AGNES GRAY

By Anne Bronte

Chapter 1

The Parsonage

All true histories contain instruction; though, in some, the treasure may

be hard to find, and when found, so trivial in quantity that the dry,

shrivelled kernel scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut.

Whether this be the case with my history or not, I am hardly competent to

judge. I sometimes think it might prove useful to some, and entertaining to

others; but the world may judge for itself. Shielded by my own obscurity,

and by the lapse of years, and a few fictitious names, I do not fear to

venture, and will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose

to the most intimate friend.

My father was a clergyman of the north of England, who was deservedly

respected by all who knew him; and, in his younger days, lived pretty

comfortably on the joint income of a small incumbency and a snug little

property of his own. My mother, who married him against the wishes of her

friends, was a squire's daughter, and a woman of spirit. In vain it was

represented to her that if she became the poor parson's wife she must

relinquish her carriage and her lady's-maid, and all the luxuries and

elegances of affluence, which to her were little less than the necessaries

of life. A carriage and a lady's-maid were great conveniences; but, thank

Heaven, she had feet to carry her, and hands to minister to her own

necessities. An elegant house and spacious grounds were not to be despised,

but she would rather live in a cottage with Richard Grey than in a palace

with any other man in the world.

Finding arguments of no avail, her father at length told the lovers they

might marry if they pleased, but, in so doing, his daughter would forfeit

every fraction of her fortune. He expected this would cool the ardour of

both; but he was mistaken. My father knew too well my mother's superior

worth not to be sensible that she was a valuable fortune in herself; and if

she would but consent to embellish his humble hearth, he should be happy to

take her on any terms; while she, on her part, would rather labour with her

own hands than be divided from the man she loved, whose happiness it would

be her joy to make, and who was already one with her in heart and soul. So

her fortune went to swell the purse of a wiser sister, who had married a

rich nabob; and she, to the wonder and compassionate regret of all who knew

her, went to bury herself in the homely village parsonage among the hills

of -. And yet, in spite of all this, and in spite of my mother's high

spirit and my father's whims, I believe you might search all England

through and fail to find a happier couple.

Of six children, my sister Mary and myself were the only two that survived

the perils of infancy and early childhood. I, being the younger by five or

six years, was always regarded as the child, and the pet of the family.

Father, mother and sister all combined to spoil me - not by foolish

indulgence, to render me fractious and ungovernable, but by ceaseless

kindness, to make me too helpless and dependent, too unfit for buffeting

with the cares and turmoils of life.

Mary and I were brought up in the strictest seclusion. My mother, being at

once highly accomplished, well informed, and fond of employment, took the

whole charge of our education on herself, with the exception of Latin -

which my father undertook to teach us - so that we never even went to

school; and, as there was no society in the neighbourhood, our only

intercourse with the world consisted in a stately tea-party, now and then,

with the principal farmers and tradespeople of the vicinity, just to avoid

being stigmatised as too proud to consort with our neighbours, and an

annual visit to our paternal grandfather's, where himself, our kind

grandmamma, a maiden aunt, and two or three elderly ladies and gentlemen

were the only persons we ever saw. Sometimes our mother would amuse us with

stories and anecdotes of her younger days which, while they entertained us

amazingly, frequently awoke - in me, at least - a vague and secret wish to

see a little more of the world.

I thought she must have been very happy; but she never seemed to regret

past times. My father, however, whose temper was neither tranquil nor

cheerful by nature, often unduly vexed himself with thinking of the

sacrifices his dear wife had made for him; and troubled his head with

revolving endless schemes for the augmentation of his little fortune, for

her sake and ours. In vain my mother assured him she was quite satisfied;

and if he would but lay by a little for the children, we should all have

plenty, both for time present and to come; but saving was not my father's

forte. He would not run in debt (at least, my mother took good care he

should not), but while he had money, he must spend it; he liked to see his

house comfortable, and his wife and daughters well clothed, and well

attended; and besides, he was charitably disposed, and liked to give to the

poor, according to his means, or, as some might think, beyond them.

At length, however, a kind friend suggested to him a means of doubling his

private property at one stroke; and further increasing it, hereafter, to an

untold amount. This friend was a merchant, a man of enterprising spirit and

undoubted talent; who was somewhat straitened in his mercantile pursuits

for want of capital, but generously proposed to give my father a fair share

of his profits, if he would only entrust him with what he could spare; and

he thought he might safely promise that whatever sum the latter chose to

put into his hands, it should bring him in cent. per cent. The small

patrimony was speedily sold, and the whole of its price was deposited in

the hands of the friendly merchant, who as promptly proceeded to ship his

cargo and prepare for his voyage.

My father was delighted - so were we all - with our brightening prospects.

For the present, it is true, we were reduced to the narrow income of the

curacy; but my father seemed to think there was no necessity for

scrupulously restricting our expenditure to that; so, with a standing bill

at Mr Jackson's, another at Smith's, and a third at Hobson's, we got along

even more comfortably than before: though my mother affirmed we had better

keep within bounds, for our prospects of wealth were but precarious, after

all; and if my father would only trust everything to her management, he

should never feel himself stinted; but he, for once, was incorrigible.

What happy hours Mary and I have passed, while sitting at our work by the

fire, or wandering on the heath-clad hills, or idling under the weeping

birch (the only considerable tree in the garden), talking of future

happiness to ourselves and our parents, of what we would do, and see, and

possess; with no firmer foundation for our goodly superstructure than the

riches that were expected to flow in upon us from the success of the worthy

merchant's speculations. Our father was nearly as bad as ourselves, only

that he affected not to be so much in earnest, expressing his bright hopes

and sanguine expectations in jests and playful sallies, that always struck

me as being exceedingly witty and pleasant. Our mother laughed with delight

to see him so hopeful and happy; but still she feared he was settling his

heart too much upon the matter; and once I heard her whisper as she left

the room, -

"God grant he be not disappointed! I know not how he would bear it."

Disappointed he was; and bitterly, too. It came like a thunderclap on us

all that the vessel which contained our fortune had been wrecked, and gone

to the bottom with all its stores, together with several of the crew and

the unfortunate merchant himself. I was grieved for him; I was grieved for

the overthrow of all our air-built castles; but, with the elasticity of

youth, I soon recovered the shock.

Though riches had charms, poverty had no terrors for an inexperienced girl

like me. Indeed, to say the truth, there was something exhilarating in the

idea of being driven to straits, and thrown upon our own resources. I only

wished papa, mamma and Mary were all of the same mind as myself; and then,

instead of lamenting past calamities, we might all cheerfully set to work

to remedy them: and the greater the difficulties, the harder our present

privations, the greater should be our cheerfulness to endure the latter,

and our vigour to contend against the former.

Mary did not lament, but she brooded continually over the misfortune, and

sank into a state of dejection from which no effort of mine could rouse

her. I could not possibly bring her to regard the matter on its bright side

as I did; and indeed I was so fearful of being charged with childish

frivolity, or stupid insensibility, that I carefully kept most of my bright

ideas and cheering notions to myself; well knowing they could not be

appreciated.

My mother thought only of consoling my father, and paying our debts and

retrenching our expenditure by every available means; but my father was

completely overwhelmed by the calamity - health, strength and spirits sank

beneath the blow; and he never wholly recovered them. In vain my mother

strove to cheer him by appealing to his piety, to his courage, to his

affection for herself and us. That very affection was his greatest torment;

it was for our sakes he had so ardently longed to increase his fortune - it

was our interest that had lent such brightness to his hopes, and that

imparted such bitterness to his present distress. He now tormented himself

with remorse at having neglected my mother's advice, which would at least

have saved him from the additional burden of debt - he vainly reproached

himself for having brought her from the dignity, the ease, the luxury of

her former station to toil with him through the cares and toils of poverty.

It was gall and wormwood to his soul to see that splendid, highly

accomplished woman, once so courted and admired, transformed into an active

managing housewife, with hands and head continually occupied with household

labours and household economy. The very willingness with which she

performed these duties, the cheerfulness with which she bore her reverses,

and the kindness which withheld her from imputing the smallest blame to

him, were all perverted by this ingenious self-tormentor into further

aggravations of his sufferings. And thus the mind preyed upon the body, and

disordered the system of the nerves, and they in turn increased the

troubles of the mind, till, by action and reaction, his health was

seriously impaired; and not one of us could convince him that the aspect of

our affairs was not half so gloomy, so utterly hopeless, as his morbid

imagination represented it to be.

The useful pony phaeton was sold, together with the stout well-fed pony -

the old favourite that we had fully determined should end its days in

peace, and never pass from our hands; the little coach-house and stable

were let; the servant-boy, and the more efficient (being the more

expensive) of the two maidservants were dismissed. Our clothes were mended,

turned, and darned to the utmost verge of decency; our food, always plain,

was now simplified to an unprecedented degree - except my father's

favourite dishes; our coals and candles were painfully economised - the

pair of candles reduced to one, and that most sparingly used; the coals

carefully husbanded in the half-empty grate, especially when my father was

out on his parish duties, or confined to bed through illness - then we sat

with our feet on the fender, scraping the perishing embers together from

time to time, and occasionally adding a slight scattering of the dust and

fragments of coal, just to keep them alive. As for our carpets, they in

time were worn threadbare, and patched and darned even to a greater extent

than our garments. To save the expense of a gardener, Mary and I undertook

to keep the garden in order; and all the cooking and household work that

could not easily be managed by one servant-girl was done by my mother and

sister, with a little occasional help from me - only a little, because,

though a woman in my own estimation, I was still a child in theirs; and my

mother, like most active, managing women, was not gifted with very active

daughters; for this reason - that being so clever and diligent herself, she

was never tempted to trust her affairs to a deputy, but, on the contrary,

was willing to act and think for others as well as for number one; and

whatever was the business in hand, she was apt to think that no one could

do it so well as herself; so that whenever I offered to assist her, I

received such an answer as - "No, love, you cannot indeed - there's nothing

here you can do. Go and help your sister, or get her to take a walk with

you - tell her she must not sit so much, and stay so constantly in the

house as she does - she may well look thin and dejected."

"Mary, mamma says I'm to help you; or get you to take a walk with me; she

says you may well look thin and dejected if you sit so constantly in the

house."

"Help me you cannot, Agnes; and I cannot go out with you - I have far too

much to do."

"Then let me help you."

"You cannot indeed, dear child. Go and practise your music, or play with

the kitten."

There was always plenty of sewing on hand; but I had not been taught to cut

out a single garment; and, except plain hemming and seaming, there was

little I could do, even in that line; for they both asserted, that it was

far easier to do the work themselves than to prepare it for me; and

besides, they liked better to see me prosecuting my studies or amusing

myself - it was time enough for me to sit bending over my work, like a

grave matron, when my favourite little pussy was become a steady old cat.

Under such circumstances, although I was not many degrees more useful than

the kitten, my idleness was not entirely without excuse.

Through all our troubles, I never but once heard my mother complain of our

want of money. As summer was coming on, she observed to Mary and me, -

"What a desirable thing it would be for your papa to spend a few weeks at a

watering-place. I am convinced the sea air and the change of scene would be

of incalculable service to him. But then, you see, there's no money," she

added with a sigh.

We both wished exceedingly that the thing might be done, and lamented

greatly that it could not.

"Well, well!" said she, "it's no use complaining. Possibly something might

be done to further the project after all. Mary, you are a beautiful drawer.

What do you say to doing a few more pictures, in your best style, and

getting them framed, with the watercolour drawings you have already done,

and trying to dispose of them to some liberal picture-dealer, who has the

sense to discern their merits?"

"Mamma, I should be delighted, if you think they could be sold; and for

anything worth while."

"It's worth while trying, however, my dear. Do you procure the drawings,

and I'll endeavour to find a purchaser."

"I wish I could do something," said I.

"You, Agnes! well, who knows? You draw pretty well, too; if you choose some

simple piece for your subject, I daresay you will be able to produce

something we shall all be proud to exhibit."

"But I have another scheme in my head, mamma, and have had long, only I did

not like to mention it."

"Indeed! pray tell us what it is."

"I should like to be a governess."

My mother uttered an exclamation of surprise, and laughed. My sister

dropped her work in astonishment, exclaiming, "You a governess, Agnes! What

can you be dreaming of?"

"Well! I don't see anything so very extraordinary in it. I do not pretend

to be able to instruct great girls; but surely I could teach little ones -

and I should like it so much - I am so fond of children. Do let me, mamma!"

"But, my love, you have not learnt to take care of yourself yet; and young

children require more judgement and experience to manage than elder ones."

"But, mamma, I am above eighteen, and quite able to take care of myself,

and others, too. You do not know half the wisdom and prudence I possess,

because I have never been tried."

"Only think," said Mary, "what would you do in a house full of strangers,

without me or mamma to speak and act for you - with a parcel of children,

besides yourself, to attend to; and no one to look to for advice? You would

not even know what clothes to put on."

"You think, because I always do as you bid me, I have no judgement of my

own: but only try me - that is all I ask - and you shall see what I can

do."

At that moment my father entered, and the subject of our discussion was

explained to him.

"What, my little Agnes a governess!" cried he; and, in spite of his

dejection, he laughed at the idea.

"Yes, papa, don't you say anything against it; I should like it so much;

and I'm sure I could manage delightfully."

"But, my darling, we could not spare you." And a tear glistened in his eye

as he added - "No, no! afflicted as we are, surely we are not brought to

that pass yet."

"Oh, no!" said my mother. "There is no necessity whatever for such a step;

it is merely a whim of her own. So you must hold your tongue, you naughty

girl; for though you are so ready to leave us, you know very well we cannot

part with you."

I was silenced for that day, and for many succeeding ones; but still I did

not wholly relinquish my darling scheme. Mary got her drawing materials,

and steadily set to work. I got mine, tootoo; but while I drew I thought of

other things.

How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to

enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties;

to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance, and something to

comfort and help my father, mother and sister, besides exonerating them

from the provision of my food and clothing; to show papa what his little

Agnes could do; to convince mamma and Mary that I was not quite the

helpless, thoughtless being they supposed. And then, how charming to be

entrusted with the care and education of children! Whatever others said, I

felt I was fully competent to the task: the clear remembrance of my own

thoughts and feelings in early childhood would be a surer guide than the

instructions of the most mature adviser. I had but to turn from my little

pupils to myself at their age, and I should know, at once, how to win their

confidence and affections; how to waken the contrition of the erring; how

to embolden the timid, and console the afflicted; how to make Virtue

practicable, Instruction desirable, and Religion lovely and comprehensible.

 - Delightful task!

 To teach the young idea how to shoot!

To train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day!

Influenced by so many inducements, I determined still to persevere; though

the fear of displeasing my mother, or distressing my father's feelings,

prevented me from resuming the subject for several days. At length, again,

I mentioned it to my mother in private, and, with some difficulty, got her

to promise to assist me with her endeavours. My father's reluctant consent

was next obtained, and then, though Mary still sighed her disapproval, my

dear, kind mother began to look out for a situation for me. She wrote to my

father's relations, and consulted the newspaper advertisements - her own

relations she had long dropped all communication with: a formal interchange

of occasional letters was all she had ever had since her marriage, and she

would not at any time have applied to them in a case of this nature. But so

long and so entire had been my parents' seclusion from the world, that many

weeks elapsed before a suitable situation could be procured. At last, to my

great joy, it was decreed that I should take charge of the young family of

a certain Mrs Bloomfield, whom my kind, prim Aunt Grey had known in her

youth, and asserted to be a very fine woman. Her husband was a retired

tradesman, who had realised a very comfortable fortune, but could not be

prevailed upon to give a greater salary than twenty-five pounds to the

instructress of his children. I, however, was glad to accept this rather

than refuse the situation - which my parents were inclined to think the

better plan.

But some weeks more were yet to be devoted to preparation. How long, how

tedious those weeks appeared to me! Yet they were happy ones in the main -

full of bright hopes and ardent expectations. With what peculiar pleasure I

assisted at the making of my new clothes, and, subsequently, the packing of

my trunks! But there was a feeling of bitterness mingling with the latter

occupation, too; and when it was done - when all was ready for my departure

on the morrow, and the last night at home approached - a sudden anguish

seemed to swell my heart. My dear friends looked so sad, and spoke so very

kindly, that I could scarcely keep my eyes from overflowing; but I still

affected to be gay. I had taken my last ramble with Mary on the moors, my

last walk in the garden and round the house; I had fed, with her, our pet

pigeons for the last time - the pretty creatures that we had tamed to peck

their food from our hands; I had given a farewell stroke to an their silky

backs as they crowded in my lap. I had tenderly kissed my own peculiar

favourites, the pair of snow-white fantails; I had played my last tune on

the old familiar piano, and sung my last song to papa; not the last, I

hoped, but the last for what appeared to me a very long time; and, perhaps,

when I did these things again, it would be with different feelings:

circumstances might be changed, and this house might never be my settled

home again.

My dear little friend the kitten would certainly be changed; she was

already growing a fine cat; and when I returned, even for a hasty visit at

Christmas, would most likely have forgotten both her playmate and her merry

pranks. I had romped with her for the last time; and when I stroked her

soft bright fur, while she lay purring herself to sleep in my lap, it was

with a feeling of sadness I could not easily disguise. Then, at bedtime,

when I retired with Mary to our quiet little chamber, where already my

drawers were cleared out, and my share of the bookcase was empty, and

where, hereafter, she would have to sleep alone in dreary solitude, as she

expressed it, my heart sank more than ever. I felt as if I had been selfish

and wrong to persist in leaving her; and when I knelt once more beside our

little bed, I prayed for a blessing on her and on my parents more fervently

than ever I had done before. To conceal my emotion, I buried my face in my

hands, and they were presently bathed in tears. I perceived, on rising,

that she had been crying, too; but neither of us spoke; and in silence we

betook ourselves to our repose, creeping more closely together, from the

consciousness that we were to part so soon.

But the morning brought a renewal of hope and spirits. I was to depart

early, that the conveyance which took me (a gig hired from Mr Smith, the

draper, grocer, and tea-dealer of the village) might return the same day. I

rose, washed, dressed, swallowed a hasty breakfast, received the fond

embraces of my father, mother and sister, kissed the cat, to the great

scandal of Sally, the maid, shook hands with her, mounted the gig, drew my

veil over my face, and then, but not till then, burst into a flood of

tears.

The gig rolled on - I looked back: my dear mother and sister were still

standing at the door, looking after me, and waving their adieux. I returned

their salute, and prayed God to bless them from my heart: we descended the

hill, and I could see them no more.

"It's a coldish mornin' for you, Miss Agnes," observed Smith; "and a

darksome un, too; but we's, happen, get to yon' spot afore there come much

rain to signify."

"Yes, I hope so," replied I, as calmly as I could.

"It's comed a good sup last night, too."

"Yes."

"But this cold wind ull, happen, keep it off."

"Perhaps it will."

Here ended our colloquy. We crossed the valley, and began to ascend the

opposite hill. As we were toiling up, I looked back again: there was the

village spire, and the old grey parsonage beyond it, basking in a slanting

beam of sunshine - it was but a sickly ray, but the village and surrounding

hills were all in sombre shade, and I hailed the wandering beam as a

propitious omen to my home. With clasped hands, I fervently implored a

blessing on its inhabitants, and hastily turned away; for I saw the

sunshine was departing, and I carefully avoided another glance lest I

should see it in gloomy shadow like the rest of the landscape.

Chapter 2

First Lessons In The Art Of Instruction

As we drove along, my spirits revived again, and I turned, with pleasure,

to the contemplation of the new life upon which I was entering; but, though

it was not far past the middle of September, the heavy clouds and strong

north-easterly wind combined to render the day extremely cold and dreary,

and the journey seemed a very long one, for, as Smith observed, the roads

were "very heavy;" and, certainly, his horse was very heavy, too; it

crawled up the hills, and crept down them, and only condescended to shake

its sides in a trot where the road was at a dead level or a very gentle

slope, which was rarely the case in those rugged regions; so that it was

nearly one o'clock before we reached the place of our destination. Yet,

after all, when we entered the lofty iron gateway, when we drove softly up

the smooth, well-rolled carriage road, with the green lawn on each side,

studded with young trees, and approached the new but stately mansion of

Wellwood, rising above its mushroom poplar groves, my heart failed me, and

I wished it were a mile or two farther off. For the first time in my life,

I must stand alone: there was no retreating now, I must enter that house,

and introduce myself among its strange inhabitants. But how was it to be

done? True, I was near nineteen, but, thanks to my retired life, and the

protecting care of my mother and sister, I well knew that many a girl of

fifteen, or under, was gifted with a more womanly address, and greater ease

and self-possession, than I was. Yet, if Mrs Bloomfield were a kind,

motherly woman, I might do very well after all; and the children, of

course, I should soon be at ease with them - and Mr Bloomfield, I hoped, I

should have but little to do with.

"Be calm, be calm, whatever happens," I said within myself, and truly I

kept this resolution so well, and was so fully occupied in steadying my

nerves, and stilling the rebellious flutter of my heart, that when I was

admitted into the hall, and ushered into the presence of Mrs Bloomfield, I

almost forgot to answer her polite salutation; and it afterwards struck me

that the little I did say was spoken in the tone of one half-dead, or half-

asleep. The lady, too, was somewhat chilly in her manner, as I discovered

when I had time to reflect. She was a tall, spare, stately woman, with

black hair, cold grey eyes, and extremely sallow complexion.

With due politeness, however, she showed me my bedroom, and left me there

to take a little refreshment. I was somewhat dismayed at my appearance on

looking in the glass - the cold wind had swelled and reddened my hands,

uncurled and entangled my hair, and dyed my face of a pale purple; add to

this my collar was horridly crumpled, my frock splashed with mud, my feet

clad in stout new boots, and as the trunks were not brought up, there was

no remedy; so having smoothed my hair as well as I could, and repeatedly

twitched my obdurate collar, I proceeded to clomp down the two flights of

stairs, philosophising as I went, and with some difficulty found my way

into the room where Mrs Bloomfield awaited me.

She led me into the dining-room where the family luncheon had been laid

out. Some beefsteaks and half-cold potatoes were set before me; and while I

dined upon these, she sat opposite, watching me (as I thought), and

endeavouring to sustain something like a conversation - consisting chiefly

of a succession of commonplace remarks, expressed with frigid formality;

but this might be more my fault than hers, for I really could not converse.

In fact, my attention was almost wholly absorbed in my dinner; not from

ravenous appetite, but from distress at the toughness of the beefsteaks,

and the numbness of my hands, almost palsied by their five hours exposure

to the bitter wind. I would gladly have eaten the potatoes and let the meat

alone, but having got a large piece of the latter on to my plate, I could

not be so impolite as to leave it; so, after many awkward and unsuccessful

attempts to cut it with the knife, or tear it with the fork, or pull it

asunder between them, sensible that the awful lady was a spectator to the

whole transaction, I at last desperately grasped the knife and fork in my

fists, like a child of two years old, and fell to work with all the little

strength I possessed. But this needed some apology - with a feeble attempt

at a laugh, I said, "My hands are so benumbed with the cold that I can

scarcely handle my knife and fork."

"I daresay you would find it cold," replied she with a cool, immutable

gravity that did not serve to reassure me.

When the ceremony was concluded, she led me into the sitting-room again,

where she rang and sent for the children.

"You will find them not very far advanced in their attainments," said she,

"for I have had so little time to attend to their education myself, and we

have thought them too young for a governess till now; but I think they are

clever children, and very apt to learn, especially the little boy: he is, I

think, the flower of the flock - a generous, noble-spirited boy, one to be

led, but not driven, and remarkable for always speaking the truth. He seems

to scorn deception" (this was good news). "His sister, Mary Ann, will

require watching," continued she, "but she is a very good girl upon the

whole: though I wish her to be kept out of the nursery as much as possible,

as she is now almost six years old, and might acquire bad habits from the

nurses. I have ordered her crib to be placed in your room, and if you will

be so kind as to overlook her washing and dressing, and take charge of her

clothes, she need have nothing further to do with the nursery-maid."

I replied I was quite willing to do so; and at that moment my young pupils

entered the apartment with their two younger sisters. Master Tom Bloomfield

was a well-grown boy of seven, with a somewhat wiry frame, flaxen hair,

blue eyes, small turned-up nose, and fair complexion. Mary Ann was a tall

girl too, somewhat dark like her mother, but with a round, full face, and a

high colour in her cheeks. The second sister was Fanny, a very pretty

little girl; Mrs Bloomfield assured me she was a remarkably gentle child,

and required encouragement: she had not learnt anything yet; but in a few

days, she would be four years old, and then she might take her first lesson

in the alphabet, and be promoted to the schoolroom. The remaining one was

Harriet, a little broad, fat, merry, playful thing of scarcely two, that I

coveted more than all the rest - but with her I had nothing to do.

I talked to my little pupils as well as I could, and tried to render myself

agreeable; but with little success I fear, for their mother's presence kept

me under an unpleasant restraint. They, however, were remarkably free from

shyness. They seemed bold, lively children, and I hoped I should soon be on

friendly terms with them - the little boy especially, of whom I had heard

such a favourable character from his mamma. In Mary Ann there was a certain

affected simper, and a craving for notice, that I was sorry to observe. But

her brother claimed all my attention to himself; he stood bolt upright

between me and the fire, with his hands behind his back, talking away like

an orator, occasionally interrupting his discourse with a sharp reproof to

his sisters when they made too much noise.

"O, Tom, what a darling you are!" exclaimed his mother. "Come and kiss dear

mamma; and then won't you show Miss Grey your schoolroom and your nice new

books?"

"I won't kiss you mamma; but I will show Miss Grey my schoolroom, and my

new books."

"And my schoolroom, and my new books, Tom," said Mary Ann, "They're mine,

too."

"They're mine," replied he decisively. "Come along, Miss Grey - I'll escort

you."

When the room and books had been shown, with some bickerings between the

brother and sister that I did my utmost to appease or mitigate, Mary Ann

brought me her doll, and began to be very loquacious on the subject of its

fine clothes, its bed, its chest of drawers, and other appurtenances; but

Tom told her to hold her clamour, that Miss Grey might see his rocking-

horse, which, with a most important bustle, he dragged forth from its

corner into the middle of the room, loudly calling on me to attend to it.

Then, ordering his sister to hold the reins, he mounted, and made me stand

for ten minutes, watching how manfully he used his whip and spurs.

Meantime, however, I admired Mary Ann's pretty doll, and all its

possessions; and then told Master Tom he was a capital rider, but I hoped

he would not use his whip and spurs so much when he rode a real pony.

"Oh yes, I will!" said he, laying on with redoubled ardour. "I'll cut into

him like smoke! Eeh! my word! but he shall sweat for it."

This was very shocking, but I hoped in time to be able to work a

reformation.

"Now you must put on your bonnet and shawl," said the little hero, "and

I'll show you my garden."

"And mine," said Mary Ann.

Tom lifted his fist with a menacing gesture, she uttered a loud, shrill

scream, ran to the other side of me, and made a face at him.

"Surely, Tom, you would not strike your sister! I hope I shall never see

you do that."

"You will sometimes; I'm obliged to do it now and then to keep her in

order."

"But it is not your business to keep her in order, you know - that is for

-"

"Well, now go and put on your bonnet."

"I don't know - it is so very cloudy and cold, it seems likely to rain; and

you know I have had a long drive."

"No matter - you must come; I shall allow of no excuses," replied the

consequential little gentleman. And as it was the first day of our

acquaintance, I thought I might as well indulge him. It was too cold for

Mary Ann to venture out, so she stayed with her mamma, to the great relief

of her brother, who liked to have me all to himself.

The garden was a large one, and tastefully laid out; besides several

splendid dahlias, there were some other fine flowers still in bloom; but my

companion would not give me time to examine them: I must go with him,

across the wet grass, to a remote, sequestered corner, the most important

place in the grounds, because it contained his garden. There were two round

beds, stocked with a variety of plants. In one, there was a pretty little

rose tree. I paused to admire its lovely blossoms.

"Oh, never mind that!" said he contemptuously. "That's only Mary Ann's

garden: look, THIS is mine."

After I had observed every flower, and listened to a disquisition on every

plant, I was permitted to depart; but first, with great pomp, he plucked a

polyanthus and presented it to me, as one conferring a prodigious favour. I

observed, on the grass about his garden, certain apparatus of sticks and

cord, and asked what they were.

"Traps for birds."

"Why do you catch them?"

"Papa says they do harm."

"And what do you do with them, when you catch them?"

"Different things. Sometimes I give them to the cat; sometimes I cut them

in pieces with my penknife; but the next, I mean to roast alive."

"And why do you mean to do such a horrible thing?"

"For two reasons: first, to see how long it will live - and then, to see

what it will taste like."

"But don't you know it is extremely wicked to do such things? Remember, the

birds can feel as well as you; and think, how would you like it yourself?"

"Oh, that's nothing! I'm not a bird, and I can't feel what I do to them."

"But you will have to feel it sometime, Tom: you have heard where wicked

people go to when they die; and if you don't leave off torturing innocent

birds, remember, you will have to go there, and suffer just what you have

made them suffer."

"Oh, pooh! I shan't. Papa knows how I treat them, and he never blames me

for it; he says it's just what he used to do when he was a boy. Last summer

he gave me a nest full of young sparrows, and he saw me pulling off their

legs and wings and heads, and never said anything, except that they were

nasty things, and I must not let them soil my trousers; and Uncle Robson

was there too, and he laughed, and said I was a fine boy."

"But what would your mamma say?"

"Oh! she doesn't care! she says it's a pity to kill the pretty singing

birds, but the naughty sparrows, and mice and rats, I may do what I like

with. So now, Miss Grey, you see it is not wicked."

"I still think it is, Tom; and perhaps your papa and mamma would think so

too if they thought much about it. However," I internally added, "they may

say what they please, but I am determined you shall do nothing of the kind

as long as I have power to prevent it."

He next took me across the lawn to see his mole-traps, and then into the

stack-yard to see his weasel-traps, one of which, to his great joy,

contained a dead weasel; and then into the stable to see, not the fine

carriage horses, but a little rough colt, which he informed me had been

bred on purpose for him, and he was to ride it as soon as it was properly

trained.

I tried to amuse the little fellow, and listened to all his chatter as

complacently as I could; for I thought if he had any affections at all, I

would endeavour to win them; and then, in time, I might be able to show him

the error of his ways; but I looked in vain for that generous, noble spirit

his mother talked of; though I could see he was not without a certain

degree of quickness and penetration, when he chose to exert it.

When we re-entered the house it was nearly tea-time. Master Tom told me

that, as papa was from home, he and I and Mary Ann were to have tea with

mamma for a treat; for, on such occasions, she always dined at luncheon

time with them, instead of at six o'clock. Soon after tea, Mary Ann went to

bed, but Tom favoured us with his company and conversation till eight.

After he was gone, Mrs Bloomfield further enlightened me on the subject of

her children's dispositions and acquirements, and on what they were to

learn, and how they were to be managed, and cautioned me to mention their

defects to no one but herself. My mother had warned me before to mention

them as little as possible to her, for people did not like to be told of

their children's faults, and so I concluded I was to keep silence on them

altogether. About half-past nine, Mrs Bloomfield invited me to partake a

frugal supper of cold meat and bread. I was glad when that was over, and

she took her bedroom candlestick and retired to rest; for though I wished

to be pleased with her, her company was extremely irksome to me, and I

could not help feeling that she was cold, grave, and forbidding - the very

opposite of the kind, warm-hearted matron my hopes had depicted her to be.

Chapter 3

A Few More Lessons

I rose next morning with a feeling of hopeful exhilaration, in spite of the

disappointments already experienced; but I found the dressing of Mary Ann

was no light matter, as her abundant hair was to be smeared with pomade,

plaited in three long tails, and tied with bows of ribbon - a task my

unaccustomed fingers found great difficulty in performing. She told me her

nurse could do it in half the time, and, by keeping up a constant fidget of

impatience, contrived to render me still longer. When all was done, we went

into the schoolroom, where I met my other pupil, and chatted with the two

till it was time to go down to breakfast. That meal being concluded, and a

few civil words having been exchanged with Mrs Bloomfield, we repaired to

the schoolroom again, and commenced the business of the day. I found my

pupils very backward indeed; but Tom, though averse to every species of

mental exertion, was not without abilities. Mary Ann could scarcely read a

word, and was so careless and inattentive that I could hardly get on with

her at all. However, by dint of great labour and patience, I managed to get

something done in the course of the morning, and then accompanied my young

charge out into the garden and adjacent grounds, for a little recreation

before dinner. There we got along tolerably together, except that I found

they had no notion of going with me: I must go with them wherever they

chose to lead me. I must run, walk, or stand exactly as it suited their

fancy. This, I thought, was reversing the order of things; and I found it

doubly disagreeable, as on this as well as subsequent occasions, they

seemed to prefer the dirtiest places and the most dismal occupations. But

there was no remedy; either I must follow them, or keep entirely apart from

them, and thus appear neglectful of my charge. Today, they manifested a

particular attachment to a well at the bottom of the lawn, where they

persisted in dabbling with sticks and pebbles for above half an hour. I was

in constant fear that their mother would see them from the window, and

blame me for allowing them thus to draggle their clothes and wet their feet

and hands, instead of taking exercise; but no arguments, commands, or

intreaties could draw them away. If she did not see them, someone else did

- a gentleman on horseback had entered the gate, and was proceeding up the

road; at the distance of a few paces from us he paused, and calling to the

children in a waspish penetrating tone, bade them "keep out of that water."

"Miss Grey," said he, "(I suppose it is Miss Grey) I am surprised that you

should allow them to dirty their clothes in that manner. Don't you see how

Miss Bloomfield has soiled her frock? and that Master Bloomfield's socks

are quite wet? and both of them without gloves! Dear! dear! Let me request

that in future you will keep them decent, at least!" so saying, he turned

away, and continued his ride up to the house. This was Mr Bloomfield. I was

surprised that he should nominate his children Master and Miss Bloomfield,

and still more so, that he should speak so uncivilly to me, their

governess, and a perfect stranger to himself. Presently the bell rang to

summon us in. I dined with the children at one, while he and his lady took

their luncheon at the same table. His conduct there did not greatly raise

him in my estimation. He was a man of ordinary stature - rather below than

above - and rather thin than stout, apparently between thirty and forty

years of age: he had a large mouth, pale, dingy complexion, milky blue

eyes, and hair the colour of a hempen cord. There was a roast leg of mutton

before him: he helped Mrs Bloomfield, the children, and me, desiring me to

cut up the children's meat; then, after twisting about the mutton in

various directions, and eyeing it from different points, he pronounced it

not fit to be eaten, and called for the cold beef.

"What is the matter with the mutton, my dear?" asked his mate.

"It is quite overdone. Don't you taste, Mrs Bloomfield, that all the

goodness is roasted out of it? And can't you see that all that nice, red

gravy is completely dried away?"

"Well, I think the beef will suit you."

The beef was set before him, and he began to carve, but with the most

rueful expressions of discontent.

"What is the matter with the beef, Mr Bloomfield? I'm sure I thought it was

very nice."

"And so it was very nice. A nicer joint could not be; but it is quite

spoiled," replied he, dolefully.

"How so?"

"How so! Why, don't you see how it is cut? Dear - dear! it is quite

shocking!"

"They must have cut it wrong in the kitchen then, for I'm sure I carved it

quite properly here, yesterday."

"No doubt they cut it wrong in the kitchen - the savages! Dear - dear! Did

ever anyone see such a fine piece of beef so completely ruined? But

remember that, in future, when a decent dish leaves this table, they shall

not touch it in the kitchen. Remember that, Mrs Bloomfield!"

Notwithstanding the ruinous state of the beef, the gentleman managed to cut

himself some delicate slices, part of which he ate in silence. When he next

spoke it was, in a less querulous tone, to ask what there was for dinner.

"Turkey and grouse," was the concise reply.

"And what besides?"

"Fish."

"What kind of fish?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" cried he, looking solemnly up from his plate, and

suspending his knife and fork in astonishment.

"No. I told the cook to get some fish - I did not particularise what."

"Well, that beats everything! A lady professes to keep house, and doesn't

even know what fish is for dinner! professes to order fish, and doesn't

specify what!"

"Perhaps, Mr Bloomfield, you will order dinner yourself in future."

Nothing more was said; and I was very glad to get out of the room with my

pupils; for I never felt so ashamed and uncomfortable in my life, for

anything that was not my own fault.

In the afternoon we applied to lessons again; then went out again; then had

tea in the schoolroom; then I dressed Mary Ann for dessert; and when she

and her brother were gone down to the dining-room, I took the opportunity

of beginning a letter to my dear friends at home; but the children came up

before I had half completed it.

At seven, I had to put Mary Ann to bed; then I played with Tom till eight,

when he too went, and I finished my letter, and unpacked my clothes, which

I had hitherto found no opportunity for doing, and, finally, went to bed

myself.

But this is a very favourable specimen of a day's proceedings.

My task of instruction and surveillance, instead of becoming easier as my

charges and I got better accustomed to each other, became more arduous as

their characters unfolded. The name of governess, I soon found, was a mere

mockery as applied to me: my pupils had no more notion of obedience than a

wild, unbroken colt. The habitual fear of their father's peevish temper,

and the dread of the punishments he was wont to inflict when irritated,

kept them generally within bounds in his immediate presence. The girls,

too, had some fear of their mother's anger; and the boy might occasionally

be bribed to do as she bid him by the hope of reward; but I had no rewards

to offer; and as for punishments, I was given to understand the parents

reserved that privilege to themselves; and yet they expected me to keep my

pupils in order. Other children might be guided by the fear of anger, and

the desire of approbation; but neither the one nor the other had any effect

upon these.

