

HENRY WOOD

IT MAY BE

TRUE, VOL. 1

(OF 3)

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Mrs. Henry Wood

It May Be True, Vol. 1 (of 3)

CHAPTER I. ASHLEIGH

*Had'st thou lived in days of old,
O, what wonders had been told
Of thy lively countenance,
And thy humid eyes that dance
In the midst of their own brightness,
In the very fane of lightness;
Over which thine eyebrows, leaning,
Picture out each lovely meaning;
In a dainty bend they lie
Like the streaks across the sky,
Or the feathers from a crow,
Fallen on a bed of snow.*

Keats.

The village of Ashleigh is situated in one of the most lovely and romantic of the English counties; where mountains, valleys, woods and forest trees appear to vie with each other in stately magnificence. The village is literally embosomed amongst the trees. Lofty elms, majestic oaks, and wide-spreading beech trees grow in and around it. On one side, as far as the eye can reach, are mountains covered with verdure, with all their varied and lovely tints of green. On the other side the view is partially obstructed by a mass of forest trees growing in clumps, or forming an arch overhead, through which nevertheless may be gained a peep of the distant sea, with its blue waves, and sometimes the white sails of a ship; or, on a clear day, even the small fishermen's boats can be distinguished dotted here and there like small pearls.

Ashleigh has its country inn and ivy-mantled church, with the small house dignified as the Parsonage, close by. Other houses are sprinkled here and there down the green lanes, or along the road, shaded by its lofty elms, at the end of which, on a small eminence, stands the Manor or "Big House," as the villagers call it.

It is a large, brick building, but with nothing grand or imposing about it; in fact, but for the lovely grounds and plantations on a small scale around, the clematis, jasmine and other beautiful creepers, too numerous to mention, trained up its walls, and hanging in luxuriant festoons about the porch, and the dark ivy which almost covers the roof, the whole of one side, and part of the front itself, it would be an ugly, unwieldy-looking edifice; as it was, everything appeared bright and gladsome.

Before you reach the village, a bridge crosses a small stream which flows from the hill-side, and after winding gracefully and silently through the midst, passes by the mill and being just seen like a long thin thread of silver in the distance, is lost in the rich meadows beyond.

It was the beautiful spring time of the year:—

"The delicate-footed May,
With its slight fingers full of leaves and flowers."

The sun was just setting in all its regal splendour beneath the deep rich crimson sky, throwing long dim shadows from the stately trees which over-arched the road along which a young girl was slowly wending her way. Her figure was slight, yet her step—although she appeared very young—had none of the buoyancy or elasticity of youth. It was slow; almost mournful. But either the graceful figure or step itself had a certain dignified pride, neither stately, haughty, nor commanding; perhaps it combined all three. Her face was very lovely. Fair golden masses of hair waved under the broad straw hat she wore, while her eyes were shaded by long, dark silken lashes. She had a clear, high forehead, and a delicately fair complexion. Such was Amy Neville. She paused as she reached the bridge, and, leaning against the low masonry at the side, looked back. Nothing could be lovelier than the scene she gazed on. The sun, as we have said, was just setting, and the sea, distinctly seen from the bridge, looked like one large, broad mirror, its waves dashing here and there like glittering diamonds. Far off, touched by the last rays of the sun, the white cliffs stood out grandly, while birds chirped and warbled among the leafy branches; groups of merry, noisy children played in the village, under the shade of the elms, through which here and there long thin white wreaths of smoke curled gracefully and slowly upwards.

A cart, with its team of horses, roused Amy from her reverie, and she went into the lane where the hedge-rows were one mass of wild flowers. The delicate primrose, yellow cowslips, blue-bells, bryony, travellers' joy, and a number of others, almost rivalling in their loveliness the painted, petted ones in our own cultivated parterres, grew here in wild luxuriance, and as Amy sauntered slowly on, she filled the basket she carried on her arm with their beauty and fragrance. As she came in sight of one of the houses before mentioned, a child of about ten years of age came flying down the narrow garden-walk to meet her. Throwing her arms round her neck she upset Amy's basket of treasures, covering her dark hair with the lovely buds and blossoms. Leaving her to collect the scattered flowers, Amy passed into the cottage, her home.

"You are late, Amy," said a voice, as she entered the little sitting room, "or otherwise I have wished to see you more than usual, and am impatient. Sarah has been eagerly watching the road ever since her return from her walk. Poor child! I fear she misses her young school companions."

"I think I am rather later than usual, mamma, but old Mrs. Collins was more than usually talkative; so full of her ailments and griefs, I really was quite vexed with her at last, as if no one in the world suffers as she does. Then the evening was so lovely, I loitered at the bridge to watch the sun set; you can have no idea how beautiful it was; and the wild flowers in the lane, I could not resist gathering them," and throwing her hat carelessly on the table, Amy seated herself on a low stool at her mother's feet.

"And why have you wished to see me so much, and what makes you look so sad, dear mamma?" she asked, as Mrs. Neville laid her hand caressingly on the masses of golden hair.

Receiving no reply, she bent her eager, loving eyes on her mother's face. There was a sad, almost painful expression overshadowing the eyes, and compressing the lips, and it was some time ere Mrs. Neville met her gaze, and then tears had gathered under the long eyelashes, though none rested on her cheek.

"I have been for a drive with Mrs. Elrington, Amy."

Amy turned away her face; she dared not trust herself to meet those mournful eyes, expressing as they did all the grief she feared to encounter; so she turned away, lest she also should betray emotion which must be overcome, or be wanting in firmness to adhere to the plan she had formed, a plan she knew to be right, and therefore to be carried out; if the courage and resolution of which she had so boasted to Mrs. Elrington did not give way in the now wished for, yet half-dreaded conversation.

"And she mentioned the letter to you, mamma?" asked Amy.

"She did. And much more beside. She tried to talk me over; tried to make me give my consent to parting with you, my dear child."

"And did you consent, dear mamma? Did Mrs. Elrington tell you how much I had set my heart upon going?"

"You wish to leave me, Amy?" asked Mrs. Neville reproachfully. "Think how lonely I should be. How I should miss the thousand kind things you do for me. And when I am sad, who will cheer me as you have done? I cannot part with you, my child. It is too hard a trial. I cannot bring myself to think of it!"

"But, mamma," replied Amy, pausing to stifle her rising emotion. "You have Sarah, and she is full of fun and spirits, and always laughing and merry, or singing about the house. And then, dear old Hannah will, I know, do her best to fill my place, so that after a while you will scarcely miss my sober face, and I am sure it is what I ought to do, dear mamma, instead of remaining here in idleness, and seeing you daily deprived of all the many comforts you have been accustomed to; and think of the pleasure it would give me to know and feel I am working for you, my own dear mother;" and Amy drew her mother's arm fondly round her neck.

"Slaving for me, Amy! A governess's life is a life of slavery, though to you it may appear all sunshine. A path of thorns; no bed of roses, such as your excited fancy may have sketched out."

