And he took no notice—he sent no message, no letter—not a word of explanation. He never asked my pardon. In my misery I thought I heard voices all the day as if they were talking, talking—and he never sent a message or note or anything to me. And then after a long talk, as I fancied, with him, she would come to me. "Mary, this must not be. You must get up. You must be like yourself. Neither Mr. Durham nor I have done you any wrong, Mary."

"Oh, don't call me Mary!" I said: "call me some other name. If you knew how different it sounds when it is said to you, not to me."

And then she would look at me with her eyes full of tears, and sit down by me, and say no more. And so passed this bitter day.

CHAPTER V.

Next day was Sunday. When I woke up, early, I recollected all that had happened with a flush of overwhelming shame. How childishly, how foolishly I had behaved. I was very, very wretched; but I was ashamed, and pride got the upper hand. I dressed myself carefully and went downstairs, resolved not to show my misery at least, to be proud and forget it. "If he does not care for me," I said to myself, "I will not care for him." I passed his room very softly that I might not wake him. There was early morning service in St. Mark's now, for the curate who had succeeded poor papa was very High Church. I stole out and went to this early service, and tried to be good, and to give myself up to God's will. Yes, it must have been God's will—though how it could ever be God's will that anybody should be false, or unkind, or cruel, I could not tell. I know it is right, however, whatever happens that vexes you, to accept it as if it must be the will of God. I tried to do that, and I was not quite so miserable when I went home. Ellen opened the door to me, looking frightened. "I thought you was lost, too, Miss," she said. "I have been to church," I answered, scarcely noticing her words. Breakfast was laid in the little parlour. It was very, very tidy, dreadfully tidy—everything was cleared away—the basket with the work and all the little things, and every stray thread and remnant. All of a sudden it occurred to me how little I had been doing to help of late. Instead of working I had been spending the evenings with Mrs. Stephens. I did not even know how far the "things" were advanced, and it seemed strange they should all be gone. Of course it was because of Sunday. After a while Ellen brought in the coffee. She had still the same frightened look. "Missis wasn't with you at the early service, Miss Mary?" "Oh no," I said, surprised at the question; "perhaps she is not up."

"She's never lain down all night," said Ellen; "she was worrited and worn off her legs going up and down to you yesterday Miss—you that was quite well, and had no call to your bed. She was a deal more like it, the dear. She's never lain in her bed this blessed night, and I can't find her, high or low."

I scarcely waited to hear this out, but rushed up to her room. The bed had not been touched since yesterday. A little prayer-book lay on it, as if she had been praying. The room was in perfect good order—no litter about it. The little "things" were not to be seen. One of her dresses hanging against the wall made me think for a moment she was there, but it was only an old dress, and everthing else was gone. Oh the terror and the pain and the wonder of that discovery! I could not believe it. I rushed through all the house, every room, calling her. Mr. Durham heard me, and came out to the door of his room and spoke to me as I passed, and tried to take my hand, but I snatched it away from him. I did not even think of him. I can just remember the look he had, half-ashamed, appealing with his eyes, a little abashed and strange. I scarcely saw him at the time—but I remember him now, and with good reason, for I have never seen him again.

And I have never seen Mary again from that day. Mrs. Stephens came in to me, startled by the news her servants had carried her; and she told me she had heard a carriage drive off late on the previous night, but did not think it was from our door. She knew nothing. She cried, but I could not cry; and it was Sunday, and nothing could be done —nothing! even if I had known what to do. I rushed to Spicer's, and then I was sorry I had gone, for such people as they are never understand, and they thought, and think to this day, that there was something disgraceful in it. I rushed to Mrs. Tufnell, not expecting to find her, for now it was time for church. The bells had done ringing, and I had already met, as I walked wildly along, almost all the people I knew. One woman stopped me and asked if Mrs. Peveril was taken

ill, and if she should go to her. "Poor thing, poor thing!" this good woman said. Oh, she might well pity us—both of us! But to my surprise Mrs. Tufnell was at home. She almost looked as if she expected me. She looked agitated and excited, as if she knew. Did she know? I have asked her on my knees a hundred times, but she has always shaken her head. "How should I know?" she has said, and cried. I have thought it over and over for days and for years, till my brain has whirled. But I think she does know—I think some time or other she will tell me. It is a long time ago, and my feelings have got a little dulled; but I think some time or other I must find it out.

This wonderful event made a great change in my life. I began at once, that very day, to live with Mrs. Tufnell in the Square. She would not let me go home. She kissed me, and said I was to stay with her now. Mr. Durham came twice and asked to see me; but I could not bear to see him. Then Mrs. Stephens came with a letter. He said in it that I must dispose of him; that he was in my hands, and would do whatever I pleased; that he had been startled more than he could say by the sudden sight of one whom he had loved before he knew me; but that if I could forgive him any foolish words he might have said, then he hoped we might be happy. In short, he was very honourable, ready to keep his word; and I felt as if I hated him for his virtue—for treating me "honourably!" Was that what all his love and all my happiness had come to? I sent him a very short little note back, and it was all over. He went abroad soon after, and I have never heard of him any more.

And thus my story ended at seventeen. I wonder if there are many lives with one exciting chapter in them, ending at seventeen, and then years upon years of monotonous life. I am twenty-three now. I live with Mrs. Tufnell. I am daily governess to one little girl, and I have my forty pounds a-year, the interest of poor papa's insurance money. I am very well off indeed, and some people think I need not care to take a pupil at all—better off, a great deal, than I was in Southampton-street;—but how different! I heard very soon after that Mary had a little boy. It was in the papers, but without any address; and I had one letter from her, saying that we had made a mistake in trying to live together, and that she was sorry. She hoped I would forgive her if she had been mistaken, and she would always think of me and love me. Love me? Is it like love to go away and leave me alone? Two people have said they loved me in my life, and that is what both have done.

However, after that letter I could not do anything more. If she thought it was a mistake for us to live together, of course it was a mistake. And I had my pride too. "I always felt it was a doubtful experiment," Mrs. Tufnell said when people wondered, "and it did not answer—that was all." And this is how it was settled and ended—ended, I suppose, for ever. Mrs. Tufnell is very good to me, and as long as she lives I am sure of a home. Perhaps I may tell you her story one of these days; for she has a story, like most people. She tells me I am still very young, and may yet have a life of my own; but in the meantime the most I can do is to take an interest in other people's lives.

To be continued.

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W. J. LINTON, Sc.

THE TWO MARYS.

BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

PART II.

CHAPTER VI.

I HAD not intended to carry on any further a history which is chiefly about myself; but events are always occurring which change one's mind from day to day, and alter one's most fixed resolutions. I do not pretend to understand people who make unchangeable decisions, and certainly I am not one of them. Besides, common fairness requires that I should allow Mrs. Peveril to have the same privilege as myself, and tell things her own way. I could not have imagined, had I not seen it, the difference there was between the aspect of things to her and to me. I suppose it is true after all that everybody has his or her own point of view, which is different from all others. Of course we realize this fact quite clearly in a great poem like "The Ring and the Book;" but to recognize it in one's own small affairs has somehow a much stranger, more surprising effect. What an odd difference it would make in the world if we could all see ourselves now and then with other people's eyes! I confess that the girl in her story, who was Mr. Peveril's daughter, is very much unlike the girl in mine—and yet the same somehow, as may be traced out with a little trouble. This is humbling, but it is for one's good, I suppose. When you look at yourself in a mirror, you have so much interest in yourself that your defects don't strike you—you can't help being the first figure—the most important; but to feel that all along you are not important at all—anything but the first figure, a mere shadow, scarcely noticed! it has a very odd effect—sometimes laughable, sometimes rather the reverse; but this was what now happened to me.

I must add, however, that a long time passed over before I could even think that Mrs. Peveril might have something to say on her side. It was not because of the rupture between Mr. Durham and myself, and the sudden conclusion of that dream and all that it seemed likely to bring with it. No doubt these things embittered all my feelings about her; but yet I was reasonable enough to come to see that it was not her fault—that she had kept out of the way with all her might—and that after all she could not foresee that another complication might arise between him and me. She could not of course foresee this; and even if she had foreseen it, what could she have done? I think it shows I was not unfair in my judgment, for a girl of seventeen, to say that I soon came to see that. But though I did not blame her, of course I was embittered against her, and took refuge in being very angry with her on other grounds. That she should have said our living together was a mistake was the chief of these. Why was it a mistake? Did she mean to say it was my fault? If it was simply her fault, as I felt sure it was, why did she call it a mistake? Why not say plainly out, "I was wrong, and so we got into trouble"? How easy it seems to be for people to acknowledge themselves in the wrong! but not so easy for oneself, somehow. I never met anybody who liked it, though I have met with so many who ought to have done it, and to whom it would have been so simple—so easy, I thought; but that never seemed to be their opinion.

Mrs. Tufnell, who is in some things a very odd old lady, says it never is anybody's fault. "There was never any quarrel yet," she will say, "but there were two in it—there was never any misunderstanding but two were in it. There is no such thing as absolute blame on the one side and innocence on the other. Even in your affairs, Mary, my dear——" But this I never can see nor allow. How could I be to blame? Only seventeen, and knowing so little of the world, and expecting everybody to be good and true, and say just what they thought. When a man said he was fond of me, how was I to put up with his having been fond of somebody else? And when a woman professed to be thinking of me, was it natural that I could be pleased to know she had been thinking of herself? I could not help behaving just as I did. It was the only natural, the only possible way; but for them, they ought to have known better, they ought to have thought of me. On the whole that is the thing that hurts one—that goes to one's heart. People think of themselves first—when they ought to be thinking of you, they think of themselves first. I suppose it is the same all over the world.

The way in which I first heard Mary's story was simple enough. After years of a dull sort of quiet life at Mrs. Tufnell's—who was very good to me, and very kind, but who, of course, could give to me, a girl, only what she, an old woman, had to give—the quietest life, without excitement or change of any kind—she had a bad illness. It was not an illness of the violent kind, but of what, I suppose, is more dangerous to an old woman, a languishing, slow sickness, which looked like decay more than disease. The doctors said "breaking up of the constitution," or at least the servants said so, who are less particular than the doctors, and shook their heads and looked very serious. I was less easily alarmed than anyone else, for it seemed to me a natural thing that an old lady should be gently ill like that, one day a little better and the next a little worse, without any suffering to speak of. It was not until after she was better that I knew there had been real danger, but she must have felt it herself. The way in which her sense of her precarious condition showed itself was anxiety for me. I remember one evening sitting in her room by the fire with a book; she was in bed, and I had been reading to her, and now she was dozing, or at least I thought so. Things appear (it is evident) very differently to different people. I was extremely comfortable in that nice low easy-chair by the fire. It was a pretty room, full of pictures and portraits of her friends, so full that there was scarcely an inch of the wall uncovered. The atmosphere was warm and soft, and the tranquil repose and ease of the old lady in the bed somehow seemed to increase the warmth and softness and kindly feeling. She was an additional luxury to me sitting there by the fire with my novel. If any fairy had proposed to place her by my side as young and as strong as myself, I should have rejected the proposal with scorn. I liked her a great deal best so—old, a little sick, kind, comfortable, dozing in her bed. The very illness—which I thought quite slight, rather an excuse for staying in this cosy room and being nursed than anything else—heightened my sense of luxury. She was not dozing, as it happened, but lying very still, thinking of dying—wondering how it would feel, and planning for those she should leave behind her. I knew nothing of these thoughts, no more than if I had been a thousand miles away, and fortunately neither did she of mine. I was roused from my comfortable condition by the sound of her voice calling me. I rose up half reluctantly from the bright fire, and the little table with the lamp and my book, and went and sat by her in the shade where I could not see the fire; but still the sentiment of comfort was predominant in me. I gave my old lady her mixture, which it was time for her to take, and advised her to go to sleep.

"You must not doze this time," I

said; "you must go right off to sleep, and never wake till morning. Everything is put right for the night, and I shall not go till you are asleep."

"I was not dozing," she said, with that natural resentment which everybody feels to be so accused; and then after a moment, "Mary, I was thinking of you. If I were to die, what would you do?"

I was very much shocked, and rather frightened; and when I looked at her, and saw by the dim light that she did not look any worse, I felt rather angry. "How unkind of you!" I said, "to speak so! You frightened me at first. What would it matter what became of me?"

"It would matter a great deal," she said. "It would make everything so much worse. I don't want to die, Mary, though I daresay I should be a great deal better, and get rid of all my troubles—"

"Oh, it is wicked to talk so!"

"Why should it be wicked? I can't help thinking of it," she said, lying in her warm cosy bed. It made me shiver to hear her. I began to cry, rather with a chill, wretched sense of discomfort in the midst of all the warmth than anything else; upon which she put her hand on my shoulder and gave me a little shake, and laughed at me softly. "Silly child!" she said—but she was not angry. There was a very grave look on her face behind the smile. Dying was strange to her as well as to me, though she was very old.

"But, Mary," she went on, "I want to read you something. I want you to think again about some one you once were very fond of. I have some news of Mrs. Peveril——"

"Oh!" I said; and then I went on stiffly, "I hope she is well."

"She is quite well—and—your little brother. I wish you would see them. All that happened was so long ago; I think you might see them, Mary."

"I never made any objection to seeing them," I said, more and more stiffly, though my heart began to leap and thump against my breast. "You forget I had nothing to do with it. It was she who went away. She said it was a mistake."

"You are an unforgiving child. You did not try to enter into her feelings, Mary."

"How could I?" I said. "Did she wish me to enter into her feelings? Did she ever give me a chance? She said it was a mistake. What was there left for me to say?"

"Well, well," said the old lady, "I don't defend her. I always said she was wrong; but still I have been hearing from her lately, Mary. I have three or four letters which I should like you to read——"

"You have been hearing from her without ever telling me!"

"Bless the child! must I not even get a letter without consulting her? But, Mary, I am a free agent still, and I can't be kept in such order," she said, half laughing. "Give me that blotting-book, and my keys, and my spectacles, and bring the lamp a little closer."

Indignant as I was, I was comforted by all these preparations. And when she had put on her spectacles and opened the blotting-book, sitting up in bed, my mind was so much relieved that my indignation floated away. "It is a pretty thing for you to talk of dying, and frighten people," I said, giving her a kiss, "with your cheeks like two nice old roses." She shook her head, but she smiled too: she felt better, and got better gradually from that hour.

But in the meantime I had to listen to these letters. Perhaps if it had not been that my old lady was ill, I would have been offended to find that she had deceived me, and had known about Mary all along. It was a deception, though she did not mean any harm. "She had thought it best," she said, "to let time soften all our feelings, before she told me anything about it." However, I must not enter into all the discussions we had on this subject. It is only fair that Mary should have her turn, and tell her story as I have told mine. It is not a connected story like mine, but you will see from it what kind of a life hers had been, and what

sort of a woman she was. She is different from the Mary I thought—and yet not different either—just as I am different from the girl I thought I was, and yet very like too, if you look into it. I cannot tell what my feelings were as I read first one bit and then another, and a great deal more which I do not think it necessary to quote here. One moment I was furious with her—the next I could have kissed her feet. These people who send you from one extreme of feeling to another, who do wrong things and right things all in a jumble, take a greater hold upon you, somehow, than better people do, who are placid and always on the same level—at least I think so. I started by calling her Mrs. Peveril—and here I am already saying Mary, as of old, without knowing! And Mrs. Tufnell wishes me to go and see her. She has even made me promise as a kind of reward to herself for getting better. Since she takes it in this way, I shall have to go—and sometimes I fear it, and sometimes I wish for it. Will it make any difference to me? Will the old love come back, or the still older feeling that was not love? Shall I think of that "Mary" that sounded always so much sweeter to her than to me? Or shall I remember only the time when she was everything to me—when she charmed me out of my grief and loneliness, and told me her secret, and made me her companion, and was all mine? I do not know. I begin to tremble, and my heart beats when I think of this meeting; but in the meantime Mary has a right to her turn, and to tell the story her own way. It is all in little bits taken from Mrs. Tufnell's letters, and sometimes may appear a little fragmentary; but I can only give it as it came to me.

CHAPTER VII.

HER STORY.

When I went to be governess at Mrs. Durham's I was quite young. I had been "out" before, but only as nursery governess. Mine was not a very regular or, perhaps, a very good kind of education. My mother had been a governess before me, and not one of very high pretensions, as governesses are nowadays. I don't think she ever knew anything herself, except a little music and a little French, which she had forgotten before my time. How my father and she met, and, still more wonderful, how they took to each other, is a thing I never could make out. Perhaps I was most fond of her, but certainly I was most proud of him, and liked to copy his ways, and to believe what my mother often said—that I was a Martindale every inch of me. This, poor soul, she meant as a reproach, but to me it sounded like a compliment. I was very silly and rather cruel, as young people are so often. My father had a great deal of contempt for her, and not much affection; and though I had a great deal of affection, I borrowed unconsciously his contempt, and thought myself justified in treating her as he did. She was wordy and weak in argument, and never knew when to stop. But he—when he had stated what he intended to do—would never answer any of her objections, or indeed take any notice of them, but listened to her with a contemptuous silence. I took to doing the same; and though I know better now, and am sorry I ever could have been so foolish and so unkind, yet the habit remains with me—not to take the trouble to reply to foolish arguments, but to do what I think right without saying anything about it. This habit, I may as well confess, has got me into trouble more than once; but I do not say that I am prepared to give it up, though I know I have taken harm by it, and no good, so far as I am aware.