Master Tom, not content with refusing to be ruled, must needs set up as a

ruler, and manifested a determination to keep, not only his sisters, but

his governess in order, by violent manual and pedal applications; and, as

he was a tall, strong boy of his years, this occasioned no trifling

inconvenience. A few sound boxes in the ear, on such occasions, might have

settled the matter easily enough: but as, in that case, he might make up

some story to his mother, which she would be sure to believe, as she had

such unshaken faith in his veracity - though I had already discovered it to

be by no means unimpeachable - I determined to refrain from striking him

even in self-defence; and, in his most violent moods, my only resource was

to throw him on his back, and hold his hands and feet till the frenzy was

somewhat abated.

To the difficulty of preventing him from doing what he ought not, was added

that of forcing him to do what he ought. Often he would positively refuse

to learn, or to repeat his lessons, or even to look at his book. Here

again, a good birch rod might have been serviceable; but, as my powers were

so limited, I must make the best use of what I had. As there were no

settled hours for study and play, I resolved to give my pupils a certain

task, which, with moderate attention, they could perform in a short time;

and till this was done, however weary I was, or however perverse they might

be, nothing short of parental interference should induce me to suffer them

to leave the schoolroom; even if I should sit with my chair against the

door to keep them in. Patience, Firmness, and Perseverance were my only

weapons; and these I resolved to use to the utmost.

I determined always strictly to fulfil the threats and promises I made; and

to that end, I must be cautious to threaten and promise nothing that I

could not perform. Then, I would carefully refrain from all useless

irritability and indulgence of my own ill-temper: when they behaved

tolerably, I would be as kind and obliging as it was in my power to be, in

order to make the widest possible distinction between good and bad conduct;

I would reason with them, too, in the simplest and most effective manner.

When I reproved them, or refused to gratify their wishes, after a glaring

fault, it should be more in sorrow than in anger: their little hymns and

prayers I would make plain and clear to their understanding; when they said

their prayers at night, and asked pardon for their offences, I would remind

them of the sins of the past day, solemnly, but in perfect kindness, to

avoid raising a spirit of opposition; penitential hymns should be said by

the naughty, cheerful ones by the comparatively good; and every kind of

instruction I would convey to them, as much as possible, by entertaining

discourse - apparently with no other object than their present amusement in

view.

By these means I hoped, in time, both to benefit the children and to gain

the approbation of their parents; and also to convince my friends at home

that I was not so wanting in skill and prudence as they supposed. I knew

the difficulties I had to contend with were great; but I knew (at least, I

believed) unremitting patience and perseverance could overcome them, and

night and morning I implored Divine assistance to this end. But either the

children were so incorrigible, the parents so unreasonable, or myself so

mistaken in my views, or so unable to carry them out, that my best

intentions and most strenuous efforts seemed productive of no better result

than sport to the children, dissatisfaction to their parents, and torment

to myself.

The task of instruction was as arduous for the body as the mind. I had to

run after my pupils, to catch them, to carry or drag them to the table, and

often forcibly to hold them there, till the lesson was done. Tom, I

frequently put into a corner, seating myself before him in a chair, with

the book which contained the little task that must be said or read, before

he was released, in my hand. He was not strong enough to push both me and

the chair away; so he would stand twisting his body and face into the most

grotesque and singular contortions - laughable, no doubt, to an unconcerned

spectator, but not to me - and uttering loud yells and doleful outcries,

intended to represent weeping, but wholly without the accompaniment of

tears. I knew this was done solely for the purpose of annoying me; and,

therefore, however I might inwardly tremble with impatience and irritation,

I manfully strove to suppress all visible signs of molestation, and

affected to sit, with calm indifference, waiting till it should please him

to cease this pastime, and prepare for a run in the garden, by casting his

eye on the book and reading or repeating the few words he was required to

say.

Sometimes he would determine to do his writing badly; and I had to hold his

hand to prevent him from purposely blotting or disfiguring the paper.

Frequently I threatened that, if he did not do better, he should have

another line; then he would stubbornly refuse to write this line, and I, to

save my word, had finally to resort to the expedient of holding his fingers

upon the pen, and forcibly drawing his hand up and down till, in spite of

his resistance, the line was in some sort completed.

Yet Tom was by no means the most unmanageable of my pupils: sometimes, to

my great joy, he would have the sense to see that his wisest policy was to

finish his tasks, and go out and amuse himself till I and his sisters came

to join him, which, frequently, was not at all, for Mary Ann seldom

followed his example in this particular. She apparently preferred rolling

on the floor to any other amusement. Down she would drop like a leaden

weight; and when I, with great difficulty, had succeeded in rooting her

thence, I had still to hold her up with one arm, while with the other I

held the book from which she was to read or spell her lesson. As the dead

weight of the big girl of six became too heavy for one arm to bear, I

transferred it to the other; or, if both were weary of the burden, I

carried her into a corner, and told her she might come out when she should

find the use of her feet, and stand up; but she generally preferred lying

there like a log till dinner or tea-time, when, as I could not deprive her

of her meals, she must be liberated, and would come crawling out with a

grin of triumph on her round, red face.

Often she would stubbornly refuse to pronounce some particular word in her

lesson; and I now regret the lost labour I have had in striving to conquer

her obstinacy. If I had passed it over as a matter of no consequence, it

would have been better for both parties than vainly striving to overcome

it, as I did; but I thought it my absolute duty to crush this vicious

tendency in the bud; and so it was, if I could have done it, and, had my

powers been less limited, I might have enforced obedience; but as it was,

it was but a trial of strength between her and me, in which she generally

came off victorious; and every victory served to encourage and strengthen

her for a future contest.

In vain I argued, coaxed, entreated, threatened, scolded; in vain I kept

her in from play, or, if obliged to take her out, refused to play with her,

or to speak kindly, or have anything to do with her; in vain I tried to set

before her the advantages of doing as she was bid, and being loved, and

kindly treated in consequence, and the disadvantages of persisting in her

absurd perversity. Sometimes, when she asked me to do something for her, I

would answer -

"Yes, I will, Mary Ann, if you will only say that word. Come! you'd better

say it at once, and have no more trouble about it."

"No."

"Then, of course, I can do nothing for you!"

With me, at her age, or under, neglect and disgrace were the most dreadful

of punishments; but on her they made no impression.

Sometimes, exasperated to the utmost pitch, I would shake her violently by

the shoulders, or pull her long hair, or put her in the corner, - for which

she punished me with loud, shrill, piercing screams, that went through my

head like a knife. She knew I hated this, and when she had shrieked her

utmost, would look into my face with an air of vindictive satisfaction,

exclaiming -

"Now then! that's for you!"

And then shriek again and again, till I was forced to stop my ears. Often

these dreadful cries would bring Mrs Bloomfield up to inquire what was the

matter?

"Mary Ann is a naughty girl, ma'am."

"But what are these shocking screams?"

"She is screaming in a passion."

"I never heard such a dreadful noise! You might be killing her. Why is she

not out with her brother?"

"I cannot get her to finish her lessons."

"But Mary Ann must be a good girl, and finish her lessons." This was

blandly spoken to the child. "And I hope I shall never hear such terrible

cries again!"

And fixing her cold, stony eyes upon me with a look that could not be

mistaken, she would shut the door, and walk away. Sometimes I would try to

take the little obstinate creature by surprise, and casually ask her the

word while she was thinking of something else: frequently she would begin

to say it, and then suddenly check herself, with a provoking look that

seemed to say, "Ah! I'm too sharp for you; you shan't trick it out of me

either."

On another occasion, I pretended to forget the whole affair; and talked and

played with her as usual, till night, when I put her to bed; then bending

over her, while she lay all smiles and good humour, just before departing,

I said, as cheerfully and kindly as before -

"Now, Mary Ann, just tell me that word before I kiss you good night: you

are a good girl now, and, of course, you will say it."

"No, I won't."

"Then I can't kiss you!"

"Well, I don't care."

In vain I expressed my sorrow; in vain I lingered for some symptom of

contrition; she really "didn't care," and I left her alone, and in

darkness, wondering most of all at this last proof of insensate

stubbornness. In my childhood I could not imagine a more afflictive

punishment than for my mother to refuse to kiss me at night: the very idea

was terrible - more than the idea I never felt, for, happily, I never

committed a crime that was deemed worthy of such a penalty; but, once, I

remember, for some transgression of my sister's, our mother thought proper

to inflict it upon her; what she felt, I cannot tell; but my sympathetic

tears and suffering for her sake I shall not soon forget.

Another troublesome trait in Mary Ann was her incorrigible propensity to

keep running into the nursery to play with her little sisters and the

nurse. This was natural enough, but, as it was against her mother's express

desire, I, of course, forbade her to do so, and did my utmost to keep her

with me, but that only increased her relish for the nursery; and the more I

strove to keep her out of it, the oftener she went, and the longer she

stayed; to the great dissatisfaction of Mrs Bloomfield, who, I well knew,

would impute all the blame of the matter to me. Another of my trials was

the dressing in the morning: at one time she would not be washed; at

another she would not be dressed, unless she might wear some particular

frock that, I knew, her mother would not like her to have; at another she

would scream, and run away if I attempted to touch her hair. So that,

frequently, when, after much trouble and toil, I had at length succeeded in

bringing her down, the breakfast was nearly half-over; and black looks from

"mamma," and testy observations from "papa," spoken at me, if not to me,

were sure to be my meed; for few things irritated the latter so much as

want of punctuality at meal-times.

Then, among the minor annoyances, was my inability to satisfy Mrs

Bloomfield with her daughter's dress; and the child's hair "was never fit

to be seen." Sometimes, as a powerful reproach to me, she would perform the

office of tire-woman herself, and then complain bitterly of the trouble it

gave her.

When little Fanny came into the schoolroom, I hoped she would be mild and

inoffensive at least; but a few days, if not a few hours, sufficed to

destroy the illusion: I found her a mischievous, intractable little

creature, given up to falsehood and deception, young as she was, and

alarmingly fond of exercising her two favourite weapons of offence and

defence: that of spitting in the faces of those who incurred her

displeasure, and bellowing like a bull when her unreasonable desires were

not gratified. As she, generally, was pretty quiet in her parents'

presence, and they were impressed with the notion of her being a remarkably

gentle child, her falsehoods were readily believed, and her loud uproars

led them to suspect harsh and injudicious treatment on my part; and when,

at length, her bad disposition became manifest, even to their prejudiced

eyes, I felt that the whole was attributed to me.

"What a naughty girl Fanny is getting," Mrs Bloomfield would say to her

spouse. "Don't you observe, my dear, how she is altered since she entered

the schoolroom? She will soon be as bad as the other two; and, I am sorry

to say, they have quite deteriorated of late."

"You may say that," was the answer. "I've been thinking that same myself. I

thought when we got them a governess they'd improve; but, instead of that,

they get worse and worse: I don't know how it is with their learning; but

their habits, I know, make no sort of improvement; they get rougher, and

dirtier, and more unseemly every day."

I knew this was all pointed at me; and these and all similar innuendoes

affected me far more deeply than any open accusations would have done; for,

against the latter, I should have been roused to speak in my own defence;

now, I judged it my wisest plan to subdue every resentful impulse, suppress

every sensitive shrinking, and go on perseveringly doing my best; for,

irksome as my situation was, I earnestly wished to retain it. I thought if

I could struggle on with unremitting firmness and integrity, the children

would, in time, become more humanised: every month would contribute to make

them some little wiser, and, consequently, more manageable; for a child of

nine or ten as frantic and ungovernable as these at six and seven would be

a maniac.

I flattered myself I was benefiting my parents and sister by my continuance

here; for, small as the salary was, I still was earning something, and,

with strict economy, I could easily manage to have something to spare for

them, if they would favour me by taking it. Then, it was by my own will

that I had got the place: I had brought all this tribulation on myself, and

I was determined to bear it; nay, more than that, I did not even regret the

step I had taken, and I longed to show my friends that, even now, I was

competent to undertake the charge, and able to acquit myself honourably to

the end; and if ever I felt it degrading to submit so quietly, or

intolerable to toil so constantly, I would turn towards my home, and say

within myself -

 They may crush, but they shall not subdue me!

 'Tis of thee that I think, not of them.

About Christmas I was allowed a visit home, but only of a fortnight's

duration. "For," said Mrs Bloomfield, "I thought, as you had seen your

friends so lately, you would not care for a longer stay." I left her to

think so still; but she little knew how long, how wearisome those fourteen

weeks of absence had been to me, how intensely I had longed for my

holidays, how greatly I was disappointed at their curtailment. Yet she was

not to blame in this; I had never told her my feelings, and she could not

be expected to divine them; I had not been with her a full term, and she

was justified in not allowing me a full vacation.

Chapter 4

The Grandmamma

I spare my readers the account of my delight on coming home, my happiness

while there - enjoying a brief space of rest and liberty in that dear,

familiar place, among the loving and the loved - and my sorrow on being

obliged to bid them, once more, a long adieu.

I returned, however, with unabated vigour to my work - a more arduous task

than anyone can imagine, who has not felt something like the misery of

being charged with the care and direction of a set of mischievous,

turbulent rebels, whom his utmost exertions cannot bind to their duty;

while, at the same time, he is responsible for their conduct to a higher

power, who exacts from him what cannot be achieved without the aid of the

superior's more potent authority; which, either from indolence or the fear

of becoming unpopular with the said rebellious gang, the latter refuses to

give. I can conceive few situations more harassing than that wherein,

however you may long for success, however you may labour to fulfil your

duty, your efforts are baffled and set at naught by those beneath you, and

unjustly censured and misjudged by those above.

I have not enumerated half the vexatious propensities of my pupils, or half

the troubles resulting from my heavy responsibilities, for fear of

trespassing too much upon the reader's patience; as, perhaps, I have

already done; but my design in writing the few last pages was not to amuse,

but to benefit those whom it might concern: he that has no interest in such

matters will doubtless have skipped them over with a cursory glance, and,

perhaps, a malediction against the prolixity of the writer; but if a parent

has, therefrom, gathered any useful hint, or an unfortunate governess

received thereby the slightest benefit, I am well rewarded for my pains.

To avoid trouble and confusion, I have taken my pupils one by one, and

discussed their various qualities; but this can give no adequate idea of

being worried by the whole three together; when, as was often the case, all

were determined to "be naughty, and to tease Miss Grey, and put her in a

passion."

Sometimes, on such occasions, the thought has suddenly occurred to me - "If

they could see me now!" meaning, of course, my friends at home; and the

idea of how they would pity me has made me pity myself - so greatly that I

have had the utmost difficulty to restrain my tears; but I have restrained

them, till my little tormentors were gone to dessert, or cleared off to bed

(my only prospects of deliverance), and then, in all the bliss of solitude,

I have given myself up to the luxury of an unrestricted burst of weeping.

But this was a weakness I did not often indulge: my employments were too

numerous, my leisure moments were too precious, to admit of much time being

given to fruitless lamentations.

I particularly remember one wild, snowy afternoon soon after my return in

January - the children had all come up from dinner, loudly declaring that

they meant "to be naughty;" and they had well kept their resolution, though

I had talked myself hoarse, and wearied every muscle in my throat in the

vain attempt to reason them out of it. I had got Tom pinned up in a corner,

whence, I told him, he should not escape till he had done his appointed

task. Meantime, Fanny had possessed herself of my work-bag, and was rifling

its contents - and spitting into it besides. I told her to let it alone,

but to no purpose, of course.

"Burn it, Fanny!" cried Tom; and this command she hastened to obey. I

sprang to snatch it from the fire, and Tom darted to the door.

"Mary Ann, throw her desk out of the window!" cried he, and my precious

desk, containing my letters and papers, my small amount of cash, and all my

valuables, was about to be precipitated from the three-story window. I flew

to rescue it. Meanwhile Tom had left the room, and was rushing down the

stairs, followed by Fanny. Having secured my desk, I ran to catch them, and

Mary Ann came scampering after. All three escaped me, and ran out of the

house into the garden, where they plunged about in the snow, shouting and

screaming in exultant glee.

What must I do? If I followed them, I should probably be unable to capture

one, and only drive them farther away; if I did not, how was I to get them

in? and what would their parents think of me, if they saw or heard the

children rioting, hatless, bonnetless, gloveless, and bootless in the deep,

soft snow?

While I stood in this perplexity, just without the door, trying by grim

looks and angry words to awe them into subjection, I heard a voice behind

me, in harshly piercing tones, exclaiming, -

"Miss Grey! Is it possible! What in the devil's name can you be thinking

about?"

"I can't get them in, sir," said I, turning round, and beholding Mr

Bloomfield, with his hair on end and his pale blue eyes bolting from their

sockets.

"But I INSIST upon their being got in!" cried he, approaching nearer, and

looking perfectly ferocious.

"Then, sir, you must call them yourself, if you please, for they won't

listen to me," I replied, stepping back.

"Come in with you, you filthy brats! or I'll horsewhip you every one!"

roared he; and the children instantly obeyed. "There, you see! they come at

the first word!"

"Yes, when you speak."

"And it's very strange, that when you've the care of 'em, you've no better

control over 'em than that! - Now there they are - gone upstairs with their

nasty, snowy feet! Do go after 'em and see them made decent, for Heaven's

sake!"

That gentleman's mother was then staying in the house; and as I ascended

the stairs, and passed the drawing-room door, I had the satisfaction of

hearing the old lady declaiming aloud to her daughter-in-law to this effect

(for I could only distinguish the most emphatic words),--

"Gracious Heavens! - never in all my life! - get their death as sure as! -

Do you think my dear she's a proper person? Take my word for it -"

I heard no more; but that sufficed.

The senior Mrs Bloomfield had been very attentive and civil to me; and,

till now, I had thought her a nice, kind-hearted, chatty old body. She

would often come to me and talk in a confidential strain, nodding and

shaking her head, and gesticulating with hands and eyes, as a certain class

of old ladies are wont to do, though I never knew one that carried the

peculiarity to so great an extent. She would even sympathise with me for

the trouble I had with the children, and express at times, by half

sentences interspersed with nods and knowing winks, her sense of the

injudicious conduct of their mamma in so restricting my power, and

neglecting to support me with her authority. Such a mode of testifying

disapprobation was not much to my taste; and I generally refused to take it

in, or understand anything more than was openly spoken; at least, I never

went farther than an implied acknowledgement that, if matters were

otherwise ordered, my task would be a less difficult one, and I should be

better able to guide and instruct my charge; but now I must be doubly

cautious. Hitherto, though I saw the old lady had her defects (of which one

was a proneness to proclaim her perfections), I had always been wishful to

excuse them, and to give her credit for all the virtues she professed, and

even imagine others yet untold. Kindness, which had been the food of my

life through so many years, had lately been so entirely denied me that I

welcomed with grateful joy the slightest semblance of it. No wonder then

that my heart warmed to the old lady, and always gladdened at her approach

and regretted her departure.

But now the few words, luckily or unluckily heard in passing, had wholly

revolutionised my ideas respecting her: now I looked upon her as

hypocritical and insincere, a flatterer, and a spy upon my words and deeds.

Doubtless it would have been my interest still to meet her with the same

cheerful smile and tone of respectful cordiality as before; but I could

not, if I would; my manner altered with my feelings, and became so cold and

shy that she could not fail to notice it. She soon did notice it, and her

manner altered, too: the familiar nod was changed to a stiff bow; the

gracious smile gave place to a glare of gorgon ferocity; her vivacious

loquacity was entirely transferred from me to the "darling boy and girls,"

whom she flattered and indulged more absurdly than ever their mother had

done.

I confess I was somewhat troubled at this change. I feared the consequences

of her displeasure, and even made some efforts to recover the ground I had

lost - and with better apparent success than I could have anticipated. At

one time I, merely in common civility, asked after her cough - immediately

her long visage relaxed into a smile, and she favoured me with a particular

history of that and her other infirmities, followed by an account of her

pious resignation, delivered in the usual emphatic, declamatory style which

no writing can portray.

"But there's one remedy for all, my dear, and that's resignation," (a toss

of the head), "resignation to the will of Heaven!" (an uplifting of hands

and eyes). "It has always supported me through all my trials, and always

will do" (a succession of nods). "But then, it isn't everybody that can say

that" (a shake of the head); "but I'm one of the pious ones, Miss Grey!" (a

very significant nod and toss). "And, thank Heaven, I always was" (another

nod), "and I glory in it!" (an emphatic clasping of the hands and shaking

of the head). And with several texts of scripture, misquoted or misapplied,

and religious exclamations so redolent of the ludicrous in the style of

delivery and manner of bringing in, if not in the expressions themselves,

that I decline repeating them, she withdrew, tossing her large head in high

good-humour - with herself at least - and left me hoping that, after all,

she was rather weak than wicked.

At her next visit to Wellwood House, I went so far as to say I was glad to

see her looking so well. The effect of this was magical: the words,

intended as a mark of civility, were received as a flattering compliment;

her countenance brightened up, and from that moment she became as gracious

and benign as heart could wish - in outward semblance at least; and from

what I now saw of her, and what I heard from the children, I knew that in

order to gain her cordial friendship I had but to utter a word of flattery

at each convenient opportunity; but this was against my principles; and for

lack of this the capricious old dame soon deprived me of her favour again,

and I believe did me much secret injury.

She could not greatly influence her daughter-in-law against me, because

between that lady and herself there was a mutual dislike - chiefly shown by

her in secret detractions and calumniations; by the other, in an excess of

frigid formality in her demeanour; and no fawning flattery of the elder

could thaw away the wall of ice which the younger interposed between them.

But with her son the old lady had better success: he would listen to all

she had to say, provided she could soothe his fretful temper, and refrain

from irritating him by her own asperities; and I have reason to believe

that she considerably strengthened his prejudice against me. She would tell

him that I shamefully neglected the children, and even his wife did not

attend to them as she ought, and that he must look after them himself or

they would all go to ruin.

Thus urged, he would frequently give himself the trouble of watching them

from the windows during their play; at times, he would follow them through

the grounds, and too often came suddenly upon them while they were dabbling

in the forbidden well, talking to the coachman in the stables, or revelling

in the filth of the farmyard - and I meanwhile stupidly standing by, having

previously exhausted my energy in vain attempts to get them away; often,

too, he would unexpectedly pop his head into the schoolroom while the young

people were at meals, and find them spilling their milk over the table and

themselves, plunging their fingers into their own or each other's mugs, or

quarrelling over their victuals like a set of tiger's cubs. If I were quiet

at the moment, I was conniving at their disorderly conduct; if (as was

frequently the case), I happened to be exalting my voice to enforce order,

I was using undue violence, and setting the girls a bad example by such

ungentleness of tone and language.

I remember one afternoon in spring when, owing to the rain, they could not

go out; but, by some amazing good fortune, they had all finished their

lessons, and yet abstained from running down to tease their parents - a

trick that annoyed me greatly, but which, on rainy days, I seldom could

prevent their doing; because, below, they found novelty and amusement -

especially when visitors were in the house; and their mother, though she

bid me keep them in the schoolroom, would never chide them for leaving it,

or trouble herself to send them back. But today they appeared satisfied

with their present abode, and what is more wonderful still, seemed disposed

to play together without depending on me for amusement, and without

quarrelling with each other. Their occupation was a somewhat puzzling one:

they were all squatted together on the floor by the window, over a heap of

broken toys, and a quantity of birds' eggs, or rather eggshells, for the

contents had luckily been abstracted. These shells they had broken up, and

were pounding into small fragments, to what end, I could not imagine; but,

so long as they were quiet, and not in positive mischief, I did not care;

and, with a feeling of unusual repose, I sat by the fire, putting the

finishing stitches to a frock for Mary Ann's doll, intending, when that was

done, to begin a letter to my mother. But, suddenly, the door opened, and

the dingy head of Mr Bloomfield looked in.

"All very quiet here! What are you doing?" said he.

"No harm today, at least," thought I.

But he was of a different opinion. Advancing to the window, and seeing the

children's occupation, he testily exclaimed, -

"What in the world are you about?"

"We're grinding eggshells, papa!" cried Tom.

"How dare you make such a mess, you little devils? Don't you see what

confounded work you're making of the carpet?" (The carpet was a plain,

brown drugget.) "Miss Grey, did you know what they were doing?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew it?"

"Yes."

"You knew it! and you actually sat there and permitted them to go on,

without a word of reproof!"

"I didn't think they were doing any harm."

"Any harm! Why, look there! Just look at that carpet, and see - was there

ever anything like it in a Christian house before? No wonder your room is

not fit for a pigsty - no wonder your pupils are worse than a litter of

pigs! - no wonder - Oh! I declare, it puts me quite past my patience!" and

he departed, shutting the door after him with a bang that made the children

laugh.

"It puts me quite past my patience, too!" muttered I, getting up; and,

seizing the poker, I dashed it repeatedly into the cinders, and stirred

them up with unwonted energy; thus easing my irritation, under pretence of

mending the fire.

After this, Mr Bloomfield was continually looking in to see if the

schoolroom was in order; and, as the children were continually littering

the floor with fragments of toys, sticks, stones, stubble, leaves, and

other rubbish which I could not prevent their bringing, or oblige them to

gather up, and which the servants refused to "clean after them," I had to

spend a considerable portion of my valuable leisure moments on my knees

upon the floor, in painfully reducing things to order. Once I told them

that they should not taste their supper till they had picked up everything

from the carpet. Fanny might have hers when she had taken up a certain

quantity; Mary Ann, when she had gathered twice as many; and Tom was to

clear away the rest.

Wonderful to state, the girls did their part; but Tom was in such a fury

that he flew upon the table, scattered the bread and milk about the floor,

struck his sisters, kicked the coals out of the coal-pan, attempted to

overthrow the table and chairs, and seemed inclined to make a Douglas-

larder of the whole contents of the room; but I seized upon him, and,

sending Mary Ann to call her mamma, held him in spite of kicks, blows,

yells, and execrations, till Mrs Bloomfield made her appearance.

"What is the matter with my boy?" said she.

And when the matter was explained to her, all she did was to send for the

nursery-maid to put the room in order, and bring Master Bloomfield his

supper.

"There now," cried Tom, triumphantly, looking up from his viands with his

mouth almost too full for speech. "There now, Miss Grey! you see I have got

my supper in spite of you: and I haven't picked up a single thing!"

The only person in the house who had any real sympathy for me was the

nurse; for she had suffered like afflictions, though in a smaller degree,

as she had not the task of teaching, nor was she so responsible for the

conduct of her charge.

"Oh, Miss Grey!" she would say, "you have some trouble with them childer!"

"I have indeed, Betty; and I daresay you know what it is."

"Ay, I do so! But I don't vex myself o'er 'em as you do. And then, you see,

I hit 'em a slap sometimes; and them little uns - I gives 'em a good

whipping now and then - there's nothing else ull do for 'em, as what they

say. Howsoever, I've lost my place for it."

"Have you, Betty? I heard you were going to leave."

"Eh, bless you, yes! Misses gave me warning a three-wik sin'. She told me

afore Christmas how it mud be, if I hit 'em again; but I couldn't hold my

hand off 'em at nothing. I know not how you do, for Miss Mary Ann's worse

by the half nor her sisters!"

Chapter 5

The Uncle

Besides the old lady, there was another relative of the family, whose

visits were a great annoyance to me - this was "Uncle Robson," Mrs

Bloomfield's brother, a tall, self-sufficient fellow, with dark hair and

sallow complexion like his sister, a nose that seemed to disdain the earth,

and little grey eyes, frequently half closed, with a mixture of real

stupidity and affected contempt of all surrounding objects. He was a thick-

set, strongly-built man, but he had found some means of compressing his

waist into a remarkably small compass, and that, together with the

unnatural stiffness of his form, showed that the lofty-minded, manly Mr

Robson, the scorner of the female sex, was not above the foppery of stays.

He seldom deigned to notice me; and, when he did, it was with a certain

supercilious insolence of tone and manner that convinced me he was no

gentleman, though it was intended to have a contrary effect. But it was not

for that I disliked his coming, so much as for the harm he did the children

- encouraging all their evil propensities, and undoing, in a few minutes,

the little good it had taken me months of labour to achieve.

Fanny and little Harriet he seldom condescended to notice; but Mary Ann was

something of a favourite. He was continually encouraging her tendency to

affectation (which I had done my utmost to crush), talking about her pretty

face, and filling her head with all manner of conceited notions concerning

her personal appearance (which I had instructed her to regard as dust in

the balance compared with the cultivation of her mind and manners); and I

never saw a child so susceptible of flattery as she was. Whatever was

wrong, in either her or her brother, he would encourage by laughing at, if

not by actually praising; and people little know the injury they do to

children by laughing at their faults, and making a pleasant jest of what

their true friends have endeavoured to teach them to hold in grave

abhorrence.

Though not a positive drunkard, Mr Robson habitually swallowed great

quantities of wine, and took with relish an occasional glass of brandy and

water. He taught his nephew to imitate him in this to the utmost of his

ability, and to believe that the more wine and spirits he could take, and

the better he liked them, the more he manifested his bold and manly spirit,

and rose superior to his sisters. Mr Bloomfield had not much to say against

it, for his favourite beverage was gin and water, of which he took a

considerable portion every day, by dint of constant sipping - and to that I

chiefly attributed his dingy complexion and waspish temper.

Mr Robson likewise encouraged Tom's propensity to persecute the lower

creation, both by precept and example. As he frequently came to course or

shoot over his brother-in-law's grounds, he would bring his favourite dogs

with him, and he treated them so brutally that, poor as I was, I would have

given a sovereign any day to see one of them bite him, provided the animal

could have done it with impunity. Sometimes, when in a very complacent

mood, he would go a-bird-nesting with the children, a thing that irritated

and annoyed me exceedingly, as, by frequent and persevering attempts, I

flattered myself I had partly shown them the evil of this pastime, and

hoped, in time, to bring them to some general sense of justice and

humanity; but ten minutes' bird-nesting with Uncle Robson, or even a laugh

from him at some relation of their former barbarities, was sufficient at

once to destroy the effect of my whole elaborate course of reasoning and

persuasion. Happily, however, during that spring, they never, but once, got

anything but empty nests, or eggs - being too impatient to leave them till

the birds were hatched; that once, Tom, who had been with his uncle into

the neighbouring plantation, came running in high glee into the garden with

a brood of little callow nestlings in his hands. Mary Ann and Fanny, whom I

was just bringing out, ran to admire his spoils, and to beg each a bird for

themselves.

"No, not one!" cried Tom. "They're all mine: Uncle Robson gave them to me -

one, two, three, four, five - you shan't touch one of them! no, not one for

your lives!" continued he, exultantly, laying the nest on the ground, and

standing over it with his legs wide apart, his hands thrust into his

breeches-pockets, his body bent forward, and his face twisted into all

manner of contortions in the ecstasy of his delight.

"But you shall see me fettle 'em off. My word, but I will wallop 'em! See

if I don't now! By gum! but there's rare sport for me in that nest."

"But, Tom," said I, "I shall not allow you to torture those birds. They

must either be killed at once, or carried back to the place you took them

from, that the old birds may continue to feed them."

"But you don't know where that is, madam. It's only me and Uncle Robson

that knows that."

"But if you don't tell me, I shall kill them myself - much as I hate it."

"You daren't. You daren't touch them for your life! because you know papa

and mamma and uncle Robson would be angry. Ha, ha! I've caught you there,

Miss!"

"I shall do what I think right in a case of this sort, without consulting

anyone. If your papa and mamma don't happen to approve of it, I shall be

sorry to offend them, but your Uncle Robson's opinions, of course, are

nothing to me."

So saying - urged by a sense of duty - at the risk of both making myself

sick and incurring the wrath of my employers - I got a large flat stone

that had been reared up for a mousetrap by the gardener, then, having once

more vainly endeavoured to persuade the little tyrant to let the birds be

carried back, I asked what he intended to do with them. With fiendish glee

he commenced a list of torments, and while he was busied in the relation, I

dropped the stone upon his intended victims, and crushed them flat beneath

it.

Loud were the outcries, terrible the execrations, consequent upon this

daring outrage; Uncle Robson had been coming up the walk with his gun, and

was, just then, pausing to kick his dog. Tom flew towards him, vowing he

would make him kick me instead of Juno. Mr Robson leant upon his gun, and

laughed excessively at the violence of his nephew's passion, and the bitter

maledictions and opprobrious epithets he heaped upon me.

"Well, you are a good un!" exclaimed he, at length, taking up his weapon,

and proceeding towards the house. "Damn, but the lad has some spunk in him,

too! Curse me, if ever I saw a nobler little scoundrel than that! He's

beyond petticoat government already: - by God! he defies mother, granny,

governess, and all! Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, Tom, I'll get you another brood

tomorrow."

"If you do, Mr Robson, I shall kill them, too," said I.

"Humph!" replied he, and having honoured me with a broad stare, which,

contrary to his expectations, I sustained without flinching, he turned away

with an air of supreme contempt, and stalked into the house.

Tom next went to tell his mamma. It was not her way to say much on any

subject; but, when she next saw me, her aspect and demeanour were doubly

dark and chill.

After some casual remark about the weather, she observed, -

"I am sorry, Miss Grey, you should think it necessary to interfere with

Master Bloomfield's amusements; he was very much distressed about your

destroying the birds."

"When Master Bloomfield's amusements consist in injuring sentient

creatures," I answered, "I think it my duty to interfere."

"You seemed to have forgotten," said she, calmly, "that the creatures were

all created for our convenience."

I thought that doctrine admitted some doubt, but merely replied, -

"If they were, we have no right to torment them for our amusement."

"I think," said she, "a child's amusement is scarcely to be weighed against

the welfare of a soulless brute."

"But, for the child's own sake, it ought not to be encouraged to have such

amusements," answered I, as meekly as I could, to make up for such unusual

pertinacity. - 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy'."

"Oh, of course! but that refers to our conduct towards each other."

"'The merciful man shows mercy to his beast,'" I ventured to add.

"I think you have not shown much mercy," replied she, with a short, bitter

laugh; "killing the poor birds by wholesale, in that shocking manner, and

putting the dear boy to such misery, for a mere whim!"

I judged it prudent to say no more.

This was the nearest approach to a quarrel I ever had with Mrs Bloomfield,

as well as the greatest number of words I ever exchanged with her at one

time, since the day of my first arrival.

But Mr Robson and old Mrs Bloomfield were not the only guests whose coming

to Wellwood House annoyed me; every visitor disturbed me more or less, not

so much because they neglected me (though I did feel their conduct strange

and disagreeable in that respect), as because I found it so impossible to

keep my pupils away from them, as I was repeatedly desired to do: Tom must

talk to them, and Mary Ann must be noticed by them. Neither the one nor the

other knew what it was to feel any degree of shame-facedness, or even

common modesty. They would indecently and clamorously interrupt the

conversation of their elders, tease them with the most impertinent

questions, roughly collar the gentlemen, climb their knees uninvited, hang

about their shoulders, or rifle their pockets, pull the ladies' gowns,

disorder their hair, tumble their collars, and importunately beg for their

trinkets.

Mrs Bloomfield had the sense to be shocked and annoyed at all this, but she

had not sense to prevent it. She expected me to prevent it - and how could

I - when the guests, with their fine clothes and new faces, continually

flattered and indulged them out of complaisance to their parents - how

could I, with my homely garments, everyday face, and honest words, draw

them away? I strained every nerve to do so: by striving to amuse them, I

endeavoured to attract them to my side; by the exertion of such authority

as I possessed, and by such severity as I dared to use, I tried to deter

them from tormenting the guests; and by reproaching their unmannerly

conduct, to make them ashamed to repeat it. But they knew no shame - they

scorned authority which had no terrors to back it, and as for kindness and

affection, either they had no hearts, or such as they had were so strongly

guarded, and so well concealed, that I, with all my efforts, had not yet

discovered how to reach them.

But soon my trials in this quarter came to a close - sooner than I either

expected or desired; for one sweet evening towards the close of May, as I

was rejoicing in the near approach of the holidays, and congratulating

myself upon having made some progress with my pupils as far as their

learning went at least (for I had instilled something into their heads, and

I had at length brought them to be a little - a very little - more rational

about getting their lessons done in time to leave some space for

recreation, instead of tormenting themselves and me all day long to no

purpose), Mrs Bloomfield sent for me, and calmly told me that after

Midsummer my services would be no longer required. She assured me that my

character and general conduct were unexceptionable; but the children had

made so little improvement since my arrival that Mr Blonmfield and she felt

it their duty to seek some other mode of instruction. Though superior to

most children of their years in abilities, they were decidedly behind them

in attainments, their manners were uncultivated, and their tempers unruly.

And this she attributed to a want of sufficient firmness and diligent,

persevering care on my part.

Unshaken firmness, devoted diligence, unwearied perseverance, unceasing

care were the very qualifications on which I had secretly prided myself,

and by which I had hoped, in time, to overcome all difficulties, and obtain

success at last. I wished to say something in my own justification, but in

attempting to speak I felt my voice falter, and rather than testify any

emotion, or suffer the tears to overflow, that were already gathering in my

eyes, I chose to keep silence, and bear all, like a self-convicted culprit.

Thus was I dismissed, and thus I sought my home. Alas! what would they

think of me? unable, after all my boasting, to keep my place, even for a

single year, as governess to three small children, whose mother was

asserted, by my own aunt, to be a "very nice woman." Having been thus

weighed in the balance, and found wanting, I need not hope they would be

willing to try me again. And this was an unwelcome thought, for vexed,

harassed, disappointed as I had been, and greatly as I had learnt to love

and value my home, I was not yet weary of adventure, nor willing to relax

my efforts. I knew all parents were not like Mr and Mrs Bloomfield, and I

was certain all children were not like theirs. The next family must be

different, and any change must be for the better. I had been seasoned by

adversity, and tutored by experience, and I longed to redeem my lost honour

in the eyes of those whose opinion was more than that of all the world to

me.

Chapter 6

The Parsonage Again

For a few months I remained peaceably at home, in the quiet enjoyment of

liberty and rest, and genuine friendship, from all of which I had fasted so

long, and in the earnest prosecution of my studies to recover what I had

lost during my stay at Wellwood House, and to lay in new stores for future

use.

My father's health was still very infirm, but not materially worse than

when I last saw him, and I was glad I had it in my power to cheer him by my

return, and to amuse him with singing his favourite songs.