"No, mamma; you are wrong. I have thought over all the discomforts, mortifications, slavery, if you will, and it does not alter my opinion. I am willing to bear them all; and Mrs. Elrington, whom you love so much and think so highly of, told me she thought if you gave your consent it was the very best thing I could do. Nearly a month ago the idea entered my head; and she offered then to write to a friend who she thought might want a governess for her children, and I have pondered upon it ever since. Do consent, dear mamma, pray do. Indeed you must let me have my way in this."

"Well, Amy dear, I will say no more; I half promised Mrs. Elrington before I came in; and now I give my consent; may I never have to regret it," and Mrs. Neville turned away and bent her head over her work that her daughter might not see the tears that were fast filling her eyes.

"Oh, thank you, again and again, dear mamma," said Amy, rising and kissing her pale cheek, "I will go at once and tell Mrs. Elrington; see it is not yet dusk, and I shall be back before Hannah has prepared the tea table; or if not, quite in time to make the tea."

Mrs. Neville, Amy's mother, was dressed in deep mourning, her once dark hair, now tinged with grey, smoothly braided beneath the close-fitting widow's cap. The large, dark mournful eyes, the small delicate features, the beautifully formed mouth, all told that Amy's mother must once have been gifted with no common share of beauty. Sorrow more than time had marked its ravages on her once fair face.

She had married early in life, and much against the wishes of her friends, who did not approve of the poor but handsome Captain Neville. Some years after their marriage, by the sudden and unlooked-for death of an uncle and cousin, he came into a large property; but whether this unexpected accession of wealth, with the temptations with which he was surrounded in his new sphere, changed his heart, or whether the seeds were there before, only requiring opportunity and circumstances to call them forth into action; who can tell? Suffice it to say, he ran a sad career of dissipation; and at his death little indeed remained for his widow and children. And now the once courted, flattered, and admired Sarah Barton, bred up and nurtured in the lap of luxury, with scarcely a wish ungratified; was living in a small cottage, and her beloved child on the eve of departing from her home, to be that poor despised being—a governess. Captain Neville had been dead about four months, and his widow mourned for him as the father of her children, thought of him as he had been to her in the first early days of their married life, the fond and loving husband.

Amy did not return till late. Mrs. Elrington had promised to write to the lady that evening; and less than three days might bring the answer.

As day after day passed, poor Amy's heart beat fast; and her slight form trembled whenever she heard the little gate opened, leading into the small garden before the house; yet day after day passed

by, and still Mrs. Elrington came not; and Amy almost feared her kind old friend had forgotten her promise, or, what was still worse, her application to the lady had failed.

About ten days afterwards, one morning, as Amy sat with her mother in the little sitting room, working and listening to the exclamations of delight that fell from the lips of her little sister Sarah, who was wondering how dear dolly would look in the smart new dress Amy was making for her, the sound of approaching carriage wheels was dully heard coming down the road. Presently a pony chaise drew up before the gate. Amy could hardly draw her breath as she recognized from the window the slow and measured step, the tall and stately figure of her kind old friend; and gently pushing away her sister, who attempted to detain her, probably disappointed at the unfinished state of dolly's frock, and not daring to look at her mother, she went and met the old lady at the door.

"Dear Mrs. Elrington, I thought you would never come! Have you heard from the lady, and what does she say?"

"Yes, Amy, I have heard twice from the lady since I saw you; but I thought it best not to come until I had received a definite answer."

"It is very kind of you to come at all, dear Mrs. Elrington. But have you been successful? Is the answer favourable?"

"Yes, Amy. The lady has engaged you, but there are three little girls, not two, as I at first thought; however they are very young, and I hope your trouble will be slight."

Poor Amy! What she had so long sighed and wished for, now seemed in its stern reality the greatest calamity that could have befallen her. She thought of her mother, whose comfort, solace, and companion she was, how lonely she would be; what could or would she do without her? Must she, indeed, leave her and her home where, for the last few months she had been so happy, and live amongst strangers, who cared not for her? Must she leave her birds, her flowers, all the thousand attractions and associations of home? Yes, she must give up all, and only bear them closer in her heart, not see and feel them every day; and as these thoughts crossed her mind, tears she could not keep down welled up into her eyes; they would not be controlled, and looking up and meeting Mrs. Elrington's pitying gaze bent full on her, with a smothered sob she hid her face on her kind friend's shoulder.

Mrs. Elrington suffered her to weep on in silence, and some minutes elapsed ere Amy raised her head, and, smiling through her tears, took Mrs. Elrington's hand and led her to the door of the room she had just quitted and calling her sister, left the friends together.

An hour afterwards, when Amy entered the room, her mother was alone, Mrs. Elrington was gone.

The widow's head rested on her hand, and tears were falling fast upon a small miniature of Amy that her husband had had taken, for he had been proud of his daughter's beauty.

She heard not Amy's light step, and the daughter bent softly over her mother, and pressed her lips gently to her forehead. "My child." "My mother." And they were folded in one long, mournful embrace.

It was the first—the last time Amy ever gave way before her mother; she felt she must have strength for both; and nobly she bore up against her own sorrowful feelings, smothered every rising emotion of her heart, and prayed that her widowed mother might be comforted and supported during her absence, and her own steps guided aright in the new path which lay so gloomily before her.

Mrs. Elrington was now almost constantly with them; Amy had begged it as a favour, for she felt she could not do without the kind old lady, who was ever ready with her cheerful voice and pleasant, hopeful words to cheer her mother's drooping spirits.

How fast the days flew by! It was Amy's last evening at home; in a few short hours she would be far away from all those she loved.

A heavy cloud seemed to hang over the little party assembled round the tea table, and scarce a word was spoken.

As the tea things were being removed, Mrs. Elrington went softly out, and the widow, drawing her chair near her daughter's, clasped her hand in hers, and in a low voice spoke long and earnestly words of love and advice, such as only a mother knows how to speak.

Often in after years did Amy call to remembrance the sad, sweet smile, the gentle, earnest voice with which her mother's last words of love were uttered.

CHAPTER II. A PROUD LADYE

*Spring by Spring the branches duly
Clothe themselves in tender flower;
And for her sweet sake as truly
All their fruit and fragrance shower:
But the stream with careless laughter,
Runs in merry beauty by,
And it leaves me, yearning after
Lorn to weep, and lone to die.
In my eyes the syren river
Sings and smiles up in my face;
But for ever and for ever,
Runs from my embrace.*

Massey.

As we shall have occasion to speak of Mrs. Elrington often in these pages, some description of her is necessary, though a very slight one will suffice.

She lived in the large house called the Manor, before described, and had lived there for years in lonely solitude. She was a widow, and although the widow's cap had long ago been laid aside, yet in other respects her dress had altered little since the day she had first worn widow's weeds; it was always black; even the bonnet was of the same sombre hue, the cap, collar, and cuffs alone offering any relief to it. Her features were very handsome, and her figure tall, upright, and stately. Her hair was perfectly snow white, drawn off the high broad forehead, under a simple cap; she was greatly beloved, as also held in some slight awe; her voice was peculiarly soft, and when she spoke a pleasant smile seemed to hover about her face which never failed to gladden the hearts of those whom she addressed; but in general the expression of her features when in repose was sad.