We were very poor, and I had been a nursery governess and a daily governess when I was little more than a child. When my poor mother died a little money came, and then I got a few lessons to improve me in one or two different accomplishments; and then I took Mrs. Durham's situation. My father was one of the wandering men who live a great deal abroad; and I had learned French and enough Ger-

man to make a show, in the best way, by practice rather than by book. "French acquired abroad"—that was what was put for me in the advertisement, and this I think was my principal recommendation to Mrs. Durham. Her eldest son was at home at the time—a young man just a little older than myself. She was a kind woman, and unsuspicious. She thought George only a boy, and perhaps about me she never thought at all—in connection with him, at least. I used to be encouraged at first to make him talk French, and great was the amusement in the school-room over his pronunciation and his mistakes. They were all very kind when I come to think of it. They were as fearless and trustful with me as if I had belonged to them. And then by degrees I found out that George had fallen in love with me. I think I may say quite certainly that I never was in love with him, but I was a little excited and pleased, as one always is, you know, when that happens for the first time. It is so odd—so pleasant to feel that you have that power. It seems so kind of the man—one thinks so when one is young—and it is amusing and flattering, and a thing which occupies your mind, and gives you something agreeable to think of. I do not say this is the right way of thinking on such a subject, but it is how a great many girls feel, and I was one of them. I had never thought seriously of it at all. It seemed so much more like fun than anything else; and then it is always pleasant to have people fond of you. I liked it; and I am afraid I never thought of what it might come to, and did not take up any lofty ground, but let him talk, and let him follow me about, and steal out after me, and waylay me in the passages. I did this without thinking, and more than half for the amusement of it. I liked him, and I liked the place he took up in my life, and the things he said, without really responding to his feelings at all.

When it was found out, and there was a disturbance in the house about it, I came to my senses all at once, with such a hot flush of pain and shame that I seem to feel it yet. They had been so kind to me, that I had never felt my dependence; but now, all in a moment I found it out. His mother was frightened to death lest he should marry me! She thought me quite beneath him; me—a Martindale all over—a gentleman's daughter—much better than she was! This roused a perfect tempest in me. It was my pride that was outraged, not my feelings; but that pride was strong enough and warm enough to be called a passion. I did what I could to show his mother that nothing in the world could be more indifferent to me than he was, but she would not be convinced; and at last I determined to do what my father often had done when my mother was unreasonable—to withdraw out of the discussion at once and summarily, without leaving any opportunity for further talk. My father was living then. He was at Spa, which was not very difficult to reach. One evening, after Mrs. Durham had been talking to me (George had been sent away, but I was not sent away because they were sorry for me), I stayed in the school-room till they were all at dinner, and then I carried all my things, which I had made up into bundles, down to the hall with my own hands, and got a cab and went off to the railway station. I bought a common box on my way, and packed them all into it. I tell you this to show how determined I was; not even one of the servants knew how I had gone, or anything about me. It was winter, and the Durhams dined at half-past six; so I had time enough to get off by the night train to Dover. I had not a very large wardrobe, you may suppose, but I left nothing behind me but some old things. I was not particular about crushing my dresses for that one night. I remember, as if it were yesterday, the dark sea and dark sky, and great, chill, invisible, open-air world that I seemed to stand alone in, as the steamboat went bounding over those black waves, or ploughing through them, to Ostend. There was a great deal of wind, but the

sea had not had time to rise, and there was the exhilaration of a storm without its more disagreeable consequences. The vessel did not roll, but now and then gave a leap, spurning the Channel spray from her bows. Oh how I recollect every particular! You might think a lonely girl in such circumstances—flying from persecution, if you like to put it so—flying from love; with nothing but a very uncertain welcome to look to from a very unsatisfactory father, and no prospect but to face the world again and get her bread somehow—was as sad a figure as could be imagined. But I was not sad. I had a high spirit, and I loved adventure and change. I felt as if the steamboat was me, going bounding on, caring nothing for the sea or the darkness. The wind might catch at us, the water might dash across our sides, the sky might veil itself—who cared? We pushed on, defying them all. A poor governess as good as turned out of my situation because the son of the house had fallen in love with me—a penniless creature without a home, with not a soul to stand by me in all that dark world. And yet I don't remember anything I ever enjoyed more, than that journey by night.

This will show you—and you may show it to Mary to convince her—how much I cared for George Durham. I suppose he was in love with me—at least what a young man not much over twenty considers love. That is six years ago; and probably he has always had a recollection, all this time, that he was in love with me, and thinks that he ought to have been faithful. I should not wonder if there was a kind of remorse in his mind to find that he had fallen in love with Mary, and cared for me no longer. It is a superstition with some people that, however foolish their first fancy was, they ought to hold by it; but I must say that I think it was very foolish, not to say cruel, of both of them, to make this breach on account of me.

I got another situation after that, and did well enough—as governesses do. I never complained, or thought I had any reason to complain. I taught all I knew—not very much, but enough for most people. As for education, as people talk nowadays—of awakening the minds, and training the dispositions, and re-creating the children, so to speak, intellectually and morally—I never thought of such a thing; and why should I? That is the work of a mother, appointed by God, or of some great person endowed with great genius or influence—not of a young woman between eighteen and five-and-twenty, indifferently trained herself, with quite enough to do to master her own difficulties and keep herself afloat. I was not so impertinent, so presumptuous, or so foolish as to have any such idea. I taught them as well as I could; I tried to make them as fond of books as I was myself—I tried to get them to talk like gentlewomen, and not to be mean or false. I was not their mother or their priest, but only their teacher. I had no theory then; but after one is thirty, one begins to have theories; and I can see what I meant in my earlier time by the light of what I think now. However, this is not much to the purpose. I was a successful governess on the whole; I got on very well, and I had nothing to find fault with. It is not a very happy life—when you are young, and hear pleasant sounds below-stairs, and have to sit reading by yourself in the school-room; when there is music and dancing perhaps, and merry talk, and you are left alone in that bare place with maps on the walls, and one candle—a girl does not feel happy; though on the whole, perhaps, the school-room is better than to sit in a corner of the drawing-room and be taken no notice of—which is the other alternative. There are a great many difficulties in the position altogether, as I can see now that I am older. When the governess is made exactly like one of the family, the eldest son will go and fall in love with her and bring everybody into trouble. It is hard for the lady of the house as well. However, after George Durham, I was careful, and I never got into difficulty of that kind again. Four years after I left the Durhams I had a bad illness—rheumatic

fever. My people were very kind to me, but I was too proud to be a burden on them; and as soon as I could be moved I left and went into lodgings, and was ill there till I had spent all my money; it was only then that I had recourse to the Spicers. Perhaps I ought to confess that, though Mr. Spicer is my uncle, I was ashamed of him and disliked him. I have felt angry at my poor mother all my life for having such relations; but of course there they were, and had to be made the best of. My money lasted till I was almost well, but not well enough for another situation. My father had died in the meantime; and only then I sent to the Spicers, and asked if they would take me in for a time. I was a good needlewoman; I knew I could repay them well for keeping me. That is how I went to them. What followed no one could have foreseen. You know how it was.

I cannot talk about my husband—yet. How could I talk about that which was everything to me, which changed my life, which made me another creature? People may love you, and it makes but little difference to you. It is pleasant, no doubt; it softens your lot; it makes things bearable which would not be bearable. I had known that in my life. But to love—that is another thing. That is the true revelation—the lifting up of the veil. It is as different from simply being loved as night is from day. I suppose few women are, as I was, in circumstances to feel this sudden lighting up of existence all of a sudden. Most women have a great deal to love, and know that condition better than the other. They would not make so much fuss about being loved did they not already possess the other gift. But I had never really loved anybody, I suppose. Various people had loved me. I had liked it, and had done what I could to be kind and agreeable to them. Some (women) I had been very fond of. It seems to me now that the world must have been a most curious, cloudy sort of place in my early youth—a dim place, where nothing moved one very much; where daylight was quite sober and ordinary, and nothing out of oneself was exciting. When I saw Mr. Peveril first I had no warning of what was coming. I did not feel even interested in him. He seemed too gentle, too soft for my liking. What attracted me was, I think, chiefly the fact that he was the only educated man I ever saw there—the only being, man or woman, who was not of, or like, the Spicers. This was my only feeling towards him for the first two or three times I saw him—but then——.

I am afraid I did not think very much about Mary when we were married. Of course I meant to do my duty by her: that goes without saying. And her resistance and dislike did not make me angry. They rather amused me. It seemed so odd that she should think herself of consequence enough to be so deeply offended. She, a girl, with all her life before her—fifteen—of no present importance to any mortal, though no doubt she would ripen into something after a while. When Mr. Peveril distressed himself about what he called her want of respect to me, I used to smile at him. He would have made her love me by force had that been possible—as if her little sullenness, poor child, made any difference! It was quite natural, besides—only foolish, if she could but have seen it. She was a naughty child, and she thought herself a virgin-martyr. I hope it is not wicked of me to be amused by that virgin-martyr look. I know it so well. I have seen it over and over again in all sorts of circumstances. To say a tragedy-queen is nothing. There is a sublime patience, a pathos about your virgin-martyrs, which far outdoes anything else. Poor little Mary! if I had not seen that she was quite happy in her own thoughts, even when she thought herself most miserable, I should have taken more notice of it. I can't tell what she was always thinking about—whether it was some imaginary lover or romance of her own that she kept weaving for hours together; but it kept her happy anyhow. She was very provoking sometimes—never was there such

a spoiled child. She balked me thoroughly in one thing, and would not let me be her governess as well as her stepmother; which was what I wished. How often should I have liked to box her little impertinent ears, and then laugh and kiss her into good-humour! But in that point there was nothing to be done. I had to leave all to time, in which I hoped—without, alas! having the least thought, the least prevision, how short my time was to be. You will see that I am not one to linger upon my private feelings. I have said nothing to you about my happiness. I can say nothing about my grief. The beautiful life stopped short—the light went out after this—an end seemed to come to everything. I cannot say more about it. Everything ended—except one's pulse, which will go on beating, and the long hours and days that have to be got through somehow, and the bread that has to be eaten in spite of oneself—and has to be earned too, as if it were worth the while.

I wonder at myself sometimes, and you will wonder, that I did not break down under my grief. It was my first real grief, as that which preceded it had been my first real happiness. I have even envied the people who got ill and who could go to bed, and darken their windows and lie still and let the sword go through and through them in quietness, instead of writhing on it as I did; but that must be nature. My first instinct was to snatch at something, to lay hold upon something, lest I should be carried away by some fiery flood or other. And what I snatched at was Mary. I love Mary. You may think I have not acted as if I did; but that is nothing; and she does not love me. But still I have that distinct feeling for her which I never experienced till her dear, dear father (oh, my God, my God, why is it that my child will never call him so!) showed me the way. I have had a great deal to bear from her; she is not like me; and there are many things I dislike in her. But all that does not matter. And it is not as I loved him—but yet I love her. All I remember about those dark days was that I laid hold upon Mary. She could not escape from me when I seized her so—few, very few, people can. To resist kindness is easy enough, but downright love has a different kind of grasp; you cannot get free of that. It is because there is so much fictitious love in the world that people are not aware of the power of the true.

I secured her—for the time. You may say it did not last very long; but that was not my fault; it was because she too, in her time, woke up from her affection for me, and all the torpor of her youth, and heard the call of love, and got up and left those that did but love her. The time we lived together was a strange dreamy time, between blank despair and a kind of languid happiness. Sometimes I would feel almost happy because of what was coming, and then I would be plunged into that horror of darkness, that shadow of death, which is of all things on earth the most terrible—worse, a thousand times worse, than death itself. I say this with confidence, because I as good as died once. I was so ill that I had floated off into that unconsciousness which would have been death had they left me alone; and it was not unpleasant. Had they left me alone I should have died, therefore I am justified in saying that this was death; and it was not disagreeable—just a soft floating away, a gradual growing dim and shutting out, without any of that sense of desertion and loneliness which one feels must be so strong in the dying. But the shadow of death is very terrible. No one can exaggerate its terror. When it seizes upon the soul, all that surrounds you is lost in one sea of misery. The waves and the billows pass over you. You feel as if you could not endure, could not last through that flood of pain—and yet you do last. The great billow passes over, and there is a calm, and your soul is so fatigued and worn out that it lies exhausted, and a languor of rest, which is almost ease, passes over it. This was how I lived for three months with Mary; until the

shock of the other who thrust himself into our life—the stranger, who was no stranger, came.

His first appearance was nothing but an insignificant trouble, a mere annoyance to me,—why should I care? I had not thought of him at all for years; and I never had thought of him much. But still I did not want him there: he annoyed me; he was a kind of constant menace of more annoyance to come. But I don't know what steps I could have taken. It was a long time before I could realize that he would fall in love with Mary. I rather think it is difficult to believe that a man who has loved you will love some one else. That is—if you are quite indifferent to him; it is so much easier then to believe in his faithfulness. The idea did not occur to me. I feared a little for Mary once or twice, and tried to warn her; but she was always a dreamy sort of girl, and it was hard to tell when a new influence came over her. She had lived in dreams of one kind or other ever since I knew her; and I knew nothing, really nothing, about what was going on, till that unhappy afternoon when he recognized me, and came in and talked foolishly in Mary's hearing, about things that had happened so long before. Poor child!—I don't blame her, for her foolishness was natural enough. She thought I had stolen away her lover, as I had stolen away her father. She would not listen to me, and when she did listen to me she did not believe me; and there on the other hand was he, demanding explanations. Good heavens, what right has a man like that to ask explanations—a man one had never cared for, and would have died of? He worried me so that I could not be civil. What with grief, and what with vexation at the turn things had taken, and disappointment in Mary, and illness in myself, I had no patience with the man, maundering on about things that had happened ages before, that were of no importance to any living being. When he waylaid me on my way to her, keeping me back from her, in her agony of temper and mortification and humiliation, what I could have done to him! I was in a nervous state, I suppose, and easily irritated. I could have struck him when he came out and worried me. And there was Mary turning her face to the wall, shutting out the light, shutting her ears, determined to be miserable. Oh! when I toiled up and down stairs going to her, when I felt ill and knew that nobody cared, when I saw her absorbed in her foolish misery, and him tormenting himself and me about dead nonsense that never had been anything, you may excuse me if I had very little patience. After a night of it I got tired and sick of the whole business. It seemed too hard to be obliged to put up with all this folly on the eve of being ill. And who would care whether I was ill or not, if things went on so?

Then I took my resolution suddenly, as I had done before. It was not with the hope and high spirit that had kept me up when I went off to Ostend that I left Southampton Street, my own house. I was sick and tired, that was all. I could not be troubled to go on. I was worried and impatient and indignant—and then Mary had a friend to take care of her. I went away. I went to an hospital after a while in the same irritated hopeless state, feeling that it did not matter what happened; and there my boy was born. Well! what did it matter? They are for honest, poor women, these hospitals—and Heaven knows I was poor enough, but honest. One cares for oneself only when one has other people who care. I had nobody. I did not lose heart altogether, because that is not my nature. I could not if I would; but what did I care for what people would think or for what they might say? no more than for the buzzing of the flies. I should never even hear of it—there was nobody to tell me, nobody to pay any attention. I thought most likely I should die; but I did not calculate upon dying, for by that time I knew I had strength to go through a great deal. And so I did. My boy was quite strong and well, and I got quite well and strong too. Often I have thought this showed how little heart I must have; but I could not help it. I got quite strong.

I reflected seriously whether I should not try for a nurse's place, which was very well paid, and where very little was required; but even if I could have parted with my boy, I had no one to trust with the care of him. So instead of doing this, I made shift to live for a whole year upon my forty pounds of income, with a little more which I earned by needlework. When you are a very good needlewoman, you can always earn something. I did very well; I made baby clothes; my eyes were strong, and my health was good, and I had my own baby to comfort me. There is nothing that comforts like a baby. When the child laughs, you laugh too. You laugh to make him laugh; first it is sympathy, then it is delight, till gradually you grow a baby too, and are amused at nothing, and happy for nothing, and live over again, beginning at the very beginning, in the child.

In this way I grew to be so tranquil, so eased in mind, and happy in heart, notwithstanding my loss, which I never forgot, that I was tempted to remain just as I was always; but then it occurred to me that I should lose all that I knew, that I would never be able to teach him, or to get him education, or to rise in the world, as I wanted to do for his sake; therefore it was clear I must do something else. This was what I did: I found out about a situation in a school after a great deal of inquiry. I went to the lady and told her my story; I said I would go to her for almost nothing if I might have my baby and a little maid to take care of him. When she heard of my "French acquired abroad," my showy bit of German, my music, and how I would make myself as useful as ever she liked, having excellent health and no sort of prejudices about what I did, she closed with me. I had two rooms, and board for myself and the maid and the boy—no more at first—but I managed on that. And then by degrees we improved. She gave me first twenty pounds, then a little more. A baby's white frock and a widow's black gown do not cost much. We did very well. I have fifty pounds now the school has increased so much; and I believe I may have a share soon if all goes well. My French goes for a great deal, and even my name and my widow's cap go for something, and everybody in the school likes to tell the story of the baby. Am I happy, do you say? I never stop to ask myself whether I am happy or not. One must form some idea of change in one's mind, some thought of a possibility which might make one happier, before one would think of asking oneself such a question. And as I have no reasonable prospect of ever being happier than I am, I do not think about it. I am not unhappy—of that I am sure.

You talk of bringing Mary and me together again. Would it answer, I wonder? Sentiment is one thing, but practicability is another. Having told you that I loved Mary, I have said all that either woman or man can say. Likings change and alter, but love is for ever. Yet, whether we could live together, whether she could trust me, whether she would understand the past, and feel how little I wished or intended to interfere with her, I cannot tell; unless she could, it would almost be better to leave us as we are. So long as a woman is young, as Mary is, it is doubtful and dangerous, I am afraid, to try any relationships but those that are quite natural. She is with you, you dearest, kind friend, as if she were your own child. You can do her nothing but good; but I am not so very much older than she is. I am older—centuries older—but not to outward appearance; and can you not suppose a state of things in which the last chapter of our lives might be, one way or other, repeated again? I say this not with any sort of vanity, Heaven knows, but with fear and trembling. For I should be happier with her—far happier—but not if she came to me with a single doubt in her mind, a single thought which was uncertain or suspicious. Do not tell her this one difficulty which seems to me to stand in our way, but judge for us both what is best. I want her for myself and for my boy. We belong to each

other, and no one else in the world belongs to us. How often I long for her when I am sitting alone! How many things I have in my mind to say to her! But not unless it would be well for her, to whom anything may happen. Nothing that I know of, except through her or my baby, can now happen to me.