No one triumphed over my failure, or said I had better have taken his or

her advice, and quietly stayed at home. All were glad to have me back

again, and lavished more kindness than ever upon me, to make up for the

sufferings I had undergone; but not one would touch a shilling of what I

had so cheerfully earned and so carefully saved, in the hope of sharing it

with them. By dint of pinching here, and scraping there, our debts already

were nearly paid. Mary had had good success with her drawings, but our

father had insisted upon her likewise keeping all the produce of her

industry to herself. All we could spare from the supply of our humble

wardrobe, and our little casual expenses, he directed us to put into the

savings' bank, saying we knew not how soon we might be dependent on that

alone for support, for he felt he had not long to be with us, and what

would become of our mother and us when he was gone, God only knew.

Dear papa! if he had troubled himself less about the afflictions that

threatened us in case of his death, I am convinced that dreaded event would

not have taken place so soon. My mother would never suffer him to ponder

the subject if she could help it.

"Oh Richard!" exclaimed she, on one occasion, "if you would but dismiss

such gloomy subjects from your mind, you would live as long as any of us -

at least you would live to see the girls married, and yourself a happy

grandfather with a canty old dame for your companion."

My mother laughed, and so did my father, but his laugh soon perished in a

dreary sigh.

"Them married - poor penniless things!" said he, "who will take them I

wonder!"

"Why nobody shall, that isn't thankful for them. Wasn't I penniless when

you took me? and you pretended, at least, to be vastly pleased with your

acquisition. But it's no matter whether they get married or not: we can

devise a thousand honest ways of making a livelihood; and I wonder,

Richard, you can think of bothering your head about our poverty in case of

your death, as if that would be anything compared with the calamity of

losing you - an affliction that, you well know, would swallow up all

others, and which you ought to do your utmost to preserve us from; and

there is nothing like a cheerful mind for keeping the body in health."

"I know, Alice, it is wrong to keep repining as I do, but I cannot help it;

you must bear with me."

"I won't bear with you, if I can alter you!" replied my mother: but the

harshness of her words was outdone by the earnest affection of her tone and

pleasant smile, that made my father smile again, less sadly, and less

transiently than was his wont.

"Mamma," said I, as soon as I could find an opportunity of speaking with

her alone, my money is but little, and cannot last long; if I could

increase it, it would lessen papa's anxiety on one subject at least. I

cannot draw like Mary, and so the best thing I could do would be to look

out for another situation."

"And so you would actually try again, Agnes!"

"Decidedly, I would."

"Why, my dear, I should have thought you had had enough of it."

"I know," said I, "everybody is not like Mr and Mrs Bloomfield -"

"Some are worse," interrupted my mother.

"But not many, I think," replied I, "and I'm sure all children are not like

theirs; for I and Mary were not; we always did as you bid us, didn't we?"

"Generally: but then, I did not spoil you; and you were not perfect angels

after all: Mary had a fund of quiet obstinacy, and you were somewhat faulty

in regard to temper; but you were very good children on the whole."

"I know I was sulky sometimes, and I should have been glad to see these

children sulky sometimes too; for then I could have understood them; but

they never were; for they could not be offended, nor hurt, nor ashamed:

they could not be unhappy in any way, except when they were in a passion."

"Well, if you could not, it was not their fault; you cannot expect stone to

be as pliable as clay."

"No, but still, it is very unpleasant to live with such unimpressible,

incomprehensible creatures. You cannot love them, and if you could, your

love would be utterly thrown away; they could neither return it, nor value,

nor understand it. But however, even if I should stumble on such a family

again, which is quite unlikely, I have all this experience to begin with,

and I should manage better another time; and the end and aim of this

preamble is, let me try again."

"Well, my girl, you are not easily discouraged, I see: I am glad of that.

But, let me tell you, you are a good deal paler and thinner than when you

first left home, and we cannot have you undermining your health to hoard up

money either for yourself or others."

"Mary tells me I am changed, too; and I don't much wonder at it, for I was

in a constant state of agitation and anxiety all day long; but next time I

am determined to take things coolly."

After some further discussion, my mother promised once more to assist me,

provided I would wait and be patient; and I left her to broach the matter

to my father, when and ho v she deemed it most advisable, never doubting

her ability to obtain his consent. Meantime, I searched, with great

interest, the advertising columns of the newspapers, and wrote answers to

every "Wanted a Governess," that appeared at all eligible; but all my

letters, as well as the replies, when I got any, were dutifully shown to my

mother; and she, to my chagrin, made me reject the situations one after

another: these were low people, these were too exacting in their demands,

and these too niggardly in their remunerations.

"Your talents are not such as every poor clergyman's daughter possesses,

Agnes," she would say, "and you must not throw them away. Remember, you

promised to be patient: there is no need of hurry - you have plenty of time

before you, and may have many chances yet."

At length, she advised me to put an advertisement, myself, in the paper,

stating my qualifications, etc.

"Music, Singing, Drawing, French, Latin, and German," said she, "are no

mean assemblage; many will be glad to have so much in one instructor; and

this time, you shall try your fortune in a somewhat higher family - in that

of some genuine, thorough-bred gentleman, for such are far more likely to

treat you with proper respect and consideration, than those purse-proud

trades-people, and arrogant upstarts. I have known several among the higher

ranks, who treated their governesses quite as one of the family; though

some, I allow, are as insolent and exacting as anyone else can be; for

there are bad and good in all classes."

The advertisement was quickly written and despatched. Of the two parties

who answered it, but one would consent to give me fifty pounds, the sum my

mother bade me name as the salary I should require; and here, I hesitated

about engaging myself, as I feared the children would be too old, and their

parents would require someone more showy, or more experienced, if not more

accomplished than I; but my mother dissuaded me from declining it on that

account: I should do vastly well, she said, if I would only throw aside my

diffidence, and acquire a little more confidence in myself. I was just to

give a plain, true statement of my acquirements and qualifications, and

name what stipulations I chose to make, and then await the result.

The only stipulation I ventured to propose, was that I might be allowed two

months holidays during the year to visit my friends, at Midsummer and

Christmas. The unknown lady, in her reply, made no objection to this, and

stated that, as to my acquirements, she had no doubt I should be able to

give satisfaction; but in the engagement of governesses, she considered

those things as but subordinate points, as, being situated in the

neighbourhood of O--, she could get masters to supply any deficiencies in

that respect, but, in her opinion, next to unimpeachable morality, a mild

and cheerful temper and obliging disposition were the most essential

requisites.

My mother did not relish this at all, and now made many objections to my

accepting the situation, in which my sister warmly supported her; hut,

unwilling to be baulked again, I overruled them all; and, having first

obtained the consent of my father, who had, a short time previously, been

apprised of these transactions, I wrote a most obliging epistle to my

unknovrn correspondent, and, finally, the bargain was concluded.

It was decreed that, on the last: day of January, I was to enter upon my

new office, as governess in the family of Mr Murray, of Horton Lodge, near

O--, about seventy miles from our village - a formidable distance to me, as

I had never been above twenty miles from home in all the course of my

twenty years sojourn on earth, and as, moreover, every individual, in that

family and in the neighbourhood, was utterly unknown to myself and all my

acquaintances. But this rendered it only the more piquant to me: I had now,

in some measure, got rid of the mauvaise honte that had formerly oppressed

me so much; there was a pleasing excitement in the idea of entering these

unknown regions, and making my way alone among its strange inhabitants; I

now flattered myself I was going to see something of the world; Mr Murray's

residence was near a large town, and not in a manufacturing district, where

the people had nothing to do but to make money; his rank, from what I could

gather, appeared to be higher than that of Mr Bloomfield, and, doubtless,

he was one of those genuine thorough-bred gentry my mother spoke of, who

would treat his governess with due consideration as a respectable, well

educated lady, the instructor and guide of his children, and not a mere

upper servant; then, my pupils, being older, would be more rational, more

teachable, and less troublesome than the last, they would be less confined

to the schoolroom, and not require that constant labour and incessant

watching; and, finally, bright visions mingled with my hopes, with which

the care of children and the mere duties of a governess had little or

nothing to do. So that the reader will see I had no claim to be regarded as

a martyr to filial piety, going forth to sacrifice peace and liberty for

the sole purpose of laying up stores for the comfort and support of my

parents; though, certainly, the comfort of my father, and the future

support of my mother had a large share in my calculations, and fifty pounds

appeared to me no ordinary sum. I must have decent clothes becoming my

station, I must, it seemed, put out my washing, and also pay for my four

annual journeys between Horton Lodge and home; but, with strict attention

to economy, surely twenty pounds, or little more, would cover those

expenses, and then there would be thirty for the bank, or little less; what

a valuable addition to our stock! Oh! I must struggle to keep this

situation, whatever it might be! both for my own honour among my friends,

and for the solid services I might render them by my continuance there.

Chapter 7

Horton Lodge

The thirty-first of January was a wild, tempestuous day; there was a strong

north wind, with a continual storm of snow drifting on the ground, and

whirling through the air. My friends would have had me delay my departure,

but fearful of prejudicing my employers against me by such want of

punctuality at the commencement of my undertaking, I persisted in keeping

the appointment.

I will not inflict upon my readers an account of my leaving home on that

dark winter morning, the fond farewells, the long, long journey to O--, the

solitary waitings in inns for coaches or trains - for there were some

railways then - and, finally, the meeting at O-- with Mr Murray's servant,

who had been sent, with the phaeton, to drive me from thence to Horton

Lodge.

I will just state that the heavy snow had thrown such impediments in the

way of both horses and steam-engines, that it was dark some hours before I

reached my journey's end, and that a most bewildering storm came on at

last, which made the few miles' space between O-- and Horton Lodge a long

and formidable passage. I sat resigned, with the cold, sharp snow drifting

through my veil, and filling my lap, seeing nothing, and wondering how the

unfortunate horse and driver could make their way even as well as they did,

and indeed it was but a toilsome, creeping style of progression to say the

best of it.

At length we paused; and, at the call of the driver, someone unlatched and

rolled back upon their creaking hinges what appeared to be the park gates.

Then we proceeded along a smoother road, whence, occasionally, I perceived

some huge, hoary mass gleaming through the darkness, which I took to be a

portion of a snow-clad tree.

After a considerable time, we paused again, before the stately portico of a

large house with long windows descending to the ground.

I rose with some difficulty from under the superincumbent snowdrift, and

alighted from the carriage, expecting a kind and hospitable reception would

indemnify me for the toils and hardships of the day. A gentlemanly person

in black opened the door, and admitted me into a spacious hall lighted by

an amber-coloured lamp suspended from the ceiling; he led me through this,

along a passage, and, opening the door of a back room, told me that was the

schoolroom. I entered, and found two young ladies and two young gentlemen,

my future pupils, I supposed. After a formal greeting, the elder girl, who

was trifling over a piece of canvass and a basket of German wools, asked if

I should like to go upstairs.

I replied in the affirmative, of course.

"Matilda, take a candle, and show her her room," said she.

Miss Matilda, a strapping hoyden of about fourteen, with a short frock and

trousers, shrugged her shoulders, and made a slight grimace, but took a

candle and proceeded before me, up the back stairs, a long, steep, double

flight, and through a long, narrow passage, to a small but tolerably

comfortable room. She then asked me if I would take some tea or coffee. I

was about to answer no, but, remembering that I had taken nothing since

seven o'clock that morning, and feeling faint in consequence, I said I

would take a cup of tea. Saying she would tell "Brown," the young lady

departed; and by the time I had divested myself of my heavy, wet cloak,

shawl, bonnet, etc., a mincing damsel came to say, the young ladies desired

to know whether I would take my tea up there or in the schoolroom. Under

the plea of fatigue, I chose to take it there. She withdrew; and, after a

while, returned again with a small tea-tray, and placed it on the chest of

drawers which served as a dressing-table. Having civilly thanked her, I

asked at what time I should be expected to rise in the morning.

"The young ladies and gentlemen breakfast at half-past eight, ma'am," said

she; "they rise early; but, as they seldom do any lessons before breakfast,

I should think it will do if you rise soon after seven."

I desired her to be so kind as to call me at seven; and, promising to do

so, she withdrew. Then, having broken my long fast on a cup of tea, and a

little thin bread and butter, I sat down beside the small, smouldering

fire, and amused myself with a hearty fit of crying; after which, I said my

prayers, and then, feeling considerably relieved, began to prepare for bed;

but, finding that none of my luggage was brought up, I instituted a search

for the bell; and failing to discover any signs of such a convenience in

any corner of the room, I took my candle, and ventured through the long

passage, and down the steep stairs, on a voyage of discovery. Meeting a

well-dressed female on the way, I told her what I wanted, but not without

considerable hesitation, as I was not quite sure whether it was one of the

upper servants, or Mrs Murray herself. It happened, however, to be the

lady's maid.

With the air of one conferring an unusual favour, she vouchsafed to

undertake the sending up of my things; and when I had re-entered my room,

and waited and wondered a long time, greatly fearing that she had forgotten

or neglected to perform her promise, and doubting whether to keep waiting,

or go to bed, or go down again, my hopes at length were revived by the

sound of voices and laughter, accompanied by a tramp of feet along the

passage, and, presently, the luggage was brought in by a rough-looking maid

and a man, neither of them very respectful in their demeanour to me.

Having shut the door upon their retiring footsteps, and unpacked a few of

my things, I at length betook myself to rest, gladly enough, for I was

weary in body and mind.

It was with a strange feeling of desolation mingled with a strong sense of

the novelty of my situation, and a joyless kind of curiosity concerning

what was yet unknown, that I awoke the next morning feeling like one

whirled away by enchantment, and suddenly dropped from the clouds into a

remote and unknown land, widely and completely isolated from all he had

ever seen or known before; or like a thistle-seed borne on the wind to some

strange nook of uncongenial soil, where it must lie long enough before it

can take root and germinate, extracting nourishment from what appears so

alien to its nature, if indeed it ever can; but this gives no proper idea

of my feelings at all; and no one, that has not lived such a retired,

stationary life as mine, can possibly imagine what they were - hardly even

if he has known what it is to awake some morning and find himself at Port

Nelson in New Zealand, with a world of waters between himself and all that

knew him.

I shall not soon forget the peculiar feeling with which I raised my blind

and looked out upon the unknown world - a wide, white wilderness was all

that met my gaze, a waste of

 Deserts tossed in snow,

 And heavy laden groves.

I descended to the schoolroom with no remarkable eagerness to join my

pupils, though not without some feeling of curiosity respecting what a

further acquaintance would reveal. One thing, among others of more obvious

importance, I determined with myself; I must begin with calling them Miss

and Master. It seemed to me a chilling and unnatural piece of punctilio

between the children of a family and their instructor and daily companion,

especially where the former were in their early childhood, as at Wellwood

House; but even there, my calling the little Bloomfields by their simple

names had been regarded as an offensive liberty, as their parents had taken

care to show me, by carefully designating them Master and Miss Bloomfield,

etc., in speaking to me. I had been very slow to take the hint, because the

whole affair struck me as so very absurd; but now I determined to be wiser,

and begin at once with as much form and ceremony as any member of the

family would be likely to require; and indeed, the children being so much

older, there would be less difficulty; though the little words Miss and

Master seemed to have a surprising effect in repressing all familiar, open-

hearted kindness, and extinguishing every gleam of cordiality that might

arise between us.

As I cannot, like Dogberry, find it in my heart to bestow all my

tediousness upon the reader, I will not go on to bore him with a minute

detail of all the discoveries and proceedings of this and the following

day. No doubt he will be amply satisfied with a slight sketch of the

different members of the family, and a general view of the first year or

two of my sojourn among them.

To begin with the head, Mr Murray was, by all accounts, a blustering,

roystering country squire, a devoted fox-hunter, a skilful horse-jockey and

farlier, an active, practical farmer, and a hearty bon-vivant. By all

accounts I say, for, except on Sundays when he went to church, I never saw

him from month to month, unless, in crossing the hall or walking in the

grounds, the figure of a tall, stout gentleman, with scarlet cheeks and

crimson nose, happened to come across me; on which occasions, if he passed

near enough to speak, an unceremonious nod, accompanied by a "Morning, Miss

Grey," or some such brief salutation, was usually vouchsafed. Frequently

indeed, his loud laugh reached me from afar, and oftener still, I heard him

swearing and blaspheming against the footmen, groom, coachman, or some

other hapless dependent.

Mrs Murray was a handsome, dashing lady of forty, who certainly required

neither rouge nor padding to add to her charms, and whose chief enjoyments

were, or seemed to be, in giving or frequenting parties, and in dressing at

the very top of the fashion.

I did not see her till eleven o'clock on the morning after my arrival, when

she honoured me with a visit, just as my mother might step into the kitchen

to see a new servant-girl; yet not so, either, for my mother would have

seen her immediately after her arrival, and not waited till the next day;

and moreover, she would have addressed her in a more kind and friendly

manner, and given her some words of comfort as well as a plain exposition

of her duties; but Mrs Murray did neither the one nor the other. She just

stepped into the schoolroom, on her return from ordering dinner in the

housekeeper's room, bid me good morning, stood for two minutes by the fire,

said a few words about the weather and the "rather rough" journey I must

have had yesterday, petted her youngest child, a boy of ten, who had just

been wiping his mouth and hands on her gown, after indulging in some

savoury morsel from the housekeeper's stores: told me what a sweet, good

boy he was, and then sailed out, with a self-complacent smile upon her

face, thinking, no doubt, that she had done quite enough for the present,

and had been delightfully condescending into the bargain. Her children

evidently held the same opinion, and I alone thought otherwise.

After this she looked in upon me once or twice, during the absence of my

pupils, to enlighten me concerning my duties towards them. For the girls,

she seemed anxious only to render them as superficially attractive, and

showily accomplished, as they could possibly be made without present

trouble or discomfort to themselves; and I was to act accordingly - to

study and strive to amuse and oblige, instruct, refine, and polish, with

the least possible exertion on their part, and no exercise of authority on

mine. With regard to the two boys it was much the same, only instead of

accomplishments, I was to get the greatest possible quantity of Latin

grammar and Valpy's Delectus into their heads, in order to fit them for

school - the greatest possible quantity at least, without trouble to

themselves. John might be a "little high-spirited," and Charles might be a

little "nervous and tedious - "

"But at all events, Miss Grey," said she, "I hope you will keep your

temper, and be mild and patient throughout; especially with the dear little

Charles, he is so extremely nervous and susceptible, and so utterly

unaccustomed to anything but the tenderest treatment. You will excuse my

naming these things to you; for the fact is, I have hitherto found all the

govemesses, even the very best of them, faulty in this particular. They

wanted that meek and quiet spirit which St. Matthew, or some of them, says

is better than the putting on of apparel - you will know the passage to

which I allude, for you are a clergyman's daughter; but I have no doubt you

will give satisfaction in this respect as well as the rest. And remember,

on all occasions, when any of the young people do anything very improper,

if persuasion and gentle remonstrance will not do, let one of the others

come and tell me; for I can speak to them more plainly than it would be

proper for you to do. And make them as happy as you can, Miss Grey, and I

daresay you will do very well."

I observed that while Mrs Murray was so extremely solicitous for the

comfort and happiness of her children, and continually talking about it,

she never once mentioned mine, though they were at home surrounded by

friends, and I an alien among strangers; and I did not yet know enough of

the world, not to be considerably surprised at this anomaly.

Miss Murray, otherwise Rosalie, was about sixteen when I came, and

decidedly a very pretty girl; and in two years longer, as time more

completely developed her form, and added grace to her carriage and

deportment, she was positively beautiful; and that in no common degree. She

was tall and slender, but not thin, perfectly formed, exquisitely fair, but

not without a brilliant, healthy bloom; her hair, which she wore in a

profusion of long ringlets, was of a very light brown, strongly inclining

to yellow, her eyes were pale blue, but so clear and bright that few would

wish them darker, the rest of her features were small, not quite regular,

and not remarkably otherwise, but altogether you could not hesitate to

pronounce her a very lovely girl. I wish I could say as much for her mind

and disposition as I can for her form and face.

Yet think not I have any dreadful disclosures to make: she was lively,

light-hearted, and could be very agreeable, with those who did not cross

her will. Towards me, when I first came she was cold and haughty, then,

insolent and overbearing; but on a further acquaintance, she gradually laid

aside her airs, and in time became as deeply attached to me as it was

possible for her to be to one of my character and position; for she seldom

lost sight, for above half-an-hour at a time, of the fact of my being a

hireling, and a poor curate's daughter; and yet, upon the whole, I believe

she respected me more than she herself was aware of, because I was the only

person in the house who steadily professed good principles, habitually

spoke the truth, and generally endeavoured to make inclination bow to duty;

and this I say, not of course in commendation of myself, but to show the

unfortunate state of the family to which my services were, for the present,

devoted. There was no member of it in whom I regretted this sad want of

principle so much as Miss Murray herself; not only because she had taken a

fancy to me, but because there was so much of what was pleasant and

prepossessing in herself, that, in spite of her failings, I really liked

her - when she did not rouse my indignation, or rouse my temper by too

great a display of her faults, which however, I would fain persuade myself,

were rather the effect of her education than her disposition: she had never

been properly taught the distinction between right and wrong; she had, like

her brothers and sisters, been suffered from infancy to tyrannise over

nurses, govemesses, and servants; she had not been taught to moderate her

desires, to control her temper or bridle her will, or to sacrifice her own

pleasure for the good of others; her temper being naturally good, she was

never violent or morose, but from constant indulgence and habitual scorn of

reason, she was often testy and capricious; her mind had never been

cultivated: her intellect at best was somewhat shallow; she possessed

considerable vivacity, some quickness of perception, and some talent for

music and the acquisition of languages, but till fifteen she had troubled

herself to acquire nothing; - then the love of display had roused her

faculties, and induced her to apply herself, but only to the more showy

accomplishments; and when I came, it was the same - everything was

neglected but French, German, music, singing, dancing, fancy-work, and a

little drawing - such drawing as might produce the greatest show with the

smallest labour, and the principal parts of which were generally done by

me. For music and singing, besides my occasional instruction, she had the

attendance of the best master the country afforded; and in them, as well as

in dancing, she certainly attained great proficiency. To music, indeed, she

devoted too much of her time, as, governess though I was, I frequently told

her: but her mother thought that if she liked it, she could not give too

much time to the acquisition of so attractive an accomplishment.

Of fancy-work I knew nothing but what I gathered from my pupil and my own

observation; but no sooner was I initiated, than she made me useful in

twenty different ways: all the tedious parts of her work were shifted onto

my shoulders; such as, stretching the frames, stitching in the canvass,

sorting the wools and silks, putting in the grounds, counting the stitches,

rectifying mistakes, and finishing the pieces she was tired of.

At sixteen, Miss Murray was something of a romp, yet not more so than is

natural and allowable for a girl of that age; but at seventeen, that

propensity, like all other things, began to give way to the ruling passion,

and soon was swallowed up in the all absorbing ambition, to attract and

dazzle the other sex. But enough of her: now let us turn to her sister.

Miss Matilda Murray was a veritable hoyden, of whom little need be said.

She was about two years and a half younger than her sister; her features

were larger, her complexion much darker. She might possibly make a handsome

woman, but she was far too big-boned and awkward ever to be called a pretty

girl, and, at present, she cared little about it. Rosalie knew all her

charms, and thought them even greater than they were, and valued them more

highly than she ought to have done had they been three times as great;

Matilda thought she was well enough, but cared little about the matter;

still less did she care about the cultivation of her mind, and the

acquisition of ornamental accomplishments. The manner in which she learnt

her lessons and practised her music was calculated to drive any governess

to despair. Short and easy as her tasks were, if done at all, they were

slurred over at any time, and in any way, but generally at the least

convenient times, and in the way least beneficial to herself, and least

satisfactory to me; and the short half-hour of practising was horribly

strummed through; she, meantime, unsparingly abusing me, either for

interrupting her with corrections, or for not rectifying her mistakes

before they were made, or something equally unreasonable.

Once or twice, I ventured to remonstrate with her seriously for such

irrational conduct; but, on each of these occasions, I received such

reprehensive expostulations from her mother, as convinced me that, if I

wished to keep the situation, I must even let Miss Matilda go on in her own

way.

When her lessons were over, however, her ill-humour was generally over too;

while riding her spirited pony, or romping with the dogs, or her brothers

and sister, but especially with her dear brother John, she was as happy as

a lark.

As an animal, Matilda was all right, full of life, vigour, and activity; as

an intelligent being, she was barbarously ignorant, indocile, careless, and

irrational, and consequently very distressing to one who had the task of

cultivating her understanding, reforming her manners, and aiding her to

acquire those ornamental attainments which, unlike her sister, she despised

as much as the rest: her mother was partly aware of her deficiencies, and

gave me many a lecture as to how I should try to form her tastes, and

endeavour to rouse and cherish her dominant vanity, and, by insinuating,

skilful flattery, to win her attention to the desired objects - which I

would not do; and how I should prepare and smooth the path of learning till

she could glide along it without the least exertion to herself, which I

could not, for nothing can be taught to any purpose without some little

exertion on the part of the learner.

As a moral agent, she was reckless, headstrong, violent, and unamenable to

reason. One proof of the deplorable state of her mind, was that from her

father's example, she had learnt to swear like a trooper.

Her mother was greatly shocked at the "unlady-like trick," and wondered

"how she had picked it up."

"But you can soon break her of it, Miss Grey," said she; "it is only a

habit; and if you will just gently remind her every time she does so, I am

sure she will soon lay it aside." I not only "gently reminded" her, but I

tried to impress upon her how wrong it was, and how distressing to the ears

of decent people; but all in vain, I was only answered by a careless laugh,

and, -

"Oh, Miss Grey, how shocked you are! I'm so glad!"

Or -

"Well! I can't help it; papa shouldn't have taught me: I learnt it all from

him; and may be a bit from the coachman."

Her brother John, alias Master Murray, was about eleven when I came, a

fine, stout, healthy boy, frank, and good-natured in the main, and might

have been a decent lad, had he been properly educated, but now he was as

rough as a young bear, boisterous, unruly, unprincipled, untaught,

unteachable - at least, for a governess under his mother's eye; his masters

at school might be able to manage him better - for to school he was sent,

greatly to my relief, in the course of a year; in a state, it is true, of

scandalous ignorance as to Latin, as well as the more useful, though more

neglected things; and this, doubtless, would all be laid to the account of

his education having been entrusted to an ignorant female teacher, who had

presumed to take in hand what she was wholly incompetent to perform. I was

not delivered from his brother till full twelve months after, when he also

was despatched in the same state of disgraceful ignorance as the former.

Master Charles was his mother's peculiar darling. He was little more than a

year younger than John, but much smaller, paler, and less active and

robust; a pettish, cowardly, capricious, selfish little fellow, only active

in doing mischief, and only clever in inventing falsehoods, not simply to

hide his faults, but, in mere malicious wantonness, to bring odium upon

others; in fact, Master Charles was a very great nuisance to me: it was a

trial of patience to live with him peaceably; to watch over him was worse;

and to teach him, or pretend to teach him, was inconceivable.

At ten years old, he could not read, correctly, the easiest line in the

simplest book; and as, according to his mother's principle, he was to be

told every word, before he had time to hesitate, or examine its

orthography, and never even to be informed, as a stimulant to exertion,

that other boys were more forward than he, it is not surprising that he

made but little progress during the two years I had charge of his

education.

His minute portions of Latin grammar, etc., were to be repeated over to him,

till he chose to say he knew them; and then, he was to be helped to say

them: if he made mistakes in his little easy sums in arithmetic, they were

to be shown him at once, and the sum done for him, instead of his being

left to exercise his faculties in finding them out himself; so that, of

course, he took no pains to avoid mistakes, but frequently set down his

figures at random without any calculation at all.

Yet I did not invariably confine myself to these rules; it was against my

conscience to do so; but I seldom could venture to deviate from them, in

the slightest degree, without incurring the wrath of my little pupil, and

subsequently of his mamma, to whom he would relate my transgressions,

maliciously exaggerated, or adorned with embellishments of his own; and

often, in consequence, was I on the point of losing or resigning my

situation; but, for their sakes at home, I smothered my pride and

suppressed my indignation, and managed to struggle on till my little

tormentor was despatched to school, his father declaring that home

education was "no go for him, it was plain; his mother spoiled him

outrageously, and his governess could make no hand of him at all."

A few more observations about Horton Lodge and its ongoings, and I have

done with dry description for the present.

The house was a very respectable one, superior to Mr Bloomfield's both in

age, size, and magnificence: the garden was not so tastefully laid out; but

instead of the smooth-shaven lawn, the young trees guarded by palings, the

grove of upstart poplars, and the plantation of firs, there was a wide

park, stocked with deer, and beautified by fine old trees. The surrounding

country itself was pleasant, as far as fertile fields, flourishing trees,

quiet green lanes, and smiling hedges, with wild flowers scattered along

their banks, could make it; but it was depressingly flat, to one born and

nurtured among the rugged hills of --.

We were situated nearly two miles from the village church, and,

consequently, the family carriage was put in requisition every Sunday

morning, and sometimes oftener.

Mr and Mrs Murray generally thought it sufficient to show themselves at

church once in the course of the day; but frequently the children preferred

going a second time to wandering about the grounds all day with nothing to

do.

If some of my pupils chose to walk and take me with them, it was well for

me; for otherwise, my position in the carriage was, to be crushed into the

comer farthest from the open window, and with my back to the horses, a

position which invariably made me sick; and if I were not actually obliged

to leave the church in the middle of the service, my devotions were

disturbed with a feeling of languor and sickliness, and the tormenting fear

of its becoming worse; and a depressing headache was generally my companion

throughout the day, which would otherwise have been one of welcome rest,

and holy, calm enjoyment.

"It's very odd, Miss Grey, that the carriage should always make you sick;

it never makes me," remarked Miss Matilda.

"Nor me either," said her sister; "but I daresay it would, if I sat where

she does - such a nasty, horrid place, Miss Grey; I wonder how you can bear

it!"

I am obliged to bear it, since no choice is left me - I might have

answered; but in tenderness for their feelings I only replied, -

"Oh! it is but a short way, and if I am not sick in church, I don't mind

it."

If I were called upon to give a description of the usual divisions and

arrangements of the day, I should find it a very difficult matter. I had

all my meals in the schoolroom with my pupils, at such times as suited

their fancy: sometimes they would ring for dinner before it was half

cooked; sometimes they would keep it waiting on the table for above an

hour, and then be out of humour because the potatoes were cold, and the

gravy covered with cakes of solid fat; sometimes they would have tea at

four, frequently, they would storm at the servants because it was not in

precisely at five; and when these orders were obeyed, by way of

encouragement to punctuality, they would keep it on the table till seven or

eight.

Their hours of study were managed in much the same way: my judgement or

convenience was never once consulted. Sometimes Matilda and John would

determine "to get all the plaguy business over before breakfast," and send

the maid to call me up at half-past five, without any scruple or apology;

sometimes, I was told to be ready precisely at six, and, having dressed in

a hurry, came down to an empty room, and after waiting a long time in

suspense, discovered that they had changed their minds, and were still in

bed; or, perhaps, if it were a fine summer morning, Brown would come to

tell me that the young ladies and gentlemen had taken a holiday, and were

gone out; and then, I was kept waiting for breakfast till I was almost

ready to faint; they having fortified themselves with something before they

went.

Often they would do their lessons in the open air, which I had nothing to

say against, except that I frequently caught cold by sitting on the damp

grass, or from exposure to the evening dew, or some insidious draught,

which seemed to have no such injurious effect on them. It was quite right

that they should be hardy; yet, surely, they might have been taught some

consideration for others who were less so. But I must not blame them for

what was, perhaps, my own fault; for I never made any particular objections

to sitting where they pleased, foolishly choosing to risk the consequences,

rather than trouble them for my convenience

Their indecorous manner of doing their lessons was quite as remarkable as

the caprice displayed in their choice of time and place. While receiving my

instructions, or repeating what they had learnt, they would lounge upon the

sofa, lie on the rug, stretch, yawn, talk to each other, or look out of the

window; whereas I could not so much as stir the fire, or pick up the

handkerchief I had dropped, without being rebuked for inattention by one of

my pupils, or told that "mamma would not like me to be so careless."

The servants, seeing in what little estimation the governess was held by

both parents and children, regulated their behaviour by the same standard.

I frequently stood up for them, at the risk of some injury to myself,

against the tyranny and injustice of their young masters and mistresses;

and I always endeavoured to give them as little trouble as possible; but

they entirely neglected my comfort, despised my requests, and slighted my

directions. All servants, I am convinced, would not have done so; but

domestics in general, being ignorant and little accustomed to reason and

reflection, are too easily corrupted by the carelessness and bad example of

those above them; and these, I think, were not of the best order to begin

with.

I sometimes felt myself degraded by the life I led, and ashamed of

submitting to so many indignities; and sometimes I thought myself a

precious fool for caring so much about them, and feared I must be sadly

wanting in Christian humility, or that charity which "suffereth long and is

kind, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, bearedh all things,

enduredh all things."

But, with time and patience, matters began to be slightly ameliorated,

slowly, it is true, and almost imperceptibly; but I got rid of my male

pupils (that was no trifling advantage), and the girls, as I intimated

before concerning one of them, became a little less insolent, and began to

show some symptoms of esteem.

Miss Grey was a queer creature; she never flattered, and did not praise

them half enough, but whenever she did speak favourably of them, or

anything belonging to them, they could be quite sure her approbation was

sincere.

She was very obliging, quiet, and peaceable in the main, but there were

some things that put her out of temper; they did not much care for that, to

be sure, but still, it was better to keep her in tune, as when she was in a

good humour she would talk to them, and be very agreeable and amusing

sometimes, in her way, which was quite different from mamma's, but still

very well for a change. She had her own opinions on every subject, and kept

steadily to them - very tiresome opinions they often were, as she was

always thinking of what was right and what was wrong, and had a strange

reverence for matters connected with Religion, and an unaccountable liking

to good people.

Chapter 8

The "Coming Out"

At eighteen, Miss Murray was to emerge from the quiet obscurity of the

schoolroom into the full blaze of the fashionable world - as much of it, at

least, as could be had out of London, for her papa could not be persuaded

to leave his rural pleasures and pursuits, even for a few weeks' residence

in town.

She was to make her debut on the third of January, at a magnificent ball,

which her mamma proposed to give to all the nobility and choice gentry of

O-- and its neighbourhood for twenty miles round. Of course, she looked

forward to it with the wildest impatience, and the most extravagant

anticipations of delight.

"Miss Grey," said she one evening, a month before the all important day, as

I was perusing a long and extremely interesting letter of my sister's which

I had just glanced at, in the morning, to see that it contained no very bad

news, and kept till now, unable before to find a quiet moment for reading

it. "Miss Grey, do put away that dull, stupid letter, and listen to me! I'm

sure my talk must be far more amusing than that."

She seated herself on the low stool at my feet; and I, suppressing a sigh

of vexation, began to fold up the epistle.

"You should tell the good people at home not to bore you with such long

letters," said she; "and above all, do bid them write on proper note-paper,

and not on those great vulgar sheets! You should see the charming little

lady-like notes mamma writes to her friends."

"The good people at home," replied I, "know very well that the longer their

letters are, the better I like them. I should be very sorry to receive a

charming little lady-like note from any of them; and I thought you were too

much of a lady yourself, Miss Murray, to talk about the 'vulgarity' of

writing on a large sheet of paper."

" Well, I only said it to tease you. But now I want to talk about the ball;

and to tell you that you positively must put off your holidays till it is

over."

"Why so? I shall not be present at the ball."

"No, but you will see the rooms decked out before it begins, and hear the

music, and, above all, see me in my splendid new dress! I shall be so

charming, you'll be ready to worship me, you really must stay."

"I should like to see you very much; but I shall have many opportunities of

seeing you equally charming on the occasion of some of the numberless balls

and parties that are to be, and I cannot disappoint my friends by

postponing my return so long."

"Oh, never mind your friends! Tell them we won't let you go."

"But, to say the truth, it would be a disappointment to myself: I long to

see them as much as they to see me - perhaps more."

"'Well, but it is such a short time."

"Nearly a fortnight by my computation; and, besides, I cannot bear the

thoughts of a Christmas spent from home; and, moreover, my sister is going

to be married."

"Is she - when?"

"Not till next month; but I want to be there to assist her in making

preparations, and to make the best of her company while we have her."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I've only got the news in this letter, which you stigmatise as dull and

stupid, and won't let me read."

"Who is she to be married to?"

"To Mr Richardson, the vicar of a neighbouring parish."

"Is he rich?"

"No, - only comfortable."

"Is he handsome?"

"No - only decent."

"Young?"

"No - only middling."

"O mercy! what a wretch! What sort of a house is it?"

"A quiet little vicarage, with an ivy-clad porch, an old fashioned garden,

and -"

"Oh stop! - you'll make me sick. How can she bear it?"

"I expect she'll not only be able to bear it, but to be very happy. You did

not ask me if Mr Richardson were a good, wise, or amiable man; I could have

answered yes, to all these questions - at least so Mary thinks, and I hope

she will not find herself mistaken."

"But - miserable creature! how can she think of spending her life there,

cooped up with that nasty old man; and no hope of change?"

"He is not old; he's only six or seven and thirty; and she herself is

twenty-eight, and as sober as if she were fifty."

"Oh! that's better then - they're well matched; but do they call him the

'worthy vicar'?"

"I don't know; but if they do, I believe he merits the epithet."

"Mercy, how shocking! and will she wear a white apron, and make pies and

puddings?"

"I don't know about the white apron, but I daresay she will make pies and

puddings, now and then; but that will be no great hardship as she has done

it before."

"And will she go about in a plain shawl, and a large straw bonnet, carrying

tracts and bone soup to her husband's poor parishioners?"

"I'm not clear about that, but I daresay she will do her best to make them

comfortable in body and mind, in accordance with our mother's example."