Mrs. Elrington and Mrs. Neville were old friends, which accounted perhaps for the latter's choice of Ashleigh as a home on her husband's death. They had both been severely tried with this world's sorrows; the one years ago, the other very recently, so that Amy's earnest entreaty that Mrs. Elrington would come and cheer her mother was comparatively an easy task to one who so well knew all the doubts, fears, and desponding feelings existing in the mind and harassing the thoughts of the widow, so lately afflicted, now so sorely tried. Early in the morning of the day on which Amy was to leave her home, Mrs. Elrington was at the cottage, encouraging the daughter, and speaking hopefully to the mother; the *return*, not departure, being what she dwelt on to both, but it was a painful task after all, and everyone looked sad. As Mrs. Neville left the room to see if everything was satisfactorily prepared for the coming departure, Amy drew near her old friend, and said— "Dear Mrs. Elrington, I do hope mamma will not fret much after I am gone; she seems very downhearted now, and full of sadness. I am keeping up as well as I can, but I dare not look in her tearful face." "I make no doubt she will feel your absence much, Amy; but she knows all is for the best and as it should be, and that, in time will help to make her happy again. After all it is but a temporary parting from one she loves. How many have had to bear a more lengthened, and in this world an eternal separation! Your mother has still one child left to love. I lost my only one—all I had." "It was a hard trial to you, and still harder to bear," replied Amy, as Mrs. Elrington's voice faltered— "Very, very hard to bear: God alone knows how I did bear it. But He who dealt the blow alone gave the strength. I fear my stricken heart murmured sadly at first; it would not be comforted nor consoled. The thought of my poor boy's

broken heart was dreadful. Amy, child, do not trust too soon in the man who seeks your love; and oh! be very wary of an ambitious one. Ambition sunders, breaks many hearts, the coveting either rank or riches, whichever leads on to the one darling object of life only to be obtained by possessing either one or both of these, and thereby sacrificing your love or perhaps breaking your heart in the act of stepping over it to reach the goal he longs for; and which, when attained, must, under these circumstances bear its sting, and make him look back regretfully to the time gone by for ever; or, perhaps worse still, to days too painful to recall.

"I would far rather it would be so; than that a man should love me for either my rank or riches, but having neither, perhaps no one will think me worth having, or take the trouble to fall in love with me."

Mrs. Elrington smiled as she looked at the lovely, almost scornful face now lifted to hers, and thought what a stumbling block it would prove in many a man's path in life.

"You are laughing at me," exclaimed Amy, as she caught the smile on the old lady's face. "Do let us talk of something else; of Mrs. Linchmore, for instance; I do so want to know what she is like, only you never will tell me."

"Because I cannot Amy; it is years since we met," replied Mrs. Elrington, in a hard tone; "so that what she is like now I cannot describe; you will have to do that when next we meet."

"But then," persisted Amy, "in that long ago time what was she like?"

"Very beautiful. A slight, tall, graceful figure, pliant as a reed. Eyes dark as jet, and hair like a raven's wing. Are you satisfied, Amy?"

"Not quite. I still want to know what her character was. I am quite satisfied that she must have been very beautiful."

"She was as a girl more than beautiful. There was a charm, a softness in her manner that never failed to allure to her side those she essayed to please. But in the end she grew vain of her loveliness, and paraded it as a snare, until it led her to commit a great sin."

"She may be altered now," exclaimed Amy, "altered for the better."

"She must be grievously altered. Grief and remorse must have done their work slowly but surely, for I never will believe that her heart has been untouched by them."

"I am afraid I shall not like her," replied Amy, "and I had so made up my mind that as your friend I should like her at once."

"We are not friends, Amy! Never can be now! Did we meet to-morrow it would be as strangers. Let us speak of her no more. I cannot bear it," exclaimed Mrs. Elrington in an agitated voice, but after a moment her face grew calm again, and she moved away looking more sorrowful than angry; but Amy could not help wishing with all her heart that her journey that day were miles away from Brampton Park; but there was scarcely time for thought, for in another moment the coach was at the door, and although bitter tears were shed when the last kiss was given, Amy tried to smile through her tears and to be sanguine as to the future, while Mrs. Neville was resigned, or apparently so, and little Sarah—the only one who gave way to her grief unrestrained—sobbed as if her heart would break, and when old Hannah took her by force almost, from her sister's arms, she burst into a perfect passion of tears, which lasted long after the coach was out of sight which conveyed Amy partly on her road to her future home.

The morning was hot and sultry, one of those warm spring days, when scarcely a breath of air disturbs the hum of the bee, or interrupts the song of the birds; not a leaf stirred, even the flowers in the garden scarcely lent their sweet perfume to the light wind; and the rippling noise the little stream made gently gliding over the pebbly ground could be distinctly heard from the cottage.

In the lane just outside the gate were collected a number of men, women, and children; some out of curiosity, but by far the greater number to bid farewell to, and to see the last of their beloved Miss Amy; for although so recent an inhabitant, she was a general favourite in the village, and numberless

were the blessings she received as she stepped past them into the coach, and with a fervent "God bless you," from Mrs. Elrington, she was gone.

It was evening before she reached Brampton Park, her future home, and the avenue of trees under which she passed were dimly seen in the bright moonlight.

It was a long avenue, much longer than the elm tree road at Ashleigh, yet it bore some resemblance to it; the trees as large and stately, and the road as broad; but instead of the fragrant flowers in the little lane at one end, Amy could discern a spacious lawn stretching far away on one side, while the house, large, old fashioned, and gloomy rose darkly to view on the other; but within a bright lamp hung in the large, old handsome hall, illuminating a beautifully carved oak staircase. Pictures of lords and ladies, in old fashioned dresses, were hanging on the walls; Amy fancied they gazed sternly at her from out their time worn frames, as she passed by them, and entered a large handsome drawing-room, where easy couches, soft sofas, luxurious chairs of every size and shape, inviting to repose and ease, seemed scattered about in happy confusion. Crimson silk curtains hung in rich heavy folds before the windows; a carpet as soft as velvet covered the floor; alabaster vases and figures adorned the many tables; lamps hung from the ceiling; in short everything that taste suggested and money could buy, was there.

At the further end of this room, or rather an inner room beyond, connected by large folding doors, sat a lady reclining in a large arm chair; one hand rested on a book in her lap, the other languidly on the curly head of a little girl, kneeling at her feet; her dark hair lay in rich glossy bands, on either temple, and was gathered in a knot at the back of her small, beautifully shaped head, under a lace cap; a dark silk dress fitted tight to her almost faultless figure, and fell in graceful folds from her slender waist; a little lace collar, fastened by a pearl brooch (the only ornament she wore), completed her attire, which was elegant and simple. Her eyes were dark and piercing, the nose and chin well-shaped, but perhaps a little too pointed; and the mouth small and beautiful. Such was Mrs. Linchmore, the mother of two of Amy's pupils. She was generally considered handsome, though few admired her haughty manners, or the scornful expression of her face.