CHAPTER VIII.

I WILL not enter into all the particulars of our discussion after this, for time would fail me. The last part of Mary's letter, which she said was not to be shown to me, made me angry. I thought it was vanity on her part to be afraid of interfering with me again. "In what way?" I could not but ask, and that sharply; how could the last chapter of our lives be repeated? Mrs. Tufnell only smoothed my hair and soothed me, and called me "dear" and "darling," but would give no explanation. "What does she mean?" I asked. "Oh, she means, my love—probably she means nothing. It is just a way of talking that people fall into," said my old lady. I knew this was said simply to quiet me, but on the whole perhaps I preferred it to anything more definite; and, after a time, I allowed myself to be persuaded to pay this visit. What a strange journey into the past it seemed! and yet actually we went far away from the scene of the past, into a place so new and unknown to me, that it could awaken no associations. We drove in the comfortable old fly, with the old sleek horse and the old fat man, which was as good as Mrs. Tufnell's private carriage. She did not keep a carriage of her own, but I am sure this fly, in which she drove every day of her life except when she was ill, cost her more than a carriage would have done. She was very apologetic about it always. "I could not undertake the responsibility of a carriage," she would say; "horses are always getting ill, and your coachman drinks, or he gets into trouble with the maids, or something. Old Groombridge and his fly suit me quite well. No, he is not an old rogue. I have to pay him, of course, for all his trouble, and for the loss of customers, and so forth. You know, Mary, he always suits himself to my convenience at whatever sacrifice——"

This was her idea, and nothing would convince her otherwise. So we drove in Groombridge's old fly—which was one of the most expensive vehicles in town—out Hampstead way, but past all the houses, past everything, till we came to new houses again, and skeleton roads and villas growing up like mushrooms, in one of those long straggling arms that London puts out into the country. I had got excited so often thinking that we must be quite close upon the place, that at last I ceased to be excited, and felt as if we had set out upon a hopeless circle, and were going to wind in and out and round and round, till we worked back to the point from which we started. How dreary they look, those new places—roads newly laid out, breaking in upon the fields, which somehow look so superior, so desecrated, and vulgarized by those new muddy lines with the unnecessary kerbstones; and then all the half-built houses, each one uglier than the other, with their bow-windows, all made by the gross (I suppose), and their thin little walls that the wind whistles through, and even their monotonous attempt at irregularity. A steady, solid row which is very ugly and nothing more, is endurable. I was saying this, when suddenly the fly made a sharp turn, and immediately the villas and the kerbstones became invisible. We had got within a mossy wall, through a large old-fashioned gate. There was an avenue, not very long nor very grand, but still an avenue, with odd old trees all gnarled and mossed over, and I suppose in a very bad condition, but still old, and trees—trees which our grandfathers might have walked under. The house was an old red-brick house, very dark red, and covered with little brown and yellow lichens. It was neat, but yet one could see it was in want of repair, and looked like a poor lady in

a faded gown and mended lace by the side of the fine shop-people in silk and satin. It was a winter day—a very still and bright one. The shadows of all the leafless trees made a network upon the brown gravel path. The old house seemed to be basking, warming itself in the sun. There were a great many twinkling windows, but not a creature to be seen except one little child on the white step of the deep doorway. There was a porch, and probably his nurse was there, but the little fellow was standing out in the sun, cracking a little whip he had, with his hair shining in the bright light, and his little face like an apple-blossom. He was shouting out some baby nonsense at the top of his voice. He did not care for us, nor for anyone. He was the monarch of all—quite alone in his kingdom, independent of everybody.

"Who do you think it is, Mary?" said Mrs. Tufnell, taking my hand suddenly, as I looked out laughing and amused by him. Good heavens! I had never once thought. I fell back into my corner and began to cry, I cannot tell why. Of course I knew at once whom it must be.

And then *she* came, not in the least altered, kissing me just as if we had parted yesterday. But she was agitated, though she tried not to show it. She took the little boy and brought him to me, and thrust him into my arms without a word, and her lip quivered, and for some minutes she could not say anything. The meeting was hard altogether. When the thing that sundered you is too far off to be talked about, and when everybody counsels you to avoid explanations and go on again as if nothing had happened, it is very hard; you may succeed in uniting the old strands and twisting them together once more, but it is perhaps more likely that you will fail. We went into Mary's new home, and saw the lady who was the head of the school. It was holiday time—the Christmas holidays—and they were alone. This lady was middle-aged, older than Mary, but not so old as Mrs. Tufnell. She was an unmarried woman, and I could at once understand what Mary had said, that her very name and her widow's cap told for something in the place. But what was most evident of all was that little Jack was the sovereign of Grove House. Whatever anybody might do or say, he was supreme. Miss Robinson was fond of his mother, and "appreciated" her, as she told us; but little Jack was the monarch, and did what he pleased.

Our visit was, as people say, quite pleasant. It went off perfectly well—we kissed when we met and when we parted—we had a great deal to say to each other of what had passed since we met—and there was little Jack to make acquaintance with, and a great many of his wonderful adventures to be told of. Mrs. Tufnell came away with the thought that it had been a great success, and that henceforward nothing more was wanted—that Mary and I would be one again.

But Mary and I felt differently. I did, at least, and I am sure so did she. You cannot mend a rent so easily. Such a rent—a rent that had lasted more than five years—how can it be drawn together again by any hasty needle and thread like a thing done yesterday? We parted friends, with promises to meet again; but with hearts, oh! so much more apart from each other than they had been an hour before! An hour before we met I had all sorts of vague hopes in my heart—vague feelings that she would understand me, that I would understand her—vague yearnings towards the old union which was almost perfect. Did you ever see the great glass screen they have in some houses to shield you from the heat of the fire? You can see the cheerful blaze through it, but you feel nothing. Something of the kind was between Mary and me. We saw through it as well as ever, and seemed to enjoy the pleasant warmth; but no other sensation followed, only the chill of a disappointment. I felt that she was now nothing, nothing to me; and I—I cannot tell how I seemed to her. We had the old habit suddenly brought to life and put on again, but

none of the old meaning. We were like mummers trying to make ourselves out to be heroines of the past, but knowing we were not and never could be what we appeared. I was very silent during our drive home. I did not know what to say to my dear old lady. She looked very fragile with her pretty rose-cheeks, lying back in the corner of the fly; she was fatigued, and in the daylight I suddenly woke up to see that she did look very fragile. I had not believed in it before. And how could I vex her by telling her of my disappointment? I could not do it; she was pleased and happy; she held my hand, and nodded to me and said: "Now you see you are not so much alone as you thought you were. Now you see you have friends who belong to you." How could I have had the heart to say otherwise—to say I had found out that we were separated for ever, Mary and I?

That evening, however, after tea, she began to talk to me very seriously. We were sitting over the fire—she on her favourite sofa, I on a low chair near her. The firelight kept dancing about, lighting up the room fitfully. It was a large room. We had some candles on the mantel-piece, which shone, reflected in the great mirror, as if from some dim, deep chamber opening off this one; but it was really the firelight that lighted the room. I had been singing to her, and I half thought she had been asleep, when suddenly she roused up all at once, and sat upright in her little prim way.

"I want to speak to you, Mary," she said; and then, after a pause—"You think I meant nothing but love and kindness when I took you to see Mrs. Peveril to-day; but I am a scheming, wicked old woman, Mary. I had more than that in my mind."

I was a little, but only a little, startled by this: I knew her way. I looked up at her, smiling. "You are so designing," I said; "I might have known there was something underneath. You are going to ask them to spend the rest of their holidays here?"

"That if you like," she said brightly, encouraged, I could see, by my tone; "but more than that, Mary; more than that."

I was not curious. I looked with an indolent amusement at the shining of the firelight and the reflection in the mirror of the flame of the candles, which shone out of its surface without seeming to move the dark ruddy gloom beyond. A glass is always an inscrutable, wonderful thing, like an opening into the unseen: it was especially so that night.

"Mary," Mrs. Tufnell resumed, with a voice that faltered, I could not tell why; "do you remember when I first spoke to you of Mrs. Peveril—when I was ill—and what I said?"

"Yes," I answered, with sudden alarm, looking up at her. "You don't feel ill now?"

"No, but I have got a shake," she said. "When a woman at my time of life is ill, though it may seem to pass quite away, it always leaves a something. I shall never be as strong as I have been, my dear child. I feel I have got a shake. My life has come to be like the late leaves on the top of a tree. They may last through many gales, but the first gust may blow them off. I cannot feel sure for a day."

I went close up to her in my fright, and knelt down by the sofa, and put my arms round her. "Do not speak so," I said; "you could not leave me? What could I do without you? I am not an orphan as long as I have you. You cannot have the heart——"

"Oh, Mary! hush; don't overwhelm me. It was of that I wanted to speak. I shall live as long as I can, for your sake. But, dear, old people cannot stay always, however much they may be wanted. I have been thinking of it a great deal, and there is a proposal I have to make to you—with Mrs. Peveril's consent, Mary. You must listen to all I have to say."

"Oh, you have consulted Mrs. Peveril!" said I; and I got up, feeling my heart grow chill and sore, and went back to my seat to hear what was to be said to me. In the depths of my heart

I must have been jealous of her still. It came all back upon me like a flood. My dear old lady gave me a grieved look, but she did not stop to explain. She went quickly on with what she had to say:——

"Grove House is a nice old-fashioned house, and cheap, and they have a good list of scholars; and Miss Robinson would be glad to retire, and would not ask very much for the furniture and things; and Mrs. Peveril is so much liked by everybody. I have always set apart as much as I thought was right of my little property, intending it for you, Mary——"

"Don't!" I cried, in a voice so shrill and sharp that it startled even myself who spoke.

"It is not very much," she went on, "but it is all I can give away, and my whole heart has been set upon doing something for you with this money that would make you independent. My dear Mary, I am half afraid you don't like the thought, you are so silent. I had thought of buying Grove House for Mrs. Peveril and you."

"For Mrs. Peveril and me!"

"Yes—don't you like the idea, Mary?—don't you like the idea? I thought it was something that would please you so much. You have always said you liked teaching, and it would be a living for you, dear, and a home when I am gone. I have so wished to make these arrangements for you, Mary——"

"Is it all settled?" I said.

"Nothing could be settled without your consent. All that I want is your good. I could not leave you, could I, at your age, without anyone to stand by you, without a home to go to, without a friend——"

Thus she apologized to me for those kind, tender plans of hers; and I sat like a clod, feeling that I could not reply. I was dull and heavy and miserable; not grateful, yet feeling how grateful I ought to be; understanding her, yet not owning even to myself that I understood her. It was not a very great destiny that was thus allotted to me, but that was not what I was thinking. My mind did not revolt against the idea of being the mistress of a school; which was natural enough. To tell the truth, I cannot quite tell what it was that gave me so miserable a feeling. Here was my life marked out for me; there was never to be any change in it; no alteration for the brighter or better occurred to this dear old woman who loved me. She wanted to make sure I should have daily bread and a roof to shelter me, and some sort of companionship. How right she was! How good and how kind! and yet, oh, how dreary, how unutterably blank and hopeless seemed the prospect! I felt this with a dull fighting and struggle of the two things in me—wanting to please her by looking pleased, feeling how good she was, and how kind, how just, how suitable was the arrangement. I felt all this in a kind of way, and then I felt the struggle not to be wildly angry, not to burst out and ask her how she could think of condemning me so—for my life?

She was grieved and disappointed at the way I received her proposal, but she was so good that she took no notice, but kissed me, and said nothing should be done or thought of against my consent. For my part my heart was so heavy and dull that I could not even thank her for her kindness; but I hung about her when she went to bed, and held her fast in a speechless way that she understood, I think, though I said nothing. She cried; she looked at me with her kind old eyes full of tears. "Oh, Mary," she said, "don't break my heart! If I could live for ever and go on always taking care of you, don't you think I would do it, for your sake and your father's too? But I cannot. One must die when one's time comes, however much one may be wanted, and I must provide for that."

"Oh, why can't I provide for it?" I cried. "Why can't I die too? That would be the best way."

And then she was angry—half angry—as much as it was in her nature to be. And oh, with what a dreary feeling I found myself alone, and had to sit down and think it over, and make up

my mind to it, as one has so often in this life. I had to teach myself to see how good it was. And I did. I made up my mind to it. What was there else in heaven or earth—as I could not die with my only friend, or compel her to live, what was there else that I could do?

CHAPTER IX.

Next morning when I woke, the impression on my mind was, that Mrs. Tufnell must have died in the night. I cannot tell why I thought so, but I woke with such a horror in my mind, that I threw a shawl over my shoulders and rushed to her door to ask how she was, before I could take breath. She was not up; but smiled at me from her bed, where she lay with all the pictures and the portraits of her friends about her, the centre of a silent company. "I am quite well—better than usual," she said; but I think she knew the meaning of my terror, and felt that after all that had been said it was natural I should be afraid. This perhaps threw just a little cloud upon her serenity too, during the morning, for however calmly one may think of dying, I suppose it must startle one to see that others are thinking of it. I suppose so—it seems natural. She was very grave, thoughtful, and somewhat silent during the forenoon; and when I went and sat down by her, and asked her to forgive me, and said I was ready to do whatever she thought best, she took me into her arms and cried and kissed me. "Oh, that it should be necessary to change!" she said. "I do not feel as if I could face the change—but, Mary, for your good——"

It was about noon as we thus sat talking it over. It comforted me to see that she liked it as little as I did; that she would rather have kept me with her to the last moment of her life. But then what should I have done?—this was what she thought of. We were talking it all over very seriously, with more pain than either of us would show. It was a chilly winter morning. The room was bright, to be sure, with a good fire burning, and all the comforts that so many poor people are without; but there was a chill that went to one's heart—the chill of the grave for her, which she thought near; and the chill of the outside world, from which she had sheltered me so long, for me. I remember the look of that morning—there was a black frost outside which bound all the dry street, and seemed to hold the naked trees in the square so fast that they dared not rustle, though an icy wind was blowing through them. There were traces still on the windows, notwithstanding the fire, of the frosty network of the night. The sun had begun to shine as it approached noon, but even the sun was white and cold, and seemed rather to point out how chilly the world was, than to warm it. After we had got through all our explanations and said all that was to be said, and arranged that Mary was to be invited to the Square with her child to spend a week of the holidays and arrange everything, we still kept sitting together holding each other's hands, not saying much. I could not pretend that I liked it even to please her, and she did not like it, though she thought it right; but all the same it was settled, and there was nothing more to say.

It was all settled by twelve o'clock, fixed and decided with that double certainty which is given by pain. If we had liked it we should not have felt half so sure. At half-past twelve the midday post came in, and I was still sitting by my dear old lady, holding her hand, feeling my heart sink lower and lower every moment, thinking how I should have to leave her when she wanted me most—when Mrs. Tufnell's maid came in with the letters. She gave some to her mistress, and she gave one to me. I do not think I recognized the writing at first. But I got few letters, and it gave me a little thrill of agitation, I could not quite tell why. It was a foreign letter, with a number of unintelligible postmarks. I got up and went to the window, partly because my heart began to beat very loud, and partly to leave

Mrs. Tufnell at liberty to read her letters. I recollect looking out unconsciously and seeing the dried-up, dusty, frosty look of everything, the ice-wind sweeping the dust round the corners, the bare shivering trees—with a momentary thrill of sensation that my life was like that, dried-up, frost-bound, for ever and ever. And then, with my fingers trembling and my heart beating, and a consciousness of something coming, I could not tell what, I opened the envelope and found——This was what I found; without any preface or introduction—without anything to soften the difference between what was before my eyes and what was going to be.

There was no beginning to the letter; there were a good many blots in it, as if it had been written with a hand which was not very steady. There was not even a date until the end. He who had written it had been as much agitated as she who read it; and she who read it did so as in a dream, not knowing where she was standing, feeling the world and the white curtains and the frosty square to be going round and round with her, making a buzzing in her ears and a thumping against her breast.

What a plunge into a new world—into an old world—into a world not ealized, not possible, and yet so strange in its fascination, so bewildering! Was it a dream—or could it be true?

"I have long wanted, and often tried, to write to you again. I do not know now whether I may or whether I ought. If this letter should come to another man's wife, if it should fall into your hands in such changed circumstances that you will scarcely remember the writer's name—and I cannot hide from myself that all this may be the case—then forgive me, Mary, and put it in the fire without further thought. It will not be for you, in your new life, but for someone else whom you will have forgotten, though I can never forget her. But if you are still little Mary Peveril as you used to be, oh, read it! and try to throw your thoughts back to the time when you knew me—when we used to meet. You were not much more than a child. How much I have thought of that time; how often and often I have gone over it in my thoughts I need not tell you. You were badly used, dear Mary. I was wrong—I will say it humbly on my knees if you like: having got your promise and your heart—for I did have that, if only for a little while—nothing could have justified me in appearing for one moment to place you otherwise than first in all I did or said. I will not excuse myself by saying how much startled I was by the sight of Miss Martindale, nor how anxious I was to know whether my mother had any share, or what share she had, in her disappearance from our house. I will say nothing about all that, but only that I was wrong, wrong without any excuse. Had I thought of what I was risking by my curiosity, I would have bitten my tongue out sooner than have asked a single question. Do you think, could you think, that I would have sacrificed you to the old foolish business which was over years before? I was an utter fool, I allow, but not such a fool as that. Therefore, Mary dear, dearest, whom I have always thought of, listen to me again; take me back again! I will beg your pardon a hundred and a thousand times. I will humbly do whatever penance you may appoint me; but listen to me now. You would not listen to me at first—and perhaps I was not so ready at first to acknowledge how wrong I was. I have had five long years to think of it, and I see it all. You were rightly angry, dear, and I was wrong; and if ever man repented, I have repented. Mary, Mary! take me back!