Chapter 9

The Ball

"Now Miss Grey," exclaimed Miss Murray, immediately as I entered the

schoolroom, after having taken off my outdoor garments, upon returning from

my four weeks' recreation, "Now shut the door, and sit down, and I'll tell

you all about the ball."

"No, damn it, no!" shouted Miss Matilda. "Hold your tongue can't ye! and

let me tell her about my new mare - such a splendour, Miss Grey! a fine

blood mare -"

"Do be quiet, Matilda! and let me tell my news first."

"No, no, Rosalie! you'll be such a d long time over it - she shall hear me

first - I'll be hanged if she doesn't!"

"I'm sorry to hear, Miss Matilda, that you've not got rid of that shocking

habit yet."

"Well, I can't help it; but I'll never say a wicked word again, if you'll

only listen to me, and tell Rosalie to hold her confounded tongue ."

Rosalie remonstrated, and I thought I should have been torn in pieces

between them; but, Miss Matilda having the loudest voice, her sister at

length gave in, and suffered her to tell her story first: so I was doomed

to hear a long account of her splendid mare, its breeding and pedigree, its

paces, its action, its spirit, etc., and of her own amazing skill and

courage in riding it, concluding with an assertion that she could clear a

five-barred gate "like winking," that papa said she might hunt next time

the hounds met, and mamma had ordered a bright scarlet hunting-habit for

her.

"On, Matilda! what stories you are telling!" exclaimed her sister.

"Well," answered she, no whit abashed, "I know I could clear a five-barred

gate, if I tried, and papa will say I may hunt, and mamma will order the

habit when I ask them."

"Well, now get along," replied Miss Murray; "and do, dear Matilda, try to

be a little more lady-like. Miss Grey, I wish you would tell her not to use

such shocking words; she will call her horse a mare; it is so inconceivably

shocking! and then she uses such dreadful expressions in describing it: she

must have learnt it from the grooms. It nearly puts me into fits when she

begins."

"I learnt it from papa, you ass! and his jolly friends," said the young

lady, vigorously cracking a hunting-whip, which she habitually carried in

her hand. "I'm as good a judge of horseflesh as the best of 'em."

"Well now, get along, you shocking girl: I really shall take a fit if you

go on in such a way. And now Miss Grey, attend to me; I'm going to tell you

about the ball. You must be dying to hear about it, I know. Oh, such a

ball! You never saw or heard, or read, or dreamt of anything like it in all

your life! The decorations, the entertainment, the supper, the music were

indescribable! and then the guests! There were two noblemen, three

baronets, and five titled ladies, and other ladies and gentlemen

innumerable. The ladies, of course, were of no consequence to me, except to

put me in a good humour with myself, by showing how ugly and awkward most

of them were; and the best, mamma told me, - the most transcendent beauties

among them, were nothing to me. As for me, Miss Grey - I'm so sorry you

didn't see me! I was charming - wasn't I, Matilda?"

"Middling."

"No, but I really was - at least so mamma said - and Brown and Williamson.

Brown said she was sure no gentleman could set eyes on me without falling

in love that minute; and so I may be allowed to be a little vain. I know

you think me a shocking, conceited, frivolous girl, but then you know, I

don't attribute it all to my personal attractions: I give some praise to

the hairdresser, and some to my exquisitely lovely dress - you must see it

tomorrow - white gauze over pink satin - and so sweetly made! and a

necklace and bracelets of beautiful, large pearls!"

"I have no doubt you looked very charming; but should that delight you so

very much?"

"Oh, no! not that alone: but then, I was so much admired; and I made so

many conquests in that one night - you'd be astonished to hear -"

"But what good will they do you?"

"What good! Think of any woman asking that!"

"Well, I should think one conquest would be enough, and too much, unless

the subjugation were mutual."

"Oh, but you know I never agree with you on those points. Now wait a bit,

and I'll tell you my principal admirers - those who made themselves very

conspicuous that night and after, for I've been to two parties since.

Unfortunately the two noblemen, Lord G-- and Lord F--, were married, or I

might have condescended to be particularly gracious to them; as it was, I

did not, though Lord F--, who hates his wife, was evidently much struck

with me. He asked me to dance with him twice - he is a charming dancer, by

the by, and so am I - you can't think how well I did - I was astonished at

myself. My lord was very complimentary, too - rather too much so in fact,

and I thought proper to be a little haughty and repellent; but I had the

pleasure of seeing his nasty, cross wife ready to perish with spite and

vexation -"

"Oh Miss Murray! you don't mean to say that such a thing could really give

you pleasure! However cross or -"

"Well, I know it's very wrong; - but never mind! I mean to be good sometime

- only don't preach now, there's a good creature - I haven't told you half

yet. . . . Let me see . . . Oh! I was going to tell you how many

unmistakable admirers I had: - Sir Thomas Ashby was one, - Sir Hugh Meltham

and Sir Broadley Wilson are old codgers, only fit companions for papa and

mamma. Sir Thomas is young, rich, and gay, but an ugly beast nevertheless:

however, mamma says I should not mind that after a few months'

acquaintance. Then, there was Harry Meltham, Sir Hugh's younger son, rather

good-looking, and a pleasant fellow to flirt with; but being a younger son,

that is all he is good for: then there was young Mr Green, rich enough, but

of no family, and a great stupid fellow, a mere country booby; and then,

our good rector Mr Hatfield: an humble admirer, he ought to consider

himself; but I fear he has forgotten to number humility among his stock of

Christian virtues."

"Was Mr Hatfield at the ball?"

"Yes to be sure. Did you think he was too good to go?"

"I thought he might consider it unclerical."

"By no means. He did not profane his cloth by dancing; but it was with

difficulty he could refrain, poor man: he looked as if he were dying to ask

my hand just for one set; and - Oh! by-the-bye,he's got a new curate: that

seedy old fellow Mr Bligh has got his long-wished-for living at last, and

gone.

"And what is the new one like?"

"Oh such a beast! Weston his name is. I can give you his description in

three words: an insensate, ugly, stupid blockhead. That's four, but no

matter - enough of him now."

Then she returned to the ball, and gave me a further account of her

deportment there, and at the several parties she had since attended, and

further particulars respecting Sir Thomas Ashby and Messrs. Meltham, Green,

and Hatfield, and the ineffaceable impression she had wrought upon each of

them.

"Well, which of the four do you like best?" said I, suppressing my third or

fourth yawn.

"I detest them all," replied she, shaking her bright ringlets in vivacious

scorn.

"That means, I suppose, I like them all - but which most?"

"No, I really do detest them all; but Harry Meltham is the handsomest and

most amusing, and Mr Hatfield the cleverest, Sir Thomas the wickedest, and

Mr Green the most stupid. But the one I'm to have, I suppose, if I'm doomed

to have any of them, is Sir Thomas Ashby."

"Surely not, if he's so wicked, and if you dislike him?"

"Oh, I don't mind his being wicked; he's all the better for that; and as

for disliking him - I shouldn't greatly object to being Lady Ashby of Ashby

Park, if I must marry; but if I could be always young, I would be always

single. I should like to enjoy myself thoroughly, and coquet with all the

world, till I am on the verge of being called an old maid; and then, to

escape the infamy of that, after having made ten thousand conquests, to

break all their hearts save one, by marrying some high-born, rich,

indulgent husband, whom, on the other hand, fifty ladies were dying to

have."

"Well, as long as you entertain those views, keep single by all means, and

never marry at all, not even to escape the infamy of old maidenhood."

Chapter 10

The Church

"Well, Miss Grey, what do you think of the new curate?" asked Miss Murray,

on our return from church the Sunday after the re-commencement of my

duties.

"I can scarcely tell," was my reply: "I have not even heard him preach."

"Well, but you saw him, didn't you?"

"Yes; but I cannot pretend to judge of a man's character by a single,

cursory glance at his face."

"But isn't he ugly?"

"He did not strike me as being particularly so; I don't dislike that cast

of countenance: but the only thing I particularly noticed about him was his

style of reading, which appeared to me good - infinitely better, at least,

than Mr Hatfield's. He read the lessons as if he were bent on giving full

effect to every passage: it seemed as if the most careless person could not

have helped attending, nor the most ignorant have failed to understand; and

the prayers, he read as if he were not reading at all, but praying,

earnestly and sincerely from his own heart."

"Oh, yes! that's all he is good for: he can plod through the service well

enough; but he has not a single idea beyond it."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! I know perfectly well; I'm an excellent judge in such matters. Did you

see how he went out of church? stumping along, as if there was nobody there

but himself - never looking to the right hand or the left, and evidently

thinking of nothing but just getting out of the church, and, perhaps, home

to his dinner - his great stupid head could contain no other idea."

"I suppose you would have had him cast a glance into the squire's pew,"

said I, laughing at the vehemence of her hostility. "Indeed! I should have

been highly indignant if he had dared to do such a thing!" replied she,

haughtily tossing her head; then, after a moment's reflection, she added -

"Well, well! I suppose he's good enough for his place; but, I'm glad I'm

not dependent on him for amusement - that's all. Did you see how Mr

Hatfield hurried out to get a bow from me, and be in time to put us into

the carriage?"

"Yes," answered I, internally adding, "and I thought it somewhat derogatory

to his dignity as a clergyman to come flying from the pulpit in such eager

haste to shake hands with the squire, and hand his wife and daughters into

their carriage; and moreover I owe him a grudge for nearly shutting me out

of it;" for, in fact, though I was standing before his face, close beside

the carriage steps, waiting to get in, he would persist in putting them up,

and closing the door, till one of the family stopped him by calling out

that the governess was not in yet: then, without a word of apology, he

departed, wishing them good morning, and leaving the footman to finish the

business.

Nota bene. - Mr Hatfield never spoke to me, neither did Sir Hugh or Lady

Meltham, nor Mr Harry or Miss Meltham, nor Mr Green or his sisters, nor any

other lady or gentleman who frequented that church, nor, in fact, anyone

that visited at Horton Lodge.

Miss Murray ordered the carriage again, in the afternoon, for herself and

her sister: she said it was too cold for them to enjoy themselves in the

garden; and, besides, she believed Harry Meltham would be at church.

"For," said she, smiling slyly at her own fair image in the glass, "he has

been a most exemplary attendant at church these last few Sundays. You would

think he was quite a good Christian. And you may go with us, Miss Grey, I

want you to see him; he is so greatly improved since he returned from

abroad - you can't think! And, besides, then you will have an opportunity

of seeing the beautiful Mr Weston again, and of hearing him preach."

I did hear him preach, and was decidedly pleased with the evangelical truth

of his doctrine, as well as the earnest simplicity of his manner, and the

clearness and force of his style.

It was truly refreshing to hear such a sermon, after being so long

accustomed to the dry, prosy discourses of the former curate, and the still

less edifying harangues of the rector, who would come sailing up the aisle,

or rather sweeping along like a whirlwind, with his rich silk gown flying

behind him and rustling against the pew doors, mount the pulpit like a

conqueror ascending his triumphal car; then sinking on the velvet cushion

in an attitude of studied grace, remain in silent prostration for a certain

time; then, mutter over a Collect, and gabble through the Lord's Prayer,

rise, draw off one bright lavender glove to give the congregation the

benefit of his sparkling rings, lightly pass his fingers through his well-

curled hair, flourish a cambric handkerchief, recite a very short passage,

or, perhaps, a mere phrase of scripture, as a head-piece to his discourse,

and, finally, deliver a composition which, as a composition, might be

considered good, though far too studied and too artificial to be pleasing

to me; the propositions were well laid down, the arguments logically

conducted; and yet, it was sometimes hard to listen quietly throughout,

without some slight demonstrations of disapproval or impatience.

His favourite subjects were church discipline, rites and ceremonies,

apostolical succession, the duty of reverence and obedience to the clergy,

the atrocious criminality of dissent, the absolute necessity of observing

all the forms of godliness, the reprehensible presumption of individuals

who attempted to think for themselves in matters connected with religion,

or to be guided by their own interpretations of Scripture, and,

occasionally (to please his wealthy parishioners), the necessity of

deferential obedience from the poor to the rich - supporting his maxims and

exhortations throughout with quotations from the Fathers, with whom he

appeared to be far better acquainted than with the Apostles and

Evangelists, and whose importance he seemed to consider at least equal to

theirs. But now and then he gave us a sermon of a different order - what

some would call a very good one, but sunless and severe, representing the

Deity as a terrible task-master, rather than a benevolent father. Yet, as I

listened, I felt inclined to think the man was sincere in all he said; he

must have changed his views, and become decidedly religious, gloomy and

austere, but still devout: but such illusions were usually dissipated, on

coming out of church, by hearing his voice in jocund colloquy with some of

the Melthams or Greens, or, perhaps, the Murrays themselves, probably

laughing at his own sermon, and hoping that he had given the rascally

people something to think about; perchance, exulting in the thoughts that

old Betty Holmes would now lay aside the sinful indulgence of her pipe

which had been her daily solace for upwards of thirty years, that George

Higgins would be frightened out of his Sabbath evening walks, and Thomas

Jackson would be sorely troubled in his conscience, and shaken in his sure

and certain hope of a joyful resurrection at the last day.

Thus, I could not but conclude that Mr Hatfield was one of those who bind

heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them upon men's shoulders,

while they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers, and

that make the word of God of none effect by their traditions, teaching for

doctrines the commandments of men. I was well pleased to observe that the

new curate resembled him, as far as I could see, in none of these

particulars.

"Well, Miss Grey! what do you think of him now?" said Miss Murray, as we

took our places in the carriage after service.

"No harm still," replied I.

"No harm!" repeated she in amazement. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, I think no worse of him than I did before."

"No worse! I should think not indeed - quite the contrary! Is he not

greatly improved?"

"Oh, yes! very much indeed," replied I; for I had now discovered that it

was Harry Meltham she meant, not Mr Weston. That gentleman had eagerly come

forward to speak to the young ladies, a thing he would hardly have ventured

to do had their mother been present; he had likewise politely handed them

into the carriage. He had not attempted to shut me out like Mr Hatfield;

neither, of course, had he offered me his assistance (I should not have

accepted it if he had), but as long as the door remained open he had stood

smirking and chatting with them, and then lifted his hat and departed to

his own abode; - but I had scarcely noticed him all the time. My

companions, however, had been more observant; and, as we rolled along, they

discussed between them not only his looks, words, and actions, but every

feature of his face, and every article of his apparel.

"You shan't have him all to yourself, Rosalie," said Miss Matilda, at the

close of this discussion; "I like him: I know he'd make a nice, jolly

companion for me."

"Well, you're quite welcome to him, Matilda," replied her sister, in a tone

of affected indifference.

"And I'm sure," continued the other, "he admires me quite as much as he

does you - doesn't he, Miss Grey?"

"I don't know; I'm not acquainted with his sentiments."

"Well, but he does though!"

"My dear Matilda! nobody will ever admire you till you get rid of your

rough, awkward manners."

"Oh stuff! Harry Meltham likes such manners; and so do papa's friends."

"Well, you may captivate old men, and younger sons; but nobody else, I'm

sure, will ever take a fancy to you."

"I don't care: I'm not always grubbing after money, like you and mamma. If

my husband is able to keep a few good horses and dogs, I shall be quite

satisfied; and all the rest may go to the devil!"

"Well, if you use such shocking expressions, I'm sure no real gentleman

will ever venture to come near you. Really, Miss Grey, you should not let

her do so!"

"I can't possibly prevent it, Miss Murray."

"And you're quite mistaken, Matilda, in supposing that Harry Meltham

admires you: I assure you he does nothing of the kind."

Matilda was beginning an angry reply; but, happily our journey was now at

an end; and the contention was cut short by the footman's opening the

carriage door, and letting down the steps for our descent.

Chapter 11

The Cottagers

As I had now only one regular pupil - though she contrived to give me as

much trouble as three or four ordinary ones, and though her sister still

took lessons in German and drawing - I had considerably more time at my own

disposal than I had ever been blessed with before, since I had taken upon

me the governess's yoke; which time I devoted partly to correspondence with

my friends, partly to reading, study, and the practice of music, singing,

etc., partly to wandering in the grounds or adjacent fields, with my pupils

if they wanted me, alone if they did not.

Often, when they had no more agreeable occupation at hand, the Misses

Murray would amuse themselves with visiting the poor cottagers on their

father's estate to receive their flattering homage, or to hear the old

stories or gossiping news of the garrulous old women; or, perhaps, to enjoy

the purer pleasure of making the poor people happy with their cheering

presence, and their occasional gifts, so easily bestowed, so thankfully

received. Sometimes, I was called upon to accompany one or both of the

sisters in these visits; and sometimes I was desired to go alone to fulfil

some promise which they had been more ready to make than to perform, to

carry some small donation, or read to one who was sick, or seriously

disposed: and thus I made a few acquaintances among the cottagers; and,

occasionally, I went to see them on my own account.

I generally had more satisfaction in going alone than with either of the

young ladies, for they, chiefly owing to their defective education,

comported themselves towards their inferiors in a manner that was highly

disagreeable for me to witness. They never in thought exchanged places with

them; and, consequently, had no consideration for their feelings, regarding

them as an order of beings entirely distinct from themselves.

They would watch the poor creatures at their meals, making uncivil remarks

about their food, and their manner of eating; they would laugh at their

simple notions and provincial expressions, till some of them scarcely durst

venture to speak: they would call the grave, elderly men and women old

fools and silly old blockheads to their faces; and all this without meaning

to offend.

I could see that the people were often hurt and annoyed by such conduct,

though their fear of the "grand ladies" prevented them from testifying any

resentment; but they never perceived it. They thought that, as these

cottagers were poor and untaught, they must be stupid and brutish; and as

long as they, their superiors, condescended to talk to them, and to give

them shillings and half-crowns, or articles of clothing, they had a right

to amuse themselves, even at their expense; and the people must adore them

as angels of light condescending to minister to their necessities, and

enlighten their humble dwellings.

I made many and various attempts to deliver my pupils from these delusive

notions without alarming their pride, which was easily offended and not

soon appeased, but with little apparent result; and I know not which was

the more reprehensible of the two: Matilda was more rude and boisterous;

but from Rosalie's womanly age and lady-like exterior better things were

expected: yet she was as provokingly careless and inconsiderate as a giddy

child of twelve.

One bright day in the last week of February I was walking in the park,

enjoying the threefold luxury of solitude, a book, and pleasant weather,

for Miss Matilda had set out on her daily ride, and Miss Murray was gone in

the carriage with her mamma to pay some morning calls. But it struck me

that I ought to leave these selfish pleasures, and the park with its

glorious canopy of bright blue sky, the west wind sounding through its yet

leafless branches, the snow-wreaths still lingering in its hollows, but

melting fast beneath the sun, and the graceful deer browsing on its moist

herbage, already assuming the freshness and verdure of spring, and go to

the cottage of one Nancy Brown, a widow, whose son was at work all day in

the fields, and who was afflicted with an inflammation in the eyes which

had for some time incapacitated her from reading, to her own great grief,

for she was a woman of a serious, thoughtful turn of mind.

I accordingly went, and found her alone, as usual, in her little close,

dark cottage, redolent of smoke and confined air, but as tidy and clean as

she could make it. She was seated beside her little fire (consisting of a

few red cinders and a bit of stick), busily knitting, with a small

sackcloth cushion at her feet, placed for the accommodation of her gentle

friend the cat who was seated thereon, with her long tail half encircling

her velvet paws, and her half-closed eyes dreamily gazing on the low,

crooked fender.

"Well, Nancy, how are you today?"

"Why, middling, Miss, i' myseln - my eyes is no better, but I'm a deal

easier i' my mind nor I have been," replied she, rising to welcome me with

a contented smile, which I was glad to see, for Nancy had been somewhat

afflicted with religious melancholy.

I congratulated her upon the change. She agreed that it was a great

blessing, and expressed herself "right down thankful for it," adding, "If

it please God to spare my sight, and make me so as I can read my Bible

again, I think I shall be as happy as a queen."

"I hope He will, Nancy," replied I; "and, meantime, I'll come and read to

you now and then, when I have a little time to spare."

With expressions of grateful pleasure, the poor woman moved to get me a

chair; but, as I saved her the trouble, she busied herself with stirring

the fire, and adding a few more sticks to the decaying embers; and then,

taking her well-used Bible from the shelf, dusted it carefully, and gave it

to me. On my asking if there was any particular part she should like me to

read, she answered -

"Well, Miss Grey, if it's all the same to you, I'd like to hear that

chapter in the First Epistle of Saint John that says, 'God is love, and he

that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' "

With a little searching I found these words in the fourth chapter. When I

came to the seventh verse she interrupted me, and with needless apologies

for such a liberty, desired me to read it very slowly, that she might take

it all in, and dwell on every word; hoping I would excuse her as she was

but a simple body.

"The wisest person," I replied, "might think over each of these verses for

an hour, and be all the better for it; and I would rather read them slowly

than not."

Accordingly, I finished the chapter as slowly as need be, and at the same

time as impressively as I could. My auditor listened most attentively all

the while, and sincerely thanked me when I had done. I sat still about half

a minute to give her time to reflect upon it; when, somewhat to my

surprise, she broke the pause by asking me how I liked Mr Weston?

"I don't know," I replied, a little startled by the suddenness of the

question; "I think he preaches very well."

"Ay, he does so; and talks well, too!"

"Does he?"

"He does. May be you haven't seen him - not to talk to much, yet?"

"No, I never see anyone to talk to - except the young ladies of the Hall."

"Ah; they're nice, kind young ladies; but they can't talk as he does!"

"Then he comes to see you, Nancy?"

"He does, Miss; and I'se thankful for it. He comes to see all us poor

bodies a deal ofter nor Maister Bligh, or th' rector ever did; an' it's

well he does, for he's always welcome; and we can't say as much for th'

rector - there is 'at says they're fair feared on him. When he comes into a

house, they say he's sure to find summut wrong, and begin a calling 'em as

soon as he crosses th' doorstuns: but maybe he thinks it is his duty like

to tell 'em what's wrong; and very oft, he comes o' purpose to reprove folk

for not coming to church, or not kneeling an' standing when other folks

does, or going to th' Methody chapel, or summut o' that sort; but I can't

say 'at he ever fund much fault wi' me. He came to see me once or twice,

afore Maister Weston come, when I was so ill troubled in my mind: and as I

had only very poor health besides, I made bold to send for him - and he

came right enough. I was sore distressed, Miss Grey - thank God it's owered

now - but when I took my Bible I could get no comfort of it at all. That

very chapter 'at you've just been reading troubled me as much as aught -

'He that loveth not, knoweth not God.' It seemed fearsome to me; for I felt

that I loved neither God nor man as I should do, and could not, if I tried

ever so. And th' chapter afore, where it says 'He that is born of God

cannot commit sin.' And another place where it says 'Love is the fulfilling

of the Law.' And many, many others, Miss: I should fair weary you out if I

was to tell them all. But all seemed to condemn me, and to show me 'at I

was not in the right way; and as I knew not how to get into it, I sent our

Bill to beg Maister Hatfield to be as kind as look in on me some day; and

when he came, I telled him all my troubles."

"And what did he say, Nancy?"

"Why Miss, he like seemed to scorn me. I might be mista'en - but he like

gave a sort of a whistle, and I saw a bit of a smile on his face; and he

said, 'Oh it's all stuff! You've been among the Methodists, my good woman.'

But I telled him I'd never been near the Methodies. And then he said, -

" 'Well,' says he, 'you must come to church, where you'll hear the

scriptures properly explained, instead of sitting poring over your Bible at

home.'

"But I telled him I always used coming to church when I had my health; but

this very cold winter weather I hardly durst venture so far - and me so bad

i' th' rheumatiz' an' all.

"But he says, 'It'll do your rheumatiz' good to hobble to church: there's

nothing like exercise for the rheumatiz'. You can walk about the house well

enough; why can't you walk to church? The fact is,' says he, 'you're

getting too fond of your ease. It's always easy to find excuses for

shirking one's duty.'

"But then, you know, Miss Grey, it wasn't so. However, I telled him I'd

try. 'But please sir,' says I, 'if I do go to church, what the better shall

I be? I want to have my sins blotted out, and to feel that they are

remembered no more against me, and that the love of God is shed abroad in

my heart; and if I can get no good by reading my Bible, an' saying my

prayers at home, what good shall I get by going to church?'

" 'The church,' says he, 'is the place appointed by God for His worship.

It's your duty to go there as often as you can. If you want comfort you

must seek it in the path of duty' - an' a deal more he said, but I cannot

remember all his fine words. However, it all came to this, that I was to

come to church as oft as ever I could, and bring my prayer-book with me,

an' read up all the sponsers after th' clerk, an' stand an' kneel an' sit

an' do all as I should, an' take the Lord's supper at every opportunity,

an' hearken his sermons, an' Maister Bligh's, an' it 'ud be all right: if I

went on doing my duty, I should get a blessing at last.

" 'But if you get no comfort that way,' says he, 'it's all up.'

" 'Then sir,' says I, 'should you think I'm a reprobate?'

" 'Why,' says he - he says 'if you do your best to get to Heaven and can't

manage it, you must be one of those that seek to enter in at the strait

gate and shall not be able.'

"An' then he asked me if I'd seen any of the ladies o' th' Hall about that

mornin'; so I telled him where I'd seen the young Misses go on th' Moss-

lane; - an' he kicked my poor cat right across th' floor, an' went off

after 'em as gay as a lark; but I was very sad. That last word o' his fair

sank into my heart, an' lay there like a lump o' lead, till I was weary to

bear it.

"Howsoever, I follered his advice: I thought he meant it all for th' best,

though he had a queer way with him - but you know, Miss, he's rich an'

young, and suchlike cannot right understand the thoughts of a poor old

woman such as me. But howsoever, I did my best to do all as he bade me -

but maybe I'm plaguing you, Miss, wi' my chatter."

"Oh, no Nancy! Go on, and tell me all."

"Well, my rheumatiz' got better - I know not whether wi' going to church or

not, but one frosty Sunday I got this cold i' my eyes. Th' inflammation

didn't come on all at once like, but bit by bit - but I wasn't going to

tell you about my eyes, I was talking about my trouble o' mind; - and to

tell the truth, Miss Grey, I don't think it was anyways eased by coming to

church - naught to speak on at least: I like got my health better; but that

didn't mend my soul. I hearkened and hearkened the ministers, and read an'

read at my prayer-book; but it was all like sounding brass, and a tinkling

cymbal: the sermons I couldn't understand, an' th' prayer-book only served

to show me how wicked I was, that I could read such good words, an' never

be no better for it, and oftens feel it a sore labour an' a heavy task

beside, instead of a blessing and a privilege as all good Christians does.

It seemed like as all were barren an' dark to me. And then, them dreadful

words 'Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.' They like as

they fair dried up my sperrit.

"But one Sunday, when Maister Hatfield gave out about the sacrament, I

noticed where he said, 'If there be any of you that cannot quiet his own

conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me,

or some other discreet and learned minister of God's word, and open his

grief.' So, next Sunday morning, afore service, I just looked into th'

vestry, an' began a talking to th' rector again. I hardly could fashion to

take such a liberty, but I thought when my soul was at stake I shouldn't

stick at a trifle. But he said he hadn't time to attend to me then.

" 'And indeed,' says he, 'I've nothing to say to you, but what I've said

before - Take the sacrament of course, and go on doing your duty; and if

that won't serve you, nothing will. So don't bother me any more.'

"So then I went away. But I heard Maister Weston - Maister Weston was

there, Miss - this was his first Sunday at Horton, you know, an' he was i'

th' vestry in his surplice, helping th' rector on with his gown."

"Yes, Nancy."

"And I heard him ask Maister Hatfield who I was; an' he said, 'Oh! she's a

canting old fool.'

"And I was very ill grieved, Miss Grey; but I went to my seat, and I tried

to do my duty as aforetime; but I like got no peace. An' I even took the

sacrament; but I felt as though I were eating an' drinking to my own

damnation all th' time. So I went home, sorely troubled.

"But next day, afore I'd gotten fettled up - for indeed Miss, I'd no heart

to sweeping an' fettling, an' washing pots; so I sat me down i' th' muck -

but who should come in but Maister Weston! I started siding stuff then, an'

sweeping an' doing; an' I expected he'd begin a-calling me for my idle ways

as Maister Hatfield would a' done; but I was mista'en: he only bid me good

mornin' like, in a quiet dacent way. So I dusted him a chair, an' fettled

up th' fireplace a bit; but I hadn't forgotten th' rector's words, so says

I, -

" 'I wonder, sir, you should give yourself that trouble, to come so far to

see a "canting old fool," such as me.'

"He like seemed taken aback at that; but he would fain persuade me 'at th'

rector was only in jest; and when that wouldn't do, he says, -

" 'Well Nancy, you shouldn't think so much about it: Mr Hatfield was a

little out of humour just then; you know we're none of us perfect - even

Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips. But now sit down a minute, if you

can spare the time, and tell me all your doubts and fears; and I'll try to

remove them.'

"So I sat me down anent him. He was quite a stranger you know, Miss Grey,

and even younger nor Maister Hatfield, I believe; an' I had thought him not

so pleasant looking as him, and rather a bit crossish, at first, to look

at; but he spake so civil like - and when th' cat, poor thing, jumped on to

his knee, he only stroked her, and gave a bit of a smile: so I thought that

was a good sign; for once, when she did so to th' rector, he knocked her

off, like as it might be in scorn and anger, poor thing. But you can't

expect a cat to know manners like a Christian, you know, Miss Grey."

"No of course not, Nancy. But what did Mr Weston say then?"

"He said naught; but he listened to me as steady an' patient as could be,

an' never a bit o' scorn about him; so I went on, an' telled him all, just

as I've telled you - an' more, too.

" 'Well,' says he, 'Mr Hatfield was quite right in telling you to persevere

in doing your duty; but in advising you to go to church and attend to the

service, and so on, he didn't mean that was the whole of a Christian's

duty; he only thought you might there learn what more was to be done, and

be led to take delight in those exercises, instead of finding them a task

and a burden. And if you had asked him to explain those words that trouble

you so much, I think he would have told you that if many shall seek to

enter in at the strait gate and shall not be able, it is their own sins

that hinder them; just as a man with a large sack on his back might wish to

pass through a narrow doorway, and find it impossible to do so, unless he

would leave his sack behind him. But you, Nancy, I daresay, have no sins

that you would not gladly throw aside, if you knew how?'

" 'Indeed sir, you speak truth,' says I.

" 'Well,' says he, 'you know the first, and great commandment - and the

second which is like unto it - on which two commandments hang all the law

and the prophets? You say you cannot love God; but it strikes me, that if

you rightly consider who and what He is, you cannot help it. He is your

father, your best friend: every blessing, everything good, pleasant, or

useful comes from Him; and everything evil, everything you have reason to

hate, to shun, or to fear comes from Satan - His enemy as well as ours; and

for this cause was God manifest in the flesh, that He might destroy the

works of the devil: in one word God is LOVE; and the more of love we have

within us, the nearer we are to Him, and the more of His spirit we

possess.'

" 'Well sir,' I said, 'if I can always think on these things, I think I

might well love God; but how can I love my neighbours, when they vex me,

and be so contrairy and sinful as some on 'em is?'

" 'It may seem a hard matter,' says he, 'to love our neighbours, who have

so much of what is evil about them, and whose faults so often awaken the

evil that lingers within ourselves, but remember, that He made them, and He

loves them; and whosoever loved him that begat, loveth him that is begotten

also. And if God so loves us, that He gave His only begotten son to die for

us, we ought also to love one another. But if you cannot feel positive

affection for those who do not care for you, you can at least try to do to

them as you would they should do unto you: you can endeavour to pity their

failings and excuse their offences, and to do all the good you can to those

about you. And if you accustom yourself to this, Nancy, the very effort

itself will make you love them in some degree - to say nothing of the

goodwill your kindness would beget in them, though they might have little

else that is good about them. If we love God and wish to serve Him, let us

try to be like Him, to do His work, to labour for His glory, which is the

good of man, to hasten the coming of His kingdom, which is the peace and

happiness of all the world. However powerless we may seem to be, in doing

all the good we can through life, the humblest of us may do much towards

it; and let us dwell in love, that He may dwell in us, and we in Him. The

more happiness we bestow, the more we shall receive, even here, and the

greater will be our reward in Heaven when we rest from our labours.'

"I believe, Miss, them is his very words, for I've thought 'em ower many a

time. An' then he took that Bible, an' read bits here and there, an'

explained 'em as clear as the day; and it seemed like as a new light broke

in on my soul; an' I felt fair aglow about my heart, an' only wished poor

Bill an' all the world could a' been there an' heard it all, and rejoiced

wi' me.

"After he was gone, Hannah Rogers, one o' th' neighbours, came in and

wanted me to help her to wash. I telled her I couldn't just then, for I

hadn't set on th' potaties for th' dinner, nor washed up th' breakfast

stuff yet. So then she began a-calling me for my nasty, idle ways. I was a

little bit vexed at first; but I never said nothing wrong to her: I only

telled her, like all in a quiet way, 'at I'd had th' new parson to see me;

but I'd get done as quick as ever I could, an' then come an' help her. So

then she softened down; and my heart like as it warmed towards her, an' in

a bit we was very good friends.

"An' so it is, Miss Grey, 'a soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous

words stir up anger.' It isn't only in them you speak to, but in yourself."

"Very true, Nancy, if we could always remember it."

"Ay, if we could!"

"And did Mr Weston ever come to see you again?"

"Yes, many a time; and since my eyes has been so bad, he's sat an' read to

me by the half hour together; but you know, Miss, he has other folks to

see, and other things to do - God bless him! An' that next Sunday he

preached such a sermon! his text was 'Come unto me all ye that labour and

are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' and them two blessed verses

that follows. You wasn't there, Miss, you was with your friends then - but

it made me so happy! and I am happy now, thank God! an' I take a pleasure,

now, in doing little bits o' jobs for my neighbours - such as a poor old

body 'at's half blind can do - and they take it kindly of me, just as he

said. You see, Miss, I'm knitting a pair o' stockings now: - they're for

Thomas Jackson; he's a queerish old body, an' we've had many a bout at

threaping one anent t'other; an' at times we've differed sorely. So I

thought I couldn't do better nor knit him a pair o' warm stockings; an'

I've felt to like him a deal better, poor old man, sin' I began. It's

turned out just as Maister Weston said."

"Well, I'm very glad to see you so happy, Nancy, and so wise: but I must go

now; I shall be wanted at the Hall," said I; and bidding her good bye, I

departed, promising to come again when I had time, and feeling nearly as

happy as herself.

At another time, I went to read to a poor labourer who was in the last

stage of a consumption. The young ladies had been to see him, and somehow a

promise of reading to him had been extracted from them; but it was too much

trouble, so they begged me to do it instead. I went, willingly enough, and

there too I was gratified with the praises of Mr Weston, both from the sick

man and his wife. The former told me that he derived great comfort and

benefit from the visits of the new parson, who frequently came to see him,

and was "another guess sort of man," to Mr Hatfield, who before the other's

arrival at Horton had now and then paid him a visit, on which occasions he

would always insist upon having the cottage door kept open to admit the

fresh air for his own convenience, without considering how it might injure

the sufferer; and having opened his prayer-book, and hastily read over a

part of the service for the sick, would hurry away again, if he did not

stay to administer some harsh rebuke to the afflicted wife, or to make some

thoughtless, not to say heartless, observation rather calculated to

increase than diminish the troubles of the suffering pair.

"Whereas," said the man, "Maister Weston 'ull pray with me quite in a

different fashion, an' talk to me as kind as owt, an' oft read to me, too,

an' sit beside me just like a brother."

"Just for all the world!" exclaimed his wife, "an' about a three wik sin',

when he seed how poor Jem shivered wi' cold, an' what pitiful fires we

kept, he axed if wer stock o' coals was nearly done. I telled him it was,

an' we was ill set to get more - but you know, mum, I didn't think o' him

helping us - but howsoever, he sent us a sack o' coals next day; an' we've

had good fires ever sin'; an' a great blessing it is, this winter time. But

that's his way, Miss Grey: when he comes into a poor body's house a-seein'

sick folk, he like notices what they most stand i' need on, an' if he

thinks they can't readily get it theirseln, he never says nowt about it,

but just gets it for 'em: an' it isn't everybody 'at 'ud do that, 'at has

as little as he has; for you know mum, he's nowt at all to live on but what

he gets fro' th' rector; an' that's little enough they say."

I remembered then, with a species of exultation, that he had frequently

been styled a vulgar brute by the amiable Miss Murray, because he sported a

silver watch, and clothes not quite so bright and fresh as Mr Hatfield's.

In returning to the lodge, I felt very happy, and thanked God that I had

now something to think about, something to dwell on as a relief from the

weary monotony, the lonely drudgery of my present life; - for I was lonely:

never, from month to month, from year to year, except during my brief

intervals of rest at home, did I see one creature to whom I could open my

heart or freely speak my thoughts with any hope of sympathy, or even

comprehension; never one, unless it were poor Nancy Brown, with whom I

could enjoy a single moment of real social intercourse, or whose

conversation was calculated to render me better, wiser, or happier than

before; or who, as far as I could see, could be greatly benefited by mine.

My only companions had been unamiable children and ignorant, wrong-headed

girls, from whose fatiguing folly, unbroken solitude was often a relief

most earnestly desired and dearly prized. But to be restricted to such

associates was a serious evil, both in its immediate effects, and the

consequences that were likely to ensue.

Never a new idea or a stirring thought came to me from without; and such as

rose within me were, for the most part, miserably crushed at once, or

doomed to sicken and fade away, because they could not see the light.