Mrs. Elrington had sent Mrs. Linchmore a slight sketch of Amy's history, and had also mentioned that she was very young; yet Mrs. Linchmore was scarcely prepared to see so delicate and fragile a being as the young girl before her. A feeling of compassion filled her heart as she gazed on Amy's sweet face, and her manner was less haughty than usual, and her voice almost kind as she spoke.

"I fear, Miss Neville, you must have had a very unpleasant journey; the weather to-day has been more than usually warm, and a coach—I believe you came part of the way in one—not a very agreeable conveyance."

"I was the only inside passenger," replied Amy, seating herself in a chair opposite Mrs. Linchmore, "so that I did not feel the heat much; but I am rather tired; the after journey in the train, and then the drive from the station here, has fatigued me greatly."

"You must indeed be very tired and depressed, one generally is after any unusual excitement, and this must have been a very trying day for you, Miss Neville, leaving your home and all those you love; but I trust ere long you will consider this house your home, and I hope become reconciled to the change, though I cannot expect it will ever compensate for the one you have lost."

"Oh, not lost!" exclaimed Amy, raising her tearful eyes, "not lost, only exchanged for a time; self-exiled, I ought to say."

"Self-exiled we will call it, if you like; a pleasant one I hope it will be. Mr. Linchmore and I have promised Mrs. Elrington we will do all we can to make it so. I hope we may not find it a difficult task to perform. The *will* will not be wanting on my part to insure success, if I find you such as Mrs. Elrington describes."

"She is a very kind person," murmured Amy.

"She was always fond of young people, and very kind to them, so long as they allowed her to have her own way; but she did not like being thwarted. Her will was a law not to be disobeyed by

those she loved, unless they wished to incur her eternal displeasure. I suppose she is quite the old lady now. It is," continued Mrs. Linchmore, with a scarcely audible sigh, "nine long years since I saw her."

"She does not appear to me very old," replied Amy, "but nine years is a long time, and she may have altered greatly."

"Most likely not," replied Mrs. Linchmore, in a cold tone. "Life to her has been one bright sunshine. She has had few cares or troubles."

"Indeed, Mrs. Linchmore!" exclaimed Amy, forgetting in her haste her new dependent position. "I have heard Mamma say that the death of her husband early in life was a sore trial to her, as also that of her son, which occurred not so very long ago."

"You mistake me, Miss Neville," replied Mrs. Linchmore, more coldly and haughtily, "those may be trials, but were not the troubles I spoke of."

Amy was silenced, though she longed to ask what heavier trials there could be, but she dared not add more in her kind friend's defence; as it was, she fancied she detected an angry light in Mrs. Linchmore's dark eyes as they flashed on her while she was speaking, and a proud, almost defiant curl of the under lip.

Amy felt chilled as she recalled to mind Mrs. Elrington's words, that she and Mrs. Linchmore never could be friends; and wondered not as she gazed at the proud, haughty face before her, and then thought of the gentle, loving look of her old friend. No; they could not be friends, they could have nothing in common. How often had Mrs. Elrington expressed a hope that Amy would learn to love her pupils, but never a desire or wish that she might love their Mother also; and then the description which Amy had so often eagerly asked, and which only that morning had been granted her; how it had saddened her heart, and predisposed her to think harshly of Mrs. Linchmore.

There must be something hidden away from sight, something that had separated these two years ago. What was it? Had it anything to do with that dread sin Mrs. Elrington had lately touched upon, and of which Amy had longed, but dared not ask an explanation? If they had loved each other once, what had separated them now? Where was the charm and softness of manner which almost made the loveliness Mrs. Elrington had spoken of? Very beautiful Amy thought the lady before her, but there was nothing about her to win a girl's love, or draw her heart to her at first sight.

How strange all this seemed now. She had never thought of it before. It had never occurred to her. Her thoughts and feelings had been too engrossed, too much wrapt up in regret at leaving her home, and arranging for her Mother's comfort after her departure, to think of anything else; but now, the more she pondered, the more extraordinary it seemed, and the more difficult it was to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, and the impression her mind was gradually assuming was a painful one.

A light, mocking laugh from her companion startled Amy; it grated harshly on her ears, and snapped the thread of her perplexing thoughts.

"I doubt," said Mrs. Linchmore, as the laugh faded away to an almost imperceptible curl of the lip; while her head was thrown haughtily back, and she proudly met Amy's astonished gaze; "I doubt if Mrs. Elrington would recognise me; nine years, as you wisely remark, may effect—though not always—a great change. It has on me; many may possibly think for the better; *she* will say for the worse. But time, however hateful it may be for many reasons, changing, as it does sadly, our outward appearance; yet what wonderful changes it effects inwardly. It has one very great advantage in my eyes, it brings forgetfulness; so that the longer we live the less annoying to us are the faults and follies of youth; they gradually fade from our vision. I could laugh now at Mrs. Elrington's bitter remarks and sarcastic words; they would not cause me one moment's uneasiness."

Amy was spared any reply by little Alice suddenly rising, and claiming her mother's attention.

"This is the youngest of your pupils, Miss Neville. Alice dear, put down my scissors, and go and speak to that lady."

The little girl, who had been staring at Amy ever since she entered, now looked sullenly on the floor, but paid no attention to her mother's request.

"Go, dear, go! Will you not make friends with your new governess?"

"No I won't!" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes. "Nurse says she is a naughty, cross woman, and I don't love her."

"Oh, fie! Nurse is very wrong to say such things. You see how much your services are required, Miss Neville. I fear you will find this little one sadly spoilt; she is a great pet of her papa's and mine."

"I trust," replied Amy, "we shall soon be good friends. Alice, dear, will you not try and love me? I am not cross or naughty," and she attempted to take the little hand Alice held obstinately beneath her dress.

"No, no! go away, go away. I won't love you!"

At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Linchmore entered. He was a fine, tall looking man, with a pleasing expression of countenance, and his manner was so kind as he welcomed Amy that he won her heart at once. "Hey-day!" he exclaimed, "was it Alice's voice I heard as I came downstairs? I am afraid, Isabella, you keep her up too late. It is high time she was in bed and asleep. We shall have little pale cheeks, instead of these round rosy ones," added he, as the little girl climbed his knee, and looked up fondly in his face.

"She was not in the least sleepy," replied his wife, "and begged so hard to be allowed to remain, that I indulged her for once."

"Ah! well," said he, smiling, and glancing at Amy. "We shall have a grand reformation soon. But where are Edith and Fanny?"

"They were so naughty I was obliged to send them away up stairs. Fanny broke the vase Charles gave me last winter."

"By-the-by, I have just heard from Charles; he has leave from his regiment for a month, and is going to Paris; but is coming down here for a few days before he starts, just to say good-bye."