"I have been wandering about the world all this time, working and doing well enough. I can offer you something better now than the little cottage we once spoke of, though that would have been Paradise. I am leaving along with this letter, and hope to arrive in England almost as soon. I do not ask you to write—unless indeed you would, of your own sweet kindness—one word—to Chester Street? But even if you don't do that, I will go to Russell Square in

the hope of finding you. Mary! don't break my heart. You liked me once. If I knew what to say that would move you, I would make this letter miles long; but I don't know what more to say, except that I love you better than ever, and no one but you; and that I am coming back to England for you, for you only—half hopeless, only determined to try once more. Perhaps by the time you have read this I may be at your door.

"Ever and ever yours,

"GEORGE DURHAM."

"Mary!" cried some one calling me; "Mary, what is the matter? Have you bad news, my dear? Mary! Good gracious, the child will faint! Mary, don't you hear me?"

"Oh, hush, hush!" I cried, not knowing what I said. "Hark! listen! is that him at the door?"

It was not him just then; and after a little while the curtains stopped going round, and the floor and the Square and everything about grew solid and steady, and I came to myself. To myself, yes—but not to the same self as had been sitting so sadly holding my old lady's hand. What a change all in a moment! If I had not been so happy, I should have been ashamed to think that a man's letter could all in a moment make such a change in a woman's life. It is demoralizing to the last degree—it comes in the way of all the proper efforts of education and independent thought, and everything that is most necessary and elevating. If in a moment, without any virtue of yours, without any exertion of yours, you are to have your existence all altered for you—the greyness turned into brightness, the labour into ease, the poverty into wealth—how is it to be supposed that you can be trained aright? It is demoralizing—but it is very pleasant. Oh, the change in one half-hour!

But I should find it very difficult to explain to anyone how it was that I behaved like a rational creature at this moment, and did not take a bad turn and torture him and myself with objections. It was not wisdom on my part; I think it was the absolute suddenness of the whole transaction. Had he left me more time to think, or prepared me for his reception, my pride and my delicacy would have come in, and probably I should have thrown away both his happiness and my own. But fortunately he arrived that very afternoon, before the first excitement was over, and hearing that Miss Peveril was at home, and that the servants had not been forbidden to admit him, walked up stairs when I was not thinking, and took possession of me as if there had been no doubt on the subject. Mrs. Tufnell was begging me to write to him at the very moment. I had shown her my letter, and she was full of enthusiasm about it. "Be an honest girl, Mary," she was saying: "a girl should not worry a man like that: you ought to be frank and open, and send him a word to meet him when he comes home. Say you are as fond of him as he is of you——"

"No, I could not—I could not," I was beginning to say; when suddenly something overshadowed us, and a big, ringing voice said behind me, "How could she? Let us be reasonable." Reasonable! After that there was no more to say.

But if it had not all passed like a dream; if he had not been so sudden; if he had taken more time and more care—the chances are, I know, that I should have behaved like a fool, and hesitated and questioned, and been proud and been foolish. As it was, I had to be honest and happy—there was no time for anything else.

This was of course the ending of the whole matter. I have often wondered whether, had my dear old lady been burdened with the anxiety of her charge of me, she would have died. As it is, she has not died. She lives with us often now, and we with her. On my wedding day she talked of departing in peace; but so far from departing in peace, she has been stronger ever since, and has a complexion any girl of twenty might envy. When I look back to Southampton Street and to

Russell Square, where I was so unhappy, they all grow delightful and beautiful to me. It was very bad, no doubt (I suppose), while it lasted, but how I smile now at all my dolours! The delightful fact that they are over makes them pleasant. "That is how it will be, Mary," my dearest old lady says, "with all our sorrows, when we die and get safely out of them. We shall smile—I know it—and wonder how we could have made such a fuss over those momentary woes." This is a serious way of ending a story, which after all has turned out merely a love-story, a thing I never contemplated when I began to confide my early miseries to you. How miserable I was! and how it all makes me smile now!

As for Mary—the other Mary—we carried out that arrangement for her which had been proposed for me. We bought Grove House for her. I do not know what we could have done better. I never see that she is dull or weary of her life. What languors she may have she keeps from common view. Little Jack has grown a great boy, and she is very happy in him. But she does not give herself up to him, like so many mothers. "I must keep my own life," she said to me once, when I wanted her to give up, to live quietly at home and devote herself to my little brother alone. "He will go out into the world after a while," she went on; "he must, he has to make his way—and I, what should I do then? follow him or stay at home all alone?—No! I must keep my own life." And so she does. Happiness? I cannot tell if she has happiness: so many people get on without that—though some of us, I thank God humbly on my knees, have it without deserving it—without having done anything for it. Mary, I believe, never takes time to ask herself how about that. She said so once; she is not unhappy, and never will be; she has her life.

THE TWO MARYS.

BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

PART III.—GROVE HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

It is somewhat strange that, of all the many incidents in this life, those that affect the very temporary chapter of love-making, and the act, a single act in most lives, of marriage, should hold so overwhelmingly pre-eminent a place. Probably, however, the common theory that women are occupied, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, by love and its circumstances, is founded upon the fact that almost all story and song occupy themselves with these details, and that as women are indispensable to story and song, so they too are considered exclusive in their regard for that romance which all kinds of fiction have agreed to make the chief point in human life. I do not believe that it is so, nor that women are a whit more absorbed in love, properly so called, than their partners in that pretty play; but yet, so strong is the power of prejudice, that in order to interest the reader a little further in a person who much interests myself, I am obliged to leave the more important matters in her life aside, and to take up a chapter merely incidental in it. If I were to tell you how Mrs. Peveril taught her school, how she put forth all her faculties in her work, how she did her best, so far as her limitations permitted, to train up for the world a group of new women fit to play their parts in it, to have their romances too, and do their work in their turn, the gentlest reader would tire, and yawn in the midst of my best descriptions. And so, I fear, the gentle reader also would yawn, were the story told of a man's work—how he tamed lions, overcame difficulties, built towns and castles—or at least bridges and lighthouses. Men and women in real life may interest us by the narrative of real labour and pain, but in fiction they have to be placed in delicate juxtaposition, occupied with each other, not with the things outside that narrow circle which take up so much greater a share in their lives. And foolish as it is (which is the most curious thing of all), the instinct is true: for, after all, there is nothing so important in our lives as the question with whom we are to pass them, or even the lesser mysterious question, with whom we might have passed them, had things happened differently, working such change as is impossible in all we are and all we do. Think, if you had married that first love of yours far away in the remote past, in those days you laugh at softly now, when you were so miserable! It is not only your circumstances, but you, that would have been altered. You would have run into a different groove of being, learnt to think differently, and shaped your whole self in other moulds. Nothing more interesting than this question even when the decision of it is over—nothing more absorbing (for the time) when it is still to come.

So I will introduce Mrs. Peveril to you on a still autumn evening, just about the time of sunset, a period somewhat corresponding to her thoughts and circumstances. She was not old enough, it is true, to match that October afternoon, nor that soft stillness of the waning day. She was no more than July, and had not indeed even reached the full meridian and noon of life; but there was

something in her circumstances which had the effect of age. She was in that condition of calm which comes after the soul has partially recovered from a great sorrow. She was a widow, not so long widowed but that life still appeared to her a thing over and ended. Steady routine of use and wont, and the needs of ordinary existence, make an end of this hushed and stilled sensation, but sufficient time had not passed either to make the change habitual to this young woman, or to wake in her any of those obstinate new shoots of life which will spring up even out of the very grave. She was taking a solitary evening walk, up and down, up and down the long avenue before Grove House. The old brick walls shut in their two old lines of trees, some of which hung perilously over the path, while some had been stricken half-dead, palsied in a limb, stripped from all buds or leafage on one side, like old men standing pitifully waiting for their dismissal. The dark red brick of the house made a cheerful tint of colour at one end of the vista, warming the gloom. The other end to which Mrs. Peveril's eyes were turned was filled up by a more rosy glory, the wonderful colour of the western sky. The sun himself had gone out of sight—vanished, perhaps, through that celestial opening, that break of daffodil sky, half green, half blue, half saffron, which shone out of the masses of crimson vapour. Everything was very still; now and then a feeble yellow leaflet, detached, one could not tell how, wavered slowly down, as if obeying reluctantly the attraction of the earth. Sometimes these single leaflets would flutter across the solitary muser's face, or drop on her black dress, startling her with soft, impalpable touch, like the touch of a spirit. She had been trying to think—of her work—of individuals among her pupils, how she would manage them, guide them best; even of the scheme of lessons which she had arranged for them. She had been trying to do what they say women find it so hard to do, to think steadily on a certain abstract subject, avoiding personal details. This was so right a thing to do that she felt strong in it; she felt that the indulgence of the solitary walk was justified by this severely dutiful use of it. And her thoughts flowed in this admirable channel with advantage to herself as a schoolmistress and to her pupils—until she turned at the end of the avenue, turning her back upon the house, and facing the sunset. Then, I am sorry to say, she quite forgot to think any longer. She did not merely change the fashion of her thinking, but left it off altogether. She felt—she did not think; but, poor soul, was not aware of the change. She felt the rare still evening steal into her soul, flooding her very heart, as it were, with that stream of magic light and colour, of wistful hidden influence. Such sights do not quicken or encourage thought; on the contrary, they enter in and possess, filling up all the channels in which thought might flow. Poor Mary's heart and mind became all one reflection—as if she had been a lake or a stream. It gave her an inarticulate, inexpressible pang, yet stilled and calmed her with an ineffable quiet. Thus she went slowly, slowly down the avenue, which was too short, and brought her no nearer that speechless glowing of the heavens. When she turned her back upon it, which she did at length mechanically, she gave a heavy sigh, and, the reflection being gone out of her, fell into a kind of dreary thinking as she turned her face again towards the house. How that life was over; how nothing could ever change in the motionless, tedious future that lay before her, to be got through somehow; how that bearing up and holding on were all—all the hard duties that were required of her; bearing up and holding on—for what? only to be dragged down at the end into the inevitable darkness where she might as well drop now without taking the trouble to struggle. Morbid thoughts, anyone will say. But Mrs. Peveril was not morbid. The fact was, she had been full of that reflected sunshine, and the world looked cold and dull, when

suddenly she had turned herself round, and the reflection that filled her had gone out.

These were very different from the useful, edifying, and schoolmistressly thoughts which had occupied her before, though she herself was scarcely aware of the difference, or of how that difference had come about. But perhaps it was a kind of accidental justice upon her for allowing this revolution, and caprice of fate for her punishment, that made her suddenly aware of a slim, spare figure walking quickly towards the gate on the other side of the trees. Fate has its caprices, its half-humorous sudden blows, that strike us as if in jest, as well as its sledge-hammers for heavier use. The figure that caught Mrs. Peveril's eye leaving the house was that of the Italian master who gave lessons to some of her pupils; a straight, spare, threadbare man, with a long face and somewhat solemn aspect, except when he had a smile, which transfigured him. He was poor to all appearance, very gentle in his manners, kind and patient even with the dullest learners, and seeking the regard of those whom he encountered with a certain wistful, appealing glance, such as moves the heart. When she saw who it was, she turned out of her way a little to bow to him and make him a little good-night gesture with her hand. Poor M. Bonventura! She did this as she might have laid her hand on the head of a child who looked at her wistfully. He made a little pause, as though the idea of stopping to speak to her had crossed his mind, but thinking better of it, only took off his hat, with profuse foreign reverence, holding it in his hand till she had passed. The trees were between them, and the silence, and a world of unknown thought and feeling. Mrs. Peveril went back to the house with a half-smile of compassionate interest on her melancholy mouth. Poor man! he had a twilight look about him more than even that which she thought must hang about herself. He was older than she was, and, so far as she heard, quite alone. Life perhaps was over for him, too—at least and certainly it was anything but bright. With this half-consciousness of fellow-feeling in her mind, she went indoors. What a change it was to go indoors! In the parlour, which they did not call a drawing-room, a little fire was burning, two candles were lit on the table, and tea was ready. The girls were having their meal in the large dining-room, under the control of the heavy, fair German governess; and the principal of the school and her head governess had tea together without interruption. Miss Robinson already sat by the table, waiting for Mrs. Peveril to come in. The young widow only took time to throw off her shawl and take up her little two-year-old boy Jack in his clean pinafore, before she joined the other, who was a little impatient, and wondered much how any woman could linger when within reach of those fragrant fumes of tea. The room was somewhat dark, with dim walls and dim pictures, scarcely observable in the faint light, which was bright round the table, but shone little further. One of the low, deep-set windows was unshuttered, and a bit of sky, still ruddy with the waning sunset, looked straight at Mary as she came in, in her widow's cap, its long white pendants making a setting for her head, like the curtain held up behind the Madonna in an old picture—and the child in her arms with his white mass of pinafore. Every mother and child suggests more or less that sacred image. Miss Robinson, it is true, was a little fretful, waiting for her tea, and would have thought it rather improper—Ritualistic, or even Papistical—to make such a comparison; but the dim old room brightened, as still life often seems to brighten, with a dumb movement and thrill of sympathy, as the mother came in with the child.

"I saw Mr. Bonventura just going away," said Mrs. Peveril; "he was surely late to-night?"

"Yes; he came to talk to me after his lesson," Miss Robinson replied. "He makes a kind of confidant of me, poor man! He lost his only child not long ago. Foreigners are so much more

emotional than we are. He comes to me and cries, like a child."

"Poor man!"

"Yes, poor man! But it is too much to see a man cry. It breaks one's heart, and yet one feels half angry. A man should be more able to command himself."

"Poor soul!" said Mary again. She half envied the Italian his tears; and perhaps poor Miss Robinson, who had nobody either to weep or to be glad for, wholly envied him, and thus spoke somewhat sharply, more sharply than she felt.

"It is rather unreasonable of him, too, to be so heart-broken," she went on, "for he had not seen her for years and years. Her mother's people brought her up in Italy. He would not have known her, he says, had he seen her—so of course it must have been a much less heavy blow."

Would it be a much less heavy blow? Mary made no reply; but there gleamed through her mind a sudden perception of the desolateness, the blank misery, of thus losing a creature unknown—nearest and dearest, and yet unknown—never to be seen on earth, scarcely to be recognized in heaven. How dreary it was! She seemed to understand all at once the wistful, piteous look in the poor man's eyes. Next time she saw him she looked at him with eyes which were wistful too, wistful with the desire to show a sympathy which could not be put into words. Her voice softened when she spoke to him. She gave herself trouble to save him what trouble she could; to soften towards him the girls in their levity, who took the usual thoughtless advantage which girls take without knowing it, of the man who could not be harsh to their womanhood. All this Mrs. Peveril did for the Italian master (who taught French also at Grove House) out of fellow-feeling for him, and pity for that special dreariness of his sorrow which made Miss Robinson call his loss "so much less heavy" than it might have been. Mary had felt more and knew better on this point at least.

This little scene, I may say, occurred long before the second meeting and reconciliation of the two Marys; and while Mrs. Peveril was entirely separated from her step-daughter, and scarcely hoped ever to find any sympathy in her. Many of the facts have come to my knowledge since I put on record the first chapter of their history. This was the most lonely time of the elder Mary's life; but existence went on very quietly at Grove House by the help of routine. There is nothing so good as routine for getting people steadily, calmly through their lives. Now and then it may seem tedious, weary; but when the soul is travel-worn, and perhaps fallen a little lame by reason of the hardness of the way, what a good staff and crutches are those ever-returning tranquil necessities; the hour for this, the hour for that, the rule which strengthens and stills. A convent in most cases is a nest of unfledged birds, innocences that have never come in much contact with the world; but a school is the place to look for disappointed souls and weary hearts. This is not the lesson we were taught in our youth. Even now the English traveller peeps wistfully into the fresh pink-and-white face of every sister of charity, suspecting her of "a story:"—story, Lord bless you, she has none to tell—but take the first governess you find in the first well-bred, tame English school, and you will find one. I don't know if good Miss Robinson was provided with that kernel to her life. Probably she had forgotten it, outlived it, years before she began to think that having made a very comfortable little sum of money she might retire from Grove House. This idea did not occur to her until some years after the little scene I have described, which is the epilogue to my present brief little drama. By this time she had got fond of her head governess, and had indeed made a partner of her to all intents and purposes, in what all her friends felt was a very imprudent way. But when her ideas developed into that intention of giving up work altogether, the Robinsons generally in-

terposed and would not allow their cousin (she had no nearer relations) to be so weak and unbusinesslike as to give up the school to Mrs. Peveril, which was what she had thought of, without asking anything for the goodwill, or even exacting a rigid account of the fixtures. Her elder cousin Robinson was a solicitor, and declared such a bargain preposterous. It would be bad for the young woman herself, he said. It would give her false ideas of the value of money, and no doubt lead to her bankruptcy sooner or later. Poor Miss Robinson, who was not strong-minded, had to give in to these representations; and it was accordingly decided that if Mary could pay, Mary should succeed her; but that if Mrs. Peveril could not manage to raise the sum which Mr. Robinson thought necessary for the goodwill, lease, and fixtures of that long-established and most respectable seminary for young ladies, it must be sold to the highest bidder. It is not necessary to enter into the steps by which this was accomplished, nor the way in which Mrs. Peveril's friends came forward, "nobly" Mr. Robinson said; for in the meantime something else occurred which was interesting to all parties concerned, and promised for some time a conclusion of a different kind.

When this question was first opened, Mrs. Peveril was walking one evening as she was wont, in the same avenue at the same hour, and in circumstances very similar to those we have already described. The only difference was that the evening was in spring instead of autumn, and consequently colder, less genial, and less sad. The trees were budding instead of dropping their leaves, and though the sunset was warm and gorgeous as on the previous evening, it did not produce quite the same tranquillizing effect. The prick of the rising life-blood in all nature stirs humanity too with a stimulus which is sometimes irritating, always exciting. Even Mrs. Peveril felt this in the more than cloistered quiet which had fallen upon her. It seemed to whisper of change, to suggest something new, to dissent from that settled conviction which she entertained and cherished, that life was over for her. Youth is soon over, we all say, and yet how persistent it is! Mary did her best to think herself and believe herself middle-aged; but she could not help feeling young. Can anyone help it? Do we feel old at seventy, I wonder? She was not much over thirty, and, notwithstanding her conviction to the contrary, she felt younger than she had done at sixteen, which, by the way, is sometimes a very elderly age.