Habitual associates are known to exercise a great influence over each

other's minds and manners. Those whose actions are for ever before our

eyes, whose words are ever in our ears, will naturally lead us, albeit

against our will, slowly, gradually, imperceptibly, perhaps, to act and

speak as they do. I will not presume to say how far this irresistible power

of assimilation extends; but if one civilised man were doomed to pass a

dozen years amid a race of intractable savages, unless he had power to

improve them, I greatly question whether, at the close of that period, he

would not have become, at least, a barbarian himself. And I, as I could not

make my young companions better, feared exceedingly that they would make me

worse - would gradually bring my feelings, habits, capacities to the level

of their own, without, however, imparting to me their light-heartedness and

cheerful vivacity. Already, I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, my

heart petrifying, my soul contracting, and I trembled lest my very moral

perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong

confounded, and all my better faculties be sunk, at last, beneath the

baleful influence of such a mode of life. The gross vapours of earth were

gathering round me, and closing in upon my inward heaven; and thus it was

that Mr Weston rose at length upon me, appearing like the morning star in

my horizon, to save me from the fear of utter darkness; and I rejoiced that

I had now a subject for contemplation that was above me, not beneath. I was

glad to see that all the world was not made up of Bloomfields, Murrays,

Hatfields, Ashbys, etc.; and that human excellence was not a mere dream of

the imagination. When we hear a little good and no harm of a person, it is

easy and pleasant to imagine more: in short, it is needless to analyse all

my thoughts, but Sunday was now become a day of peculiar delight to me (I

was now almost broken-in to the back corner in the carriage), for I liked

to hear him - and I liked to see him, too, though I knew he was not

handsome, or even what is called agreeable, in outward aspect; but,

certainly, he was not ugly.

In stature, he was a little - a very little - above the middle size;

perfectly symmetrical in figure, deep-chested, and strongly built; the

outline of his face would be pronounced too square for beauty, but, to me,

it announced decision of character; his dark brown hair was not carefully

curled, like Mr Hatfield's, but simply brushed aside over a broad, white

forehead; the eyebrows, I suppose, were too projecting, but from under

those dark brows there gleamed an eye of singular power, brown in colour,

not large, and somewhat deep-set, but strikingly brilliant, and full of

expression; there was character, too, in the mouth, something that bespoke

a man of firm purpose, and an habitual thinker, and when he smiled - but I

will not speak of that yet, for, at the time I mention, I had never seen

him smile; and, indeed, his general appearance did not impress me with the

idea of a man given to such a relaxation, nor of such an individual as the

cottagers described him. I had early formed my opinion of him, and, in

spite of Miss Murray's objurgations, was fully convinced that he was a man

of strong sense, firm faith, and ardent piety, but thoughtful and stern:

and when I found that to his other good qualities was added that of true

benevolence, and gentle, considerate kindness, the discovery, perhaps,

delighted me the more, as I had not been prepared to expect it.

Chapter 12

The Shower

The next visit I paid to Nancy Brown was in the second week in March; for,

though I had many spare minutes during the day, I seldom could look upon an

hour as entirely my own, since, where everything was left to the caprices

of Miss Matilda and her sister, there could be no order or regularly, and

whatever occupation I chose, when not actually busied about them or their

concerns, I had, as it were, to keep my loins girded, my shoes on my feet,

and my staff in my hand; for, not to be immediately forthcoming when called

for was regarded as a grave and inexcusable offence, not only by my pupils

and their mother, but by the very servant who came in breathless haste to

call me, exclaiming -

"You're to go to the schoolroom directly, mum - the young ladies is

WAITING!"

Climax of horror! actually waiting for their governess!!!

But this time I was pretty sure of an hour or two to myself, for Matilda

was preparing for a long ride, and Rosalie was dressing for a dinner party

at Lady Ashby's; so I took the opportunity of repairing to the widow's

cottage, where I found her in some anxiety about her cat, which had been

absent all day. I comforted her with as many anecdotes of that animal's

roving propensities as I could recollect.

"I'm feared o' th' gamekeepers," said she, "that's all 'at I think on. If

th' young gentlemen had been at home, I should a' thought they'd been

setting their dogs at her, an' worried her, poor thing, as they did many a

poor body's cat; but I haven't that to be feared on now."

Nancy's eyes were better, but still far from well: she had been trying to

make a Sunday shirt for her son, but told me she could only bear to do a

little bit at it now and then; so that it progressed but slowly, though the

poor lad wanted it sadly. So I proposed to help her a little, after I had

read to her, for I had plenty of time that evening, and need not return

till dusk. She thankfully accepted the offer.

"An' you'll be a bit o' company for me, too, Miss," said she, "I like as I

feel lonesome without my cat."

But when I had finished reading, and done the half of a seam, with Nancy's

capacious brass thimble fitted on to my finger by means of a roll of paper,

I was disturbed by the entrance of Mr Weston with the identical cat in his

arms. I now saw that he could smile, and very pleasantly, too.

"I've done you a piece of good service, Nancy," he began; then seeing me,

he acknowledged my presence by a slight bow. I should have been invisible

to Mr Hatfield, or any other gentleman of those parts. "I've delivered your

cat," he continued, "from the hands, or rather the gun, of Mr Murray's

gamekeeper."

"God bless you, sir," cried the grateful old woman, ready to weep for joy

as she received her favourite from his arms.

"Take care of it," said he, "and don't let it go near the rabbit warren,

for the gamekeeper swears he'll shoot it if he sees it there again. He

would have done so today, if I had not been in time to stop him. I believe

it is raining, Miss Grey," added he, more quietly, observing that I had put

aside my work and was preparing to depart. "Don't let me disturb you - I

shan't stay two minutes."

"You'll both stay while this shower gets owered," said Nancy as she stirred

the fire, and placed another chair beside it; "what! there's room for all."

"I can see better here, thank you Nancy," replied I, taking my work to the

window, where she had the goodness to suffer me to remain unmolested while

she got a brush to remove the cat's hairs from Mr Weston's coat, carefully

wiped the rain from his hat, and gave the cat its supper, busily talking

all the time: now thanking her clerical friend for what he had done; now

wondering how the cat had found out the warren; and now lamenting the

probable consequences of such a discovery. He listened with a quiet, good-

natured smile, and at length took a seat in compliance with her pressing

invitations, but repeated that he did not mean to stay.

"I have another place to go to," said he, "and I see" (glancing at the book

on the table) "someone else has been reading to you."

"Yes, sir, Miss Grey has been as kind as read me a chapter; an' now she's

helping me with a shirt for our Bill - but I'm feared she'll be cold there.

Won't you come to th' fire, Miss?"

"No, thank you Nancy, I'm quite warm. I must go as soon as this shower is

over."

"Aw, Miss! You said you could stop while dusk!" cried the provoking old

woman, and Mr Weston seized his hat.

"Nay, sir," exclaimed she, "pray don't go now, while it rains so fast!"

"But it strikes me I'm keeping your visitor away from the fire."

"No you're not, Mr Weston," replied I, hoping there was no harm in a

falsehood of that description.

"No, sure!" cried Nancy. "What, there's lots o' room!"

"Miss Grey," said he, half-jestingly, as if he felt it necessary to change

the present subject, whether he had anything particular to say or not, "I

wish you would make my peace with the squire, when you see him. He was by

when I rescued Nancy's cat, and did not quite approve of the deed. I told

him I thought he might better spare all his rabbits than she her cat, for

which audacious assertion he treated me to some rather ungentlemanly

language, and, I fear, I retorted a trifle too warmly."

"Oh lawful, sir! I hope you didn't fall out wi' th' maister for sake o' my

cat! he cannot bide answering again - can th' maister."

"Oh! it's no matter, Nancy: I don't care about it, really; I said nothing

very uncivil; and I suppose Mr Murray is accustomed to use rather strong

language when he's heated."

"Ay sir - it's a pity!"

"And now, I really must go. I have to visit a place a mile beyond this; and

you would not have me to return in the dark; besides, it has nearly done

raining now - so good evening, Nancy. Good evening Miss Grey."

"Good evening Mr Weston; but don't depend upon me for making your peace

with Mr Murray, for I never see him to speak to."

"Don't you? it can't be helped, then!" replied he in dolorous resignation:

then, with a peculiar half smile, he added, "But never mind; I imagine the

squire has more to apologise for than I," and left the cottage.

I went on with my sewing as long as I could see; and then bid Nancy good

evening, checking her too lively gratitude by the undeniable assurance that

I had only done for her what she would have done for me, if she had been in

my place and I in hers, and hastened back to Horton Lodge; where, having

entered the schoolroom, I found the tea-table all in confusion, the tray

flooded with slops, and Miss Matilda in a most ferocious humour.

"Miss Grey, whatever have you been about? I've had tea half an hour ago,

and had to make it myself, and drink it all alone! I wish you would come in

sooner!"

"I've been to see Nancy Brown. I thought you would not be back from your

ride."

"How could I ride in the rain, I should like to know? That damned pelting

shower was vexatious enough - coming on when I was just in full swing; and

then to come and find nobody in to tea! - and you know I can't make the tea

as I like it."

"I didn't think of the shower," replied I, (and, indeed, the thought of its

driving her home had never entered my head).

"No, of course, you were under shelter yourself, and you never thought of

other people."

I bore her coarse reproaches with astonishing equanimity, even with

cheerfulness; for I was sensible that I had done more good to Nancy Brown,

than harm to her; and perhaps some other thoughts assisted to keep up my

spirits, and impart a relish to the cup of cold, overdrawn tea, and a charm

to the otherwise unsightly table, and - I had almost said - to Miss

Matilda's unamiable face. But she soon betook herself to the stables, and

left me to the quiet enjoyment of my solitary meal.

Chapter 13

The Primroses

Miss Murrey now always went twice to church, for she so loved admiration

that she could not bear to lose a single opportunity of obtaining it; and

she was so sure of it, wherever she showed herself, that whether Harry

Meltham and Mr Green were there or not, there was certain to be somebody

present who would be not insensible to her charms, besides the rector,

whose official capacity generally obliged him to attend.

"Usually, also, if the weather permitted, both she and her sister would

walk home; Matilda because she hated the confinement of the carriage; she,

because she disliked the privacy of it, and enjoyed the company that

generally enlivened the first mile of the journey in walking from the

church to Mr Green's park gates, near which commenced the private road to

Horton Lodge, which lay in the opposite direction; while the highway

conducted in a straightforward course to the still more distant mansion of

Sir Hugh Meltham. Thus, there was always a chance of being accompanied, so

far, either by Harry Meltham, with or without Miss Meltham, or Mr Green,

with perhaps one or both of his sisters, and any gentlemen visitors they

might have.

Whether I walked with the young ladies or rode with their parents, depended

entirely upon their own capricious will: if they chose to "take" me, I

went; if, for reasons best known to themselves, they chose to go alone, I

took my seat in the carriage: I liked walking better, but a sense of

reluctance to obtrude my presence on anyone who did not desire it, always

kept me passive on these and similar occasions; and I never inquired into

the causes of their varying whims. And indeed this was the best policy -

for to submit and oblige was the governess's part, to consult their own

pleasure was that of the pupils. But when I did walk, this first half of

the journey was generally a great nuisance to me. As none of the before-

mentioned ladies and gentlemen ever noticed me, it was disagreeable to walk

beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought

one of them, while they talked over me or across, and if their eyes, in

speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy -

as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear

so.

It was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my

own inferiority; for in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as

the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so, and not to imagine

that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic, who knew her own place too

well to walk beside such fine ladies and gentlemen as they were - though

her young ladies might choose to have her with them, and even condescend to

converse with her, when no better company were at hand.

Thus - I am almost ashamed to confess it - but indeed I gave myself no

little trouble in my endeavours (if I did keep up with them) to appear

perfectly unconscious or regardless of their presence, as if I were wholly

absorbed in my own reflections or the contemplation of surrounding objects;

or if I lingered behind, it was some bird or insect, some tree or flower,

that attracted my attention, and having duly examined that, I would pursue

my walk alone, at a leisurely pace, until my pupils had bid adieu to their

companions, and turned off into the quiet, private road.

One such occasion I particularly well remember, it was a lovely afternoon

about the close of March; Mr Green and his sisters had sent their carriage

back empty, in order to enjoy the bright sunshine and balmy air in a

sociable walk home along with their visitors Captain Somebody and

Lieutenant Somebody else (a couple of military fops), and the Misses

Murray, who, of course, contrived to join them.

Such a party was highly agreeable to Rosalie; but not finding it equally

suitable to my taste, I presently fell back, and began to botanise and

entomologise along the green banks and budding hedges, till the company was

considerably in advance of me, and I could hear the sweet song of the happy

lark: then my spirit of misanthropy began to melt away beneath the soft,

pure air, and genial sunshine; but sad thoughts of early childhood, and

yearnings for departed joys, or for a brighter future lot, arose instead.

As my eyes wandered over the steep banks covered with young grass and green-

leaved plants, and surmounted by budding hedges, I longed intensely for

some familiar flower that might recall the woody dales or green hillsides

of home - the brown moorlands, of course, were out of the question. Such a

discovery would make my eyes gush out with water, no doubt; but that was

one of my greatest enjoyments now.

At length I descried, high up between the twisted roots of an oak, three

lovely primroses, peeping so sweetly from their hiding-place that the tears

already started at the sight, but they grew so high above me, that I tried

in vain to gather one or two to dream over and to carry with me; I could

not reach them, unless I climbed the bank, which I was deterred from doing

by hearing a footstep at that moment behind me, and was therefore about to

turn away, when I was startled by the words, "Allow me to gather them for

you, Miss Grey," spoken in the grave, low tones of a well-known voice.

Immediately the flowers were gathered, and in my hand. It was Mr Weston of

course - who else would trouble himself to do so much for me?

I thanked him; whether warmly or coldly, I cannot tell: but certain I am,

that I did not express half the gratitude I felt. It was foolish, perhaps,

to feel any gratitude at all, but it seemed to me, at that moment, as if

this were a remarkable instance of his good nature, an act of kindness

which I could not repay, but never should forget: so utterly unaccustomed

was I to receive such civilities, so little prepared to expect them - from

anyone within fifty miles of Horton Lodge.

Yet this did not prevent me from feeling a little uncomfortable in his

presence; and I proceeded to follow my pupils at a much quicker pace than

before; though perhaps, if Mr Weston had taken the hint and let me pass

without another word, I might have repented it an hour after: but he did

not. A somewhat rapid walk for me, was but an ordinary pace for him.

"Your young ladies have left you alone," said he.

"Yes; they are occupied with more agreeable company."

"Then don't trouble yourself to overtake them."

I slackened my pace; but next moment regretted having done so; my companion

did not speak: and I had nothing in the world to say, and feared he might

be in the same predicament. At length, however, he broke the pause by

asking, with a certain quiet abruptness peculiar to himself, if I liked

flowers.

"Yes, very much," I answered, "wild flowers especially."

"I like wild flowers," said he, "others I don't care about, because I have

no particular associations connected with them - except one or two. What

are your favourite flowers?"

"Primroses, blue-bells, and heath-blossoms."

"Not violets?"

"No, because, as you say, I have no particular associations connected with

them; for there are no sweet violets among the hills and valleys round my

home."

"It must be a great consolation to you, to have a home, Miss Grey,"

observed my companion after a short pause, "however remote, or however

seldom visited, still it is something to look to."

"It is so much, that I think I could not live without it," replied I, with

an enthusiasm of which I immediately repented, for I thought it must have

sounded essentially silly.

"O yes, you could!" said he with a thoughtful smile. "The ties that bind us

to life are tougher than you imagine, or than anyone can, who has not felt

how roughly they may be pulled without breaking. You might be miserable

without a home, but even you could live, and no so miserably as you

suppose. The human heart is like Indian-rubber, a little swells it, but a

great deal will not burst it. If 'little more than nothing' will disturb

it, 'little less than all things will suffice' to break it. As in the outer

members of our frame, there is a vital power inherent in itself, that

strengthens it against external violence. Every blow that shakes it, will

serve to harden it against a future stroke; as constant labour thickens the

skin of the hand, and strengthens its muscles instead of wasting them away:

so that a day of arduous toil, that might excoriate a lady's palm, would

make no sensible impression on that of a hardy ploughman.

"I speak from experience - partly my own. There was a time when I thought

as you do; at least, I was fully persuaded that Home and its affections

were the only things that made life tolerable; that if deprived of these,

existence would become a burden hard to be endured; but now, I have no home

- unless you would dignify my two hired rooms at Horton by such a name; -

and not twelve months ago, I lost the last and dearest of my early friends:

and yet, not only I live, but I am not wholly destitute of hope and

comfort, even for this life; though I must acknowledge that I can seldom

enter even an humble cottage, at the close of day, and see its inhabitants

peaceably gathered round their cheerful hearth, without a feeling almost of

envy at their domestic enjoyment."

"You don't know what happiness lies before you yet," said I, "you are now

only in the commencement of your journey."

"The best of happiness," replied he, "is mine already - the power and the

will to be useful."

We now approached a stile communicating with a footpath that conducted to a

farmhouse, where I suppose Mr Weston purposed to make himself "useful," for

he presently took leave of me, crossed the stile, and traversed the path

with his usual firm, elastic tread, leaving me to ponder his words as I

continued my course alone.

I had heard before that he had lost his mother not many months before he

came. She then, was the last and dearest of his early friends; and he had

no home. I pitied him from my heart; I almost wept for sympathy. And this,

I thought, accounted for the shade of premature thoughtfulness that so

frequently clouded his brow, and obtained for him the reputation of a

morose and sullen disposition with the charitable Miss Murray and all her

kin.

"But," thought I, "he is not so miserable as I should be under such a

deprivation: he leads an active life; and a wide field for useful exertion

lies before him, he can make friends - and he can make a home, too, if he

pleases, and doubtless he will please sometime; and God grant the partner

of that home may be worthy of his choice, and make it a happy one . . .

such a home as he deserves to have! And how delightful it would be to - "

But no matter what I thought.

I began this book with the intention of concealing nothing, that those who

liked might have the benefit of perusing a fellow creature's heart: but we

have some thoughts that all the angels in heaven are welcome to behold -

but not our brother-men - not even the best and kindest amongst them.

By this time the Greens had taken themselves to their own abode, and the

Murrays had turned down the private road, whither I hastened to follow

them. I found the two girls lost in an animated discussion on the

respective merits of the two young officers; but on seeing me Rosalie broke

off in the middle of a sentence to exclaim, with malicious glee,

"Oh ho, Miss Grey! you're come at last, are you? No wonder you lingered so

long behind! and no wonder you always stand up so vigorously for Mr Weston

when I abuse him - Ah, ha! I see it all now!"

"Now come, Miss Murray, don't be foolish," said I, attempting a good-

natured laugh, "you know such nonsense can make no impression on me."

But she still went on talking such intolerable stuff - her sister helping

her with appropriate fictions coined for the occasion - that I thought it

necessary to say something in my own justification.

"What humbug all this is!" I exclaimed. "If Mr Weston's road happened to be

the same as mine for a few yards, and if he chose to exchange a word or two

in passing, what is there so remarkable in that? I assure you I never spoke

to him before; except once."

"Where? where? and when?" cried they eagerly.

"In Nancy's cottage."

"Ah ha! you've met him there, have you?" exclaimed Rosalie, with exultant

laughter. "Ah! now Matilda, I've found out why she's so fond of going to

Nancy Brown's! she goes there to flirt with Mr Weston!"

"Really that is not worth contradicting! I only saw him there once, I tell

you - and how could I know he was coming?"

Irritated as I was at their foolish mirth and vexatious imputations, the

uneasiness did not continue long: when they had had their laugh out, they

returned again to the Captain and Lieutenant; and, while they disputed and

commented upon them, my indignation rapidly cooled; the cause of it was

quickly forgotten, and I turned my thoughts into a pleasanter channel.

Thus we proceeded up the park, and entered the hall; and as I ascended the

stairs to my own chamber, I had but one thought within me, my heart was

filled to overflowing with one single earnest wish. Having entered the

room, and shut the door, I fell upon my knees and offered up a fervent but

not impetuous prayer: "Thy will be done," I strove to say throughout, but,

"Father, all things are possible with Thee, and may it be Thy will," was

sure to follow. That wish - that prayer both men and women would have

scorned me for - "But Father, Thou wilt not despise!" I said - and felt

that it was true. It seemed to me that another's welfare was at least as

ardently implored for as my own - nay, even that that was the principal

object of my heart's desire. I might have been deceiving myself; but that

idea gave me confidence to ask, and power to hope I did not ask in vain.

As for the primroses, I kept two of them in a glass in my room until they

were completely withered, and the housemaid threw them out, and the petals

of the other I pressed between the leaves of my Bible - I have them still,

and mean to keep them always.

Chapter 14

The Rector

The following day was as fine as the preceding one. Soon after breakfast,

Miss Matilda, having galloped and blundered through a few unprofitable

lessons, and vengefully thumped the piano for an hour, in a terrible humour

with both me and it, because her mamma would not give her a holiday, had

betaken herself to her favourite places of resort, the yards, the stables,

and the dog-kennels: and Miss Murray was gone forth to enjoy a quiet ramble

with a new fashionable novel for her companion, leaving me in the

schoolroom, hard at work upon a watercolour drawing I had promised to do

for her, and which she insisted upon my finishing that day.

At my feet lay a little rough terrier. It was the property of Miss Matilda;

but she hated the animal, and intended to sell it, alleging that it was

quite spoiled. It was really an excellent dog of its kind; but she affirmed

it was fit for nothing, and had not even the sense to know its own

mistress.

The fact is, she had purchased it when but a small puppy, insisting, at

first, that no one should touch it but herself; but, soon becoming tired of

so helpless and troublesome a nurseling, she had gladly yielded to my

entreaties to be allowed to take charge of it; and I, by carefully nursing

the little creature from infancy to adolescence, of course, had obtained

its affections; a reward I should have greatly valued and looked upon as

far outweighing all the trouble I had had with it, had not poor Snap's

grateful feelings exposed him to many a harsh word and many a spiteful kick

and pinch from his owner, and were he not now in danger of being "put away"

in consequence, or transferred to some rough, stony-hearted master. But how

could I help it? I could not make the dog hate me by cruel treatment; and

she would not propitiate him by kindness.

However, while I thus sat, working away at my pencil, Mrs Murray came, half

sailing, half bustling, into the room.

"Miss Grey," she began, "Dear! how can you sit at your drawing such a day

as this?" (she thought I was doing it for my own pleasure) "I wonder you

don't put on your bonnet and go out with the young ladies."

"I think, ma'am, Miss Murray is reading; and Miss Matilda is amusing

herself with her dogs."

"If you would try to amuse Miss Matilda yourself a little more, I think she

would not be driven to seek amusement in the companionship of dogs and

horses, and grooms, so much as she is; and if you would be a little more

cheerful and conversable with Miss Murray, she would not so often go

wandering in the fields with a book in her hand. However, I don't want to

vex you," added she, seeing, I suppose, that my cheeks burned and my hand

trembled with some unamiable emotion. "Do, pray, try not to be so touchy! -

there's no speaking to you else. And tell me if you know where Rosalie is

gone: and why she likes to be so much alone?"

"She says she likes to be alone when she has a new book to read."

"But why can't she read it in the park or the garden; - why should she go

into the fields and lanes? and how is that that Mr Hatfield so often finds

her out? She told me last week he'd walked his horse by her side all up

Moss-lane; and now I'm sure it was he I saw from my dressing-room window,

walking so briskly past the park gates, and on towards the field where she

so frequently goes. I wish you would go and see if she is there; and just

gently remind her that it is not proper for a young lady of her rank and

prospects to be wandering about by herself in that manner, exposed to the

attentions of anyone that presumes to address her, like some poor neglected

girl that has no park to walk in, and no friends to take care of her; and

tell her that her papa would be extremely angry if he knew of her treating

Mr Hatfield in that familiar manner that I fear she does; and - oh! if you

- if any governess had but half a mother's watchfulness - half a mother's

anxious care, I should be saved this trouble; and you would see at once the

necessity of keeping your eye upon her, and making your company agreeable

to - Well, go - go; there's no time to be lost," cried she, seeing that I

had put away my drawing materials, and was waiting in the doorway for the

conclusion of her address.

According to her prognostications, I found Miss Murray in her favourite

field just without the park; and, unfortunately, not alone; for the tall,

stately figure of Mr Hatfield was slowly sauntering by her side.

Here was a poser for me. It was my duty to interrupt the tete-a-tete: but

how was it to be done? Mr Hatfield could not be driven away by so

insignificant a person as I; and to go and place myself on the other side

of Miss Murray, and intrude my unwelcome presence upon her without noticing

her companion, was a piece of rudeness I could not be guilty of: neither

had I the courage to cry aloud from the top of the field that she was

wanted elsewhere. So I took the intermediate course of walking slowly, but

steadily towards them, resolving, if my approach failed to scare away the

beau, to pass by and tell Miss Murray her mamma wanted her.

She certainly looked very charming as she strolled lingering along under

the budding horse-chestnut trees that stretched their long arms over the

park-palings, with her closed book in one hand, and in the other a graceful

sprig of myrtle which served her as a very pretty plaything - her bright

ringlets escaping profusely from her little bonnet, and gently stirred by

the breeze, her fair cheek flushed with gratified vanity, her smiling blue

eyes, now slyly glancing towards her admirer, now gazing downward at her

myrtle sprig. But Snap, running before me, interrupted her in the midst of

some half pert, half playful repartee, by catching hold of her dress and

vehemently tugging thereat, till Mr Hatfield with his cane administered a

resounding thwack upon the animal's skull, and sent it yelping back to me,

with a clamorous outcry that afforded the reverend gentleman great

amusement; but seeing me so near, he thought, I suppose, he might as well

be taking his departure; and as I stooped to caress the dog, with

ostentatious pity to show my disapproval of his severity, I heard him say,

"When shall I see you again, Miss Murray?"

"At church, I suppose," replied she, "unless your business chance to bring

you here again, at the precise moment when I happen to be walking by."

"I could always manage to have business here, if I knew precisely when and

where to find you."

"But if I would, I could not inform you, for I am so unmethodical I never

can tell today what I shall do tomorrow."

"Then give me that, meantime, to comfort me," said he, half jestingly and

half in earnest, extending his hand for the sprig of myrtle.

"No indeed, I shan't!"

"Do! Pray do! I shall be the most miserable of men if you don't. You cannot

be so cruel as to deny me a favour so easily granted and yet so highly

prized!" pleaded he as ardently as if his life depended on it.

By this time, I stood within a very few yards of them, impatiently waiting

his departure.

"There then! take it and go," said Rosalie.

He joyfully received the gift, murmured something that made her blush and

toss aside her head, but with a little laugh that showed her displeasure

was entirely affected; and then with a courteous salutation withdrew.

"Did you ever see such a man, Miss Grey?" said she, turning to me, "I'm so

glad you came! I thought I never should get rid of him; - and I was so

terribly afraid of papa seeing him."

"Has he been with you long?"

"No, not long, but he's so extremely impertinent: and he's always hanging

about, pretending his business or his clerical duties require his

attendance in these parts, and really watching for poor me, and pouncing

upon me wherever he sees me."

"Well, your mamma thinks you ought not to go beyond the park or garden

without some discreet, matronly person like me to accompany you, and keep

off all intruders. She descried Mr Hatfield hurrying past the park-gates,

and forthwith dispatched me with instructions to seek you up and to take

care of you, and likewise to warn -"

"Oh, mamma's so tiresome! As if I couldn't take care of myself. She

bothered me before about Mr Hatfield; and I told her she might trust me: I

never should forget my rank and station for the most delightful man that

ever breathed. I wish he would go down on his knees tomorrow, and implore

me to be his wife, that I might just show her how mistaken she is in

supposing that I could ever - Oh! it provokes me so! To think that I could

be such a fool as to fall in love! It is quite beneath the dignity of a

woman to do such a thing. Love! I detest the word! as applied to one of our

sex, I think it a perfect insult! a preference I might acknowledge; but

never for one like poor Mr Hatfield who has not seven hundred a year to

bless himself with. I like to talk to him, because he's so clever and

amusing - I wish Sir Thomas Ashby were half as nice; besides, I must have

somebody to flirt with, and no one else has the sense to come here; and

when we go out, mamma won't let me flirt with anybody but Sir Thomas - if

he's there, and if he's not there, I'm bound hand and foot, for fear

somebody should go and make up some exaggerated story, and put it into his

head that I'm engaged, or likely to be engaged, to somebody else; or, what

is more probable, for fear his nasty old mother should see or hear of my

ongoings, and conclude that I'm not a fit wife for her excellent son; as if

the said son were not the greatest scamp in Christendom; and as if any

woman of common decency were not a world too good for him."

"Is it really so, Miss Murray? and does your mamma know it, and yet wish

you to marry him?"

"To be sure she does! She knows more against him than I do, I believe: she

keeps it from me lest I should be discouraged; not knowing how little I

care about such things. For it's no great matter really: he'll be all right

when he's married, as mamma says; and reformed rakes make the best

husbands, everybody knows. I only wish he were not so ugly - that's all I

think about; but then there's no choice here in the country, and papa will

not let us go to London -"

"But I should think Mr Hatfield would be far better."

"And so he would if he were lord of Ashby Park - there's not a doubt of it;

but the fact is, I must have Ashby Park, whoever shares it with me."

"But Mr Hatfield thinks you like him all this time; you don't consider how

bitterly he will be disappointed when he finds himself mistaken."

"No indeed! It will be a proper punishment for his presumption - for ever

daring to think I could like him. I should enjoy nothing so much as lifting

the veil from his eyes."

"The sooner you do it the better then."

"No; - I tell you, I like to amuse myself with him. Besides, he doesn't

really think I like him. I take good care of that; you don't know how

cleverly I manage. He may presume to think he can induce me to like him,

for which I shall punish him as he deserves."

"Well, mind you don't give too much reason for such presumption - that's

all," replied I.

But all my exhortations were in vain: they only made her somewhat more

solicitous to disguise her wishes and her thoughts from me. She talked no

more to me about the rector; but I could see that her mind, if not her

heart, was fixed upon him still, and that she was intent upon obtaining

another interview; for though, in compliance with her mother's request, I

was now constituted the companion of her rambles for a time, she still

persisted in wandering in the fields and lanes that lay in the nearest

proximity to the road; and, whether she talked to me, or read the book she

carried in her hand, she kept continually pausing to look round her, or

gaze up the road to see if anyone was coming; and if a horseman trotted by,

I could tell by her unqualified abuse of the poor equestrian, whoever he

might be, that she hated him because he was not Mr Hatfield. "Surely,"

thought I, "she is not so indifferent to him as she believes herself to be,

or would have others to believe her; and her mother's anxiety is not so

wholly causeless as she affirms."

Three days passed away, and he did not make his appearance. On the

afternoon of the fourth, as we were walking beside the park palings in the

memorable field, each furnished with a book, (for I always took care to

provide myself with something to be doing when she did not require me to

talk), she suddenly interrupted my studies by exclaiming,

"Oh! Miss Grey, do be so kind as to go and see Mark Wood, and take his wife

half a crown from me - I should have given or sent it a week ago, but quite

forgot. There!" said she, throwing me her purse, and speaking very fast -

"Never mind getting it out now, but take the purse and give them what you

like; I would go with you, but I want to finish this volume. I'll come and

meet you when I've done it. Be quick will you - and - Oh wait; hadn't you

better read to him a bit? Run to the house and get some sort of a good

book. Anything will do."

I did as I was desired; but, suspecting something from her hurried manner

and the suddenness of the request, I just glanced back before I quitted the

field, and there was Mr Hatfield about to enter at the gate below. By

sending me to the house for a book, she had just prevented my meeting him

on the road.

"Never mind!" thought I, "there'll be no great harm done. Poor Mark will be

glad of the half-crown, and perhaps of the good book too; and if the rector

does steal Miss Rosalie's heart, it will only humble her pride a little;

and if they do get married at last, it will only save her from a worse

fate; and she will be quite a good enough partner for him, and he for her."

Mark Wood was the consumptive labourer whom I mentioned before. He was now

rapidly wearing away. Miss Murray, by her liberality, obtained literally

the blessing of him that was ready to perish; for though the half-crown

could be of very little service to him, he was glad of it for the sake of

his wife and children, so soon to be widowed and fatherless. After I sat a

few minutes, and read a little for the comfort and edification of himself

and his afflicted wife, I left them; but I had not proceeded fifty yards

before I encountered Mr Weston, apparently on his way to the same abode.

He greeted me in his usual quiet, unaffected way, stopped to inquire about

the condition of the sick man and his family, and with a sort of

unconscious, brotherly disregard to ceremony, took from my hand the book

out of which I had been reading, turned over the pages, made a few brief,

but very sensible remarks, and restored it; then told me about some poor

sufferer he had just been visiting, talked a little about Nancy Brown, made

a few observations upon my little rough friend the terrier, that was

frisking at his feet, and finally upon the beauty of the weather, and

departed.

I have omitted to give a detail of his words from a notion that they would

not interest the reader as they did me, and not because I have forgotten

them. No; I remember them well; for I thought them over and over again in

the course of that day and many succeeding ones, I know not how often, and

recalled every intonation of his deep, clear voice, every flash of his

quick, brown eye, and every gleam of his pleasant, but too transient smile.

Such a confession will look very absurd, I fear; but no matter - I have

written it; and they that read it will not know the writer.

While I was walking along, happy within, and pleased with all around, Miss

Murray came hastening to meet me; her buoyant step, flushed cheek, and

radiant smiles showing that she, too, was happy, in her own way. Running up

to me, she put her arm in mine, and without waiting to recover breath,

began, -

"Now Miss Grey, think yourself highly honoured, for I'm come to tell you my

news before I've breathed a word of it to anyone else."

"Well, what is it?"

"Oh, such news! In the first place, you must know that Mr Hatfield came

upon me just after you were gone. I was in such a way for fear papa or

mamma should see him! but you know I couldn't call you back again; and so

I - Oh dear! I can't tell you all about it now, for there's Matilda, I see,

in the park, and I must go and open my budget to her. But however, Hatfield

was most uncommonly audacious, unspeakably complimentary, and

unprecedentedly tender - tried to be so at least - he didn't succeed very

well in that, because it's not his vein. I'll tell you all he said another

time."

"But what did you say? I'm more interested in that."

"I'll tell you that, too, at some future period. I happened to be in a very

good humour just then; but, though I was complaisant and gracious enough, I

took care not to compromise myself in any possible way. But, however, the

conceited wretch chose to interpret my amiability of temper his own way,

and at length presumed upon my indulgence so far - what do you think? - he

actually made me an offer!"

"And you -"

"I proudly drew myself up, and with the greatest coolness expressed my

astonishment at such an occurrence, and hoped he had seen nothing in my

conduct to justify his expectations. You should have seen how his

countenance fell! He went perfectly white in the face. I assured him that I

esteemed him and all that, but could not possibly accede to his proposals;

and if I did, papa and mamma could never be brought to give their consent.

" 'But if they could,' said he, 'would yours be wanting?'

" 'Certainly, Mr Hatfield,' I replied, with a cool decision which quelled

all hope at once. Oh, if you had seen how dreadfully mortified he was - how

crushed to the earth by his disappointment! really, I almost pitied him

myself!

"One more desperate attempt, however, he made. After a silence of

considerable duration, during which he struggled to be calm, and I to be

grave - for I felt a strong propensity to laugh - which would have ruined

all - he said, with the ghost of a smile, -

" 'But tell me plainly, Miss Murray; if I had the wealth of Sir Hugh

Meltham, or the prospects of his eldest son, would you still refuse me?

answer me truly, upon your honour.' " 'Certainly,' said I. 'That would make

no difference whatever.'

"It was a great lie, but he looked so confident in his own attractions

still, that I determined not to leave him one stone upon another. He looked

me full in the face; but I kept my countenance so well that he could not

imagine I was saying anything more than the actual truth.

" 'Then it's all over, I suppose,' he said, looking as if he could have

died on the spot with vexation and the intensity of his despair. But he was

angry as well as disappointed. There was he, suffering so unspeakably, and

there was I, the pitiless cause of it all, so utterly impenetrable to all

the artillery of his looks and words, so calmly cold and proud, he could

not but feel some resentment; and with singular bitterness he began,

" 'I certainly did not expect this, Miss Murray. I might say something

about your past conduct, and the hopes you have led me to foster; but I

forbear, on condition - '

" 'No conditions, Mr Hatfield!' said I, now truly indignant at his

insolence.

" 'Then let me beg it as a favour,' he replied, lowering his voice at once,

and taking an humbler tone; 'let me entreat that you will not mention this

affair to anyone whatever. If you will keep silence about it, there need be

no unpleasantness on either side - nothing, I mean, beyond what is quite

unavoidable: for my own feelings I will endeavour to keep to myself, if I

cannot annihilate; I will try to forgive, if I cannot forget the cause of

my sufferings. I will not suppose, Miss Murray, that you know how deeply

you have injured me. I would not have you aware of it; but if, in addition

to the injury you have already done me - pardon me, but whether innocently

or not, you have done it - and if you add to it by giving publicity to this

unfortunate affair, or naming it at all, you will find that I too can

speak; and though you scorned my love, you will hardly scorn my

"He stopped, but he bit his bloodless lip and looked so terribly fierce

that I was quite frightened. However, my pride upheld me still, and I

answered disdainfully, 'I do not know what motive you suppose I could have

for naming it to anyone, Mr Hatfield; but if I were disposed to do so, you

would not deter me by threats; and it is scarcely the part of a gentleman

to attempt it.'

" 'Pardon me, Miss Murray,' said he, 'I have loved you so intensely - I do

still adore you so deeply that I would not willingly offend you; but though

I never have loved, and never can love any woman as I have loved you, it is

equally certain that I never was so ill-treated by any. On the contrary, I

have always found your sex the kindest, and most tender and obliging of

God's creation, till now.' (Think of the conceited fellow saying that!)

'And the novelty and harshness of the lesson you have taught me today, and

the bitterness of being disappointed in the only quarter on which the

happiness of my life depended, must excuse any appearance of asperity. If

my presence is disagreeable to you, Miss Murray,' he said (for I was

looking about me to show how little I cared for him, so he thought I was

tired of him, I suppose), 'If my presence is disagreeable to you, Miss

Murray, you have only to promise me the favour I named, and I will relieve

you at once. There are many ladies - some even in this parish - that would

be delighted to accept what you have so scornfully trampled under your

feet. They would be naturally inclined to hate one whose surpassing

loveliness has so completely estranged my heart from them and blinded me to

their attractions; and a single hint of the truth, from me to one of these,

would be sufficient to raise such a talk against you as would seriously

injure your prospects, and diminish your chance of success with any other

gentleman you or your mamma might design to entangle.'