"One of his 'flying visits,' as he calls them. How sorry I am!"

"Sorry! why so?"

"Because he promised to spend his leave with us. What shall we do without him? and how dull it will be here."

A cloud passed over her husband's face, but he made no reply; and a silence somewhat embarrassing ensued, only broken some minutes after by the nurse, who came to fetch Alice to bed, and Amy gladly availed herself of Mrs. Linchmore's permission to retire at the same time.

They went up a short flight of stairs, and down a long corridor, or gallery, then through another longer still, when nurse, half opening a door to the left, exclaimed,—

"This is to be the school-room, miss. I thought you might like to see it before you went to bed. Madam has ordered your tea to be got ready for you there, though I'm thinking it's little you'll eat and drink to-night, coming all alone to a strange place. However you'll may be like to see Miss Edith and Miss Fanny, and they're both in here, Miss Fanny at mischief I warrant."

Then catching up Alice in her arms, after a vain attempt on Amy's part to obtain a kiss, she marched off with her in triumph, and Amy entered the room.

On a low stool, drawn close to the open window, sat a fair-haired girl, her head bent low over the page she was reading, or trying to decipher, as the candles threw little light on the spot where she sat. Her long, fair curls, gently waved by the soft evening breeze, swept the pages, and quite concealed her face from Amy's gaze on the one side; while on the other they were held back by her hand, so as not to impede the light.

A scream of merry laughter arrested Amy's footsteps as she was advancing towards her, and turning round she saw a little girl, evidently younger than the one by the window, dancing about with wild delight, holding the two fore paws of a little black and white spaniel, which was dressed up in a doll's cap and frock, and evidently anything but pleased at the ludicrous figure he cut, although obliged to gambol about on his hind legs for the little girl's amusement. Presently a snap and a growl

showed he was also inclined to resent his young mistress's liberties, when another peal of laughter rewarded him, while, bringing her face close to his, she exclaimed,—

"Oh, you dear naughty little doggie! you know you would not dare to bite me." Then, catching sight of Amy, she instantly released doggie, and springing up, rushed to the window, saying in a loud whisper—

"Oh, Edith, Edith! here's the horrid governess."

Edith instantly arose, and then stood somewhat abashed at seeing Amy so close to her; but Amy held out her hand, and said—

"I am sorry your sister thinks me so disagreeable; but I hope Edith will befriend me, and teach her in time to believe me kind and loving."

"She is not my sister, but my cousin," replied Edith, drooping her long eyelashes, and suffering her hand to remain in Amy's.

"Is Alice your sister?"

"No; she is my cousin, too. I have no sister."

The tone was sorrowful, and Amy fancied the little hand tightened its hold, while the eyes were timidly raised to hers.

Sitting down, she drew the child towards her, while Fanny stood silently by, gazing at her new friend. They chatted together some time, and when nurse came to fetch them to bed, Edith still kept her place by Amy's side, while Fanny, with Carlo in her lap, was seated at her feet, nor did either of the little girls refuse her proffered kiss as she bade them "good night."

How lonely Amy felt in that large long room.

Notwithstanding the evening was a warm one, the young girl drew her shawl closer round her shoulders, as she sat down to her solitary tea; and tears, the first she had shed that day, rolled slowly over her cheeks as she thought of her mother's calm, loving face, and her sister's merry prattle. How she missed them both! Although but a few short hours since they parted, since she felt the warm, silent pressure of her mother's hand, and Sarah's clinging embrace, yet the hours seemed long; and oh, how long the months would be! But youth is hopeful, and ere Amy went to bed, she had already begun to look forward to the holidays as nearer than they were, to image to herself the warm welcome home and the happy meeting hereafter with those she loved.

CHAPTER III. MORE ABOUT BRAMPTON

*Alas!—how changed that mien!
How changed these timid looks have been,
Since years of guilt and of disguise,
Have steel'd her brow, and arm'd her eyes!
No more of virgin terror speaks
The blood that mantles in her cheeks;
Fierce and unfeminine are there
Frenzy for joy, for grief despair.*

Scott.

Mrs. Linchmore had married for money, yet money had not brought the happiness she expected. At its shrine she had sacrificed all she held dearest on earth, and with it her own self-esteem and self-respect. In the first few months she had tried to reconcile the false step to herself, had tried to hush the still, small voice within that was constantly rising to upbraid her. Was not wealth hers? and with it could she not purchase everything else? Alas! the "still, small voice" would be heard. She could not stifle it; it pursued her everywhere: in her pursuits abroad, in her occupations at home—Home! the name was a mockery. It was a gilded prison, in which her heart was becoming cold and hard, and all the best feelings of her woman's nature were being turned to stone.

Ten years had passed away since Mrs Linchmore stood at the altar as a bride; ten, to her, slow, miserable years. How changed she was! Her husband, he who ought to have been her first thought, she treated with cold indifference; yet he still loved her so passionately that not all her coldness had been able to root out his love. Her voice was music to him, her very step made his heart beat more quickly, and sometimes brought a quick flush to his face; all that she did was his delight, even her faults he looked on with patient forbearance. But although he loved her so devotedly, he rarely betrayed it; his face might brighten and flush when he heard her step, yet by the time she had drawn near, and stood, perhaps, close by his side as he wrote, it had paled again, and he would even look up and answer her coldly and calmly, while only the unsteadiness of his hand as he bent over the paper again, would show the tumult within; while she, his wife, all unconscious, would stand coldly by, and pass as coldly away out of his sight, never heeding, never seeing, the mournful longing and love in his eyes.

To her children Mrs. Linchmore appeared a cold, stern mother, but in reality she was not so. She loved them devotedly. All her love was centred in them. She was blind to their faults, and completely spoiled them, especially Alice the youngest, a wilful affectionate little creature, who insisted on having, if possible, her own way in everything. She managed it somehow completely, and was in consequence a kind of petty tyrant in the nursery. Nothing must go contrary to her will and wishes, or a violent burst of passion was the consequence. These paroxysms of temper were now of such common and frequent occurrence, that Nurse Hopkins was not sorry the young governess had arrived, and Alice been partially transferred to the school-room, where Amy found it a hard task to manage her, and at the same time win her love. Whenever she reproved, or even tried to reason, Alice thought it was because she disliked her. "Mamma," she would say, "loves me, and she never says I am naughty."

Her sister Fanny was the veriest little romp imaginable, almost always in mischief. Chasing the butterflies on the lawn, or sitting under the shade of the trees, with her doll in her lap, and Carlo by her side, was all she cared for, and Amy could scarcely gain her attention at all. She was a bright,

merry little creature, full of laughter and fun, ready to help her young playmates out of any scrape, and yet, from utter thoughtlessness, perpetually falling into disgrace herself. Tearing her frock in climbing trees, and cutting her hair to make dolls' wigs of, were among her many misdemeanours, and a scolding was a common occurrence. But she was always so sorry for her faults, so ready to acknowledge them, and anxious to atone further. Amy's kind yet grave face could sober her in a moment, and, with her arms thrown round her neck, she would exclaim, "Oh, dear Miss Neville, I am so sorry—so sorry." She was a loveable little creature, and Amy found it one of her hardest trials to punish her. She hated books. Nothing pleased her so much, when the morning's task was done, as to put (so she said) the tiresome books to sleep on their shelves. She showed no disinclination to learn, and would sit down with the full determination of being industrious; but the slightest accident would distract her attention, and set her thoughts wandering, and Edith had generally nearly finished her lessons before Fanny had learnt her daily tasks.