And just as he had done on that other evening three years before, Mr. Bonventura's spare, straight figure appeared on the other side of the trees just as Mary turned her face towards the house which she had been wondering and calculating about, whether it would ever be hers. She was very anxious in reality about this question. It made all the difference to her between a life which was clear before her, settled and permanent, and the inevitable change and the uncertain future upon which she would be driven if anyone else got Grove House. Her thoughts were full of it, and she was not so careful perhaps to give the Italian that gracious and gentle greeting which had become gradually to him an event to be looked forward to, though it was but a smile and a wave of the hand. Personal pre-occupation comes sadly in the way of our thoughtfulness for others. Perhaps Mr. Bonventura was pre-occupied too. He stopped short and pondered a moment, always on the other side of the trees, and then he seemed to take a sudden resolution. As Mary advanced slowly towards him, he entered within the line of the avenue and went to meet her. He was one of the few Italians who carry out our conventional notion of what an Italian ought to be. He had a long face, pensive and worn, with blue eyes looking mildly out over its sallow cheeks, and heavy eyelids which drooped when he was tranquil; a melancholy-visaged man, very spare, not saying much so far as

Grove House knew, but always accompanying the little he did say with emphatic gestures. He came up to her, taking his hat off, holding it elevated from his head, as only foreigners do, with that more subtle courtesy which is seldom understood by Englishmen. "Madame Pevereel," he said to her, suddenly, "you are thinking—you have something on your mind?"

"Put on your hat, Mr. Bonventura," said Mary, with a smile.

"'Tis quite the same," he said, holding it as before—"you will be angry, I fear, but if Madame Pevereel would think of me as a very old friend—a verr' old friend—not speaking much, nevare," he went on with an insinuating, beseeching sort of smile—"for why, it was not necessary; but feeling—ah, feeling—as if Madame's little salute each evening was worth all the day."

"Indeed you have always been very kind—very good to me," said Mary, somewhat confused, she could not tell how, by his eye.

"No, no, no, no," he said, firing off the sharp, short monosyllable with little shrugs of his shoulders and rapid gestures of his hand. "Men are not good to angels—'tis t'other way, t'other way." Then divining by the confusion on Mary's face that she was not used to this sort of talk, he paused with a momentary laugh. "I laugh not because I am in fun," he said, "but because Madame Pevereel is startled that I speak as men of my country speak. We are plain, we say the words that come. We do not make so many compliments as an Englishman. When a lady is like an angel to us, we use the word plain. It is a pretty word—we employ it *senza complimenti*—do you understand?"

"Indeed we think you make more compliments than Englishmen, Signor Bonventura," said Mrs. Peveril, half-ashamed of her school-girl bashfulness, and venturing upon a smile. ("It is only their way," she said to herself.)

"Ah, that is because you will not understand us," said the Italian, with animation. Then he sank into his usually quiet tone. "If I am permitted to walk a little with Madame Pevereel," he continued, "there is something—very serious—which I would have to say."

"Surely," said Mary, quaking a little, she could not tell why—"but in that case you must put on your hat." The situation felt somehow *tendue*, as the French say. She was glad to be able to make such an insignificant stipulation. Bonventura bowed low and obeyed her. When a man asks leave to say something serious to a woman—especially after he has called her an angel—the situation is apt to become *très tendue*. Mary quaked, though when she took herself to task there seemed no reason why.

"Madame will have patience with me if I make a little account of myself, a little retrospect," he said (which made Mary more alarmed than ever), "in few, verr' few words. I am married early in life. I am become widow. I am a little shaken up, mixed, as you call it, in the politique—and it becomes necessary for me to leave my country. That is a long, long time ago. There are many years that I might have been back in Italy; but Madame does not need to be told that one's heart becomes dulled, that one no longer cares. I am like this. I desire no more Italy—nor anything. So much for me. But I have gathered up a little—money—a little money—while I have been about the world. Madame is in thought of buying this school, the trees, and many things that I need not name. I have no one to keep my money for. Will Madame Pevereel be kind, very kind, to the humblest of her servants, and use this money, seeing I have no one to be made happy by it—no one; and it is but a plague and a burden to me?"

"Mr. Bonventura! your money!" cried Mary, in consternation. Her first thought was of terror, her second a very flood of gratitude; but it was the first which appeared first. And there mingled in it a certain sharp pang of shame because she had supposed (and trembled) that his thoughts had taken a very different turn.

"Ah, Madame Pevereel! and why not my money?" he said, with a gentle patience which was strangely unlike the situation. "It might be of use—and there is no one to be made better by it. Not me—what is it to me? This would be to give me one pleasure—verr' great, verr' sweet—still in my life. It is there, the money; why not use it—why not use it? It is good money—honest, not gained by wickedness. Madame gives me more, much more, every time she gives me that little wave of the hand. For what else do I live?" cried the Italian, his large, pensive, heavy eyes suddenly lighting up. Mary trembled as she caught the full look of those eyes, which were almost always half veiled. He could open them still, he could put such glowing secret fire into them! She went back a step, afraid—yet strangely moved. She said to herself next moment that for her, another man's wife (though she was a widow), to feel that strange consciousness of restrained passion, that thrill half of fear, half of pride, of something almost like gratification, was wicked; and so perhaps it would have been had it not been so simply involuntary. Any sudden encounter with emotion strong enough to be called passion is startling, bewildering. It made her heart beat loud and fast, though there were no words of plainer import used, and no declaration made.

"What can I say to thank you?" she began, faltering, confused. "What can I say to show you how I feel—how deeply I feel—your kindness?"

"No, no, no," he cried again, sharply, shaking his head and making a host of deprecatory gestures with his hands, which talked as much as his lips. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no! That must not say itself. It is quite simple. To do me a pleasure, a service, you will take this little useless money—you will make me very happy; and the place will be yours—and the trees you love—and the garden for littel Chaque. And I—I will still see you, you will still wave to me your hand? Pardon me, it is that I think of most. Otherwise, how should I live?" he said, looking at her again with his eyes full of tears. An Englishman would have been ashamed of the tears; but the Italian was not ashamed.

"Mr. Bonventura!" cried Mary, driven to her wits' end, what with a sense that some conclusion must be put to this, and the impossibility of contending against the swell of sudden emotion, pity, and gratitude, which took away from her all power of saying No. He put up his hand eagerly, with an air of fright—

"No, not to-night," he said; "not any answer to-night. To-morrow—some other time. Madame will think it over. I wait—I attend. I am always ready. It is but to send a word at midnight, at noon, any hour. I am always there. Now, for this time, good-night."

He took her hand and kissed it, after the manner of his nation, uncovering his head. By this he did not mean half so much as Mary, trembling, thought he did. He left her standing there dismayed, excited, feeling the world go round and round with her, and hurried off into the outside world and the waning sunset. After a while, Mary, still trembling, feeling her head burn and her heart beat, went into the still, feminine house, disturbed by no such tempests. Had a volcano burst by the peaceful door, it would scarcely have appeared more strange.

CHAPTER II.

"You have seen Monsieur?" said Miss Robinson, coming forward with an eager look of curiosity, and taking Mrs. Peveril's hands as if she expected to be told something. The Italian taught French at Grove House as well as his own language, and therefore was very generally known by this name. "I have been watching you walking up and down. He has spoken to you——"

"Yes," said Mary, detaching her hands. Her friend's look, and the excitement of curiosity and suspicion about her, had an embarrassing effect upon Mrs. Peveril. She drew a chair hastily

to the table, and sat down and pulled her work-basket towards her. "Yes, he is very kind—far too kind," she said, as soon as she had the excuse of her work to fix her eyes upon. "He wants me to settle about Grove House—with his money. How good, how kind he is! He would not take a denial. Fancy his money, poor soul—all his savings! He wanted me (of course it is entirely out of the question) to take it all."

"His money—only his money?" said Miss Robinson, confounded.

"And surely enough too," said Mary, with a nervous little laugh.

There was a pause; and though this indeed had been all poor Mr. Bonventura had said, it would be vain to deny that Mrs. Peveril knew exactly what Miss Robinson was going to say, and what the Italian had really meant, as well as if it had been put into the plainest words—perhaps better. Miss Robinson made a pause, as most things do—storms and streams in flood and other excited forces of nature—before the outburst. Then—

"Mrs. Peveril!" she cried. "Mary! his money! Are you deaf? are you blind? are you stupid? Good gracious, goodness gracious, is that all you think of? You, a woman that has been married, and don't see what this poor soul must mean?"

Mrs. Peveril did not raise her head. She sat sewing, making a few rapid, large stitches of which any school-child might have been ashamed. She pricked her fingers with her needle, and the colour flushed up hotly into her cheeks. It was one great sign of guilt that she did not attempt to make any reply. And Miss Robinson continued:—

"I did think you were above that affectation! I thought you were one that would say what you would do, and not torment a man. Take him or leave him; but let it be one thing or another—that I did think."

Here Mary cleared her throat softly, and the other paused. Mrs. Peveril went on sewing, but she spoke in a voice so meek that she might have been the smallest school-girl in the house.

"How can I know what any man means except by what he says? Mr. Bonventura spoke to me of his money. I never heard of such kindness. That was all he said—to me."

"That was not all he said—to me," said Miss Robinson, calming down; "if there had been any need to say it; if I had not seen months ago—years ago—that the sight of you was all his pleasure in life. He did not tell you that, perhaps," said the schoolmistress, with sudden, sharp irony, turning upon her victim. "You did not know?"

"He said—something of the kind," said Mrs. Peveril, demurely; "but then he is full of compliments, like every foreigner." Then she threw away her work, and went up to her indignant and excited friend. "What do you want me to do?" she said, taking hold of her arm and leaning upon her. "I cannot—marry the man—if that is what you mean."

"Why can't you?"

"Oh!" cried Mary, with a great sudden outburst of the tears which all this time had been lying so near the surface, "because I cannot! I know all you will say. I know he is good, very good. I know his life is dreary. I know—everything you can tell me. If it was another than me, I should say with you—Yes, she ought. But I cannot—cannot! Don't ask me any more."

"Sit down," said Miss Robinson, kissing her, "and I will give you a cup of tea. You are worried and tired. You have had a hard day. A cup of tea will do you all the good in the world."

This was very politic as well as kind, and in her heart Miss Robinson felt hopeful. "When a young woman produces her very last argument first of all," she said afterwards, "don't you see she takes the force out of all the others, and has nothing to fall back upon? I am never alarmed when I see that;" and she bustled round to the tea-table, and poured out some tea for Mrs. Peveril, and made her drink it, coaxing and soothing her. "You are tired, poor dear," said the designing woman, "and anxious and full of cares one way and

another. Poor Mary! There is plenty of time. I will not allow any hurry, and it will come all right. You shall see—it will come all right."

The tea was a cordial, and refreshed Mary, and the sympathy helped her. She felt to her very heart that sense of moral backing up which is the best and last consolation in life. Her agitation calmed down. She was not a weak woman, nor one to be thrown off her balance by such an incident; but yet, when a woman has gone entirely back into the quiet of feminine life, withdrawn from contact even with the other half of the creation, an adventure of this kind tells more upon her than if she were in the full tide of ordinary life. A subtle sense that something of the kind was about breathed all through the maiden household, fluttering the dovecots. The presence of that mysterious sentiment which was so unknown, so much dreamt of, so deliciously strange and novel, thrilled through every room, no one could tell how; and Mrs. Peveril felt it as she could not have felt anything of the kind outside this strict enclosure. It excited her, with a mixture of pain and startled pride and something like pleasure. Yes, there was a certain gratification underneath. It was hard upon the man that he should love her and gain nothing by it; but instinctively there mingled in the woman's mind, among a host of other feelings, a thrill of involuntary and half-guilty pleasure. It was detestable—it was cruel—it was wicked—to be half pleased, half amused, because of the existence in another of feelings which could not but bring sharp pain with them. But, alas! so it was. I do not justify this atrocious sentiment —but so it was.

Miss Robinson sat down quietly by the tea-tray as if nothing particular remained to be discussed. This was mere guile and artfulness, for her heart was beating almost as loudly as if she had been herself the principal in this novel incident. And these designing ways were rewarded as they so often are. The tranquillity soothed the victim. She began to unfold herself—to open her mind.

"Have I been wearing my heart upon my sleeve?" she said. "You know how anxious I have been—but have I been showing it? To stay here is all I wish for—but if I have been going about with a pitiful face, calling for everybody's sympathy——"

"No, dear, no," said Miss Robinson; "not everybody's. Poor Monsieur! he deserves better of you than to be ranked with everybody—so full of feeling as he is, so sympathetic."

"I did not mean to make little of him," said Mary; "he is too good. I cannot think what could have put this into his head. It is so strange to offer —money."

"'Tis very strange indeed," said Miss Robinson, with a little snort; "so strange that your nearest relations will let you die first—in most cases."

Mary looked up, startled by the tone. Excitement was beginning to get the upper hand of the usually tranquil schoolmistress; but at this glance she recovered her self-control.

"You must not be suspicious of me, dear, as if I were taking his part—but I have long known what put this into his head. I told you he made a sort of confidant of me. Poor man, perhaps he thought I was of more use to him than I ever ventured to try to be. Foreigners have such strange notions. They think, instead of rushing first-hand to speak to a woman, that it does them good to speak to her friends. There is something to be said for it, though it is not our way. After all," said the good woman, driven by mere zeal of partisanship to a wild liberality which in her sober senses she was far from feeling,—"after all, I don't see why a thing should be perfect because it is our English way."

Mary made no direct answer. She murmured something, but it was not audible, and Miss Robinson continued. "Right or wrong, he has talked a great deal to me. I have heard more poetry lately than I have done before in all the course of my existence. I couldn't repeat all he has said. I should feel shy of saying it—and so would you—but he is just mad about you, Mary. There!

I don't know anything else to say. A second marriage ought to be a tame sort of an affair, but this would not be tame if you would have him. He is oldish, too," said Miss Robinson, with that quaint, half-humorous, half-indignant sense of comparison which so often strikes a woman,—"not much younger than myself, I suppose. Goodness gracious! what would anybody say if I were to fall in love at my age?"

Here Mrs. Peveril, struck, too, by the ludicrousness of the suggestion, was tempted to a nervous laugh. "You see how impossible it is," she said.

"Not impossible at all, my dear. Men are different from us. I don't say myself, Mary, that it would be at all unpleasant if there was some nice, comfortable, oldish man waiting to set up house with me. It is not a thing I would say if we were not all alone, and if I did not know you well. But I shall be very dull by myself when I leave Grove House and you. And if there was some nice, quiet man—not making any fuss of love, you know, or nonsense, but just wanting a good-natured companion, and to be taken care of—I shall want that, too—I don't see why there might not be old marriages like that, just for company. So, you see, I understand poor Monsieur in a way. To be sure, if I were to fall in love, it would be laughable—but not in his case. And, Mary, you should think what a difference you would make in his life. Think of him going home to his dreary little room, all alone; no one to make things look bright for him or give him a welcome. We women are never so bad as a man for that. We can make a place look like home; but they have no notion of cheating themselves with a look of comfort. Think of the dark room with boots and books all higgledy-piggledy, nothing bright, nothing nice—and that poor man going in and shutting himself up all of a bright afternoon, and never caring to budge. Mary, what a change you would make—you and the child. What is it? Good gracious! how you do startle me! What is the matter? Have you forgotten something?"

For Mary had given a sudden cry, and starting to her feet had rushed out of the room. Had she forgotten something? Yes—for the first time in his life, she had forgotten Jack. When this was brought home to her, she started guilty from the table. Here was an evidence of the more than folly, the guilt of this discussion. It had made her forget her boy.

CHAPTER III.

Not much more was said that evening, and yet a good deal of food for thought was furnished to Mrs. Peveril, who lay awake all night thinking over the whole matter till her head ached. Miss Robinson was a violent partisan, but she was also learned in woman's wiles, and knew how to be pertinacious skilfully. She threw in a word here and there which told—not too much—rather a suggestion, pregnant and more full of meaning than a thousand arguments. One of these seeds of thought she threw into her friend's mind the last thing when they separated, and she did not neglect at breakfast to foster the seedling. On one side there was Grove House and a settled home—a place to bring Jack up in, to be always home to him; a reasonable revenue, which might increase every year; a position of some influence, as much as a woman can in ordinary cases hope to attain; work enough to keep her employed, but not too much; and, last of all, indicated in the sketch rather than insisted upon, a good, very good, honourable man, who would stand by her and advise her, and teach French and Italian, as it were, for nothing. This last particular, by no means the least upon which Miss Robinson insisted, gave a touch of humour which relieved the very serious reality of the rest. Probably it saved Mary from falling ill of it, by leaving one safety valve for a laugh, though the laugh was of a very unsteady kind. How lessons got on that morning I cannot say; but it was after twelve, and the girls safely sent out for their walk, and the house silent; and Mary, seated at a table in a little

room specially appropriated to her—a small bright room on the ground-floor, looking out upon a green corner of the garden, where there shone already a bouquet of crocuses—was trying to reduce her agitated thoughts to something like calmness, when the door was suddenly opened, and—thrust in apparently by someone behind, who disappeared as he entered—Mr. Bonventura, with his large eyes fully open and shining, with an unusual colour and animation in his face, suddenly came in. He was shy by nature, and in such circumstances an Englishman would probably have been more than shy. But emotion gave that courage to the Italian which it generally takes away from our dear countrymen. He came up to Mary's side holding out his hand, smiling upon her with that smile which lighted up his whole face. He was a man transfigured—light shining out of him, with the new hope which had recalled him to life. This was the natural man arrayed in all his advantages as God intended him to be. How seldom are we permitted so to appear to the eyes of others! To Mary he seemed another man, something different. He was changed, she felt, and to her it appeared that he was changed out of, not into, his real self.