" 'What do you mean, sir?' said I, ready to stamp with passion. " 'I mean

that this affair from beginning to end appears to me like a case of arrant

flirtation, to say the least of it - such a case as you would find it

rather inconvenient to have blazoned through the world: especially with the

additions and exaggerations of your female rivals, who would be too glad to

publish the matter, if I only gave them a handle to it. But I promise you,

on the faith of a gentleman, that no word or syllable that could tend to

your prejudice shall ever escape my lips, provided you will - '

" 'Well, well, I won't mention it,' said I, 'You may rely upon my silence,

if that can afford you any consolation.'

" 'You promise it?'

" 'Yes,' I answered, for I wanted to get rid of him now.

" 'Farewell, then!' said he, in a most doleful heart-sick tone; and with a

look where pride vainly struggled against despair, he turned and went away,

longing, no doubt, to get home, that he might shut himself up in his study

and cry - if he doesn't burst into tears before he gets there."

"But you have broken your promise already!" said I, truly horrified at her

perfidy.

"Oh! it's only to you: I know you won't repeat it."

"Certainly I shall not; but you say you are going to tell your sister; and

she will tell your brothers when they come home, and Brown immediately, if

you do not tell her yourself, and Brown will blazon it, or be the means of

blazoning it throughout the country."

"No, indeed she won't. We shall not tell her at all, unless it be under

promise of the strictest secrecy."

"But how can you expect her to keep her promises better than her more

enlightened mistress?"

"Well, well, she shan't hear it then," said Miss Murray, somewhat

snappishly.

"But you will tell your mamma, of course," pursued I; "and she will tell

your papa."

"Of course I shall tell mamma: that is the very thing that pleases me so

much. I shall now be able to convince her how mistaken she was in her fears

about me."

"Oh, that's it, is it? I was wondering what it was that delighted you so

much."

"Yes; and another thing is, that I've humbled Mr Hatfield so charmingly;

and another - why, you must allow me some share of female vanity; I don't

pretend to be without that most essential attribute of our sex - and if you

had seen poor Hatfield's intense eagerness in making his ardent declaration

and his flattering proposal, and his agony of mind, that no effort of pride

could conceal, on being refused, you would have allowed I had some cause to

be gratified."

"The greater his agony, I should think, the less your cause for

gratification."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried the young lady, shaking herself with vexation. "You

either can't understand me, or you won't. If I had not confidence in your

magnanimity, I should think you envied me. But you will perhaps comprehend

this cause of pleasure - which is as great as any - namely, that I am

delighted with myself for my prudence, my self-command, my heartlessness,

if you please; I was not a bit taken by surprise, not a bit confused, or

awkward, or foolish; I just acted and spoke as I ought to have done, and

was completely my own mistress throughout. And here was a man, decidedly

good-looking - Jane and Susan Green call him bewitchingly handsome - I

suppose they're two of the ladies he pretends would be so glad to have him;

but, however, he was certainly a very clever, witty, agreeable companion -

not what you call clever, but just enough to make him entertaining; and a

man one needn't be ashamed of anywhere, and would not soon grow tired of;

and to confess the truth, I rather liked him - better even, of late, than

Harry Meltham - and he evidently idolised me; and yet, though he came upon

me all alone and unprepared, I had the wisdom, and the pride, and the

strength to refuse him - and so scornfully and coolly as I did: I have good

reason to be proud of that!"

"And you are equally proud of having told him that his having the wealth of

Sir Hugh Meltham would make no difference to you when that was not the

case; and of having promised to tell no one of his misadventure, apparently

without the slightest intention of keeping your promise?"

"Of course! what else could I do? You would not have had me - but I see,

Miss Grey, you're not in a good temper. Here's Matilda; I'll see what she

and mamma have to say about it."

She left me, offended at my want of sympathy, and thinking, no doubt, that

I envied her. I did not - at least, I firmly believe I did not. I was sorry

for her; I was amazed, disgusted at her heartless vanity; I wondered why so

much beauty should be given to those who made so bad a use of it, and

denied to some who would make it a benefit to both themselves and others.

But, God knows best, I concluded. There are, I suppose, some men as vain,

as selfish, and as heartless as she is, and perhaps such women may be

useful to punish them.

Chapter 15

The Walk

"O dear! I wish Hatfield had not been so precipitate!" said Rosalie next

day at four p.m., as, with a portentous yawn, she laid down her worsted-

work and looked listlessly towards the window.

"There's no inducement to go out now; and nothing to look forward to. The

days will be so long and dull when there are no parties to enliven them;

and there are none this week, or next either, that I know of."

"Pity you were so cross to him," observed Matilda, to whom this lamentation

was addressed. "He'll never come again; and I suspect you liked him after

all. I hoped you would have taken him for your beau, and left dear Harry to

me."

"Humph! my beau must be an Adonis indeed, Matilda, the admired of all

beholders, if I am to be contented with him alone. I'm sorry to lose

Hatfield, I confess; but the first decent man, or number of men, that come

to supply his place, will be more than welcome. It's Sunday tomorrow - I do

wonder how he'll look, and whether he'll be able to go through the service.

Most likely he'll pretend he's got a cold and make Mr Weston do it all."

"Not he!" exclaimed Matilda, somewhat contemptuously. "Fool as he is, he's

not so soft as that comes to."

Her sister was slightly offended; but the event proved Matilda was right.

The disappointed lover performed his pastoral duties as usual. Rosalie,

indeed, affirmed he looked very pale and dejected: he might be a little

paler, but the difference, if any, was scarcely perceptible. As for his

dejection, I certainly did not hear his laugh ringing from the vestry as

usual, nor his voice loud in hilarious discourse, though I did hear it

uplifted in rating the sexton in a manner that made the congregation stare;

and in his transits to and from the pulpit and the communion-table there

was more of solemn pomp, and less of that irreverent, self-confident, or

rather self-delighted imperiousness with which he usually swept along -

that air that seemed to say, "You all reverence and adore me, I know; but

if anyone does not, I defy him to the teeth!"

But the most remarkable change was that he never once suffered his eyes to

wander in the direction of Mr Murray's pew, and did not leave the church

till we were gone.

Mr Hatfield had doubtless received a very severe blow; but his pride

impelled him to use every effort to conceal the effects of it. He had been

disappointed in his certain hope of obtaining not only a beautiful and, to

him, highly attractive wife, but one whose rank and fortune might give

brilliance to far inferior charms: he was likewise, no doubt, intensely

mortified by his repulse, and deeply offended at the conduct of Miss Murray

throughout.

It would have given him no little consolation to have known how

disappointed she was to find him apparently so little moved, and to see

that he was able to refrain from casting a single glance at her throughout

both the services, though, she declared, it showed he was thinking of her

all the time, or his eyes would have fallen upon her, if it were only by

chance; but if they had so chanced to fall, she would have affirmed it was

because they could not resist the attraction. It might have pleased him

too, in some degree, to have seen how dull and dissatisfied she was

throughout that week (the greater part of it, at least), for lack of her

usual source of excitement; and how often she regretted having "used him up

so soon," like a child that, having devoured its plum-cake too hastily,

sits sucking its fingers, and vainly lamenting its greediness.

At length, I was called upon, one fine morning, to accompany her in a walk

to the village. Ostensibly she went to get some shades of Berlin wool at a

tolerably respectable shop that was chiefly supported by the ladies of the

vicinity: really - I trust there is no breach of charity in supposing that

she went with the idea of meeting either with the rector himself, or some

other admirer by the way; for as we went along, she kept wondering, "what

Hatfield would do or say if we met him," etc., etc.; as we passed Mr Green's

park-gates, she "wondered whether he was at home - great stupid blockhead;"

as Lady Meltham's carriage passed us she "wondered what Mr Harry was doing

this fine day;" and then began to abuse his elder brother for being "such a

fool as to get married and go and live in London."

"Why," said I, "I thought you wanted to live in London yourself."

"Yes, because it's so dull here; but then he makes it still duller by

taking himself off; and if he were not married I might have him instead of

that odious Sir Thomas."

Then, observing the prints of a horse's feet on the somewhat miry road, she

"wondered whether it was a gentleman's horse," and finally concluded it

was, for the impressions were too small to have been made by a "great,

clumsy carthorse;" and then she "wondered who the rider could be," and

whether we should meet him coming back, for she was sure he had only passed

that morning; and lastly, when we entered the village and saw only a few of

its humble inhabitants moving about, she "wondered why the stupid people

couldn't keep in their houses; she was sure she didn't want to see their

ugly faces, and dirty, vulgar clothes - it wasn't for that she came to

Horton!"

Amid all this, I confess, I wondered too, in secret, whether we should

meet, or catch a glimpse of somebody else; and as we passed his lodgings, I

even went so far as to wonder whether he was at the window.

On entering the shop, Miss Murray desired me to stand in the doorway while

she transacted her business, and tell her if anyone passed. But alas! there

was no one visible besides the villagers, except Jane and Susan Green

coming down the single street, apparently returning from a walk.

"Stupid things!" muttered she, as she came out after having concluded her

bargain. "Why couldn't they have their dolt of a brother with them? even he

would be better than nothing!" She greeted them, however, with a cheerful

smile, and protestations of pleasure at the happy meeting equal to their

own. They placed themselves one on each side of her; and all three walked

away chatting and laughing as young ladies do when they get together, if

they be but on tolerably intimate terms. But I, feeling myself to be one

too many, left them to their merriment and lagged behind, as usual on such

occasions: I had no relish for walking beside Miss Green or Miss Susan like

one deaf and dumb, who could neither speak nor be spoken to.

But this time I was not long alone. It struck me, at first, as very odd,

that just as I was thinking about Mr Weston he should come up and accost

me; but afterwards, on due reflection, I thought there was nothing odd

about it, unless it were the fact of his speaking to me, for, on such a

morning, and so near his own abode, it was natural enough that he should be

about; and as for my thinking of him, I had been doing that, with little

intermission, ever since we set out on our journey; so there was nothing

remarkable in that.

"You are alone again, Miss Grey," said he.

"Yes."

"What kind of people are those ladies - the Misses Green?"

"I really don't know."

"That's strange - when you live so near and see them so often!"

"Well, I suppose they are lively, good-tempered girls; but I imagine you

must know them better than I do, yourself, for I never exchanged a word

with either of them."

"Indeed! They don't strike me as being particularly reserved."

"Very likely they are not so to people of their own class; but they

consider themselves as moving in quite a different sphere from me!"

He made no reply to this; but after a short pause, he said,

"I suppose it's these things, Miss Grey, that make you think you could not

live without a home?"

"Not exactly. The fact is I am too socially disposed to be able :o live

contentedly without a friend, and as the only friends I have, or am likely

to have, are at home, if it - or rather, if they were gone - I will not say

I could not live - but I would rather not live in such a desolate world."

"But why do you say the only friends you are likely to have? Are you so

unsociable that you cannot make friends?"

"No, but I never made one yet; and in my present position there is no

possibility of doing so, or even of forming a common acquaintance. The

fault may be partly in myself, but I hope not altogether."

"The fault is partly in society, and partly, I should think, in your

immediate neighbours, and partly, too, in yourself; for many ladies, in

your position, would make themselves be noticed and accounted of. But your

pupils should be companions for you in some degree; they cannot be many

years younger than yourself."

"Oh yes, they are good company sometimes; but I cannot call them friends,

nor would they think of bestowing such a name on me - they have other

companions better suited to their tastes."

"Perhaps you are too wise for them. How do you amuse yourself when alone -

do you read much?"

"Reading is my favourite occupation when I have leisure for it, and books

to read."

From speaking of books in general, he passed to different books in

particular, and proceeded by rapid transitions from topic to topic, till

several matters, both of taste and opinion, had been discussed considerably

within the space of half an hour, but without the embellishment of many

observations from himself; he being evidently less bent upon communicating

his own thoughts and predilections, than on discovering mine. He had not

the tact or the art to effect such a purpose by skilfully drawing out my

sentiments or ideas through the real or apparent statement of his own, or

leading the conversation by imperceptible gradations to such topics as he

wished to advert to. But such gentle abruptness, and such single-minded

straightforwardness could not possibly offend me.

"And why should he interest himself at all in my moral and intellectual

capacities: what is it to him what I think or feel?" I asked myself.

And my heart throbbed in answer to the question.

But Jane and Susan Green soon reached their home. As they stood parleying

at the park-gates, attempting to persuade Miss Murray to come in, I wished

Mr Weston would go, that she might not see him with me when she turned

round; but, unfortunately, his business, which was to pay one more visit to

poor Mark Wood, led him to pursue the same path as we did, till nearly the

close of our journey.

When, however, he saw that Rosalie had taken leave of her friends, and I

was about to join her, he would have left me and passed on at a quicker

pace; but, as he civilly lifted his hat in passing her, to my surprise,

instead of returning the salute with a stiff, ungracious bow, she accosted

him with one of her sweetest smiles, and, walking by his side, began to

talk to him with all imaginable cheerfulness and affability; and so we

proceeded all three together.

After a short pause in the conversation, Mr Weston made some remark

addressed particularly to me, as referring to something we had been talking

of before; but, before I could answer, Miss Murray replied to the

observation and enlarged upon it: he rejoined; and, from thence to the

close of the interview, she engrossed him entirely to herself.

It might be partly owing to my own stupidity, my want of tact and

assurance; but I felt myself wronged; I trembled with apprehension; and I

listened with envy to her easy, rapid flow of utterance, and saw with

anxiety the bright smile with which she looked into his face from time to

time, for she was walking a little in advance for the purpose (as I judged)

of being seen as well as heard.

If her conversation was light and trivial, it was amusing, and she was

never at a loss for something to say, or for suitable words to express it

in. There was nothing pert or flippant in her manner now, as when she

walked with Mr Hatfield; there was only a gentle, playful kind of vivacity

which I thought must be peculiarly pleasing to a man of Mr Weston's

disposition and temperament.

When he was gone she began to laugh, and muttered to herself. - "I thought

I could do it!"

"Do what?" I asked.

"Fix that man."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"I mean that he will go home and dream of me. I have shot him through the

heart!"

"How do you know?"

"By many infallible proofs: more especially the look he gave me when he

went away. It was not an impudent look - I exonerate him from that - it was

a look of reverential, tender adoration. Ha, ha! he's not quite such a

stupid blockhead as I thought him!"

I made no answer, for my heart was in my throat, or something like it, and

I could not trust myself to speak.

"Oh, God, avert it!" I cried, internally - "for his sake, not for mine!"

Miss Murray made several trivial observations as we passed up the park, to

which, in spite of my reluctance to let one glimpse of my feelings appear,

I could only answer by monosyllables.

Whether she intended to torment me, or merely to amuse herself, I could not

tell - and did not much care; but I thought of the poor man and his one

lamb, and the rich man with his thousand flocks; and I dreaded I knew not

what for Mr Weston, independently of my own blighted hopes.

Right glad was I to get into the house, and find myself alone once more in

my own room. My first impulse was to sink into the chair beside the bed,

and laying my head on the pillow, to seek relief in a passionate burst of

tears: there was an imperative craving for such an indulgence; but alas! I

must restrain and swallow back my feelings still: there was the bell - the

odious bell for the schoolroom dinner; and I must go down with a calm face,

and smile, and laugh, and talk nonsense - yes, and eat, too, if possible,

as if all were right, and I were just returned from a pleasant walk.

Chapter 16

The Substitution

Next Sunday was one of the gloomiest of April days - a day of thick, dark

clouds, and heavy showers. None of the Murrays were disposed to attend

church in the afternoon, excepting Rosalie: she was bent upon going as

usual; so she ordered the carriage, and I went with her, nothing loth of

course, for at church I might look without fear of scorn or censure upon a

form and face more pleasing to me than the most beautiful of God's

creations; I might listen without disturbance to a voice more charming than

the sweetest music to my ears; I might seem to hold communion with that

soul in which I felt so deeply interested, and imbibe its purest thoughts

and holiest aspirations, with no alloy to such felicity, except the secret

reproaches of my conscience which would too often whisper that I was

deceiving my own self, and mocking God with the service of a heart more

bent upon the creature than the creator.

Sometimes such thoughts would give me trouble enough; but sometimes I could

quiet them with thinking,

It is not the man, it is his goodness that I love.

"Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever

things are honest and of good report, think on these things."

We do well to worship God in His works; and I know none of them in which so

many of His attributes - so much of His own spirit shines, as this His

faithful servant, whom to know and not to appreciate, were obtuse

insensibility in me, who have so little else to occupy my heart.

Almost immediately after the conclusion of the service, Miss Murray left

the church. We had to stand in the porch; for it was raining, and the

carriage was not yet come. I wondered at her coming forth so hastily, for

neither young Meltham nor Squire Green were there; but I soon found it was

to secure an interview with Mr Weston as he came out, which he presently

did, and, having saluted us both, would have passed on, but she detained

him; first with observations upon the disagreeable weather, and then with

asking if he would be so kind as to come sometime tomorrow to see the

granddaughter of the old woman who kept the porter's lodge, for the girl

was ill of a fever, and wished to see him. He promised to do so.

"And at what time will you be most likely to come, Mr Weston? The old woman

will like to know when to expect you - you know such people think more

about having their cottages in order when decent people come to see them

than we are apt to suppose."

Here was a wonderful instance of consideration from the thoughtless Miss

Murray.

Mr Weston named an hour in the morning at which he would endeavour to be

there. By this time the carriage was ready, and the footman was waiting,

with an open umbrella, to escort Miss Murray through the churchyard. I was

about to follow; but Mr Weston had an umbrella too, and offered me the

benefit of its shelter, for it was raining heavily.

"No, thank you, I don't mind the rain," I said. I always lacked commonsense

when taken by surprise.

"But you don't like it I suppose? - an umbrella will do you no harm at any

rate," he replied, with a smile that showed he was not offended, as a man

of worse temper or less penetration would have been at such a refusal of

his aid.

I could not deny the truth of his assertion, and so went with him to the

carriage; he even offered me his hand on getting in, an unnecessary piece

of civility, but I accepted that too for fear of giving offence. One glance

he gave, one little smile at parting - it was but for a moment, but therein

I read, or thought I read, a meaning that kindled in my heart a brighter

flame of hope than had ever yet arisen.

"I would have sent the footman back for you, Miss Grey, if you'd waited a

moment - you needn't to have taken Mr Weston's umbrella," observed Rosalie,

with a very unamiable cloud upon her pretty face.

"I would have come without an umbrella, but Mr Weston offered me the

benefit of his and I could not have refused it, more than I did, without

offending him," replied I, smiling placidly, for my inward happiness made

that amusing, which would have wounded me at another time.

The carriage was now in motion. Miss Murray bent forwards, and looked out

of the window as we were passing Mr Weston. He was pacing homewards along

the causeway, and did not turn his head.

"Stupid ass!" cried she, throwing herself back again in the seat. "You

don't know what you've lost by not looking this way!"

"What has he lost?"

"A bow from me, that would have raised him to the seventh heaven!"

I made no answer. I saw she was out of humour, and I derived a secret

gratification from the fact; not that she was vexed, but that she thought

she had reason to be so. It made me think my hopes were not entirely the

offspring of my wishes and imagination.

"I mean to take up Mr Weston instead of Mr Hatfield," said my companion

after a short pause, resuming something of her usual cheerfulness. "The

ball at Ashby Park takes place on Tuesday you know; and mamma thinks it

very likely that Sir Thomas will propose to me then: such things are often

done in the privacy of the ballroom, when gentlemen are most easily

ensnared, and ladies most enchanting: - but if I am to be married so soon,

I must make the best of the present time: I am determined Hatfield shall

not be the only man who shall lay his heart at my feet, and implore me to

accept the worthless gift in vain."

"If you mean Mr Weston to be one of your victims," said I, with affected

indifference, "you will have to make such overtures yourself, that you will

find it difficult to draw back when he asks you to fulfil the expectations

you have raised."

"I don't suppose he will ask me to marry him - nor should I desire it -

that would be rather too much presumption! but I intend him to feel my

power. He has felt it already, indeed; but he shall acknowledge it too; and

what visionary hopes he may have, he must keep to himself, and only amuse

me with the result of them - for a time."

"Oh! that some kind spirit would whisper those words in his ear!" I

inwardly exclaimed. I was far too indignant to hazard a reply to her

observation aloud; and nothing more was said about Mr Weston that day, by

me or in my hearing.

But next morning, soon after breakfast, Miss Murray came into the

schoolroom where her sister was employed with me at her studies - or rather

her lessons, for studies they were not - and said,

"Matilda, I want you to take a walk with me about eleven o'clock."

"Oh, I can't, Rosalie! I've got to give orders about my new bridle and

saddle-cloth, and to speak to the rat-catcher about his dogs - Miss Grey

must go with you."

"No, I want you," said Rosalie; and calling her sister to the window, she

whispered an explanation in her ear, upon which the latter consented to go.

I remembered that eleven was the hour at which Mr Weston proposed to come

to the porter's lodge; and remembering that, I beheld the whole

contrivance.

Accordingly at dinner, I was entertained with a long account of how Mr

Weston had overtaken them as they were walking along the road; and how they

had had a long walk and talk with him, and really found him quite an

agreeable companion; and how he must have been, and evidently was,

delighted with them and their amazing condescension, etc., etc.

Chapter 17

Confessions

As I am in the way of confessions, I may as well acknowledge that, about

this time, I paid more attention to dress than ever I had done before. This

is not saying much, for hitherto I had been a little neglectful in that

particular; but now, also, it was no uncommon thing to spend as much as two

minutes in the contemplation of my own image in the glass; though I never

could derive any consolation from such a study: I could discover no beauty

in those marked features, that pale hollow cheek, and ordinary dark brown

hair; there might be intellect in the forehead, there might be expression

in the dark grey eyes, but what of that? a low Grecian brow, and large

black eyes devoid of sentiment would be esteemed far preferable.

It is foolish to wish for beauty. Sensible people never either desire it

for themselves or care about it in others. If the mind be but well

cultivated, and the heart well disposed, no one ever cares for the

exterior.

So said the teachers of our childhood; and so say we to the children of the

present day. All very judicious and proper no doubt; but are such

assertions supported by actual experience?

We are naturally disposed to love what gives us pleasure, and what more

pleasing than a beautiful face - when we know no harm of the possessor, at

least? A little girl loves her bird. Why? - because it lives and feels,

because it is helpless and harmless. A toad, likewise, lives and feels, and

is equally helpless and harmless; but though she would not hurt a toad, she

cannot love it like the bird, with its graceful form, soft feathers, and

bright, speaking eyes. If a woman is fair and amiable, she is praised for

both qualities, but especially the former, by the bulk of mankind: if, on

the other hand, she is disagreeable in person and character, her plainness

is commonly inveighed against as her greatest crime, because to common

observers, it gives the greatest offence; while, if she is plain and good,

provided she is a person of retired manners and secluded life, no one ever

knows of her goodness, except her immediate connections; others, on the

contrary, are disposed to form unfavourable opinions of her mind and

disposition, if it be but to excuse themselves for their instinctive

dislike of one so unfavoured by nature; and vice versa with her whose angel

form conceals a vicious heart, or sheds a false, deceitful charm over

defects and foibles that would not be tolerated in another.

They that have beauty, let them be thankful for it, and make a good use of

it, like any other talent: they that have it not, let them console

themselves, and do the best they can without it; certainly, though liable

to be over-estimated, it is a gift of God, and not to be despised. Many

will feel this, who have felt that they could love, and whose hearts tell

them they are worthy to be loved again, while yet they are debarred, by the

lack of this, or some such seeming trifle from giving and receiving that

happiness they seem almost made to feel and to impart. As well might the

humble glow-worm despise that power of giving light, without which the

roving fly might pass her and repass her a thousand times, and never light

beside her; she might hear her winged darling buzzing over and around her;

he vainly seeking her, she longing to be found, but with no power to make

her presence known, no voice to call him, no wings to follow his flight; -

the fly must seek another mate, the worm must live and die alone.

Such were some of my reflections about this period. I might go on prosing

more and more, I might dive much deeper, and disclose other thoughts,

propose questions the reader might be puzzled to answer, and deduce

arguments that might startle his prejudices, or perhaps provoke his

ridicule, because he could not comprehend them; but I forbear.

Now, therefore, let us return to Miss Murray. She accompanied her mamma to

the ball on Tuesday; of course, splendidly attired, and delighted with her

prospects and her charms. As Ashby Park was nearly ten miles distant from

Horton Lodge, they had to set out pretty early, and I intended to have

spent the evening with Nancy Brown, whom I had not seen for a long time;

but my kind pupil took care I should spend it neither there nor anywhere

else beyond the limits of the schoolroom by giving me a piece of music to

copy, which kept me closely occupied till bedtime.

About eleven next morning, as soon as she had left her room, she came to

tell me her news. Sir Thomas had indeed proposed to her at the ball, an

event which reflected great credit on her mamma's sagacity, if not upon her

skill in contrivance; I rather incline to the belief that she had first

laid her plans, and then predicted their success.

The offer had been accepted of course, and the bridegroom elect was coming

that day to settle matters with Mr Murray.

Rosalie was pleased with the thoughts of becoming mistress of Ashby Park;

she was elated with the prospect of the bridal ceremony and its attendant

splendour and Èclat, the honeymoon spent abroad, and the subsequent

gaieties she expected to enjoy in London and elsewhere; she appeared pretty

well pleased, too, for the time being, with Sir Thomas himself, because she

had so lately seen him, danced with him, and been flattered by him; but,

after all, she seemed to shrink from the idea of being so soon united: she

wished the ceremony to be delayed some months, at least; and I wished it,

too. It seemed a horrible thing to hurry on the inauspicious match, and not

to give the poor creature time to think and reason on the irrevocable step

she was about to take. I made no pretension to "a mother's watchful,

anxious care," but I was amazed and horrified at Mrs Murray's

heartlessness, or want of thought for the real good of her child; and, by

my unheeded warnings and exhortations, I vainly strove to remedy the evil.

Miss Murray only laughed at what I said; and I soon found that her

reluctance to an immediate union arose chiefly from a desire to do what

execution she could among the young gentlemen of her acquaintance before

she was incapacitated from further mischief of the kind. It was for this

cause that, before confiding to me the secret of her engagement, she had

extracted a promise that I would not mention a word on the subject to

anyone. And when I saw this, and when I beheld her plunge more recklessly

than ever into the depths of heartless coquetry, I had no more pity for

her.

"Come what will," I thought, "she deserves it. Sir Thomas cannot be too bad

for her; and the sooner she is incapacitated from deceiving and injuring

others the better."

The wedding was fixed for the first of June. Between that and the critical

ball was little more than six weeks; but, with Rosalie's accomplished skill

and resolute exertion, much might be done, even within that period,

especially as Sir Thomas spent most of the interim in London, whither he

went up, it was said, to settle affairs with his lawyer, and make other

preparations for the approaching nuptials.

He endeavoured to supply the want of his presence by a pretty constant fire

of billets-doux; but these did not attract the neighbours' attention, and

open their eyes as personal visits would have done; and old Lady Ashby's

haughty, sour spirit of reserve withheld her from spreading the news, while

her indifferent health prevented her coming to visit her future daughter-in-

law; so that, altogether, this affair was kept far closer than such things

usually are.

Rosalie would sometimes show her lover's epistles to me to convince me what

a kind, devoted husband he would make. She showed me the letters of another

individual, too, the unfortunate Mr Green, who had not the courage, or, as

she expressed it, the "spunk" to plead his cause in person, but whom one

denial would not satisfy; he must write again and again.

He would not have done so if he could have seen the grimaces his fair idol

made over his moving appeals to her feelings, and heard her scornful

laughter, and the opprobrious epithets she heaped upon him for his

perseverance.

"Why don't you tell him, at once, that you are engaged?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't want him to know that!" replied she. "If he knew it, his

sisters and everybody would know it, and then there would be an end of my -

ahem! And besides, if I told him that, he would think my engagement was the

only obstacle, and that I would have him if I were free, which I could not

bear that any man should think, and he, of all others, the least. Besides,

I don't care for his letters," she added, contemptuously; "he may write as

often as he pleases, and look as great a calf as he likes when I meet him;

it only amuses me."

Meantime, young Meltham was pretty frequent in his visits to the house or

transits past it; and, judging by Matilda's execrations and reproaches, her

sister paid more attention to him than civility required: in other words

she carried on as animated a flirtation as the presence of her parents

would admit.

She made some attempts to bring Mr Hatfield once more to her feet; but

finding them unsuccessful, she repaid his haughty indifference with still

loftier scorn, and spoke of him with as much disdain and detestation as she

had formerly done of his curate.

But, amid all this, she never for a moment lost sight of Mr Weston. She

embraced every opportunity of meeting him, tried every art to fascinate

him, and pursued him with as much perseverance as if she really loved him

and no other, and the happiness of her life depended upon eliciting a

return of affection. Such conduct was beyond my comprehension. Had I seen

it depicted in a novel I should have thought it unnatural; had I heard it

described by others, I should have deemed it a mistake or an exaggeration;

but when I saw it with my own eyes, and suffered from it, too, I could only

conclude that excessive vanity, like drunkenness, hardens the heart,

enslaves the faculties, and perverts the feelings, and that dogs are not

the only creatures which, when gorged to the throat, will yet gloat over

what they cannot devour, and grudge the smallest morsel to a starving

brother.

She now became extremely beneficent to the poor cottagers. Her acquaintance

among them was more widely extended, her visits to their humble dwellings

were more frequent and excursive than they had ever been before. Hereby she

earned among them the reputation of a condescending and very charitable

young lady; and their encomiums were sure to be repeated to Mr Weston, whom

also she had thus a daily chance of meeting in one or other of their

abodes, or in her transits to and fro; and often, likewise, she could

gather, through their gossip, to what places he was likely to go at such

and such a time, whether to baptise a child, or to visit the aged, the

sick, the sad, or the dying; and most skilfully she laid her plans

accordingly.

In these excursions she would sometimes go with her sister, whom, by some

means, she had persuaded or bribed to enter into her schemes, sometimes

alone, never, now, with me; so that I was debarred the pleasure of seeing

Mr Weston, or hearing his voice, even in conversation with another, which

would certainly have been a very great pleasure, however hurtful or however

fraught with pain.

I could not even see him at church, for Miss Murray, under some trivial

pretext, chose to take possession of that corner in the family pew, which

had been mine ever since I came; and, unless I had the presumption to

station myself between Mr and Mrs Murray, I must sit with my back to the

pulpit, which I accordingly did.

Now, also, I never walked home with my pupils: they said their mamma

thought it did not look well to see three people out of the family walking,

and only two going in the carriage; and, as they greatly preferred walking

in fine weather, I should be honoured by going with the seniors.

"And besides," said they, "you can't walk as fast as we do; you know you're

always lagging behind."

I knew these were false excuses, but I made no objections, and never

contradicted such assertions, well knowing the motives which dictated them.

And in the afternoons, during those six memorable weeks, I never went to

church at all. If I had a cold, or any slight indisposition, they took

advantage of that to make me stay at home; and often they would tell me

they were not going again that day, themselves, and then pretend to change

their minds, and set off without telling me, so managing their departure

that I never discovered the change of purpose till too late.

Upon their return home, on one of these occasions, they entertained me with

an animated account of a conversation they had had with Mr Weston as they

came along.

"And he asked if you were ill, Miss Grey," said Matilda; abut we told him

you were quite well, only you didn't want to come to church - so he'll

think you're turned wicked."

All chance meetings on weekdays were likewise carefully prevented; for,

lest I should go to see poor Nancy Brown or any other person, Miss Murray

took good care to provide sufficient employment for all my leisure hours.

There was always some drawing to finish, some music to copy, or some work

to do, sufficient to incapacitate me from indulging in anything beyond a

short walk about the grounds, however she or her sister might be occupied.

One morning, having sought and waylaid Mr Weston, they returned in high

glee to give me an account of their interview.

"And he asked after you again," said Matilda, in spite of her sister's

silent, but imperative intimation that she should hold her tongue. "He

wondered why you were never with us, and thought you must have delicate

health as you came out so seldom."

"He didn't, Matilda - what nonsense you're talking!"

"Oh, Rosalie, what a lie! He did, you know; and you said - Don't, Rosalie -

hang it! - I won't be pinched so! And, Miss Grey, Rosalie told him you were

quite well, but you were always so buried in your books that you had no

pleasure in anything else."

"What an idea he must have of me!" I thought.

"And," I asked, "does old Nancy ever inquire about me?"

"Yes, and we tell her you are so fond of reading and drawing that you can

do nothing else."

"That is not the case though; if you had told her I was so busy I could not

come to see her, it would have been nearer the truth."

"I don't think it would," replied Miss Murray, suddenly kindling up; "I'm

sure you have plenty of time to yourself now, when you have so little

teaching to do."

It was no use beginning to dispute with such indulged, unreasoning

creatures; so I held my peace. I was accustomed, now, to keeping silence

when things distasteful to my ear were uttered; and now, too, I was used to

wearing a placid smiling countenance when my heart was bitter within me.

Only those who have felt the like can imagine my feelings, as I sat with an

assumption of smiling indifference, listening to the accounts of those

meetings and interviews with Mr Weston, which they seemed to find such

pleasure in describing to me, and hearing things asserted of him which,

from the character of the man, I knew to be exaggerations and perversions

of the truth, if not entirely false - things derogatory to him, and

flattering to them - especially to Miss Murray - which I burned to

contradict, or, at least, to show my doubts about, but dared not, lest, in

expressing my disbelief, I should display my interest, too.

Other things I heard, which I felt or feared were indeed too true; but I

must still conceal my anxiety respecting him, my indignation against them,

beneath a careless aspect; others again, mere hints of something said or

done, which I longed to hear more of, but could not venture to inquire.

So passed the weary time. I could not even comfort myself with saying, "She

will soon be married; and then, there may be hope."

Soon after her marriage the holidays would come; and when I returned from

home, most likely, Mr Weston would be gone, for I was told that he and the

rector could not agree (the rector's fault, of course), and he was about to

remove to another place.

No - besides my hope in God, my only consolation was in thinking that,

though he knew it not, I was more worthy of his love than Rosalie Murray,

charming and engaging as she was; for I could appreciate his excellence,

which she could not; I would devote my life to the promotion of his

happiness; she would destroy his happiness for the momentary gratification

of her own vanity.

"Oh, if he could but know the difference!" I would earnestly exclaim. "But

no! I would not have him see my heart; yet, if he could but know her

hollowness, her worthless, heartless frivolity, he would then be safe, and

I should be - almost happy, though I might never see him more!"

I fear, by this time, the reader is well nigh disgusted with the folly and

weakness I have so freely laid before him. I never disclosed it then, and

would not have done so had my own sister or my mother been with me in the

house.

I was a close and resolute dissembler - in this one case at least. My

prayers, my tears, my wishes, fears, and lamentations were witnessed by

myself and Heaven alone.

When we are harassed by sorrows or anxieties, or long oppressed by any

powerful feelings which we must keep to ourselves, for which we can obtain

and seek no sympathy from any living creature, and which yet we cannot, or

will not wholly crush, we often naturally seek relief in poetry - and often

find it, too - whether in the effusions of others, which seem to harmonise

with our existing case, or in our own attempts to give utterance to those

thoughts and feelings in strains less musical, perchance, but more

appropriate, and therefore more penetrating and sympathetic, and, for the

time, more soothing, or more powerful to rouse and to unburden the

oppressed and swollen heart.

Before this time, at Wellwood House and here, when suffering from homesick

melancholy, I had sought relief twice or thrice at this secret source of

consolation; and now I flew to it again, with greater avidity than ever,

because I seemed to need it more. I still preserve those relics of past

sufferings and experience, like pillars of witness set up, in travelling

through the vale of life, to mark particular occurrences.

The footsteps are obliterated now; the face of the country may be changed,

but the pillar is still there to remind me how all things were when it was

reared.

Lest the reader should be curious to see any of these effusions, I will

favour him with one short specimen: cold and languid as the lines may seem,

it was almost a passion of grief to which they owed their being.

 "O, they have robbed me of the hope

 My spirit held so dear;

 They will not let me hear that voice

 My soul delights to hear.

 "They will not let me see that face

 I so delight to see;

 And they have taken all thy smiles,

 And all thy love from me.

 "Well, let them seize on all they can; -

 One treasure still is mine, -

 A heart that loves to think on thee,

 And feels the worth of thine."

Yes! at least, they could not deprive me of that; I could think of him day

and night; and I could feel that he was worthy to be thought of. Nobody

knew him as I did; nobody could appreciate him as I did; nobody could love

him as I could, if I might; but there was the evil. What business had I to

think so much of one that never thought of me? Was it not foolish? - was it

not wrong?

Yet, if I found such deep delight in thinking of him, and if I kept those

thoughts to myself, and troubled no one else with them, where was the harm

of it? I would ask myself.

And such reasoning prevented me from making any sufficient effort to shake

off my fetters.

But, if those thoughts brought delight, it was a painful, troubled

pleasure, too near akin to anguish; and one that did me more injury than I

was aware of. It was an indulgence that a person of more wisdom or more

experience would doubtless have denied herself.

And yet, how dreary to turn my eyes from the contemplation of that bright

object, and force them to dwell on the dull, grey, desolate prospect

around, the joyless, hopeless, solitary path that lay before me. It was

wrong to be so joyless, so desponding; I should have made God my friend,

and to do His will the pleasure and the business of my life; but Faith was

weak, and Passion was too strong.