Edith, a child of ten years old, was totally dissimilar, and of a reserved, shrinking nature, rendered still more so from her peculiar position. She was the orphan daughter of Mr. Linchmore's only sister, bequeathed to him as a sacred trust; and he had taken her to his house to be looked upon henceforth as his own child; but no kind voice greeted her there, no hands clasped the little trembling one in theirs, and bade her welcome; not a single word of encouragement or promise of future love was hers, only the cold, calm look of her new aunt; and then total indifference. Sad and silent, she would sit night after night in the twilight by the nursery window, her little thoughts wandering away in a world of her own, or more often still to her lost mother. None roused her from them; even Fanny, giddy as she was, never disturbed her then. Once nurse Hopkins said—

"Miss Edith, it isn't natural for you to be sitting here for all the world like a grown woman; do get up, miss, and go and play with your cousins."

But as nurse never insisted upon it, so Edith sat on, and would have remained for ever if she could in the bright world her fancy had created. It was well for her Amy had come, or the girl's very nature would have been changed by the cold atmosphere around her, so different from the home she had lost, where all seemed one long sunshine. It was long ere Amy understood her; so diligent, so attentive to her lessons, so cautious of offending, so mindful of every word during school hours, and yet never anxious to join Fanny in her play; but on a chair drawn close to the window, and with a book in her lap, or her hands clasped listlessly over the pages, and her eyes drooping under their long lashes—so she sat. But a new era was opening in the child's history.

Some few weeks after Amy's arrival, as she sat working very busily (Edith, as usual, had taken her seat at the window), she felt that the child, far from reading, was intently watching her. At length, without looking up, she said—

"Edith, dear, if you have done reading will you come and tidy my workbasket for me? My wools are in sad confusion. I suspect Alice's fingers have been very busy amongst them."

She came and busied herself with her task until it was completed. Then, still and silent, she remained at her governess' side.

"Who is this shawl for, Miss Neville, when it is finished?" asked she.

"For my mother."

Edith drew closer still.

"Ah!" said she, "that is the reason why you look so happy; because, though you are away from her, still you are trying to please her; and you know she loves you, though no one else does."

"Yes, Edith; but I should never think *no one* loved me, and if I were you I am sure I should be happy."

"Ah, no! It is impossible."

"Not so; I should be ever saying to myself would my dear mamma have liked this, or wished me to do that. Then I should love to think she might be watching over me, and that thought alone would, I am sure, keep me from idleness and folly."

"What is idleness?"

"Waste of time. Sitting doing nothing."

"And you think me idle, then?"

"Often, dear Edith. Almost every day, when you sit at the window so long."

"But no one minds it. No one loves me."

"I mind it, or I should not have noticed it; and I will love you if you will let me."

For an instant the child stood irresolute, then, with her head buried in Amy's lap, she sobbed out, "Oh! I never thought of that. I never thought you would love me—no one does. I will not be idle any more," and she was not; someone loved her, both the living and the dead; and the little craving heart was satisfied.

And so the days flew by. The summer months passed on, only interrupted by a visit from Charles Linchmore. He was very unlike his brother; full of fun and spirits, as fair as he was dark, and not so tall. He seemed to look upon Amy at once as one of the belongings of the house, was quite at home with her, chatted, sang duets, or turned the pages of the music while she sang. Sometimes he joined her in her morning's walk with the children. Once he insisted on rowing her on the lake; but as it was always "Come along, Edith, now for the walk we talked of," or, "Now then, Fanny, I'm ready for the promised lesson in rowing;" what could Amy say? she could only hesitate, and then follow the rest. She felt Mrs. Linchmore look coldly on her, and one evening, on the plea of a severe headache, she remained up stairs; but so much consideration was expressed by Mrs. Linchmore, such anxiety lest she should be unable to go down the next evening, that Amy fancied she must have been mistaken; the thought, nevertheless, haunted her all night. The next morning she had hardly commenced studies when Charles Linchmore's whistle sounded in the passage.

He opened the door, and insisted on the children having a holiday, and while Amy stood half surprised, half irresolute, sent them for their hats and a scamper on the lawn, then returned, and laughed at her discomfiture. He had scarcely gone when Mrs. Linchmore came in; she glanced round as Amy rose.

"Pray sit down, Miss Neville, but—surely I heard my brother here."

There was something in the tone Amy did not like, so she replied, somewhat proudly,

"He *was* here. Madam."

"*Was* here? Why did he come?"

"He came for the children, and I suppose he had your sanction for so doing."

"He never asked it. And I must beg, Miss Neville, that you will in future make him distinctly understand that this is the school-room, where he cannot possibly have any business whatever."

With flushed cheeks, for a while Amy stood near the window, just where Mrs. Linchmore had left her; and then, "Oh! I will not put up with it!" she said, half aloud, "I will go and tell her so." But on turning round there stood Nurse Hopkins.

"It's a lovely place, miss, isn't it? such a many trees; you were looking at it from the window, wern't you, miss? And then all those fields do look so green and beautiful; and the lake, too; I declare it looks every bit like silver shining among the trees."

"It is indeed lovely; but, Nurse, I was not thinking of that when you came."

"No, miss? Still it does not do to sit mopy like, it makes one dull. Now I've lived here many a year, and yet, when I think of my old home, I do get stupid like."

"Where is your home Nurse?"

"I've no home but this Miss, now."

"No home? But you said you had a home once."

"Yes Miss, so I had, but it's passed away long ago—some one else has it now; such a pleasant cottage as it was, with its sanded floor and neat garden; my husband always spent every spare hour in planting and laying it out, and all to please me. I was so fond of flowers. Ah! me," sighed she,

"many's the time they've sent from the Park here to beg a nosegay—at least, John, the gardener has—when company was coming."

"Your cottage was near here, then?"

"Yes Miss, just down the lane; why you can see the top of it from here, right between those two tall trees yonder."

"Yes. I can just catch a far off glimpse of it."

"You've passed it often too, Miss. It's the farm as belongs to Farmer Rackland."

"I know it well. But why did you give it up?"

"My husband, or old man, as I used joke like to call him, died," and Nurse's voice trembled, "he was young and hearty looking too when he was took away; what a happy woman I was Miss, before that! and so proud of him and my children."

"How many children have you?"

"I had three Miss; two girls and a boy. I seem to see them now playing about on the cottage floor; but others play there now just every bit as happy, and I've lost them all. I'm all alone," and Nurse wiped her eyes with the corner of her white apron.