"You have heard what I mean—what I feel," he said, taking her hand—his very language seeming (or perhaps it was Mary's agitation which had this effect) elevated out of its usual imperfections. "I could say much, but I fear to frighten you. Love—we will not speak of that—but if, if—then you should feel what it was! No—I do not speak of that——"

"Mr. Bonventura," cried Mary, "listen to me. I have no love to give anyone—none—that is impossible."

"So—so," said the Italian, gently; "it is understood. We say nothing of love. There would be one to stand between you and the world. That is what I say—one to stand between you and the world. A man, even if he be not much, can do that. One, perhaps, to lean upon a little when you are weary. Ah! But let us cease to speak of the uses of me—not for what could be done by me, did you wake me back to life. Yes, you have called me back to life. Why? Because you love to be good. You love—not me—but to be good. Here is a way to be good—more good than tongue can say; to make a man—what shall I say?—not happy, 'tis too small—happy, yes! as the saints are in heaven. To take me would be to do this; but I am not exacting," he said, his whole face melting with a child's pleading, insinuating smile, with an exquisite humbleness which was half sweet, half bitter. "I am not exacting. I will not force *me* everywhere to trouble you. I would ask not too much. So little as you will do, 'twill make me—ah, more than happy. Will not that be possible? I respect too much the past to ask more."

"This is not enough," said Mary, looking up at him with eyes which were dazzled by his looks and saw but dimly. "Mr. Bonventura, you are too good. This is not enough, and ought not to be enough. No, no, you would not be happy; you would feel all that was wanting, and every day you would feel it more. You should have nothing, or more than this."

"If I cannot have more, I should be content with this," he said.

Mary covered her face with her hands. Her heart seemed to be grasped in some iron hold which wrung it so that blood seemed to come instead of tears. Oh, it was cruel to press her so! What could she say? She could be kind to him, esteem him, make (and that was a temptation) his life happier; but for herself, what would she do? It seemed to her that she was forced into this step—that all at once her life had turned into discord, and was torn out of all natural harmony. She looked up at him humbly, beseeching him.

"Why must I marry you?" she said. "I will be your friend. You might even, perhaps—live here—I don't know. We might be companions, dear friends. What can be better than that? Oh, be content with that! The other would be false, but this would be true."

"It could not be," he said, with the tears coming into his eyes. "You like me so little, then? Ah, pardon, pardon! I will go away."

And therewith the light went out in his face, went out as if you had blown out a candle. It was the same man, but no longer as God meant him to be. His lip quivered as the light went out. He took Mary's hand and held it between both of his, with his head bent down as if to kiss it, and repeated drearily, "I will go away."

"Oh, no, no; do not go!" she cried. The change in his face struck her like a sudden sharp blow. Could not she put up with a little to save a man from this—so lonely a man, so good a man? "Don't go—rather take a little time—and think. I might—try—again."

She knew she was committing herself, but what could she do? If he had held out a little longer, she would have consented to everything; but he was too ready to accept the crumb of comfort. And with this he went away, leaving her worn out, guilty, miserable—guilty to everybody: to her husband who was in his grave, to her child, to this man even whom she had weakly held on. To redouble the final blow, Miss Robinson came rushing to her while she sat thus wretched, holding her head in her hands.

"Oh, what a fright I have been in!" cried that kind woman; "I have been at the door—I don't deny it. Unfortunately I could not hear; but oh, when I thought by the sound of his voice that you were sending him away, I thought I should have died. The only nice foreign master I ever had about the place! They are not nice as a rule; they give you a great deal of trouble. You are always frightened for them with the girls. But Mr. Bonventura has always been so good; and to have your French and Italian, as it were, my dear, within yourself——"

"Oh, don't make me laugh," cried poor Mary, "when I feel as if I should die!"

"Die—why should you die? No, live, Mary, to be happy, and to make him happy. I daresay it will be hard at first to get into the way of it. It must be with a strange man. But people get accustomed to anything. And, Mary, such an excellent man, and such an advantage for the school; and then, your boy. How is a woman like you, a young woman without experience, to bring up a boy? I should not say a word if Jack was a girl; but a boy wants a man to control him. He wants a strong hand over him——"

Mary sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing through her tears, her cheeks burning. "A man to control him—a strong hand over him!" she cried loudly, with a sort of scream, and rushed to her own room and barricaded herself there; and would speak to no one. She flew to the window with an impulse which I cannot explain, as soon as she had locked her door to defend herself from intrusion. It looked out upon the front of the house, where Jack was visible on the gravel path with Mr. Bonventura. The Italian had found that small personage in mischief of some kind, and was leading him back to the house. To have done it more tenderly, more gently, would have been impossible; for besides the fact that this was Mary's child, the good man was foolishly tender to all children, as is the wont of his race. But Jack did not appreciate his goodness. The child hung back, crying loudly, kicking, screaming, and struggling. "I won't go; I won't go!" he cried. The kind Italian answered nothing, but made him go, leading him in. There is no telling what he saved the little rebel from—perhaps from being run over, or making some other such sacrifice of life and limb as British children delight in. Mr. Bonventura did it with a heart swelling with kindness and pleasure in the thought that he was thus doing something for Mary. Poor, unconscious, good man! without knowing it, he was sealing his fate.

All that day Miss Robinson went about wringing her hands and telling everybody that Mrs. Peveril was ill. She had nearly committed herself, and lost a new pupil to the establishment,

by injudicious terror exhibited to a lady who came to inquire into terms, &c. "She was as well as I am this morning," poor Miss Robinson cried, "and now quite stricken down. And I feel, oh, I can't tell how, as if it must have been my fault, exposing her——"

"Oh, good heavens! if it is anything catching," cried the lady, rising. "Lucy, Lucy, come here, my darling!"

Miss Robinson came to her senses as sharply as if she had received a douche in her face. "Oh dear, oh dear, what can I have said to give you such an impression? It is—toothache—only toothache," she said, seizing upon the first harmless ill she could think of. And, fortunately, the lady laughed and sat down again, and the new pupil was secured.

Mrs. Peveril wrote two notes from the solitude of her chamber that day—one to Mr. Bonventura, the contents of which never transpired. But the consequence was that he sent in his resignation as French and Italian teacher at Grove House that evening, and started (the maids, who heard it from the postman, informed Miss Robinson) for the Continent next day. The second was to Miss Robinson herself, informing her that the writer was ready to look out for another situation as a governess, if Grove House was bought by anyone else; but she could not, would not pay *that* price for it. And Mrs. Peveril remained in her room all day shut up with Jack, who, the reader may be glad to know, was exceptionally naughty, and at last had to be whipped and sent to bed.

This was how this little episode ended—as far as such things ever end. It lived for years and years, a painful recollection set round with many compunctions, in Mrs. Peveril's mind; and no doubt it lived in the other, who suffered still more by it. To this day it is a lasting regret to good Miss Robinson; but other agencies came in, as has been already chronicled, securing the school and the fixtures, and everything thereto appertaining, to Mrs. Peveril. There has never been a teacher of languages so entirely trustworthy in Grove House; but then it must be remembered that Mrs. Peveril herself possessed the French language perfectly, "acquired abroad."

THE TWO MARYS.

BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

PART LAST.—GROVE HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

Miss Robinson had established her Young Ladies' Seminary at Grove House twenty years before the date of this history. It had been her own creation, aided by no previous foundation, and she was naturally proud of it. She had been a woman of thirty, somewhat beaten about by winds and waves of evil fortune, when she resolved upon making this effort for herself. There is a great deal to be said about the position of governesses on both sides of the question. They are often badly treated, and they often treat their employers badly. It is dismal to live in the midst of a lively, happy household with no share in its life; and, on the other hand, it is hard upon the household to have a perpetual critic and spectator thrust into their privacy. Miss Robinson had no prospect in life from the very beginning of her career but to occupy this position. She had no money, no beauty, no particular skill in adapting herself to the caprices of others. In her early days she had been like other young women, desirous of a little personal enjoyment, attention, and admiration, as most people are, and had not learned the faculty of self-sacrifice more quickly than most people do. But she had a certain amount of practical sense which does not fall to every young woman's lot; and by the time she came to be thirty, nature made a stand in her and confronted the difficulties of circumstance. She had been in at least half-a-dozen situations during the past ten years. Some of them she did not like, and in some she was not liked. One lady thought her too independent in her opinions for a governess; and another found her too much disposed to stand on her dignity, and disinclined to make herself generally useful. At the end of her sixth place she retired to country lodgings in the house of a woman whom she had known all her life, and thought the matter over. She was over thirty—she was not handsome; she had got over her romance, a chapter which it is unnecessary here to enter upon. She had a little money in the bank; she had nobody to consult, unless indeed it was certain cousins who had never done anything for her, and whom she kept up friendly relations with only that she might not be entirely alone in the world. She felt as much like a man, having her fate in her own hands, as a woman can ever feel; and stimulated by certain pricks of supposed injustice, slight, and contumely, she made up her mind to act for herself. A great many women are disgusted and angered by the world's treatment of them, who never put it on paper, nor claim "rights" which they don't care for; and for this once in her life the ordinary insolence of human contempt for her thirty years of maiden life and for her want of beauty stung this homely woman, not into outcry and lament, but into independence and the courage of acting for herself. Great was the shame and woe of the cousin Robinsons, who had slurred over the fact that their orphan relative was a governess "in the best families," when it became known that she was living independently in lodgings of her own, not very far from them, and setting up a

small school. Such a proceeding was not to be hid. When they rushed to her in a body to point out that by so doing she was infringing their respectability and making it evident to the world that a woman of their kith and kin had to live by her own exertions, she turned an utterly deaf ear to their remonstrances. When they came abjectly to her with offers of this and that excellent situation which had been heard of, she was equally obdurate. "I am determined to have a house of my own," she answered to them. House of her own! What could she want with a house, a solitary woman, neither young nor good-looking, whose manifest duty it was to be contented with the fate which Providence had allotted to her?

But Miss Robinson would not see her duty in this way. She persevered with her little school; she took even tradesmen's daughters, abandoned and impenitent creature! and gradually fought and struggled her way into independence. The second step is always a great deal easier to take than the first; but still she had a severe struggle after she attained to the honour of Grove House and to "a higher class" of pupils. If I were to tell you how comically her mind veered round from the governess point of view to the point of view held by an employer of governesses, and how in her turn she objected to independence of opinions and the absence of that desire to make themselves generally useful which is so sadly conspicuous in some young women, I should take up too much space in a narrative which is not the history of Miss Robinson, but of Mary Peveril. Sometimes, however, Miss Robinson had herself a half-annoyed, half-humorous consciousness of this difference. The aspect of affairs had changed for her, as it does for all who pass from obedience to rule, and fall naturally into something of those governing ways which once seemed so oppressive to them. She had trouble, too, with her masters, and sometimes with her pupils, into which I need not enter, and found no bed of roses in the old house, which was always wanting repairs, and made up for the cheapness of its rent by imposing upon her a perpetual conflict with bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, glaziers, and other members of the reigning classes who have our comfort in their hands. Sometimes Miss Robinson would be very mournful over all these miseries, and declare that it was not worth anyone's while to keep a school, and that no one who had not experienced it could tell what the Principal of such an establishment had to go through before ever she entered the schoolroom, where the governesses were often perverse, and the masters unmanageable, and the pupils disobedient. She led the life of a slave, she would sometimes say. But nevertheless she grew stout and prospered, and every year had a richer black silk for her best, and a better balance at her banker's, and mounted upwards from Valenciennes lace to a suit of old point for great occasions, an advance of which the gentle reader will see the immense and weighty meaning. When she came to be the highest ratepayer in the parish, by dint of additions built to Grove House to accommodate the increasing number of pupils, and when it came to be considered an honour and a privilege to get a girl into that establishment, the Robinsons all re-discovered their cousin's existence, and went to see her, and made much of her. This happened some time after Mrs. Peveril became her assistant. You may think perhaps that Miss Robinson should have rejected these interested overtures from her own family, and remembered more clearly of their neglect of her than their blood relationship. But there is a mellowing effect in prosperity which often takes the sting out of old unkindnesses. When you have surmounted the buffetings of Fate, you are apt to smile at the little efforts which were made to keep you down, with a sense of personal superiority to them which is very sweet, and promotes magnanimity. "They thought once that I was going to disgrace them all," Miss Robinson said with a hearty laugh. She bore no malice; for Time had proved her delightfully in the right, and them as foolishly in the wrong.

And as has been seen, Miss Robinson soon became the tried friend as well as benefactor of Mary Peveril. Women are sometimes hard upon each other, and this is a phase of feminine character which the world is fond of dwelling on and making merry over. But there never was a woman yet involved in any honest struggle with the world who had not women for her warmest partisans and supporters. Miss Robinson took Mary and her baby into her heart before they had been in her house six months, and since then had been the best friend of the one and the worshipper of the other, notwithstanding all the opposition to her plans, both scholastic and otherwise, which Mrs. Peveril exhibited, and all the naughtiness of Jack, who presumed much upon the adoration offered to him, and was as mischievous a little Turk as ever was adored by womankind. I cannot quite explain how it was that, having thus collected as it were a family round her, and being still in perfect health and vigour, though over fifty-five, Miss Robinson should have yielded to the representations of her relations and made up her mind to retire, selling the lease and goodwill of Grove House. The motives of the relations are more simple. Not to say that it was more "respectable" for a cousin of theirs to "live on her means" in a district where Grove House might be ignored, it was much safer for the persons who intended to be her heirs to have those means realized and consolidated than to have them all invested in the school which the Robinsons thought their cousin might be so "worked upon" as to allow to fall into the hands of "that Mrs. Peveril." They made a great point accordingly of her retirement. "You have been working all your life," said a married Robinson whose name was now Wentworth Smith, "nobly, my dear Jane. I say nobly, and I mean it. When I look round upon this house, I see what a great work you have done, and feel proud of you. But now that you have attained a competence, you ought to enjoy it. You are comparatively young still, and may look forward to many years of comfort——"

"I am fifty-six," said Miss Robinson, "but I am as well as ever I was in my life, thank God, and as fit for work."

"Yes; but remember all the worries you are subjected to—worries which would wear anyone out. Have you not just told us how Mrs. Peveril, whom you are so fond of, has frightened away your best master, that excellent Monsieur Bonventura, who was such a help and a comfort to you? You don't think how much you will miss his advice."

"His advice!" cried Miss Robinson: "bless your heart! you don't think I ever thought of going to Monsieur for advice! Poor dear man, he came to me for that."

"But he was always a man that you could rely upon," said Mrs. Wentworth Smith. "Even you, though you have shown what a female is capable of, can never get along without some man to back you up."

"She will never want that, Ellen, as long as my husband lives," said the wife of Mr. Robinson the solicitor, who was brother to the previous speaker.

"I got on for a great many years, my dears," said Miss Robinson with spirit, "without ever seeing a man except at church. And though Percival is very kind, I don't really see what need there is to trouble him. Everything, I am happy to say, goes on like clockwork in my house."

"You have got it into such a state of perfection," said Mr. Percival Robinson, coming in just as she made this observation; "and a capital thing too, since you want to dispose of it. It should bring you in a pretty penny, Jane. I've been over all the offices, and they are first-rate—does you credit, the whole place. I'd advertise it well, and not be in too great a hurry to accept the first offer."

"You see, Percival," said Miss Robinson, impressed in spite of herself by the interposition of "a man" and the decided tone in which he spoke—(for does it not stand to reason that a man must understand best about a matter of business, whether he has any special understanding of the special subject or not?)—"you see, I should like to

give Mrs. Peveril an advantage if her friends could gather up anything like the money required. It is since she has been with me that the school has increased so much. You can't think how she has helped it on. She has such charming manners, all the parents are enchanted with her—and then, besides the very highest English, she has the advantage of speaking French like a native. I really think that it is my duty to give her an advantage—besides that it is my wish——"

"My dear Jane, sentimental motives have nothing to do with business," said Mr. Robinson, gloomily. "That is always the way with you ladies—you go off into a line of action that is perfectly unbusinesslike. If Mrs. Peveril has a solicitor, let him come and talk to me about it. I can negotiate with a man who knows what he is talking about; but the moment you bring in feelings and likings and all that stuff——"

"Hush, Percival! Of course it is quite natural that dear Jane should wish to be kind to a person who she thinks has been of use to her," said his wife; "but I think you are a great deal too humble about your own merits, and think too much of Mrs. Peveril: it is surely your first duty, Jane, not to be unjust to yourself."

"Oh, I shall have enough—for a single woman—anyhow," said Miss Robinson; "and I have nobody to come after me—which simplifies my duty to myself very much."

Miss Robinson's relations looked at each other with conscious gloom. Their impression was that she had only too many to come after her. Four Wentworth Smiths and six Percival Robinsons, not to speak of the descendants of the other brothers and sisters. "Dear Jane," said Mrs. Wentworth Smith with great sweetness, "it seems almost unkind of you to say that. If Providence has not seen fit to give you a family of your own, it is nobody's fault. You did not marry like the rest of us——"

"I might have married if I had liked," said Miss Robinson with a flush upon her sober countenance—for there had been in fact certain love-passages between her and the solicitor, upon whose face her jealous eyes detected a conscious smile. "I might have married both when I was young and since I have been old; and though it is nobody's fault, that does not alter the matter. I have nobody to come after me—and therefore, as I tell you, I mean to please myself."