In this time of trouble I had two other causes of affliction. The first may

seem a trifle, but it cost me many a tear: Snap, my little dumb, rough-

visaged, but bright-eyed, warm-hearted companion, the only thing I had to

love me, was taken away, and delivered over to the tender mercies of the

village rat-catcher, a man notorious for his brutal treatment of his canine

slaves.

The other was serious enough: my letters from home gave intimation that my

father's health was worse. No boding fears were expressed, but I was grown

timid and despondent, and could not help fearing that some dreadful

calamity awaited us there. I seemed to see the black clouds gathering round

my native hills, and to hear the angry muttering of a storm that was about

to burst, and desolate our hearth.

Chapter 18

Mirth And Mourning

The first of June arrived at last; and Rosalie Murray was transmuted into

Lady Ashby. Most splendidly beautiful she looked in her bridal costume.

Upon her return from church after the ceremony, she came flying into the

schoolroom, flushed with excitement, and laughing - half in mirth, and half

in reckless desperation - as it seemed to me.

"Now, Miss Grey, I'm Lady Ashby!" she exclaimed. "It's done! my fate is

sealed; there's no drawing back now! I'm come to receive your

congratulations, and bid you good-bye; and then I'm off - for Paris . . .

Rome . . . Naples . . . Switzerland . . . London. Oh dear! what a deal I

shall see and hear before I come back again! But don't forget me; I shan't

forget you, though I've been a naughty girl. Come! why don't you

congratulate me?"

"I cannot congratulate you," I replied, "till I know whether this change is

really for the better; but I sincerely hope it is; and I wish you true

happiness and the best of blessings."

"Well good-bye, the carriage is waiting, and they're calling me."

She gave me a hasty kiss, and was hurrying away, but, suddenly returning,

embraced me with more affection than I thought her capable of evincing, and

departed with tears in her eyes.

Poor girl! I really loved her then; and forgave her from my heart all the

injury she had done me - and others also; she had not half known it, I was

sure; and I prayed God to pardon her, too.

During the remainder of that day of festal sadness, I was left to my own

devices. Being too much unhinged for any steady occupation, I wandered

about with a book in my hand for several hours, more thinking than reading,

for I had many things to think about; and in the evening, I made use of my

liberty to go and see my old friend Nancy once again; to apologise for my

long absence, which must have seemed so neglectful and unkind, by telling

her how busy I had been, and to talk, or read, or work for her, whichever

might be most acceptable; and also of course, to tell her the news of this

important day, and perhaps to obtain a little information from her in

return, respecting Mr Weston's expected departure. But of this, she seemed

to know nothing, and I hoped, as she did, that it was all a false report.

She was very glad to see me; but, happily, her eyes were now so nearly well

that she was almost independent of my services. She was deeply interested

in the wedding; but while I amused her with the details of the festive day,

the splendours of the bridal party and of the bride herself, she often

sighed and shook her head, and wished good might come of it: she seemed

like me to regard it rather as a theme for sorrow than rejoicing. I sat a

long time talking to her about that and other things; - but no one came.

Shall I confess that I sometimes looked towards the door with a half

expectant wish to see it open and give entrance to Mr Weston, as had

happened once before? and that, returning through the lanes and fields, I

often paused to look round me, and walked more slowly than was at all

necessary - for, though a fine evening, it was not a hot one - and,

finally, felt a sense of emptiness and disappointment at having reached the

house without meeting or even catching a distant glimpse of anyone, except

a few labourers returning from their work?

Sunday however was approaching: I should see him then; for now that Miss

Murray was gone, I could have my old corner again. I should see him; and by

look, speech, and manner I might judge whether the circumstance of her

marriage had very much afflicted him.

Happily I could perceive no shadow of a difference: he wore the same aspect

as he had worn two months ago - voice, look, manner, all alike unchanged:

there was the same keen-sighted, unclouded truthfulness in his discourse,

the same forcible clearness in his style, the same earnest simplicity in

all he said and did, that made itself, not marked by the eye and ear, but

felt upon the hearts of his audience.

I walked home with Miss Matilda, but he did not join us. Matilda was now

sadly at a loss for amusement, and woefully in want of a companion: Her

brothers at school, her sister married and gone, she too young to be

admitted into society, for which, from Rosalie's example, she was in some

degree beginning to acquire a taste - a taste at least for the company of

certain classes of gentlemen; at this dull time of the year - no hunting

going on - no shooting even - for, though she might not join in that, it

was something to see her father or the gamekeeper go out with the dogs, and

to talk with them, on their return, about the different birds they had

bagged. Now also she was denied the solace which the companionship of the

coachman, groom, horses, greyhounds and pointers might have afforded; for

her mother, having notwithstanding the disadvantages of a country life so

satisfactorily disposed of her elder daughter, the pride of her heart, had

begun seriously to turn her attention to the younger, and being truly

alarmed at the roughness of her manners, and thinking it high time to work

a reform, had been roused at length to exert her authority, and prohibited

entirely the yards, stables, kennels, and coach-house. Of course, she was

not implicitly obeyed; but indulgent as she had hitherto been, when once

her spirit was roused, her temper was not so gentle as she required that of

her govemesses to be, and her will was not to be thwarted with impunity;

and after many a scene of contention between mother and daughter, many a

violent outbreak which I was ashamed to witness, in which the father's

authority was often called in to confirm, with oaths and threats, the

mother's slighted prohibitions; for even he could see that "Tilly," though

she would have made a fine lad, was not quite what a young lady ought to be

- Matilda at length found that her easiest plan was to keep clear of the

forbidden regions, unless she could now and then steal a visit without her

watchful mother's knowledge.

Amid all this, let it not be imagined that I escaped without many a

reprimand, and many an implied reproach that lost none of its sting from

not being openly worded, but rather wounded the more deeply, because from

that very reason it seemed to preclude self-defence. Frequently, I was told

to amuse Miss Matilda with other things, and to remind her of her mother's

precepts and prohibitions. I did so to the best of my power; but she would

not be amused against her will, and could not against her taste; and though

I went beyond mere reminding, such gentle remonstrances as I could use were

utterly ineffectual.

"Dear Miss Grey! it is the strangest thing. I suppose you can't help it, if

it's not in your nature - but I wonder you can't win the confidence of that

girl, and make your society at least as agreeable to her as that of Robert

or Joseph!"

"They can talk the best about the things in which she is most interested,"

I replied.

"Well! that is a strange confession, however, to come from her governess!

Who is to form a young lady's tastes, I wonder, if the governess doesn't do

it! I have known governesses who have so completely identified themselves

with the reputation of their young ladies for elegance and propriety in

mind and manners, that they would blush to speak a word against them; and

to hear the slightest blame imputed to their pupils was worse than to be

censured in their own persons, - and I really think it very natural, for my

part."

"Do you, ma'am?"

"Yes: of course, the young lady's proficiency and elegance is of more

consequence to the governess than her own, as well as to the world. If she

wishes to prosper in her vocation she must devote all her energies to her

business; all her ideas and all her ambition will tend to the

accomplishment of that one object. When we wish to decide upon the merits

of a governess, we naturally look at the young ladies she professes to have

educated, and judge accordingly. The judicious governess knows this; she

knows that, while she lives in obscurity herself, her pupils' virtues and

defects will be open to every eye, and that unless she loses sight of

herself in their cultivation, she need not hope for success. You see, Miss

Grey, it is just the same as any other trade or profession; they that wish

to prosper must devote themselves body and soul to their calling, and if

they begin to yield to indolence or self-indulgence they are speedily

distanced by wiser competitors: there is little to choose between a person

that ruins her pupils by neglect, and one that corrupts them by her

example. You will excuse my dropping these little hints: you know it is all

for your own good. Many ladies would speak to you much more strongly; and

many would not trouble themselves to speak at all, but quietly look out for

a substitute. That, of course, would be the easiest plan; but I know the

advantages of a place like this to a person in your situation; and I have

no desire to part with you, as I am sure you would do very well if you will

only think of these things and try to exert yourself a little more; and

then, I am convinced, you would soon acquire that delicate tact which alone

is wanting to give you a proper influence over the mind of your pupil."

I was about to give the lady some idea of the fallacy of her expectations;

but she sailed away as soon as she had concluded her speech. Having said

what she wished, it was no part of her plan to await my answer: it was my

business to hear, and not to speak.

However, as I have said, Matilda at length yielded, in some degree, to her

mother's authority (pity it had not been exerted before), and being thus

deprived of almost every source of amusement, there was nothing for it but

to take long rides with the groom and long walks with the governess, and to

visit the cottages and farmhouses on her father's estate, to kill time in

chatting with the old men and women that inhabited them.

In one of these walks, it was our chance to meet Mr Weston. This was what I

had long desired; but now, for a moment, I wished either he or I were away:

I felt my heart throb so violently that I dreaded lest some outward signs

of emotion should appear; but I think he hardly glanced at me, and I was

soon calm enough. After a brief salutation to both, he asked Matilda if she

had lately heard from her sister.

"Yes," replied she. "She was at Paris when she wrote, and very well and

very happy."

She spoke the last word emphatically, and with a glance impertinently sly.

He did not seem to notice it, but replied, with equal emphasis, and very

seriously,

"I hope she will continue to be so."

"Do you think it likely?" I ventured to inquire, for Matilda had started

off in pursuit of her dog, that was chasing a leveret.

"I cannot tell," replied he. "Sir Thomas may be a better man than I

suppose; but from all I have heard and seen it seems a pity that one so

young and gay and . . . and interesting, to express many things by one -

whose greatest, if not her only fault, appears to be thoughtlessness . . .

no trifling fault to be sure, since it renders the possessor liable to

almost every other, and exposes him to so many temptations; but it seems a

pity that she should be thrown away on such a man. It was her mother's

wish, I suppose?"

"Yes; and her own, too, I think, for she always laughed at my attempts to

dissuade her from the step."

"You did attempt it? Then, at least, you will have the satisfaction of

knowing that it is no fault of yours, if any harm should come of it; as for

Mrs Murray, I don't know how she can justify her conduct; if I had

sufficient acquaintance with her I'd ask her."

"It seems unnatural; but some people think rank and wealth the chief good;

and, if they can secure that to their children, they think they have done

their duty."

"True; but is it not strange that persons of experience who have been

married themselves should judge so falsely?"

Matilda now came panting back, with the lacerated body of the young hare in

her hand.

"Was it your intention to kill that hare, or to save it, Miss Murray?"

asked Mr Weston, apparently puzzled at her gleeful countenance.

"I pretended to want to save it," she answered, honestly enough, "as it was

so glaringly out of season; but I was better pleased to see it killed.

However, you can both witness that I couldn't help it; Prince was

determined to have her; and he clutched her by the back, and killed her in

a minute! Wasn't it a noble chase?"

"Very! for a young lady after a leveret."

There was a quiet sarcasm in the tone of his reply which was not lost upon

her; she shrugged her shoulders, and, turning away with a significant

"Humph!" asked me how I had enjoyed the fun.

I replied that I saw no fun in the matter; but admitted that I had not

observed the transaction very narrowly.

"Didn't you see how it doubled - just like an old hare? and didn't you hear

it scream?"

"I'm happy to say I did not."

"It cried out just like a child."

"Poor little thing! What will you do with it?"

"Come along - I shall leave it in the first house we come to. I don't want

to take it home, for fear papa should scold me for letting the dog kill

it."

Mr Weston was now gone, and we too went on our way; but as we returned,

after having deposited the hare in a farmhouse, and demolished some spice

cake and currant wine in exchange, we met him returning also from the

execution of his mission, whatever it might be. He carried in his hand a

cluster of beautiful bluebells which he offered to me, observing, with a

mile, that though he had seen so little of me for the last two months, he

had not forgotten that bluebells were numbered among my favourite flowers.

It was done as a simple act of good will, without compliment, :)r

remarkable courtesy, or any look that could be construed into 'reverential,

tender adoration," (vide Rosalie Murray); but still, t was something to

find my unimportant saying so well remembered; it was something that he had

noticed so accurately the time I had ceased to be visible.

"I was told," said he, "that you were a perfect bookworm, Miss Grey, so

completely absorbed in your studies that you were lost to every other

pleasure."

"Yes, and it's quite true!" cried Matilda.

"No, Mr Weston; don't believe it; it's a scandalous libel. These young

ladies are too fond of making random assertions at the expense of their

friends; and you ought to be careful how you listen to them."

"I hope this assertion is groundless, at any rate."

"Why? Do you particularly object to ladies studying?"

"No; but I object to anyone so devoting himself or herself to study, as to

lose sight of everything else. Except under peculiar circumstances, I

consider very close and constant study as a waste of time, and an injury to

the mind as well as the body."

"Well, I have neither the time nor the inclination for such

transgressions."

We parted again.

Well! what is there remarkable in all this? Why have I recorded it?

Because, reader, it was important enough to give me a cheerful evening, a

night of pleasing dreams, and a morning of felicitous hopes. Shallow-

brained cheerfulness, foolish dreams, unfounded hopes, you would say; and I

will not venture to deny it: suspicion to that effect arose too frequently

in my own mind; but our wishes are like tinder: the flint and steel of

circumstances are continually striking out sparks, which vanish

immediately, unless they chance to fall upon the tinder of our wishes;

then, they instantly ignite, and the flame of hope is kindled in a moment.

But alas! that very morning, my flickering flame of hope was dismally

quenched by a letter from my mother, which spoke so seriously of my

father's increasing illness, that I feared there was little or no chance of

his recovery; and, close at hand as the holidays were, I almost trembled

lest they should come too late for me to meet him in this world. Two days

after, a letter from Mary told me his life was despaired of, and his end

seemed fast approaching.

Then, immediately, I sought permission to anticipate the vacation, and go

without delay.

Mrs Murray stared, and wondered at the unwonted energy and boldness with

which I urged the request, and thought there was no occasion to hurry; but

finally gave me leave, stating, however, that there was "no need to be in

such agitation about the matter - it might prove a false alarm after all;

and if not - why, it was only in the common course of nature; we must all

die sometime; and I was not to suppose myself the only afflicted person in

the world;" and concluding with saying I might have the phaeton to take me

to O--.

"And instead of repining, Miss Grey, be thankful for the privileges you

enjoy. There's many a poor clergyman whose family would be plunged into

ruin by the event of his death; but you, you see, have influential friends

ready to continue their patronage, and to show you every consideration."

I thanked her for her "consideration," and flew to my room to make some

hurried preparations for my departure. My bonnet and shawl being on, and a

few things hastily crammed into my largest trunk, I descended. But I might

have done the work more leisurely, for no one else was in a hurry; and I

had still a considerable time to wait for the phaeton.

At length it came to the door, and I was off; but oh, what a dreary journey

was that! how utterly different from my former passages homewards!

Being too late for the last coach to --, I had to hire a cab for ten miles,

and then a car to take me over the rugged hills. It was half-past ten

before I reached home. They were not in bed.

My mother and sister both met me in the passage - sad - silent - pale! I

was so much shocked and terror-stricken I could not speak to ask the

information I so much longed yet dreaded to obtain.

"Agnes," said my mother, struggling to repress some strong emotion. "Oh,

Agnes!" cried Mary, and burst into tears. "How is he?" I asked, gasping for

the answer. "Dead!" It was the reply I had anticipated; but the shock

seemed none the less tremendous.

Chapter 19

The Letter

My father's mortal remains had been consigned to the tomb; and we, with sad

faces and sombre garments, sat lingering over the frugal breakfast-table,

revolving plans for our future life.

My mother's strong mind had not given way beneath even this affliction: her

spirit, though crushed, was not broken. Mary's wish was that I should go

back to Horton Lodge, and that our mother should come and live with her and

Mr Richardson at the vicarage: she affirmed that he wished it no less than

herself, and that such an arrangement could not fail to benefit all

parties, for my mother's society and experience would be of inestimable

value to them, and they would do all they could to make her happy. But no

arguments or entreaties could prevail: my mother was determined not to go;

not that she questioned, for a moment, the kind wishes and intentions of

her daughter; but she affirmed that so long as God spared her health and

strength, she would make use of them to earn her own livelihood, and be

chargeable to no one, whether her dependence would be felt as a burden or

not. If she could afford to reside as a lodger in -- vicarage, she would

choose that house before all others as the place of her abode; but, not

being so circumstanced, she would never come under its roof, except as an

occasional visitor, unless sickness or calamity should render her

assistance really needful, or until age or infirmity made her incapable of

maintaining herself.

"No Mary," said she, "if Richardson and you have anything to spare, you

must lay it aside for your family; and Agnes and I must gather honey for

ourselves. Thanks to my having had daughters to educate, I have not

forgotten my accomplishments - God willing I will check this vain

repining," - she said, while the tears coursed one another down her cheeks

in spite of her efforts; but she wiped them away, and resolutely shaking

back her head, continued, "I will exert myself and look out for a small

house commodiously situated in some populous but healthy district, where we

will take a few young ladies to board and educate, - if we can get them -

and as many day-pupils as will come, or as we can manage to instruct. Your

father's relations and old friends will be able to send us some pupils or

to assist us with their recommendations, no doubt: I shall not apply to my

own. What say you to it, Agnes - will you be willing to leave your present

situation and try?"

"Quite willing, mamma; and the money I have saved will do to furnish the

house. It shall be taken from the bank directly."

"When it is wanted: we must get the house, and settle all preliminaries

first."

Mary offered to lend the little she possessed; but my mother declined it,

saying that we must begin on an economical plan, and she hoped that the

whole or part of mine added to what we could get by the sale of the

furniture, and what little our dear papa had contrived to lay aside for her

since the debts were paid, would be sufficient to last us till Christmas,

when, it was hoped, something would accrue from our united labours.

It was finally settled that this should be our plan; and that inquiries and

preparations should immediately be set on foot; and while my mother busied

herself with these, I should return to Horton Lodge at the close of my four

weeks' vacation, and give notice for my final departure when things were in

train for the speedy commencement of our school.

We were discussing these affairs on the morning I have mentioned, about a

fortnight after my father's death, when a letter was brought in for my

mother, on beholding which the colour mounted to her face - lately pale

enough with anxious watchings and excessive sorrow.

"From my father!" murmured she, as she hastily tore off the cover.

It was many years since she had heard from any of her own relations before.

Naturally wondering what the letter might contain, I watched her

countenance while she read it, and was somewhat surprised to see her bite

her lip and knit her brows as if in anger. When she had done, she somewhat

irreverently cast it on the table, saying with a scornful smile, -

"Your grandpapa has been so kind as to write to me. He says he has no doubt

I have long repented of my 'unfortunate marriage,' and if I will only

acknowledge this, and confess I was wrong in neglecting his advice, and

that I have justly suffered for it, he will make a lady of me once again -

if that be possible after my long degradation - and remember my girls in

his will. Get my desk, Agnes, and send these things away: I will answer the

letter directly - but first, as I may be depriving you both of a legacy, it

is just that I should tell you what I mean to say.

"I shall say that he is mistaken in supposing that I can regret the birth

of my daughters, (who have been the pride of my life, and are likely to be

the comfort of my old age), or the thirty years I have passed in the

company of my best and dearest friend; - that, had our misfortunes been

three times as great as they were (unless they had been my bringing on), I

should still the more rejoice to have shared them with your father, and

administered what consolation I was able; and, had his sufferings in

illness been ten times what they were, I could not regret having watched

over and laboured to relieve them: that, if he had married a richer wife,

misfortunes and trials would no doubt have come upon him still; while I am

an egotist enough to imagine that no other woman could have cheered him

through them so well - not that I am superior to the rest, but I was made

for him, and he for me; and I can no more repent the hours, days, years of

happiness we have spent together, and which neither could have had without

the other, than I can the privilege of having been his nurse in sickness,

and his comfort in affliction.

"Will this do, children? - or shall I say we are all very sorry for what

has happened during the last thirty years; and my daughters wish they had

never been born; but since they have had that misfortune, they will be

thankful for any trifle their grandpapa will be kind enough to bestow?"

Of course, we both applauded our mother's resolution; Mary cleared away the

breakfast things; I brought the desk; the letter was quickly written and

despatched; and, from that day, we heard no more of our grandfather till we

saw his death announced in the newspaper a considerable time after - all

his worldly possessions, of course, being left to our wealthy, unknown

cousins.

Chapter 20

The Farewell

A house in A--, the fashionable watering place, was hired for our seminary;

and a promise of two or three pupils was obtained to commence with. I

returned to Horton Lodge about the middle of July, leaving my mother to

conclude the bargain for the house, to obtain more pupils, to sell off the

furniture of our old abode, and to fit out the new one.

We often pity the poor, because they have no leisure to mourn their

departed relatives, and necessity obliges them to labour through their

severest afflictions; but is not active employment the best remedy for

overwhelming sorrow, the surest antidote for despair? It may be a rough

comforter: it may seem hard to be harassed with the cares of life when we

have no relish for its enjoyments, to be goaded to labour when the heart is

ready to break, and the vexed spirit implores for rest only to weep in

silence; but is not labour better than the rest we covet? and are not those

petty, tormenting cares less hurtful than a continual brooding over the

great affliction that oppresses us? Besides, we cannot have cares, and

anxieties, and toil, without hope - if it be but the hope of fulfilling our

joyless task, accomplishing some needful project, or escaping some further

annoyance.

At any rate, I was glad my mother had so much employment for every faculty

of her action-loving frame. Our kind neighbours lamented that she, once so

exalted in wealth and station, should be reduced to such extremity in her

time of sorrow; but I am persuaded that she would have suffered thrice as

much had she been left in affluence, with liberty to remain in that house,

the scene of her early happiness and late affliction, and no stern

necessity to prevent her from incessantly brooding over and lamenting her

bereavement. I will not dilate upon the feelings with which I left the old

house, the well-known garden, the little village church - then doubly dear

to me, because my father, who for thirty years had taught and prayed within

its walls, lay slumbering now beneath its flags - and the old bare hills,

delightful in their very desolation, with the narrow vales between, smiling

in green wood and sparkling water - the house where I was born, the scene

of all my early associations, the place where, throughout life, my earthly

affections had been centred; - and left them to return no more! True, I was

going back to Horton Lodge where, amid many evils, one source of pleasure

yet remained; but it was pleasure mingled with excessive pain, and my stay,

alas! was limited to six weeks.

And even of that precious time, day after day slipped by and I did not see

him: - except at church, I never saw him for a fortnight after my return.

It seemed a long time to me: and, as I was often out with my rambling

pupil, of course hopes would keep rising, and disappointments would ensue;

and then I would say to my own heart, "Here is a convincing proof - if you

would but have the sense to see it, or the candour to acknowledge it - that

he does not care for you. If he only thought half as much about you, as you

do about him, he would have contrived to meet you many times ere this: you

must know that by consulting your own feelings. Therefore have done with

this nonsense; you have no ground for hope; dismiss, at once, these hurtful

thoughts and foolish wishes from your mind and turn to your own duty and

the dull, blank life that lies before you. You might have known such

happiness was not for you."

But I saw him at last. He came suddenly upon me as I was crossing a field

in returning from a visit to Nancy Brown, which I had taken the opportunity

of paying while Matilda Murray was riding her matchless mare. He must have

heard of the heavy loss I had sustained; he expressed no sympathy, offered

no condolence, but almost the first words he uttered were, "How is your

mother?" and this was no matter of course question, for I never told him

that I had a mother, he must have learnt the fact from others, if he knew

it at all; and, besides, there was sincere good-will, and even deep,

touching, unobtrusive sympathy in the tone and manner of the inquiry.

I thanked him with due civility, and told him she was as well as could be

expected.

"What will she do?" was the next question. Many would have deemed it an

impertinent one, and given an evasive reply; but such an idea never entered

my head, and I gave a brief, but plain statement of my mother's plans and

prospects.

"Then you will leave this place shortly?" said he.

"Yes, in a month."

He paused a minute, as if in thought. When he spoke again I hoped it would

be to express his concern at my departure; but it was only to say,

"I should think you will be willing enough to go?"

"Yes - for some things," I replied.

"For some things only - I wonder what should make you regret it!"

I was annoyed at this, in some degree because it embarrassed me; I had only

one reason for regretting it; and that was a profound secret, which he had

no business to trouble me about.

"Why," said I - "why should you suppose that I dislike the place?"

"You told me so yourself," was the decisive reply. "You said, at least,

that you could not live contentedly without a friend; and that you had no

friend here, and no possibility of making one, and besides, I know you must

dislike it."

"But, if you remember rightly, I said, or meant to say, I could not live

contentedly without a friend in the world: I was not so unreasonable as to

require one always near me. I think I could be happy in a house full of

enemies if - " but no; that sentence must not be continued, - I paused, and

hastily added, "And, besides, we cannot well leave a place where we have

lived for two or three years, without some feeling of regret."

"Will you regret to part with Miss Murray - your sole remaining pupil and

companion?"

"I daresay I shall in some degree: it was not without sorrow I parted with

her sister."

"I can imagine that."

"Well, Miss Matilda is quite as good - better in one respect."

"What is that?"

"She's honest."

"And the other is not?"

"I should not call her dishonest; but it must be confessed, she's a little

artful."

"Artful is she? - I saw she was giddy and vain - and now," he added, after

a pause, "I can well believe she was artful, too, but so excessively so as

to assume an aspect of extreme simplicity and unguarded openness. Yes,"

continued he musingly, "that accounts for some little things that puzzled

me a trifle before."

After that, he turned the conversation to more general subjects. He did not

leave me till we had nearly reached the park-gates: he had certainly

stepped a little out of his way to accompany me so far, for he now went

back and disappeared down Moss-lane, the entrance of which we had passed

some time before. Assuredly, I did not regret this circumstance: if sorrow

had any place in my heart, it was that he was gone at last; that he was no

longer walking by my side, and that short interval of delightful

intercourse was at an end. He had not breathed a word of love, or dropped

one hint of tenderness or affection, and yet I had been supremely happy. To

be near him, to hear him talk - as he did talk; and to feel that he thought

me worthy to be so spoken to - capable of understanding and duly

appreciating such discourse - was enough.

"Yes, Edward Weston, I could indeed be happy in a house full of enemies, if

I had but one friend who truly, deeply, and faithfully loved me, and if

that friend were you: though we might be far apart, seldom to hear from

each other, still more seldom to meet; though toil and trouble and vexation

might surround me, still - it would be too much happiness for me to dream

of! Yet who can tell," said I within myself, as I proceeded up the park -

"who can tell what this one month, may bring forth? I have lived nearly

three and twenty years, and I have suffered much, and tasted little

pleasure yet: is it likely my life all through will be so clouded? Is it

not possible that God may hear my prayers, disperse these gloomy shadows,

and grant me some beams of heaven's sunshine yet? Will He entirely deny to

me those blessings which are so freely given to others, who neither ask

them nor acknowledge them when received? May I not still hope and trust?"

I did hope and trust, for a while; but alas, alas! the time ebbed away; one

week followed another, and, excepting one distant glimpse, and two

transient meetings during which scarcely anything was said - while I was

walking with Miss Matilda - I saw nothing of him, except, of course, at

church.

And now, the last Sunday was come, and the last service. I was often on the

point of melting into tears during the sermon - the last I was to hear from

him - the best I should hear from anyone, I was well assured. It was over:

the congregation were departing; and I must follow - I had then seen him

and heard his voice, too, probably for the last time.

In the church-yard, Matilda was pounced upon by the two Misses Green. They

had many inquiries to make about her sister, and I know not what besides. I

only wished they would have done, that we might hasten back to Horton

Lodge: I longed to seek the retirement of my own room, or some sequestered

nook in the grounds, that I might deliver myself up to my feelings to weep

my last farewell, and lament my false hopes and vain delusions - only this

once and then adieu to fruitless dreaming - thenceforth, only sober, solid,

sad reality should occupy my mind; but while I thus resolved, a low voice

close beside me said,

"I suppose you are going this week, Miss Grey?"

"Yes," I replied. I was very much startled; and had I been at all

hysterically inclined, I certainly should have committed myself in some way

then. Thank God I was not.

"Well," said Mr Weston, "I want to bid you good-bye - it is not likely I

shall see you again before you go."

"Good-bye Mr Weston," I said - Oh, how I struggled to say it calmly! I gave

him my hand. He retained it a few seconds in his.

"It is possible we may meet again," said he, "will it be of any consequence

to you whether we do or not?"

"Yes, I should be very glad to see you again."

I could say no less. He kindly pressed my hand, and went. Now I was happy

again; though more inclined to burst into tears than ever. If I had been

forced to speak at that moment, a succession of sobs would have inevitably

ensued; and as it was, I could not keep the water out of my eyes. I walked

along with Miss Murray, turning aside my face and neglecting to notice

several successive remarks, till she bawled out I was either deaf or

stupid, and then (having recovered my self-possession) as one awakened from

a fit of abstraction, I suddenly looked up and asked what she had been

saying.

Chapter 21

The School

I Left Horton Lodge, and went to join my mother in our new abode at A--. I

found her well in health, resigned in spirit, and even cheerful, though

subdued and sober, in her general demeanour. We had only three boarders and

half-a-dozen day-pupils to commence with; but by due care and diligence we

hoped ere long to increase the number of both.

I set myself with befitting energy to discharge the duties of this new mode

of life. I call it new, for there was, indeed, a considerable difference

between working with my mother in a school of our own, and working as a

hireling among strangers, despised and trampled upon by old and young; and

for the first few weeks I was by no means unhappy. "It is possible we may

meet again," and "Will it be of any consequence to you whether we do or

not?" - those words still rang in my ear and rested on my heart; they were

my secret solace and support.

"I shall see him again. - He will come; or he will write." No promise, in

fact, was too bright or too extravagant for Hope to whisper in my ear. I

did not believe half of what she told me; I pretended to laugh at it all;

but I was far more credulous than I myself supposed: otherwise, why did my

heart leap up when a knock was heard at the front door, and the maid, who

opened it, came to tell my mother a gentleman wished to see her? and why

was I out of humour for the rest of the day, because it proved to be a

music-master come to offer his services to our school? and what stopped my

breath for a moment, when the postman having brought a couple of letters,

my mother said, "Here Agnes, this is for you," and threw one of them to me?

and what made the hot blood rush into my face when I saw it was directed in

a gentleman's hand? and why - Oh! why did that cold, sickening sense of

disappointment fall upon me, when I had torn open the cover and found it

was only a letter from Mary, which, for some reason or other, her husband

had directed for her?

Was it then come to this - that I should be disappointed to receive a

letter from my only sister; and because it was not written by a comparative

stranger? Dear Mary! and she had written it so kindly - and thinking I

should be so pleased to have it! - I was not worthy to read it!

And I believe, in my indignation against myself, I should have put it aside

till I had schooled myself into a better frame of mind, and was become more

deserving of the honour and privilege of its perusal; but there was my

mother looking on, and wishful to know what news it contained; so I read it

and delivered it to her, and then went into the schoolroom to attend to the

pupils; but amidst the cares of copies and sums - in the intervals of

correcting errors here, and reproving derelictions of duty there, I was

inwardly taking myself to task with far sterner severity.

"What a fool you must be," said my head to my heart, or my sterner to my

softer self; - "how could you ever dream that he would - write to you? What

grounds have you for such a hope - or that he will see you, or give himself

any trouble about you - or even think of you again?"

"What grounds?" - and then Hope set before me that last, short interview

and repeated the words I had so faithfully treasured in my memory.

"Well, and what was there in that? Who ever hung his hopes upon so frail a

twig? What was there in those words that any common acquaintance might not

say to another? Of course, it was possible you might meet again; he might

have said so if you had been going to New Zealand; but that did not imply

any intention of seeing you - and then, as to the question that followed,

anyone might ask that; and how did you answer? Merely with a stupid,

commonplace reply, such as you would have given to Master Murray, or anyone

else you had been on tolerably civil terms with."

"But then," persisted Hope, "the tone and manner in which he spoke."

"Oh, that is nonsense! he always speaks impressively; and at that moment

there were the Greens and Miss Matilda Murray just before, and other people

passing by, and he was obliged to stand close beside you, and to speak very

low, unless he wished everybody to hear what he said, which - though it was

nothing at all particular - of course, he would rather not."

"But then, above all, that emphatic, yet gentle pressure of the hand, which

seemed to say, 'Trust me,' and many other things besides - too delightful,

almost too flattering, to be repeated, even to one's self."

"Egregious folly - too absurd to require contradiction - mere inventions of

the imagination, which you ought to be ashamed of. If you would but

consider your own unattractive exterior, your unamiable reserve, your

foolish diffidence, which must make you appear cold, dull, awkward, and

perhaps ill-tempered too; - if you had but rightly considered these from

the beginning, you would never have harboured such presumptuous thoughts;

and now that you have been so foolish, pray repent and amend, and let us

have no more of it!"

I cannot say that I implicitly obeyed my own injunctions; but such

reasoning as this became more and more effective as time wore on and

nothing was seen or heard of Mr Weston; until at last, I gave up hoping,

for even my heart acknowledged it was all in vain. But still, I would think

of him; I would cherish his image in my mind; and treasure every word,

look, and gesture that my memory could retain; and brood over his

excellences, and his peculiarities, and, in fact, all I had seen, heard, or

imagined respecting him.

"Agnes, this sea air and change of scene do you no good, I think; I never

saw you look so wretched. It must be that you sit too much, and allow the

cares of the schoolroom to worry you: - you must learn to take things easy,

and to be more active and cheerful; you must take exercise whenever you can

get it, and leave the most tiresome duties to me: they will only serve to

exercise my patience, and, perhaps, try my temper a little."

So said my mother as we sat at work one morning during the Easter holidays.

I assured her that my employments were not at all oppressive, that I was

well, or if there was anything amiss, it would be gone as soon as the

trying months of spring were over; when summer came I should be as strong

and hearty as she could wish to see me; but inwardly her observation

startled me. I knew my strength was declining, my appetite had failed, and

I was grown listless and desponding; - and if indeed he could never care

for me, and I could never see him more - if I was forbidden to minister to

his happiness, forbidden, for ever, to taste the joys of love, to bless and

to be blessed, then life must be a burden, and if my heavenly Father would

call me away, I should be glad to rest; but it would not do to die and

leave my mother - Selfish, unworthy daughter, to forget her for a moment!

Was not her happiness committed in a great measure to my charge - and the

welfare of our young pupils, too? Should I shrink from the work that God

had set before me, because it was not fitted to my taste? Did not He know

best what I should do, and where I ought to labour? and should I long to

quit His service before I had finished my task, and expect to enter into

His rest without having laboured to earn it? "No; by His help I will arise

and address myself diligently to my appointed duty. If happiness in this

world is not for me, I will endeavour to promote the welfare of those

around me, and my reward shall be hereafter."

So said I in my heart, and from that hour I only permitted my thoughts to

wander to Edward Weston - or at least to dwell upon him now and then - as a

treat for rare occasions; and whether it was really the approach of summer,

or the effect of these good resolutions, or the lapse of time, or all

together, tranquillity of mind was soon restored, and bodily health and

vigour began likewise, slowly but surely, to return.

Early in June, I received a letter from Lady Ashby, late Miss Murray. She

had written to me twice or thrice before, from the different stages of her

bridal tour, always in good spirits, and professing to be very happy. I

wondered every time that she had not forgotten me in the midst of so much

gaiety and variety of scene. At length however, there was a pause; and it

seemed she had forgotten me, for upwards of seven months passed away, and

no letter. Of course, I did not break my heart about that, though I often

wondered how she was getting on; and when this last epistle so unexpectedly

arrived, I was glad enough to receive it.

It was dated from Ashby Park where she was come to settle down at last,

having previously divided her time between the Continent and the

Metropolis. She made many apologies for having neglected me so long,

assured me she had not forgotten me, and had often intended to write, etc.,

etc., but always been prevented by something. She acknowledged that she had

been leading a very dissipated life, and I should think her very wicked and

very thoughtless, but notwithstanding that, she thought a great deal, and

among other things, that she should vastly like to see me.

"We have been several days here already," wrote she. "We have not a single

friend with us, and are likely to be very dull. You know I never had a

fancy for living with my husband like two turtles in a nest, were he the

most delightful creature that ever wore a coat, so do take pity upon me and

come. I suppose your Midsummer holidays commence in June, the same as other

people's, therefore you cannot plead want of time, and you must and shall

come - in fact I shall die if you don't. I want you to visit me as a

friend, and stay a long time. There is nobody with me, as I told you

before, but Sir Thomas and old Lady Ashby; but you needn't mind them -

they'll trouble us but little with their company; and you shall have a room

to yourself, whenever you like to retire to it, and plenty of books to read

when my company is not sufficiently amusing. I forget whether you like

babies; if you do, you may have the pleasure of seeing mine - the most

charming child in the world, no doubt; and all the more so, that I am not

troubled with nursing it - I was determined I wouldn't be bothered with

that. Unfortunately it is a girl, and Sir Thomas has never forgiven me; but

however, if you will only come, I promise you shall be its governess as

soon as it can speak, and you shall bring it up in the way it should go,

and make a better woman of it than its mamma; - and you shall see my

poodle, too, a splendid little charmer imported from Paris, and two fine

Italian paintings of great value - I forget the artist - doubtless you will

be able to discover prodigious beauties in them, which you must point out

to me, as I only admire by hearsay, - and many elegant curiosities besides,

which I purchased at Rome and elsewhere; - and, finally, you shall see my

new home - the splendid house and grounds I used to covet so greatly. Alas!

how far the promise of anticipation exceeds the pleasure of possession! -

There's a fine sentiment! I assure you I am become quite a grave old

matron: - pray come, if it be only to witness the wonderful change. Write

by return of post, and tell me when your vacation commences, and say that

you will come the day after, and stay till the day before it closes - in

mercy to

Yours affectionately

Rosalie Ashby."

I showed this strange epistle to my mother, and consulted her on what I

ought to do. She advised me to go; and I went - willing enough to see Lady

Ashby, and her baby, too, and to do anything I could to benefit her by

consolation or advice, for I imagined she must be unhappy, or she would not

have applied to me thus - but feeling, as may readily be conceived, that,

in accepting the invitation, I made a great sacrifice for her, and did

violence to my feelings in many ways, instead of being delighted with the

honourable distinction of being entreated by the baronet's lady to visit

her as a friend.