"Not all alone Nurse," said Amy, compassionately.

"True Miss; not all alone; I was wrong. Well, I sometimes wish those days would come again, but there, we never knows what's best for us. I'm getting an old woman now and no one left to care for me. But I wasn't going to tell you all about myself and my troubles when I began; but somehow or other it came out, and I shall like you—if I may be so bold to say so—all the better for knowing all about me; but I want, begging your pardon, Miss, to give you a piece of advice, if so be as you won't be too proud to take it from me; you see I know as well as you can tell me, that you and the Madam have fallen out; and if it's about Miss Alice, which I suppose it is, why don't be too strong handed over her at first; she will never abide by it, but'll scream till her Mamma hears her, and then Madam can't stand it no how; but'll be sure to pet her more than ever to quiet her."

"But Nurse, I do not mean to be strong-handed with Miss Alice, that is, if you mean severe; but she is at times naughty and must be punished."

"Well Miss, we should most of us be sorry to lose you: you are so quiet like, and never interferes with nobody, and they do all downstairs agree with me, that it ain't possible to cure Miss Alice altogether at first; you must begin by little and little, and that when Madam isn't by."

"But that would be wrong, and I cannot consent to punish Miss Alice without Mrs. Linchmore's free and full permission; neither can nor will I take charge of any of the children unless I am allowed to exercise my own judgment as to the course I am to pursue. I am not I hope, harsh or severe towards your late charge; but I must be firm."

"I see Miss, it's no use talking, and I hope Madam will consent to let you do as you wish; but I fear—I very much fear—" and nurse shook her head wisely as she walked away.

"Well, I've done all I could, Mary," said she to the under housemaid, as she went below, "and all to no purpose; there's no persuading Miss Neville, more's the pity; she thinks she's right about Miss Alice, and she'll stick to it. I wish I'd asked her not to go near Madam to-day. I'm positive sure she was going when I surprised her after passing Mrs. Linchmore in the passage. *She* came from the school-room too, I know, and vexed enough she was, or she'd never have had that hard look on her face. Well, I only hope the Master will be by when they do meet again, or there'll be mischief, mark me if there isn't."

"Law! Mrs. Hopkins, how you talk. I wouldn't wait for the master neither, if I were Miss Neville. I'd speak at once and have done with it, that's my plan; see if I would let Miss Alice come over me with her tantrums, if I was a lady!"

"She speaks every bit like that lady you were reading about in the book last night; she'd make you believe anything and love her too. Well, I hope no harm will come of it, but I don't like that look on Madam's face, nor on Miss Neville's, neither, for the matter of that."

But nurse was wrong. Perhaps Amy changed her mind, and never spoke to Mrs. Linchmore. At all events, things went on as they did before Charles Linchmore came—whose visit, by the way, was not quite such a flying one—and continued the same long after he had gone away.

CHAPTER IV. THE BOOK SHELVES

*"O my swete mother, before all other
For you I have most drede:
But now adue! I must ensue,
Where fortune doth me lede.
All this make ye: now let us flee:
The day cometh fast upon;
For in my minde, of all mankynde
I love but you alone."*

The Nut Brown Maid.

Amy spent the summer holidays with her mother. Mrs. Neville had grown pale and thin, while a careworn expression had stolen over her face, supplanting the former sad one; and she had a certain nervous, restless manner unusual to her, which Amy could not fail to remark. Mrs. Elrington attributed it to anxiety on her daughter's account during her absence. It was a trying time for Mrs. Neville; she felt and thought often of what her child might suffer, all that one so sensitive might have to undergo from the neglect or taunts of the world; that world she knew so little of, and into the gay circles of which only two short years ago she had been introduced. How she had been admired and courted! Perhaps some of those very acquaintances she might now meet, and how would it be with her? How would they greet her? Not with the grasp of friendship, but as one they had never seen, or having seen, forgotten. She was no longer the rich heiress, but a governess working for her own and others' support. She was no longer in the same society as themselves, no longer worthy of a thought, and would be passed by and forgotten; or, if remembered, looked on as a stranger.

Mrs. Neville thought her daughter altered. She had grown quieter, more reserved, more womanly than before, and more forbearing with little, exacting Sarah.

Would Amy do this, or look at that? show her how to cut out this, or paint that—always something new; but Amy seldom expostulated or refused assistance, but was, as her mother told Mrs. Elrington, a perfect martyr to her sister's whims and fancies. She had changed. But why? Her mother watched her narrowly, and doubted her being happy, and this thought made her doubly anxious, and imprinted the careworn look more indelibly on her face. A few mornings before Amy returned to Brampton, at the close of the holidays, she went over to Mrs. Elrington's, and found her busy in the garden tying up the stray shrubs, and rooting up the weeds.

"I am afraid, Amy dear, you have come to say 'good-bye,' so I must finish my gardening to-morrow, and devote my time for the present to you."

"I shall be very glad, Mrs. Elrington, for indeed I have a great deal to say. I am so anxious about mamma."

"Anxious, Amy! Well, come in and sit down, and tell me all about it. Sit here close by me, and tell me what is the matter, or rather, what you fancy is; as I think the anxiety is all on your account."

"It's mamma, Mrs. Elrington. I am so dissatisfied about her; she is so changed."

"Changed! In what way?"

"In every way. She is not so strong, the least exertion tires her, and I so often notice the traces of tears on her face. Then she is so dull; and will sit for hours sometimes without saying a word, always busy with that everlasting knitting, which I hate; it is quite an event if she drops a stitch, as then her fingers are quiet for a little. If I look up suddenly, I find her eyes fixed on me so mournfully:

at other times, when I speak she does not hear me, being evidently deep in her own thoughts. She is so different from what she used to be, so very different."

"I cannot say I have noticed any change, and I am constantly with her."

"Ah! that is just why you don't see it. Hannah does not."

"But, my dear, she never complains: I think she would if she felt ill."

"Mamma never complains, dear Mrs. Elrington; I wish she would, as then I might question her, now I feel it impossible. Does she seem happy when I am away?"

"Quite so; and always especially cheerful when she has your letters."

"I will write much oftener this time; and you will also, will you not? and tell me always exactly how she is, and do watch her, too, Mrs. Elrington, for I am sure she is not so strong as she was."

"I will, indeed," and Mrs. Elrington pressed Amy's hand, "but you must not fidget yourself unnecessarily, when there is not the least occasion for it. I assure you I see little change in your mother—I mean in bodily health, and I hope, please God, you will find her quite well when you come again, so do not be low-spirited, Amy."

And so they parted. Mrs. Elrington's words comforted without convincing Amy; and her face wore a more cheerful expression for some days after her return to Brampton.

Mr. Linchmore greeted her very kindly; even Mrs. Linchmore seemed pleased to see her; while the children, especially Fanny, were boisterous in their welcome, and buzzed about her like bees, recounting all the little events and accidents that had happened since she left, until they were fetched away; when Mrs. Linchmore and Amy were alone.