"Which you have an excellent good right to do," said Mrs. Percival Robinson, taking the place of peace-maker. And when the conversation veered back again into details, the schoolmistress was once more cowed by the scorn of the "man," who laughed at the idea of bringing sentimental notions into a matter of business. She took her relations all over the house—for she had for some time given up personal instruction in the schoolroom, confining herself to general supervision—and showed them all her feather beds, and the heaps of linen, of which she was truly proud. "I began with three girls," she said with a glow of natural pride, "and now I have twenty-five, and plenty of good bedding for them all, and table-linen for twice the number. I built these new rooms three years ago. They are the best rooms in the house, though some of the young ladies prefer the old-fashioned ones. And this is Mrs. Peveril's little *appartement*, as she always calls it in her pretty French way," said the good woman, who was fond of Mary's French "acquired abroad." Mrs. Peveril had two rooms, one opening into the other, and had indulged herself in some pretty articles of furniture, and a few pictures. The ladies nodded their heads, and looked at each other; and the gentleman snorted his disapproval as Miss Robinson got down on the floor beside Jack to give him a kiss. "Isn't he a darling?" she said in her innocence. The three relations looked like three basilisks at Jack with his whip, who was mounted on a footstool and wearing out the carpet, remorselessly riding race round and round the room.

"A nice boy," said Mrs. Robinson, coldly; "but don't you think he had better have one of your unfurnished rooms to play in? The carpet will be

ruined—and it is spoiling the child to let him do whatever he likes."

"The less people have, the more wasteful they always are," said Mrs. Wentworth Smith. Mr. Robinson scowled at Jack, who had paused half frightened to look at his invaders, and went on loudly with his inventory. "A suite of three small rooms opening into each other—perfectly adapted for two or three sisters," he said—and made a rapid divergence to the linen closet on the landing. But he did not feel less strongly than his wife and his sister. When the survey was over and the relations had taken leave, he expressed his opinion very freely. "By George," he said, "I'll put a fancy price on the concern to keep that woman out. I'll tell King privately he may entertain a lower proposal from anyone else, but keep up the figure for her. If you don't mind, she and that confounded boy of hers will cut you all out."

"Nasty, artful, designing creature," said his sister; "playing upon poor Jane's weakness."

"Oh, I have no patience with Jane!" said Mrs. Robinson; "but it is just like an old maid. They are all the same. You never can get any satisfaction out of them. She will favour a creature of her own that toadies her, and turn her back upon all right and justice. It's just like an old maid."

"Well, don't be too hard upon her," said the solicitor. "In spite of all she told you, perhaps it ain't her fault she's an old maid. Poor Jane! But we must put a stop to this woman," he added, in a voice very different from the complacent roll of words with which he began. That was certain, that it must be put a stop to. Mr. Robinson drew up a very flaming advertisement, and confided the sale, with private instructions, to Mr. King the auctioneer. "She'll be clever if she gets over King with her confounded French and her manners," he said to himself with a chuckle; yet felt sure, when all was done and said, that the existence of Jack was a terrible obstacle in the way of the Robinsons. All the family were agreed that there was no saying what foolish thing old Jane or any other old maid might do, and that it was a shame there was no legal way of keeping such an old fool in order, and preventing her from injuring her relations. Miss Robinson herself felt a little tremor after they left her, and did not feel quite sure that she had done a wise thing in showing them all her possessions. "They never gave me a penny," she said to Mrs. Peveril: "they would not even countenance me when I might have been the better for it; and now they want to force me to sell it to the first comer, thinking the money will all come to them. I was foolish and weak, and let them see everything, and consented to what they proposed. It is difficult to contradict people when they insist upon their own way. But next time, I promise you, I will not give in—not an inch," said Miss Robinson bravely. It was much easier, however, to make a stand against them in their absence than when they were on the spot; and Miss Robinson found it doubly difficult to get over the feminine prejudice, that "a man" must know best about a matter of business—even when that business was her own affairs.

CHAPTER II.

Things, however, soon took a different aspect from that intended by Mr. Robinson. Either the market at that moment was glutted with schools, and few speculators turned their thoughts in that direction, or else the high price put upon the lease and goodwill of Grove House discouraged the ladies who in ordinary circumstances would have bid for it. The advertisement appeared a great many times in the newspapers, and many respectable visitors in flys, armed with the card of Mr. King, the auctioneer, came to "view the premises" and satisfy themselves about the character of the place; but with all this the business flagged, and no real purchaser appeared, though a few people coquetted with it, making ridiculous proposals which could not be entertained for a moment. At the end of three months it turned out, to the great dis-

may of Mr. Percival Robinson, the solicitor, that Mrs. Peveril was the only *bonâ fide* candidate to replace Miss Robinson. Mary's friends had come forward, as Miss Robinson said, nobly. Mrs. Tufnell, who had intended to make Grove House a provision both for the younger Mary Peveril, now Mrs. Durham, and her stepmother, had generously maintained her kind purpose when that younger Mary was provided for in a more happy way. Mrs. Tufnell's respectable old fly, which cost her more than any carriage, drove constantly back and forward at this period to Grove House—sometimes bringing the old lady herself from the Square to another and another consultation, and sometimes conveying the Grove House ladies to her for the same purpose. It was only in the evening that they could be out together—when for an hour or two Mademoiselle Dummkopf (for German and music) had charge of the young ladies—and there would be long consultations at the Square over Mrs. Peveril's prospects, at which the other Mary would assist, asking anxiously always whether she could be of use, and what they would permit her to do in the matter. Mary's husband had come home very well off, and he too, it was said by all the ladies, "took a great interest in Mrs. Peveril." Among them they planned how Grove House could be still further increased in accommodation and popularity; another efficient governess would have to be procured, and some one selected to take the place of Signor Bonventura, who had disappeared a little time before. Upon this point, as soon as she had got over her disquiet and disappointment at the untoward event, Miss Robinson would permit herself a mild little joke at Mrs. Peveril's expense. "He will come back," she said; "he is sure to come back some time or other, and however Mary may feel about it, I shall be glad. We never had such a nice master since I have had a school. He treated the girls as if they were his own children, and brought them on so nicely. I live in hope that he will come back."

"With the old ideas?" said young Mrs. Durham, laughing. She was young enough to laugh at the notion of such an elderly love-story, and could not quite conceal the amusement it caused her. As for Miss Robinson, she had always taken the deepest interest in the little romance, and had not, nor perhaps would ever quite give up hope. She spoke of it very volubly when Mary was not present. "If ever there was a constant man in the world, it is poor dear Monsieur," she said, "and I cannot but entertain the hope that when he comes back—as I am certain he will, one time or another—she will not be able to resist him. He has a very winning way. Of course one would naturally prefer one's own countryman to anybody else; but I never met any gentleman with just such a way with him. I can't help thinking and hoping that if he would have a little more patience, and not be so dreadfully in earnest, Mary could not resist."

"If I were you, I would not meddle with it," said old Mrs. Tufnell, whose favourite policy this was: "it is wonderful, when things are left alone, how they arrange themselves sometimes far better than we could have done it."

"Oh, you may be sure I shall not interfere," said Miss Robinson, half affronted. Mary Durham was more sympathetic, who was lately married herself, and still strong in the belief that there was no other way of being perfectly happy. But Mrs. Peveril did not like these allusions. They brought an angry colour to her face, and made her draw back silent from the most interesting discussion. Indeed, I do not think that Mrs. Peveril cared for the new revolution that was threatening. To be sure, her position would be mightily improved if Grove House became her own with all its advantages. It would make her capable of many things which now were beyond hoping for. It would clear the way before Jack, and enable her to educate and provide for him. She was not the kind of woman to despise or pretend to despise these advantages, but there were drawbacks along with them. She had found Christian charity and kindness in the house of which she was now to be mistress,

and the friendliest companionship and sympathy. Miss Robinson was not clever in general conversation, but she was very good; and she had her trade at her finger ends, from the most superficial details to the highest, having perfect understanding of the number of pounds of meat which ought to be ordered for the dinner of twenty or twenty-five persons, and how much linen was requisite to keep the house going, and a hundred other details which may be less important to polite education than the use of the globes or astronomy, or even than French acquired abroad—but yet are of great consequence, as everybody will allow. Mary Peveril feared changes, as most people do who have gone through many. It seemed to her that some misfortune must be lurking round the corner when she took a new step in life; and though it was quite necessary that the step should be taken, and it involved the future comfort of her whole existence and her boy's, yet she did not like it. She was the least enthusiastic, almost the least interested, of all, when the change was discussed, as it was so often with feminine fulness; she would miss the simple, kind companionship which had done so much to sweeten her life. She went forward stoutly to take upon herself the new responsibility, but she was not fond of talking of it, nor did she look forward to it with any delight. Miss Robinson had not yet realized the way in which the change would affect her; but Mary did realize it, and anticipated it with no sort of pleasure.

The arrangements, however, went on without much reference to their feelings. When the Robinsons saw that it was destined by fate that Mary should be the possessor of Grove House, they ceased from their unavailing struggle, and took steps to separate their relative from her and her child and her influence in a different kind of way. They declared themselves most anxious that their dear Jane should leave a neighbourhood in which justice had never been done her, and remove into another district within near reach of themselves. They hurried into the rashness of "securing" a house which was to let, close to Mr. Percival Robinson's, but a day's journey from Grove House. When the entire breadth of London was between her and her old haunts, and no possibility existed of seeing Mrs. Peveril at the cost of less than a day's journey, they calculated that they would have secured their object, and that Mary and Mary's boy need trouble their repose no longer. Miss Robinson herself was so surprised when she found herself the mistress of a spick and span new house, with all the furnishing to do, that the unexpectedness of the situation put other thoughts out of her mind.

Things went on thus during the whole winter, and the deeds were drawn up, the inventories gone over, and the whole business accomplished before the lingering long days of spring came back again, chilly yet hopeful. Mrs. Peveril was like the weather. She was chilled, but yet satisfied when the conclusion of the long business came. That very day Miss Robinson had settled to leave her old home. Half the girls in the school had colds in their heads with crying, while the other half were working so hard to finish a carpet for Miss Robinson that they had not time to cry, which was their salvation. Miss Robinson herself spent a very agitated day. She kept running up and down everywhere, making irruptions into the schoolroom, a thing which was forbidden by all the laws that Grove House held dear, and carrying little presents of valuables, which had turned up in her packing, to her equally agitated pupils. Mdlle. Dummkopf, who was in charge for the afternoon, was at her wits' end, not liking absolutely to find fault with the lady who an hour before had been head of the school, and her own employer, but terribly disturbed in her temper by that final down-pour of china ornaments, cardboard baskets, remnants of lace, and other unconsidered trifles, which Miss Robinson distributed to all and sundry. At last the terrible moment arrived when the fly came to the door to carry away her and her possessions. The

bringing down of the trunks was the first step in the funereal solemnity; and as they bumped upon the stairs in their descent, every bump made itself felt on Miss Robinson's heart. She was in the parlour with Mary, looking out for the last time through the deep little windows upon the crocuses which were no longer hers, holding Jack upon her knee, who, to tell the truth, was tired of his perch, and had got over the first tenderness of childish pity which had moved him at the sight of her tears. Mrs. Peveril sat by her, holding her friend's hand. What a friend she had been to Mary! She had taken her in, and given her a home, and made prosperity possible. The absence of her homely tenderness, and of that backing up of sympathy which has so much to do with the comfort of life, would, for a time at least, be like taking the very heart out of her monotonous existence. So that both the women were crying, and Jack sitting looking at them with big round eyes, rather anxious to have it over, when one of the maids knocked solemnly at the door, to announce that the boxes were placed upon the fly, and that the terrible moment had arrived. When Miss Robinson, with her eyes red and streaming, showed herself in the hall, holding a damp handkerchief in one hand and Jack by the other, the girls came all clustering about her. They kissed her, they clung to her—(though Jack, struggling to get away out of the midst of that maze of despair, did all his little possible to moderate the excitement as became his sex)—they called her by a hundred affectionate names. "Oh, dear Miss Robinson, don't go away from us —why should you go away from us?" they cried.

"My dear children! oh, be good!' cried Miss Robinson. "Be good! these are my last words. There is nothing so satisfactory. I am at the end of my career, and you are at the beginning of yours"—(this little speech the good woman had prepared carefully, for she felt it necessary that such an occasion should be improved to the permanent advantage of "the girls")—"but real goodness has always been the thing that I have wanted most to cultivate in you. Music is most desirable, and French, especially as dear Mrs. Peveril teaches it, is a delightful accomplishment, and there is nothing which advances a young lady like a good knowledge of her own language and of scientific discoveries; but oh, my dear children, goodness is above all! We have tried to give you knowledge, but you must get goodness for yourselves. Be good! and then, though I shall not come back to you"— you will come to me where I am going—Miss Robinson was about to add, feeling herself exalted to a sort of deathbed dignity; but she paused in time, reflecting that Kensington was not Paradise, and that to dwell there had never been supposed a reward for superlative merit. "Oh, Jack, my darling child, don't pull so hard," she cried, as a conclusion, and then rushed into the cab, hiding her tears. The girls did not cheer her, not quite knowing how, but they followed her to the door with tearful good-byes. "But why *should* she go away?" cried the stupid one of the school, rubbing a red nose violently. "Couldn't she stay if she liked—why, why does she go away?"

These were the last words Miss Robinson heard as she drove from the door; and then that door was shut, and Mdlle. Dummkopf invited the young ladies to return into the schoolroom to put aside their books and work, and Mary went back to the parlour which was now hers. It was now all hers—the pretty garden behind, the old trees, the house, the profitable work, the means of making a substantial foundation for her boy's life—everything was hers. This was the lot of one of the Marys, while the other was that which humanity from its earliest time has pronounced to be the happiest—the lot of a life guarded and kept from evil. Mrs. Peveril made no comparisons. She was far better off, she felt, than she had any right to expect or reason to hope. Her heart swelled a little with natural regret, little with natural satisfaction. It is something amid all the shipwrecks of this world to be able to live, to be able to work, to keep one's head above wa

to make life easy for one's child; this is supposed, it is true, to be the satisfaction of a man rather than of a woman —which is one of the fallacies so current in the world. Mrs. Peveril had a much stronger sense of the real advantage of having her life thus set clear before her, and made possible to her, than a man would have been likely to have had, who would have taken it as a matter of course. She went out and took her evening walk under the trees with feelings much sobered down from those which moved her a few years before. At the bottom of her heart there might lie that well of sadness which exists in most hearts, even under conditions more evidently happy; but on the upper surface of her mind, so to speak, there was no room for sadness. If I had full time and space to define such a character, and enter into all the deeper thoughts of middle age, I might be able to make you see that such a woman may have more in her to interest the gentle reader than the prettiest palpitating creature of eighteen, on the brink of a love-story; but I will not make such a doubtful experiment on my limited canvas. *Vive la jeunesse!* It is, after all, the true subject for romance; its difficulties are interesting without being too dangerous, its delights open and comprehensible. Therefore I will not endeavour to cheat you into sympathy by telling you that the shadow of Mrs. Peveril's old Italian lover kept flitting out and in about those trees. Poor Mr. Bonventura! good, tender, unsatisfied soul! going quietly about a world which contained no individual happiness for him, and no personal love; a great many of us do this, and take it kindly or take it harshly according to our nature. Mary thought of him with a compunction as she strayed up and down under the brown buds of the chestnuts. It was hard, when he would have been content with so little, that he could not have what he wanted. In youth we grasp at all, and get it sometimes; in middle age we ask but a little, and we do not get it. And so good a man, kind to everybody, harming no one! What a pity that he had not set his heart upon some one else! But when Mary said this to herself, I am not perfectly certain that she was so sincere as she supposed herself to be. It is dreadfully wicked and cruel to be gratified by what gives pain to another—so I have always been taught, and so, I am sure, dear reader, have you—and *we* have no sympathy, neither you nor I, with those evil beings, be they man or woman, who endeavour to attract a love which they cannot return. But when that love is given in spite of all discouragement, does not every polite letter-writer assure us that it is "flattering" and "gratifying?" And then one cannot but approve of the good taste (however one may deplore the sufferings) of the individual whose melancholy fate it has been, without return, to love oneself. Therefore Mrs. Peveril's heart turned very sympathetically to poor Mr. Bonventura as she walked along somewhat sadly, knowing that to-night, for the first time, no one waited for her, or wished for her, in the low, old-fashioned parlour which was her very own, and where a lonely table was just now being set out for her. Under such circumstances, the ghosts and spectres among the trees were almost more attractive than the solitary hearth.

To be sure there was Jack—Jack, the happiness of her life and its support—whose name made her eyes brighten and her heart warm, who was everything in the world to this woman, all whose hopes were concentrated in him, and whose strength and inspiration he was;—everything in the world—except a companion. He was mounted on a chair astride, with a train of other chairs behind him, smacking his whip and shouting to his imaginary horses, when his mother went in. She kissed him and drew her fingers through the mass of curly hair which hung about his white, smooth, open forehead. But Mary was not the woman to lift the laughing, shouting little postilion off his horse and trouble him before his time with grown-up talk or confidences; so she drew her chair to the fire and sat down, and missed her honest, pleasant companion, and felt alone.

She had not been very long in th comfortable chair, gazing into the fire

with no one to speak to, when the most unusual incident in the world at Grove House, a loud summons at the front door, disturbed all the echoes. At six o'clock in the evening no profane visitor ever came within those virginal precincts. "Parents" made their calls in the morning, and Miss Robinson and Mrs. Peveril had their private friends to see them in the afternoon. But "after dark," something wild, dissipated, abandoned, was in the sound. It suggested a man in the house—it suggested going out to dinner, or to the theatre, or some other such extravagant proceeding. Mrs. Peveril rose, wondering and listening, from her chair. Then she thought of her stepdaughter Mary, now generally entitled by her friends "The Durhams," the only person of her immediate belongings who (strong in the protection of a husband, still ready to run about with her wherever she pleased) could be supposed likely to come at so unusual an hour. But a visit from the Durhams would scarcely have occasioned the outcries, the laughter, the bumping as of boxes which followed. Mary, listening with more and more surprise, had just turned from the fire to see what it was, when the door suddenly burst open, and Miss Robinson, with her bonnet pushed awry, with all her wraps hanging about her, her boa twisted twice round her neck, her face glowing red with tears and laughter, rushed into the room. She threw down her bag on the floor as she entered. She let her shawls drop from her one by one as she flew to Mary and hugged her in her arms.