However, I determined my visit should be only for a few days at most; and I

will not deny that I derived some consolation from the idea that as Ashby

Park was not very far from Horton, I might possibly see Mr Weston, or, at

least, hear something about him.

Chapter 22

The Visit

Ashby Park was certainly a very delightful residence. The mansion was

stately without, commodious and elegant within, the park was spacious and

beautiful, chiefly on account of its magnificent old trees, its stately

herds of deer, its broad sheet of water, and the ancient woods that

stretched beyond it, for there was no broken ground to give variety to the

landscape, and but very little of that undulating swell which adds so

greatly to the charm of park scenery.

And so this was the place Rosalie Murray had so longed to call her own,

that she must have a share of it on whatever terms it might be offered,

whatever price was to be paid for the tide of mistress, and whoever was to

be her partner in the honour and bliss of such a possession! Well! - I am

not disposed to censure her now.

She received me very kindly; and, though I was a poor clergyman's daughter,

a governess, and a school-mistress, she welcomed me with unaffected

pleasure to her home; and - what surprised me rather - took some pains to

make my visit agreeable. I could see, it is true, that she expected me to

be greatly struck with the magnificence that surrounded her; and, I

confess, I was rather annoyed at her evident efforts to reassure me, and

prevent me from being overwhelmed by so much grandeur; too much awed at the

idea of encountering her husband and mother-in-law, or too much ashamed of

my own humble appearance. I was not ashamed of it at all; for, though

plain, I had taken good care not to be shabby or mean, and should have been

pretty considerably at my ease, if my condescending hostess had not taken

such manifest pains to make me so; and, as for the magnificence that

surrounded her, nothing that met my eyes struck me, or affected me half so

much as her own altered appearance.

Whether from the influence of fashionable dissipation, or some other evil,

a space of little more than twelve months, had had the effect that might be

expected from as many years, in reducing the plumpness of her form, the

freshness of her complexion, the vivacity of her movements, and the

exuberance of her spirits.

I wished to know if she was unhappy; but I felt it was not my province to

inquire; I might endeavour to win her confidence; but, if she chose to

conceal her matrimonial cares from me, I would trouble her with no

obtrusive questions.

I, therefore, at first, confined myself to a few general inquiries about

her health and welfare, and a few commendations on the beauty of the park,

and of the little girl that should have been a boy, a small delicate infant

of seven or eight weeks old, whom its mother seemed to regard with no

remarkable degree of interest or affection, though full as much as I

expected her to show.

Shortly after my arrival, she commissioned her maid to conduct me to my

room and see that I had everything I wanted: it was a small, unpretending,

but sufficiently comfortable apartment.

When I descended thence - having divested myself of all travelling

encumbrances, and arranged my toilet with due consideration for the

feelings of my lady hostess - she conducted me herself to the room I was to

occupy when I chose to be alone, or when she was engaged with visitors, or

obliged to be with her mother-in-law, or otherwise prevented, as she said,

from enjoying the pleasure of my society. It was a quiet, tidy little

sitting-room, and I was not sorry to be provided with such a harbour of

refuge.

"And sometime," said she, "I will show you the library; I never examined

its shelves, but, I daresay, it is full of wise books, and you may go and

burrow among them whenever you please; and now you shall have some tea - it

will soon be dinner time, but I thought, as you were accustomed to dine at

one, you would perhaps like better to have a cup of tea about this time,

and to dine when we lunch; and then, you know, you can have your tea in

this room, and that will save you from having to dine with Lady Ashby and

Sir Thomas, which would be rather awkward - at least, not awkward, but

rather - a - you know what I mean. I thought you mightn't like it so well -

especially as we may have other ladies and gentlemen to dine with us

occasionally."

"Certainly," said I, "I would much rather have it as you say; and, if you

have no objection, I should prefer having all my meals in this room."

"Why so?"

"Because, I imagine, it would be more agreeable to Lady Ashby and Sir

Thomas."

"Nothing of the kind!"

"At any rate it would be more agreeable to me."

She made some faint objections, but soon conceded; and I could see that the

proposal was a considerable relief to her.

"Now, come into the drawing-room," said she. "There's the dressing-bell;

but I won't go yet; it's no use dressing when there's no one to see you;

and I want to have a little discourse."

The drawing-room was certainly an imposing apartment, and very elegantly

furnished; but I saw its young mistress glance towards me as we entered, as

if to notice how I was impressed by the spectacle, and, accordingly, I

determined to preserve an aspect of stony indifference, as if I saw nothing

at all remarkable; but this was only for a moment: immediately conscience

whispered, "Why should I disappoint her to save my pride? No - rather let

me sacrifice my pride to give her a little innocent gratification." And I

honestly looked round, and told her it was a noble room, and very

tastefully furnished. She said little, but I saw she was pleased.

She showed me her fat French poodle that lay curled up on a silk cushion,

and the two fine Italian paintings, which, however, she would not give me

time to examine, but, saying I must look at them some other day, insisted

upon my admiring the little jewelled watch she had brought from Geneva, and

then took me round the room to point out sundry other articles of vertu she

had imported from Italy, an elegant little timepiece, and several busts,

small, graceful figures, and vases, all beautifully carved in white marble.

She spoke of these with animation, and heard my admiring comments with a

smile of pleasure, that soon, however, vanished, and was followed by a

melancholy sigh, as if in consideration of the insufficiency of all such

baubles to the happiness of the human heart, and their woeful inability to

supply its insatiate demands.

Then, stretching herself upon a couch, she motioned me to a capacious easy

chair that stood opposite - not before the fire, but before a wide open

window; for it was summer, be it remembered; a sweet, warm evening in the

latter half of June; and I sat for a moment in silence, enjoying the still,

pure air, and the delightful prospect of the park that lay before me, rich

in verdure and foliage, and basking in yellow sunshine relieved by the long

shadows of declining day. But I must take advantage of this pause: I had

inquiries to make, and, like the substance of a lady's postscript, the most

important must come last.

So I began with asking after Mr and Mrs Murray, and Miss Matilda and the

young gentlemen.

I was told that papa had got the gout which made him very ferocious, and

that he would not give up his choice wines, and his substantial dinners and

suppers, and had quarrelled with his physician, because the latter had

dared to say, that no medicine could cure him while he lived so freely;

that mamma and the rest were well: Matilda was still wild and reckless, but

she had got a fashionable governess, and was considerably improved in her

manners, and soon to be introduced to the world; and that John and Charles

(now at home for the holidays), were, by all accounts, "fine, bold, unruly,

mischievous boys."

"And how are the other people getting on?" said I - "the Greens, for

instance?"

"Ah! Mr Green is heartbroken, you know," replied she, with a languid smile;

"he hasn't got over his disappointment yet, and never will, I suppose. He's

doomed to be an old bachelor; and his sisters are doing their best to get

married."

"And the Melthams?"

"Oh, they're jogging on as usual, I suppose; but I know very little about

any of them - except Harry," said she, blushing slightly, and smiling

again; "I saw a great deal of him while we were in London; for, as soon as

he heard we were there, he came up under pretence of visiting his brother,

and either followed me, like a shadow, wherever I went, or met me, like a

reflection, at every turn. But you needn't look so shocked, Miss Grey; I

was very discreet, I assure you; but, you know, one can't help being

admired. Poor fellow! He was not my only worshipper, but he was certainly

the most conspicuous, and, I think, the most devoted among them all. And

that detestable - ahem - and Sir Thomas chose to take offence at him - or

my profuse expenditure, or something - I don't exactly know what - and

hurried me down to the country, at a moment's notice, where I'm to play the

hermit, I suppose, for life."

And she bit her lip, and frowned vindictively upon the fair domain she had

once so coveted to call her own.

"And Mr Hatfield," said I, "what is become of him?"

Again, she brightened up, and answered gaily, -

"Oh! he made up to an elderly spinster, and married her, not long since,

weighing her heavy purse against her faded charms, and expecting to find

that solace in gold which was denied him in love, ha, ha!"

"Well, and I think that's all - except Mr Weston: what is he doing?"

"I don't know I'm sure. He's gone from Horton."

"How long since; and where is he gone to?"

"I know nothing about him," replied she, yawning - "except that he went

about a month ago - I never asked where" (I would have asked whether it was

to a living or merely another curacy, but thought it better not), "and the

people made a great rout about his leaving," continued she, "much to Mr

Hatfield's displeasure, for Hatfield didn't like him, because he had too

much influence with the common people, and because he was not sufficiently

tractable and submissive to him - and for some other unpardonable sins, I

don't know what. But now I positively must go and dress; the second bell

will ring directly, and if I come to dinner in this guise, I shall never

hear the end of it from Lady Ashby. It's a strange thing one can't be

mistress in one's own house! Just ring the bell, and I'll send for my maid,

and tell them to get you some tea. Only think of that intolerable woman -"

"Who - your maid?"

"No, my mother-in-law - and my unfortunate mistake! Instead of letting her

take herself off to some other house, as she offered to do when I married,

I was fool enough to ask her to live here still, and direct the affairs of

the house for me; because, in the first place, I hoped we should spend the

greater part of the year in Town, and in the second place, being so young

and inexperienced, I was frightened at the idea of having a houseful of

servants to manage, and dinners to order, and parties to entertain, and all

the rest of it, and I thought she might assist me with her experience;

never dreaming that she would prove a usurper, a tyrant, an incubus, a spy,

and everything else that's detestable. I wish she was dead!"

She then turned to give her orders to the footman, who had been standing

bolt upright within the door for the last half minute, and had heard the

latter part of her animadversions, and, of course, made his own reflections

upon them, notwithstanding the inflexible, wooden countenance he thought

proper to preserve in the drawing-room.

On my remarking afterwards that he must have heard her, she replied,

"Oh, no matter! I never care about the footmen; they're mere automatons:

it's nothing to them what their superiors say or do; they won't dare to

repeat it; and as to what they think - if they presume to think at all - of

course, nobody cares for that. It would be a pretty thing indeed, if we

were to be tongue-tied by our servants!"

So saying, she ran off to make her hasty toilet, leaving me to pilot my way

back to my sitting-room, where, in due time, I was served with a cup of

tea; and, after that, I sat musing on Lady Ashby's past and present

condition; and on what little information I had obtained respecting Mr

Weston, and the small chance there was of ever seeing or hearing anything

more of him throughout my quiet, drab-colour life, which, henceforth,

seemed to offer no alternative between positive rainy days, and days of

dull, grey clouds without downfall.

At length, however, I began to weary of my thoughts, and to wish I knew

where to find the library my hostess had spoken of, and to wonder whether I

was to remain there, doing nothing till bedtime.

As I was not rich enough to possess a watch, I could not tell how time was

passing, except by observing the slowly lengthening shadows from the

window, which presented a side view, including a corner of the park, a

clump of trees, whose topmost branches had been colonised by an innumerable

company of noisy rooks, and a high wall with a massive wooden gate, no

doubt communicating with the stable yard, as a broad carriage-road swept up

to it from the park. The shadow of this wall soon took possession of the

whole of the ground as far as I could see, forcing the golden sunlight to

retreat inch by inch, and at last take refuge in the very tops of the

trees. At last, even they were left in shadow - the shadow of the distant

hills, or of the earth itself; and, in sympathy for the busy citizens of

the rookery, I regretted to see their habitation, so lately bathed in

glorious light, reduced to the sombre, work-a-day hue of the lower world,

or of my own world within. For a moment, such birds as soared above the

rest might still receive the lustre on their wings, which imparted to their

sable plumage the hue and brilliance of deep red gold; at last, that too

departed. Twilight came stealing on: the rooks became more quiet; I became

more weary, and wished I were going home tomorrow.

At length it grew dark; and I was thinking of ringing for a candle, and

betaking myself to bed, when my hostess appeared, with many apologies for

having neglected me so long, and laying all the blame upon that "nasty old

woman," as she called her mother-in-law. "If I didn't sit with her in the

drawing-room while Sir Thomas is taking his wine," said she, "she would

never forgive me; and then, if I leave the room the instant he comes - as I

have done once or twice - it is an unpardonable offence against her dear

Thomas. She never showed such disrespect to her husband; and as for

affection, wives never think of that nowadays, she supposes; but things

were different in her time - as if there was any good to be done by staying

in the room, when he does nothing but grumble and scold when he's in a bad

humour, talk disgusting nonsense when he's in a good one, and go to sleep

on the sofa when he's too stupid for either, which is most frequently the

case now, when he has nothing to do but to sot over his wine."

"But could you not try to occupy his mind with something better; and engage

him to give up such habits? I'm sure you have powers of persuasion, and

qualifications for amusing a gentleman, which many ladies would be glad to

possess."

"And so you think I would lay myself out for his amusement! No; that's not

my idea of a wife. It's the husband's part to please the wife, not hers to

please him; and if he isn't satisfied with her as she is - and thankful to

possess her, too - he isn't worthy of her, that's all. And as for

persuasion, I assure you I shan't trouble myself with that: I've enough to

do to bear with him as he is, without attempting to work a reform. But, I'm

sorry I left you so long alone, Miss Grey. How have you passed the time?"

"Chiefly in watching the rooks."

"Mercy, how dull you must have been! I really must show you the library;

and you must ring for everything you want, just as you would in an inn, and

make yourself comfortable. I have selfish reasons for wishing to make you

happy, because I want you to stay with me, and not fulfil your horrid

threat of running away in a day or two."

"Well, don't let me keep you out of the drawing-room any longer tonight,

for at present I am tired, and wish to go to bed."

Chapter 23

The Park

I came down a little before eight, next morning, as I knew by the striking

of a distant clock. There was no appearance of breakfast. I waited above an

hour before it came, still vainly longing for access to the library; and,

after that lonely repast was concluded, I waited again about an hour and a

half in great suspense and discomfort, uncertain what to do.

At length, Lady Ashby came to bid me good morning. She informed me she had

only just breakfasted, and now wanted me to take an early walk with her in

the park. She asked how long I had been up, and, on receiving my answer,

expressed the deepest regret, and again promised to show me the library.

I suggested she had better do so at once, and then there would be no

further trouble either with remembering or forgetting. She complied, on

condition that I would not think of reading, or bothering with the books

now, for she wanted to show me the gardens, and take a walk in the park

with me, before it became too hot for enjoyment, which, indeed, was nearly

the case already. Of course, I readily assented; and we took our walk

accordingly.

As we were strolling in the park, talking of what my companion had seen and

heard during her travelling experience, a gentleman on horseback rode up

and passed us. As he turned, in passing, and stared me full in the face, I

had a good opportunity of seeing what he was like. He was tall, thin, and

wasted, with a slight stoop in the shoulders, a pale face, but somewhat

blotchy, and disagreeably red about the eyelids, plain features, and a

general appearance of languor and flatness, relieved by a sinister

expression about the mouth and the dull, soulless eyes. "I detest that

man!" whispered Lady Ashby with bitter emphasis, as he slowly trotted by.

"Who is it?" I asked, unwilling to suppose that she should so speak of her

husband.

"Sir Thomas Ashby," she replied with dreary composure.

"And do you detest him, Miss Murray?" said I, for I was too much shocked to

remember her name at the moment.

"Yes, I do, Miss Grey; and despise him, too! and if you knew him, you would

not blame me."

"But you knew what he was before you married him."

"No; I only thought so; - I did not half know him really. I know you warned

me against it; and I wish I had listened to you; but it's too late to

regret that now; and besides, mamma ought to have known better than either

of us; and she never said anything against it - quite the contrary. And

then I thought he adored me, and would let me have my own way: he did

pretend to do so at first; but now he does not care a bit about me. But I

should not care for that; he might do as he pleased, if I might only be

free to amuse myself and to stay in London, or have a few friends down here

- but he will do as he pleases, and I must be a prisoner and a slave. The

moment he saw I could enjoy myself without him, and that others knew my

value better than himself, the selfish wretch began to accuse me of

coquetry and extravagance, and to abuse Harry Meltham whose shoes he was

not worthy to clean; - and then, he must needs have me down in the country

to lead the life of a nun, lest I should dishonour him or bring him to

ruin, as if he had not been ten times worse every way, with his betting-

book, and his gaming-table, and his opera girls, and his Lady This and Mrs

That - yes and his bottles of wine, and glasses of brandy and water, too -

filthy beast! Oh, I would give ten thousand worlds to be Miss Murray again!

It is too bad to feel life, health, and beauty wasting away, unfelt and

unenjoyed, for such a brute as that!" exclaimed she, fairly bursting into

tears in the bitterness of her vexation.

Of course, I pitied her exceedingly, as well for her false idea of

happiness and disregard of duty, as for the wretched partner with whom her

fate was linked.

I said what I could to comfort her, and offered such counsels as I thought

she most required, advising her, first, by gentle reasoning, by kindness,

example, and persuasion to try to ameliorate her husband; and then, when

she had done all she could, if she still found him incorrigible, to

endeavour to abstract herself from him - to wrap herself up in her own

integrity, and trouble herself as little about him as possible. I exhorted

her to seek consolation in doing her duty to God and man, to put her trust

in Heaven, and solace herself with the care and nurture of her little

daughter, assuring her she would be amply rewarded by witnessing its

progress in strength and wisdom, and receiving its genuine affection.

"But I can't devote myself entirely to a child," said she, "it may die -

which is not at all improbable."

"But with care, many a delicate infant has become a strong man or woman."

"But it may grow so intolerably like its father that I shall hate it."

"That is not likely; it is a little girl, and strongly resembles its

mother."

"No matter; I should like it better if it were a boy - only that its father

will leave it no inheritance that he can possibly squander away. What

pleasure can I have in seeing a girl grow up to eclipse me, and enjoy those

pleasures that I am for ever debarred from? But supposing I could be so

generous as to take delight in this, still it is only a child; and I can't

centre all my hopes in a child; that is only one degree better than

devoting one's self to a dog. And as for all the wisdom and goodness you

have been trying to instil into me - that is all very right and proper, I

daresay; and if I were some twenty years older, I might fructify by it; but

people must enjoy themselves when they're young; and if others won't let

them - why, they must hate them for it!"

"The best way to enjoy yourself is to do what is right, and hate nobody.

The end of Religion is not to teach us how to die, but how to live; and the

earlier you become wise and good, the more of happiness you secure. And now

Lady Ashby, I have one more piece of advice to offer you, which is that you

will not make an enemy of your mother-in-law. Don't get into the way of

holding her at arm's length and regarding her with jealous distrust. I

never saw her, but I have heard good as well as evil respecting her, and I

imagine that, though cold and haughty in her general demeanour, and even

exacting in her requirements, she has strong affections for those who can

reach them; and, though so blindly attached to her son, she is not without

good principles, or incapable of hearing reason; and if you would but

conciliate her a little, and adopt a friendly, open manner - and even

confide your grievances to her - real grievances, such as you have a right

to complain of - it is my firm belief that she would, in time, become your

faithful friend, and a comfort and support to you, instead of the incubus

you describe her."

But I fear my advice had little effect upon the unfortunate young lady;

and, finding I could render myself so little serviceable, my residence at

Ashby Park became doubly painful. But still, I must stay out that day and

the following one, as I had promised to do so; though, resisting all

intreaties and inducements to prolong my visit further, I insisted upon

departing the next morning, affirming that my mother would be lonely

without me, and that she impatiently expected my return.

Nevertheless, it was with a heavy heart that I bid adieu to poor Lady Ashby

and left her in her princely home. It was no slight additional proof of her

unhappiness, that she should so cling to the consolation of my presence,

and earnestly desire the company of one whose general tastes and ideas were

so little congenial to her own, whom she had completely forgotten in her

hours of prosperity, and whose presence would be rather a nuisance than a

pleasure, if she could but have half her heart's desire.

Chapter 24

The Sands

Our school was not situated in the heart of the town: on entering A-- from

the north-west there is a row of respectable looking houses, on each side

of the broad, white road, with narrow slips of garden ground before them,

Venetian blinds to the windows, and a flight of steps leading to each trim,

brass-handled door. In one of the largest of these habitations dwelt my

mother and I, with such young ladies as our friends and the public chose to

commit to our charge. Consequently, we were a considerable distance from

the sea, and divided from it by a labyrinth of streets and houses. But the

sea was my delight; and I would often gladly pierce the town to obtain the

pleasure of a walk beside it, whether with the pupils, or alone or with my

mother during the vacations. It was delightful to me at all times and

seasons, but especially in the wild 'commotion of a rough sea-breeze, and

in the brilliant freshness of a summer morning.

I awoke early on the third morning after my return from Ashby Park - the

sun was shining through the blind, and I thought how pleasant it would be

to pass through the quiet town and take a solitary ramble on the sands

while half the world was in bed. I was not long in forming the resolution,

nor slow to act upon it. Of course I would not disturb my mother, so I

stole noiselessly down stairs, and quietly unfastened the door. I was

dressed, down, and out when the church clock struck a quarter to six.

There was a feeling of freshness and vigour in the very streets; and when I

got free of the town, when my foot was on the sands and my face towards the

broad, bright bay - no language can describe the effect of the deep, clear

azure of the sky and ocean, the bright morning sunshine on the semicircular

barrier of craggy cliffs surmounted by green swelling hills, and on the

smooth, wide sands, and the low rocks out at sea, looking, with their

clothing of weeds and moss, like little grass-grown islands - and above

all, on the brilliant, sparkling waves. And then, the unspeakable purity

and freshness of the air! there was just enough heat to enhance the value

of the breeze, and just enough wind to keep the whole sea in motion, to

make the waves come bounding to the shore, foaming and sparkling, as if

wild with glee. Nothing else was stirring - no living creature was visible

besides myself. My footsteps were the first to press the firm, unbroken

sands; - nothing before had trampled them since last night's flowing tide

had obliterated the deepest marks of yesterday, and left it fair and even,

except where the subsiding water had left behind it the traces of dimpled

pools, and little running streams.

Refreshed, delighted, invigorated, I walked along, forgetting all my cares,

feeling as if I had wings to my feet, and could go at least forty miles

without fatigue, and experiencing a sense of exhilaration to which I had

been an entire stranger since the days of early youth. About half-past six,

however, the grooms began to come down to air their master's horses - first

one, and then another, till there were some dozen horses and five or six

riders; but that need not trouble me, for they would not come as far as the

low rocks which I was now approaching. When I had reached these, and walked

over the moist, slippery seaweed (at the risk of floundering into one of

the numerous pools of clear, salt water that lay between them), to a little

mossy promontory with the sea splashing round it, I looked back again to

see who next was stirring. Still, there were only the early grooms with

their horses, and one gentleman with a little dark speck of a dog running

before him, and one water-cart coming out of the town to get water for the

baths. In another minute or two, the distant bathing machines would begin

to move: and then the elderly gentlemen of regular habits, and sober Quaker

ladies would be coming to take their salutary morning walks. But however

interesting such a scene might be, I could not wait to witness it, for the

sun and the sea so dazzled my eyes in that direction, that I could but

afford one glance; and then I turned again to delight myself with the sight

and the sound of the sea dashing against my promontory - with no prodigious

force, for the swell was broken by the tangled seaweed and the unseen rocks

beneath; otherwise I should soon have been deluged with spray.

But the tide was coming in; the water was rising; the gulfs and lakes were

filling; the straits were widening: it was time to seek some safer footing;

so I walked, skipped, and stumbled back to the smooth, wide sands, and

resolved to proceed to a certain bold projection in the cliffs, and then

return.

Presently, I heard a snuffling sound behind me, and then a dog came

frisking and wriggling to my feet. It was my own Snap - the little dark,

wire-haired terrier! When I spoke his name, he leapt up in my face, and

yelled for joy.

Almost as much delighted as himself, I caught the little creature in my

arms, and kissed him repeatedly. But how came he to be there? He could not

have dropped from the sky, or come all that way alone: it must be either

his master, the rat-catcher, or somebody else that had brought him; so,

repressing my extravagant caresses, and endeavouring to repress his

likewise, I looked round, and beheld - Mr Weston!

"Your dog remembers you well, Miss Grey," said he, warmly grasping the hand

I offered him without clearly knowing what I was about.

"You rise early."

"Not often so early as this," I replied, with amazing composure,

considering all the circumstances of the case.

"How far do you purpose to extend your walk?"

"I was thinking of returning - it must be almost time, I think."

He consulted his watch - a gold one now - and told me it was only five

minutes past seven.

"But doubtless, you have had a long enough walk," said he, turning towards

the town, to which I now proceeded leisurely to retrace my steps; and he

walked beside me. "In what part of the town do you live?" asked he. "I

never could discover."

Never could discover? Had he endeavoured to do so then? I told him the

place of our abode.

He asked how we prospered in our affairs; I told him we were doing very

well - that we had had a considerable addition to our pupils after the

Christmas vacation, and expected a still further increase at the close of

this.

"You must be an accomplished instructor," he observed.

"No, it is my mother," I replied, "she manages things so well, and is so

active, and clever, and kind."

"I should like to know your mother. Will you introduce me to her sometime

if I call?"

"Yes, willingly."

"And will you allow me the privilege of an old friend, of looking in upon

you now and then?"

"Yes, if - I suppose so."

This was a very foolish answer, but the truth was, I considered that I had

no right to invite anyone to my mother's house without her knowledge; and

if I had said, ayes, if my mother does not object," it would appear as if,

by his question, I understood more than was expressed, so, supposing she

would not, I added, "I suppose so," but of course I should have said

something more sensible and more polite if I had had my wits about me. We

continued our walk for a minute in silence, which, however, was shortly

relieved (no small relief to me), by Mr Weston commenting upon the

brightness of the morning, and the beauty of the bay, and then, upon the

advantages A-- possessed over many other. fashionable places of resort.

"You don't ask what brings me to A--," said he. "You can't suppose I'm rich

enough to come for my own pleasure."

"I heard you had left Horton."

"You didn't hear then, that I had got the living of F--?"

F-- was a village about two miles distant from A--.

"No," said I; awe live so completely out of the world, even here, that news

seldom reaches me from any quarter, except through the medium of the --

Gazette. But I hope you like your new parish; and that I may congratulate

you on the acquisition?"

"I expect to like my parish better a year or two hence, when I have worked

certain reforms I have set my heart upon - or, at least, progressed some

steps towards such an achievement; but you may congratulate me now, for I

find it very agreeable to have a parish all to myself with nobody to

interfere with me - to thwart my plans or cripple my exertions; and

besides, I have a respectable house in a rather pleasant neighbourhood, and

three hundred pounds a year; and, in fact, I have nothing but solitude to

complain of, and nothing but a companion to wish for."

He looked at me as he concluded; and the flash of his dark eyes seemed to

set my face on fire, greatly to my own disconcertion, for to evince

confusion at such a juncture was intolerable.

I made an effort, therefore, to remedy the evil, and disclaim all personal

application of the remark, by a hasty, ill-expressed reply to the effect

that, if he waited till he was well known in the neighbourhood, he might

have numerous opportunities for supplying his want among the residents of

F--, and its vicinity, or the visitors of A--, if he required so ample a

choice; not considering the compliment implied by such an assertion, till

his answer made me aware of it.

"I am not so presumptuous as to believe that," said he, "though you tell it

me; but if it were so, I am rather particular in my notions of a companion

for life, and perhaps I might not find one to suit me among the ladies you

mention."

"If you require perfection, you never will."

"I do not - I have no right to, as being so far from perfect myself."

Here the conversation was interrupted by a water-cart lumbering past us,

for we were now come to the busy part of the sands; and, for the next eight

or ten minutes, between carts and horses, and asses, and men, there was

little room for social intercourse, till we had turned our backs upon the

sea, and begun to ascend the precipitous road leading into the town. Here

my companion offered me his arm, which I accepted, though not with the

intention of using it as a support.

"You don't often come on to the sands, I think," said he, "for I have

walked there many times, both morning and evening, since I came, and never

seen you till now; and several times, in passing through the town, too, I

have looked about for your school - but I did not think of the -- Road; and

once or twice I made inquiries, but without obtaining the requisite

information."

When we had surmounted the acclivity, I was about to withdraw my arm from

his, but by a slight tightening of the elbow was tacitly informed that such

was not his will, and accordingly desisted.

Discoursing on different subjects, we entered the town, and passed through

several streets; I saw that he was going out of his way to accompany me,

notwithstanding the long walk that was yet before him; and, fearing that he

might be inconveniencing himself from motives of politeness, I observed, -

"I fear I am taking you out of your way, Mr Weston - I believe the road to

F-- lies quite in another direction."

"I'll leave you at the end of the next street," said he.

"And when will you come to see mamma?"

"Tomorrow - God willing."

The end of the next street was nearly the conclusion of my journey. He

stopped there, however, bid me good morning, and called Snap, who seemed a

little doubtful whether to follow his old mistress or his new master, but

trotted away upon being summoned by the latter.

"I won't offer to restore him to you, Miss Grey," said Mr Weston, smiling,

"because I like him."

"Oh, I don't want him," replied I; "now that he has a good master, I'm

quite satisfied."

"You take it for granted that I am a good one then?"

The man and the dog departed, and I returned home, full of gratitude to

Heaven for so much bliss, and praying that my hopes might not again be

crushed.

Chapter 25

Conclusion

"Well, Agnes, you must not take such long walks again before breakfast,"

said my mother, observing that I drank an extra cup of coffee and ate

nothing - pleading the heat of the weather, and the fatigue of my long walk

as an excuse.

I certainly did feel feverish, and tired, too.

"You always do things by extremes: now, if you had taken a short walk every

morning, and would continue to do so, it would do you good."

"Well, mamma, I will."

"But this is worse than lying in bed, or bending over your books; you have

quite put yourself into a fever."

"I won't do it again," said I.

I was racking my brains with thinking how to tell her about Mr Weston, for

she must know he was coming tomorrow. However, I waited till the breakfast

things were removed, and I was more calm and cool; and then, having sat

down to my drawing, I began, -

"I met an old friend on the sands today, mamma."

"An old friend! Who could it be?"

"Two old friends indeed. One was a dog," and then I reminded her of Snap,

whose history I had recounted before, and related the incident of his

sudden appearance and remarkable recognition, "and the other," continued I,

"was Mr Weston, the Curate of Horton."

"Mr Weston! I never heard of him before."

"Yes, you have: I've mentioned him several times, I believe, but you don't

remember."

"I've heard you speak of Mr Hatfield."

"Mr Hatfield was the rector, and Mr Weston the curate; I used to mention

him sometimes in contradistinction to Mr Hatfield, as being a more

efficient clergyman. However, he was on the sands this morning with the dog

- he had bought it, I suppose, from the rat-catcher; and he knew me as well

as it did - probably through its means; and I had a little conversation

with him, in the course of which, as he asked about our school, I was led

to say something about you and your good management; and he said he should

like to know you, and asked if I would introduce him to you, if he should

take the liberty of calling tomorrow, so I said I would. Was I right?"

"Of course. What kind of a man is he?"

"A very respectable man, I think; but you will see him tomorrow. He is the

new vicar of F--, and as he has only been there a few weeks, I suppose he

has made no friends yet, and wants a little society."

The morrow came. What a fever of anxiety and expectation I was in from

breakfast till noon - at which time he made his appearance.

Having introduced him to my mother, I took my work to the window, and sat

down to await the result of the interview.

They got on extremely well together, greatly to my satisfaction, for I had

felt very anxious about what my mother would think of him. He did not stay

long that time; but when he rose to take leave, she said she should be

happy to see him, whenever he might find it convenient to call again; and

when he was gone, I was gratified by hearing her say, -

"Well! I think he's a very sensible man. But why did you sit back there,

Agnes," she added, "and talk so little?"

"Because you talked so well, mamma, I thought you required no assistance

from me; and, besides, he was your visitor, not mine."

After that, he often called upon us - several times in the course of a

week. He generally addressed most of his conversation to my mother; and no

wonder, for she could converse. I almost envied the unfettered, vigorous

fluency of her discourse, and the strong sense evinced by everything she

said - and yet, I did not, for though I occasionally regretted my own

deficiencies for his sake, it gave me very great pleasure to sit and hear

the two beings I loved and honoured above every one else in the world,

discoursing together so amicably, so wisely, and so well.

I was not always silent, however; nor was I at all neglected. I was quite

as much noticed as I would wish to be: there was no lack of kind words and

kinder looks, no end of delicate attentions, too fine and subtle to be

grasped by words, and, therefore, indescribable - but deeply felt at heart.

Ceremony was quickly dropped between us, Mr Weston came as an expected

guest, welcome at all times, and never deranging the economy of our

household affairs. He even called me "Agnes;" the name had been timidly

spoken at first, but, finding it gave no offence in any quarter, he seemed

greatly to prefer that appellation to "Miss Grey," and so did I.

How tedious and gloomy were those days in which he did not come! and yet

not miserable, for I had still the remembrance of the last visit and the

hope of the next to cheer me. But when two or three days passed without my

seeing him, I certainly felt very anxious - absurdly, unreasonably so, for,

of course, he had his own business and the affairs of his parish to attend

to: and I dreaded the close of the holidays, when my business also would

begin, and I should be sometimes unable to see him, and sometimes - when my

mother was in the schoolroom - obliged to be with him alone, a position I

did not at all desire - in the house, though to meet him out of doors, and

walk beside him had proved by no means disagreeable.

One evening, however, in the last week of the vacation, he arrived -

unexpectedly, for a heavy and protracted thunder shower during the

afternoon had almost destroyed my hopes of seeing him that day; but now the

storm was over, and the sun was shining brightly.

"A beautiful evening, Mrs Grey!" said he, as he entered. "Agnes, I want you

to take a walk with me to --" (he named a certain part of the coast - a

bold hill on the land side, and towards the sea, a steep precipice, from

the summit of which a glorious view is to be had.) "The rain has laid the

dust, and cooled and cleared the air, and the prospect will be magnificent.

Will you come?"

"Can I go, mamma?"

"Yes, to be sure."

I went to get ready, and was down again in a few minutes, though, of

course, I took a little more pains with my attire than if I had merely been

going out on some shopping expedition alone.

The thunder-shower had certainly had a most beneficial effect upon the

weather, and the evening was most delightful. Mr Weston would have me to

take his arm: he said little during our passage through the crowded

streets, but walked very fast, and appeared grave and abstracted.

I wondered what was the matter, and felt an indefinite dread that something

unpleasant was on his mind; and vague surmises, concerning what it might

be, troubled me not a little, and made me grave and silent enough. But

these fantasies vanished upon reaching the quiet outskirts of the town, for

as soon as we came within sight of the venerable old church, and the --

hill, with the deep blue sea beyond it, I found my companion was cheerful

enough.

"I'm afraid I've been walking too fast for you, Agnes," said he; "in my

impatience to be rid of the town, I forgot to consult your convenience; but

now, we'll walk as slowly as you please: I see, by those light clouds in

the west, there will be a brilliant sunset, and we shall be in time to

witness its effect upon the sea, at the most moderate rate of progression."

When we had got about half-way up the hill, we fell into silence again,

which, as usual, he was the first to break.

"My house is desolate yet, Miss Grey," he smilingly observed, "and I am

acquainted now with all the ladies in my parish, and several in this town,

too; and many others I know by sight and by report; but not one of them

will suit me for a companion. In fact, there is only one person in the

world that will; and that is yourself; and I want to know your decision?"

"Are you in earnest, Mr Weston?"

"In earnest! How could you think I should jest on such a subject?"

He laid his hand on mine that rested on his arm: he must have felt it

tremble - but it was no great matter now.

"I hope I have not been too precipitate," he said, in a serious tone. "You

must have known that it was not my way to flatter and talk soft nonsense,

or even to speak the admiration that I felt; and that a single word or

glance of mine meant more than the honeyed phrases and fervent

protestations of most other men."

I said something about not liking to leave my mother, and doing nothing

without her consent.

"I settled everything with Mrs Grey while you were putting on your bonnet,"

replied he. "She said I might have her consent if I could obtain yours; and

I asked her, in case I should be so happy, to come and live with us - for I

was sure you would like it better; but she refused, saying she could now

afford to employ an assistant, and would continue the school till she could

purchase an annuity sufficient to maintain her in comfortable lodgings; and

meantime she would spend her vacations alternately with us and your sister,

and should be quite contented if you were happy. And so now I have

overruled your objections on her account. Have you any other?"

"No - none."

"You love me then?" said he, fervently pressing my hand.

"Yes."

Here I pause. My diary, from which I compiled these pages, goes but little

farther. I could go on for years; but I will content myself with adding,

that I shall never forget that glorious summer evening, and always remember

with delight that steep, rugged hill, and the edge of the precipice where

we stood together watching the splendid sunset mirrored on the restless

world of waters at our feet - with hearts filled with gratitude to Heaven,

and happiness, and love - almost too full for speech.

A few weeks after that, when my mother had supplied herself with an

assistant, I became the wife of Edward Weston, and never have found cause

to repent it, and am certain that I never shall. We have had trials, and we

know that we must have them again; but we bear them well together, and

endeavour to fortify ourselves and each other against the final separation

- that greatest of all afflictions to the survivor; but, if we keep in mind

the glorious heaven beyond, where both may meet again, and sin and sorrow

are unknown, surely that too may be borne; and meantime, we endeavour to

live to the glory of Him who has scattered so many blessings in our path.

Edward, by his strenuous exertions, has worked surprising reforms in his

parish, and is esteemed and loved by its inhabitants - as he deserves, for

whatever his faults may be as a man (and no one is entirely without), I

defy anybody to blame him as a pastor, a husband, or a father.

Our children, Edward, Agnes, and little Mary, promise well; their

education, for the time being, is chiefly committed to me; and they shall

want no good thing that a mother's care can give.

Our modest income is amply sufficient for our requirements; and by

practising the economy we learnt in harder times, and never attempting to

imitate our richer neighbours, we manage not only to enjoy comfort and

contentment ourselves, but to have every year something to lay by for our

children, and something to give to those who need it.

And now I think I have said sufficient.

The End.