"I trust you enjoyed your visit home, Miss Neville?"

"Thank you, yes; it was a great treat being with my mother and sister again."

"We missed you sadly, and are not sorry to welcome you back again. Edith and Fanny have both grown weary of themselves and idleness; as for Alice, only yesterday, while I was dressing for dinner, having taken the child with me into my room, she amused herself by scrubbing the floor with my toothbrush, having managed to turn up a piece of the carpet in one of the corners; indeed, I should weary you, did I recount half she has been guilty of in the way of mischief."

Amy smiled, and Mrs. Linchmore continued,

"Did you ever leave home before for so long a time?"

"Never. My mother and I had never been parted until I came here."

"You must have felt it very much. I trust Mrs. Neville is well?"

"No. I regret to say I am not quite satisfied with my mother. I do not see any very material change, neither can I say she is ill, but I notice a difference somewhere. I fear she frets a great deal, she is so much alone."

"But your sister?"

"She is too young to be much of a companion to mamma, and I think tries her a great deal. She has been rather a spoilt child, being so much younger than I."

"Younger children always are spoilt. Have you no friends besides Mrs. Elrington?"

"Yes; several very kind ones: there are many nice people living near, but none like clear, good Mrs. Elrington; she is so true, so unselfish, so kind, and devotes a great deal of her time to mamma."

"Does she notice any change in your Mother?"

"She assured me not. But then they meet so constantly, she would not be likely to notice it so much as I, who only see her seldom. She has promised to let me know if she does see any alteration for the worse, so with that I must rest satisfied, and hope all is well, unless I hear to the contrary."

"How is Mrs. Elrington?"

"Quite well, thank you, and looks much the same."

"She asked about me, of course?" and Mrs. Linchmore half averted her face from Amy's gaze.

"Yes, often; and as she has not seen you for so many years, I had much to tell her. She seemed pleased to hear of the children, and asked a great many questions about them."

"You *thought* she seemed pleased to hear about them. I suspect curiosity had a great deal to do with it, if not all. You will grow wiser some day, Miss Neville, and learn to distinguish the true from the false—friends from foes," and Mrs. Linchmore's eyes flashed. "Did you give her my message, the kind remembrances I sent her, with the hope that—that she had not forgotten me? Did she send no message in return?"

The question was sternly asked; Amy hesitated what to say. What was the mysterious connection between the two? and why was it Mrs. Linchmore never spoke of Mrs. Elrington without a touch of anger or bitterness? even the latter, who seemed ever careful of wounding the feelings of others, never spoke of Mrs. Linchmore in a friendly manner, though she appeared to know or have known her well at some earlier period of life.

The question embarrassed Amy, "I was so hurried," said she, "in coming away that I forgot—I mean she forgot—."

Mrs. Linchmore rose haughtily, "I dislike equivocation, Miss Neville, and here there is not the slightest occasion for it. I did not expect a message in return; I think I told you so, if I remember aright, when I entrusted you with mine," and very proudly she walked across the room, seated herself at the piano and sang as if there was no such thing as woe in the world, while Amy sat, listened, and wondered, then softly rose and went upstairs to the school room.

"Here we are! so busy, Miss Neville," cried Fanny, "putting all the things to rights. It's so nice to have something to do, and I'm sorting all the books, although I do hate lessons so," with which assertion Fanny threw her arms round her governess' neck, while Alice begged for a kiss, and Edith pressed closer to her side and passed her small hand in hers.

Certainly the children were very fond of her; Fanny had been so from the first; it was natural for her to love everybody, she was so impulsive, but the other two she had won over by her own strong will and gentle but firm training. Carlo, Fanny's dog, seemed as overjoyed as any of them, leaping, barking, and jumping about until desired rather severely by his young mistress to be quiet. "You are making a shameful noise, sir," she said, giving him a pat, "will you please let somebody else's voice be heard; and do sit down, dear Miss Neville, and let us tell you all we have done since you have been away; we have lots of news, we have not told you half yet, have we, Edith?"

So they began all over again, totally forgetting what they had said or left unsaid, Amy patiently listening, pleased to think how glad they were to see her. Each tendered a small present, to show that their little fingers had not been quite unprofitably employed; half pleased, half frightened lest it should not be liked. They told her amongst other things that uncle Charles had been to Brampton again, but only for three days; he would not remain longer, although Mrs. Linchmore had wished him to; he had brought his dog "Bob" with him, such an ugly thing, who growled and showed his teeth; they were all afraid of it, and were glad when it went away.

"Bob used to come up here, Miss Neville, and sit in the window while uncle was at work."

"At work! what work, Edith?"

"The book shelves. Oh! have you not seen them? do come and look, they are so nice. See, he put them all up by himself, and worked so hard, and when they were done he made us bring all your books; then he set them up, and desired us not to meddle with them as they were only for you. Was it not kind of him? We told him it was just what you wanted."

"How could you? I did not want them at all."

"Yes, Miss Neville, indeed you did; you said long before you went away how much you should like some."

But Amy thought she neither wanted nor liked them, and felt vexed they had been put up.

"Ah!" said Fanny, catching the vexed expression, "you can thank him for them when he comes again; we were to tell you so, and that he would be here in November, and this is August Miss Neville, so it's only three months to wait."

"You can tell him Fanny when he comes, that I am much obliged to him, lest I should forget to do so."

And Amy turned away, feeling more vexed than she liked to acknowledge to herself; she had had nothing to do with putting up the shelves, but would Mrs. Linchmore think so if she knew it? And did she know it, and what had she thought? "Mamma was right," said she to her self. "It is very hard to be a governess; and *he* has misinterpreted and misjudged me."

A thorn had sprung up in Amy's path, which already wounded her slightly.

CHAPTER V. VISITORS ARRIVE

*O! if in this great world of strife,
This mighty round of human life,
We had no friends to cheer,
O! then how cold the world would seem!
How desolate the ebbing stream
Of life from year to year!*

J. B. Kerridge.

Autumn passed away, and winter spread its icy mantle over the earth. Abroad all looked bleak, cold, and desolate. Trees had lost their leaves, flowers their blossoms, and the beautiful green fields were covered with snow; while here and there a snowdrop reared her drooping head from under its white veil, or a crocus feebly struggled to escape its cold embraces. Within doors, things wore a brighter aspect than they had done for some time past. Visitors had arrived at Brampton, who, it was hoped, would enliven the old Hall, and dissipate the dulness of its haughty mistress. Rooms long unoccupied had bright, cheerful fires blazing in the grates; footsteps hurried to and fro, echoing through the long, lofty passages, where all before had been so still and silent. The old, gloomy, melancholy look had totally disappeared, and the house teemed with life and mirth.

Mrs. Hopkins was no longer nurse, but had been installed as housekeeper in the room of one who had grown too old for the office; and was all smiles and importance, much to the disgust of Mason, the lady's maid, who, having always considered herself a grade above the *Nurse*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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