"My dear, why should I go away?" cried the good woman: "that's the question. If you've any good reason to give me, I'll listen to it; but here's the question—Why *should* I go?"

"Sit down and get warm," said Mary, untwisting the boa, which was strangling the runaway. "Why, indeed, but that you wished it—I thought you wished it. I could give you a hundred good reasons why you shouldn't——"

"There, now, that makes me feel happy!" cried Miss Robinson; "I was afraid you would have some view of duty or something. Bless that girl Milly Lightfoot! We always thought her stupid, and she's a girl of genius. Send for her and let me give her a kiss, Mary, you dear soul—and come here and be hugged this moment, Jack, you little villain! And oh, send my boxes upstairs to my own room and give me a cup of tea! It's all Milly Lightfoot," she ran on, laughing and crying and pushing her bonnet more and more awry. "What does that sweet girl, blowing her nose all the time, and it as red as fire, say—just before the fly went off, when I could not see out of my eyes for crying—but 'Why should she go away? Couldn't she stay, if she wanted to?' Mary! it was what you may call a revelation. She may not be quick at her music, but she has a great deal of sense, has that girl. I thought of it all the way down the London Road and across Oxford Street. 'Why *should* I go?' I said to myself: 'I am fond of the house, and I am fond of Mary, and I have lived there twenty years, and I am as able to pay for my board as anyone need to be. And what are the Robinsons to me?' I said, just as we turned into the Park. 'There's no Mary. and no little Jack, and no girls in Kensington. Why *should* I, I should like to know?' And that very moment, in the middle of the Park, with a policeman looking on and thinking me mad, I pulled the string and let down the window. 'Budd,' said I, 'drive home again directly.' ''Ome!' he said, drawing up his horse so sharp that I thought we should have upset. 'Yes, home, of course, and don't lose one moment, and you shall have a shilling to yourself if you are quick.' He thought I was mad, and so did the policeman. Oh, how dreary it is driving all by yourself about London! When I saw the public-house lights at the end of the lane, my heart began to dance. I said to myself, 'I will never abuse the people at that public-house again.' And so, Mary, here I am, if you will let me stay. I'll be parlour boarder, and if you like I'll help in the housekeeping. Don't tell me you don't want me, for it breaks my heart to go away."

By this time the whole house was roused. The hall was full of cries and laughter; and a deputation of girls stood knocking at the parlour-door. It was a peaceful mutiny over which Mdlle. Dummkopf looked on from the stairs, wringing her hands, the representative of authority without power, regarding a revolution which she could not hinder, and vindictively inventing punishments for to-morrow. Never was there such a commotion in a ladies' school. But the issue was that Miss Robinson returned that night to her old quarters, heroically sacrificing a year's rent of the house her relatives had taken for her, and the furniture they had bought, and defying them by letter at a safe distance. "I am happy here, and my resolution to stay here is *unalterable*," she wrote, doubly underlining that uncompromising word. "But, Mary dear, if any of them call, let the maids say I have gone out for a walk," she added, tremulous, though decided. Milly Lightfoot was the heroine of the hour for a whole day—until, presuming on her elevation, she announced her conviction that 150 sheep at 3*l.* each, came to 95*l.* 2*s.*; upon which she subsided to her natural level, and was heard of no more.

CHAPTER III.

"I AM as happy as the day is long," said Miss Robinson; "why should I have gone away? It is very nice to think of having a house of one's own when one is young, and when a house of one's own means everything you know; and if I had had an old Mr. Durham like your young one, my dear, I don't deny that I might have taken some pleasure in it. But to set up all in a new place, with everything new—a new maid, and only one, after I had been used to half-a-dozen—new things, spick and span from the upholsterer's, after my old furniture, which I know some of your connoisseurs would give their heads for—and to order two poor chops for dinner, one for my servant and one for myself, when I used to have a butcher's bill of six or seven pounds a week, and all the tradespeople on their knees to me! I said to myself, why should I? And I didn't. That's the whole story. And Mary, I am sure, on the whole, is glad to have me back. I have retired all the same," said Miss Robinson, smoothing her black silk apron which was trimmed with lace made by "the girls" as a parting present. "I may amuse myself with a little housekeeping, but I have no responsibilities. Mary sees the parents and does everything. I'm parlour boarder, and governess to Jack, and make myself generally useful. But I have no responsibility. I get all the good of it and none of the trouble, and here I shall stay unless Mary turns me out."

"I am very glad you have come back," said young Mrs. Durham; and then was silent with a young woman's wonder over the different phase of life which made Miss Robinson so happy—"As happy as the day is long." Mary was inclined to think that this was her own case. Her husband was foolishly in love with her, and she with him. They were always together when he was not at work, roaming about everywhere arm-in-arm. It was like the old days, Mary sometimes thought, when she went everywhere by her father's side, holding his arm, thinking her own thoughts and dreaming her dreams—like it, but how much better!—for her present companion had no separate thoughts into which he did not admit her, and her heart and life were too full to admit of dreams. That old life of hers which she had forgotten rose up into her recollection now like a painter's childish study for a great picture to come. Not any longer to the old-book-stands or curious passages about Southampton Street, but upon all sorts of expeditions did this pair ramble together. Mary, with a young woman's fresh delight in that unaccustomed liberty, felt herself free now to go anywhere or everywhere with her husband's arm. The two moved like one through the streets and across the more distant country, going everywhere together—free to go everywhere because they were together—or, at least, this was

the woman's view of the question, who had never been emancipated before. All her life had been tending to this, Mary felt, and she could have laughed when she thought how unhappy she had been sometimes, and how her friends had made their decisions about her future life, and sentenced her, too, in imagination to Grove House and its cloistered retirement. This seemed to her strangely funny—the most amusing idea. And then her eye fell upon Miss Robinson, who had been all this time chatting on, in her kindly way. Instead of the younger Mary's George, Mrs. Peveril had Miss Robinson—instead of the delicious freedom of that life *à deux*, she had the shut-up propriety of a school. And it was never to change—never to change in all her life! This struck Mary a great deal more forcibly than it did either her stepmother or her present companion. Miss Robinson would not have changed with Mrs. Durham for any consideration. She would not have changed with the Queen, as she herself said. She was "as happy as the day was long." The contrast struck Mary with a pang like a sudden blow. She felt as if somehow she deserved to be punished for being more happy than they—and bowed herself metaphorically to the ground and performed humble homage to the old schoolmistress who was so much less blessed than herself.

"I am so glad you have come back—since you like it," she said, humbly, to conciliate this woman, who was her superior from the mere fact of being less fortunate than she was—"and Mary likes it. It will be good for her to have your company," said the younger Mary, faltering, looking in Miss Robinson's kindly, homely face.

"Yes, she is pleased to have me, bless her; and missed me; I am very thankful," said Miss Robinson, "that I had the spirit to come back, for Mary's sake."

The younger Mary went away full of many thoughts. Why should one woman's life be so different from another's? She felt very humble, half guilty, in her happiness. And Mrs. Peveril came into the room after seeing her away, and smiled a little over Mrs. Durham's satisfaction with her own lot.

"He was a sad harum-scarum when I used to know him—always a good fellow, but full of whims and fancies—and now he seems to have settled down into a model husband, and to make her thoroughly happy. I am very glad," said Mrs. Peveril, "though I can scarcely help laughing. It is very funny to see that there is some one in the world who takes George Durham for a sort of engineering archangel"—and she did laugh, a merry, silvery, ringing laugh, as merry as Jack's, though not so loud.

"That is one nice thing about being married," said Miss Robinson. "When you *are* happy, you are so *very* satisfied with yourself and your lot. I am afraid she thinks this rather a dull sort of life for you, Mary—not like hers, with her husband and her nice new house."

Mrs. Peveril laughed again softly, and made no answer. Probably she thought—for women have shabby memories sometimes—that this happiness might have been hers had she wished; and felt a little superior to Mary, who had accepted the man whom she rejected. Such feelings, though it is humbling to admit it, do find a place even in the best-regulated minds.

So the gentle reader will perceive that while the one Mary was "happy" in the established and recognized way, and felt herself so to the bottom of her heart, the other Mary was not by any means so far from being happy as she ought, by all rules of conventional blessedness, to have been. Just as pain takes double importance when it becomes personal, and a small matter affecting ourselves is more momentous than a greater matter affecting some one else, so the happier circumstances of our lot take also an additional importance because they are ours and not another's. Little details of life, which are petty enough in themselves, get magnified when they come within that halo of personal consciousness which surrounds each of us. Mary Peveril laughed softly at the idea that Mary Durham's life was more perfect and more important than her own.

On the other hand, Mary Durham did not laugh, but felt its superiority so much that out of pure pity for the other she was like to cry. Thus the two, from their different positions, looked each upon the other with a sense of unexpressed and affectionate superiority —as, for one thing or another, on one ground or another, most people do. We all of us do it, whether our higher ground is made up of more sorrow or more joy, more pain or more prosperity. Anything answers for a pedestal; so wears the world away.

There is but one other incident that I know of which has occurred in the life at Grove House, beyond the building of the new wing and the arrival of Miss Rosa Broadbent, Sir John Broadbent's daughter, from Leicestershire, which event made Miss Robinson very happy and proud, as denoting the advent of the aristocracy to share the advantage of Mrs. Peveril's instructions. I will tell you what this was, and leave you to form such conclusions from it as your knowledge of human nature suggests. It came to pass in the following way:—

A boy is a troublesome being, intended for the delight and affliction, but often more for the affliction than delight, of his anxious parents. This is a fact recognized largely by the parental mind, especially on the advent of the holidays, and will come home, I do not doubt, at the present moment to many; and little Jack Peveril was one of those anxious blessings. He was a bold and daring child, all the bolder and more enterprising, as sometimes happens, from living in an atmosphere which was not favourable to adventure. He knew, the little rogue, better than anyone, that in the narrative of his escapades which Miss Robinson was fond of making, there was always a tone of admiration, and that wonder at his feats changed very easily into pride of them—a fact which was little likely to diminish either the frequency or the boldness of his enterprises. But one winter afternoon during the Christmas holidays a glorious dream took possession of Jack's mind. He was seven years old, and he had never seen London except when he drove there with his mother to visit the Durhams or old Mrs. Tufnell in the Square, upon which solemn journeys he had seen visions of lights and shows and shop-windows, which had filled his imagination. Just the day before, Miss Robinson had given him an account of the wonders of the Polytechnic, an institution which to her schoolmistressly mind, combining as it did instruction with amusement, continued to hold a high place among what she would have called the attractions of the metropolis. When Jack heard of the diving-bell, his eyes grew rounder and rounder, and danced and shone with excitement. He dreamed of it all night, and when he got up in the morning, nothing but the fact that the great old well at the end of the garden was frozen over would have prevented him from attempting a descent in the bucket, covered with an impromptu lid, and supplied with air by the hose for watering the garden, according to an elaborate plan which he had formed in his own mind, and which, illustrated by diagrams, he confided after breakfast to Miss Robinson. She screamed, good soul, and rushed to the gardener to beg that the well might be instantly closed up, while Mrs. Peveril took her son by her hand and explained to him how such an experiment would necessarily end. "But the man in the diving-bell is not drowned," said Jack, incredulous.

"When you see the diving-bell, you will see that it is very different," said Mary, solemnly.

"Then take me to see the diving-bell, mamma."

"Yes, dear, some time or other," said the mother.

"But I should like to go now—now —to-day; come to-day. What is the good of putting things off? I want to see the diving-bell very much. I want to try it. Why should I be told of it if I am not to see it? Come to-day."

"I wish you would not tell the boy about such things," Mrs. Peveril said afterwards to Miss Robinson, who was humble and confessed her fault, but

asked proudly, "Who could help telling him, a boy just running over with sense and cleverness? Only look at his drawings! He had settled it all, bless him: how to cover up the bucket and breathe through the india-rubber tube." Miss Robinson was not at all sure that he would not have been successful. "Anyhow, it was an excellent idea," she said, "and just shows what I am always telling you, how wonderfully clever that child is. When he has got to be a great engineer, or something, you will confess that I am right."

But Jack went away with his head full of the diving-bell. He had a shilling in his little pocket, and unbounded audacity in his little soul. After their early dinner he went out with his whip into the garden. It was just the sort of exhilarating winter day which brings the temptation to be doing. He could not go and sit indoors "like a girl," and he had nothing particular to play at outside; and the big gate was open. Jack ran over all the pros and cons in his mind, and felt the shilling in his pocket. He thought to himself that he would go a little way and see. If he did not get the length of the diving-bell, at least he might get to some shop and spend his shilling. He propped up his whip against a tree, and, after pausing for some time at the gate, made a rush through. Then the first delight of doing what was absolutely forbidden seized upon him. His eyes lighted up, his heart began to beat—and he plunged forth into the unknown.

When he was missed, I will not attempt to describe the consternation of Grove House. It was holiday time, and the girls were all away; but the whole of the maids, who had little to do and were eager for an excitement, got into "such a way" that there was no subduing them. The house had already gone out of its mind, and was in a frantic condition, raving about the doors and at the windows, when Mrs. Peveril heard first that her boy was missing. By this time Miss Robinson herself, pale and speechless with terror, had set out to look for him, attended by two of the maids—a frightened group. There was a scout at the gate to report if anyone was seen coming. The gardener had already dragged the well; and they told Mary this to make her cheerful when she came down to tea.

"Dragged the well!" cried poor Mrs. Peveril. She too rushed out, poor soul, with anguish indescribable in her heart; and I should use up all the adjectives in the language did I attempt to describe to you all the miseries, despairs, and horrors that were in Grove House, and on the principal suburban ways all about, till nine o'clock of that dreadful night. The gardener went off in one direction, and two policemen in two others. Mary ran everywhere, distracted, not knowing where to go. Elder runaways have haunts, and they have friends who can be applied to for knowledge of their whereabouts; but a young gentleman of seven has seldom anywhere to go to. The imaginations of the two ladies naturally jumped to the very worst that could happen. He must have been run over, or fallen into the canal, or something equally dreadful; and nobody so much as thought of the Polytechnic and the diving-bell.

At nine o'clock, however, just as Mary had come back despairing, from a useless search, to hear that no trace had been found, and was preparing to set out again, a shout was heard from the gate. The first to perceive the returning runaway was the boy who cleaned the shoes, and who shouted loud enough to be heard a mile off; then all the maids took up the cry; and Mary, who had sunk into a chair in the parlour, half resting, half despairing, before she set out, sprang to her feet at the sound. The doors were all open, the night-air blew the lights about, and would of course have given them all their death of cold, as Miss Robinson remarked afterwards, had it not been for the excitement. She flew out to the dark garden, half wild, and clutched at something which stood very firm upon two small legs, and looked up at her, half-alarmed, half-defiant. "I losted my way," said little Jack, wanting very much to cry, but too proud to

yield to the impulse. He was terribly afraid. I don't know what the child thought would or might be done to him; and this terror froze him, though his little heart was swelling. Some one had led the child in by the hand, to whom nobody gave the least attention. He followed the rest into the parlour without saying a word, when Mary, after devouring the boy with wild kisses, carried him in there, by this time howling freely. Jack put his cold little arms round his mother's neck and roared as soon as he felt that he was safe and nothing was going to be done to him; and Miss Robinson and the maids stood round and bemoaned him. He should have been whipped, and Mary fully intended to do so when occasion served. But with the little newly-found creature nestling against her, and her heart and her frame all trembling with emotion, what could she do but kiss the little villain? The gentleman who had brought him in smiled and looked on. He stood in the shade where no one remarked him. The maids, when they dispersed, were the first to notice this strange figure, and that with a thrill of fright—for it was late to have a strange man in the house; but then the two policemen were in the kitchen, come to receive the reward of their trouble. When Miss Robinson turned round in her turn to go and order supper for these valiant champions, she too perceived with a start the strange man. "Oh, Mary, you have not thanked the gentleman!" she cried, making him a curtsey in her surprise—and then she gave a great cry, and rushed forward with extended hands.

You will ask me by what strange chance it was that poor Mr. Bonventura, come back after many wanderings, thirsting for a sight of the people he had been fond of and the woman whom he loved, should find himself in Jack's way precisely on this very night when he was most wanted. I do not pretend to be able to answer the question. Such things do happen sometimes, as we all know. We dare not make them happen in books, so very pat to the occasion as they often happen in life; but I cannot disguise this piece of good fortune which happened just at the right moment. Mr. Bonventura was welcomed back into the house as if he had been its guardian angel. He was made to tell all the story of his wanderings, as people are made to do when they arrive at home. They surrounded him with kind and friendly and grateful looks. "Stay with us, oh stay, thou art weary and worn!" they said to him, as the soldier's friends said to him in his dream. To a young lover this eager warmth of affectionate friendship makes (people say) the absence of the love he desires all the more bitter. But Mr. Bonventura was not young, and the wisdom of his country, as well as the wisdom of his age, had taught him, when he could not have all he wanted, to accept as much as he could get. And he did accept it. He came back to his old occupation which he had loved. He spent his evenings in the parlour, where he was always welcome. Many people think—and Miss Robinson, always sanguine and never tired of a little romance, is one of them—that after all Mrs. Peveril will relent and marry this good man. But I do not think so. In the meantime, however, his company is a great addition to her happiness. She believes in him, respects him, is attached to him in a way. It is very pleasant, very strengthening and satisfactory, for men and women to be friends: nor is it necessary that they should be lovers in order to secure this mutual comfort; and I imagine Mr. Bonventura has given in to Mary's view of the subject. At all events the "man in the house" makes a very pleasant addition to their society. Both her companions worship Mrs. Peveril, and think there never was anyone like her. The Durhams make a joke of it between themselves, though always in a kindly way from the height of their superior happiness; but, then, the gentle reader is aware that Mrs. Peveril sometimes smiles at them too.