Velhagen & Klasings Sammlung
französischer u. englischer Schulausgaben

English authors Lieferung 118B

CRANFORD

BY

MRS. GASKELL

V&K

Lotte Jamrowski O L III

ENGLISH AUTHORS
118. Lieferung.
Ausgabe B. Mit Anmerkungen in einem Anhang.

CRANFORD

BY

MRS. GASKELL

Im Auszuge mit Anmerkungen zum Schulgebrauch

herausgegeben von

GUSTAV OPITZ,
Professor am Dorotheenstädtischen Realgymnasium in Berlin.

BIELEFELD und LEIPZIG.
VELHAGEN & KLASING.
1909.

Einleitung.

Mrs. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell nimmt unter den englischen Schriftstellerinnen des 19. Jahrhunderts eine hervorragende Stelle ein. Ihr Vater, William Stevenson, war, als sie im Jahre 1810 in Chelsea, einer Vorstadt von London, als das zweite Kind ihrer Eltern geboren wurde, eben zum Archivar im Finanzministerium angestellt worden, war aber daneben auch Mitarbeiter an verschiedenen periodischen Zeitschriften. Ihre Mutter starb bei der Geburt ihres Töchterchens, dessen sich nun mit aufopfernder Sorgfalt ihre Tante, Mrs. Lumb annahm, die selber ihre einzige Tochter unlängst verloren hatte und nach Knutsford, einem kleinen ruhigen Städtchen in der Grafschaft Cheshire übergesiedelt war. In diesem stillen, von der übrigen Welt fast abgeschiedenen Marktflecken, dessen Gesellschaft uns in „Cranford" wieder vor Augen geführt wird, verbrachte Elisabeth ihre frühe Jugend. Nur selten sah sie ihren Vater, noch seltener erhielt sie den Besuch ihres Bruders, der Seemann geworden war, dann nach Indien ging und später völlig verscholl. Zur Erweiterung ihrer Bildung wurde sie in eine Privatschule in Stratford-on-Avon geschickt, und siedelte darauf zu ihrem Vater über, bei dem sie bis zu ihrem 19. Lebensjahre verblieb und unter dessen Leitung sie die Werke der neueren Literatur und Geschichte kennen lernte, während sie gleichzeitig Latein, Französisch und Italienisch trieb. Zwei Jahre darauf

kehrte sie nach dem Tode ihres Vaters zu ihrer Tante nach Knutsford zurück, bei der sie bis zu ihrer Verheiratung mit William Gaskell, einem Prediger in Manchester, lebte.

Die Sorge für ihren Haushalt und ihre Familie hinderte Mrs. Gaskell nicht, sich um die Not der armen Bevölkerung von Manchester zu kümmern und an der Verbesserung ihres Loses mit allen Kräften zu arbeiten. Sie suchte die Unglücklichen in ihren Wohnungen auf, erwarb sich das Vertrauen der Arbeiterbevölkerung und widmete sich mit großem Eifer namentlich den jugendlichen Arbeiterinnen, denen sie im eigenen Hause Unterricht erteilte.

Die Erfahrungen, die sie während dieser Zeit in reichem Maße sammelte, sollten ihr den Stoff zu ihren schriftstellerischen Werken liefern. Den Anstoß zu dieser Tätigkeit aber gab ihr die Verzweiflung über den Tod ihres jüngsten Kindes, des einzigen Sohnes. Um ihre Gedanken von ihrem Kummer abzulenken, empfahl ihr Gatte ihr sich literarisch zu beschäftigen; und so fing sie zunächst an, kurze Erzählungen zu schreiben und in den Tagesblättern zu veröffentlichen. Ihr erstes größeres Werk, mit dem sie sogleich in die Reihe der bedeutenderen Schriftsteller trat, war „Mary Barton, a Tale of Manchester Life", welches 1848 erschien. Die Unerschrockenheit, mit der sie das soziale Elend der arbeitenden Klassen aufdeckte, verursachte in Manchester eine starke Erregung teils gegen, teils für den anonymen Verfasser. Die Wirkung des Buches beruhte eben auf der Naturtreue und Wahrheit, mit der Mrs. Gaskell das Bild der Zustände in Manchester entwarf, die sie in ihrem treuen Wirken an der Seite ihres Mannes kennen gelernt hatte. Zugleich verschaffte dieser Roman der Verfasserin eine weite Berühmtheit und die Freundschaft großer Zeit-

genossen, wie Ch. Dickens, Ruskin, Forster, Charlotte Bronte. Dickens veranlaßte sie, an seiner Wochenschrift „Household Words" mitzuarbeiten und zahlreiche Beiträge zu liefern, die später in Buchform („Round the Sofa") vereinigt wurden. Nicht weniger beliebt als ihr erster Roman waren die folgenden: „Moorland Cottage" (1850), „Cranford" und „Ruth" (1853), „North and South" (1855), „The Life of Charlotte Bronte" (1857), „Cousin Phillis" (1865).

Der Erfolg aller ihrer Arbeiten war derart, daß sie ihrer Familie nicht nur alle wirtschaftlichen Sorgen fern halten, sondern auch sich selber ihr Leben ihrem Wunsche gemäß gestalten konnte. Zu ihren größten Genüssen gehörte der Verkehr mit edlen Freunden und Reisen und Aufenthalt in Frankreich, Italien und Deutschland. Der Tod ereilte sie unerwartet im Jahre 1865, während sie noch an ihrem letzten Werke, dem unvollendeten Roman „Wives and Daughters", arbeitete.

Wie fast alles, was Elisabeth Gaskell schrieb, auf eigener Beobachtung und Erfahrung beruhte, so lassen sich ganz besonders die Schilderungen und Ereignisse ihres humoristischen Romans „Cranford" auf die Erlebnisse in ihrem geliebten Knutsford zurückführen; auch die einzelnen Charaktere sind nicht nur lebenswahr, sondern sollen auch wirklichen Personen entlehnt sein. Die rührende Geschichte des armen Peter, der zur See ging, enthält die poetisch ausgeschmückte Erzählung ihres eigenen Bruders, der nach Indien ging und niemals zurückkehrte.

Das Lesen dieser reizenden Erzählung mit ihren harmlosen, altfränkischen Jungfrauen, die die Männer verabscheuen und so peinlich auf jeden gesellschaftlichen Anstand achten, mit den ehrbaren und steifen Damen, die in ihren ererbten Vorurteilen so unendlich komisch wirken, in deren Herzen aber doch echtes

menschliches Mitgefühl lebt, das bei fremdem Leid sogleich in wahrhaft weiblicher Weise zu Trost und Hilfe bereit ist, muß jedem Freunde echten Humors wirklichen Genuß bereiten. Auch unsere Jugend, namentlich das erwachsene Mädchen, wird die Feinheit der Schilderungen und die gemütvolle Zeichnung der Charaktere zu würdigen wissen.

Trotz der starken Kürzung, die im Interesse der Zweckmäßigkeit gemacht werden mußte, hofft der Verfasser einen brauchbaren Text hergestellt zu haben, der bemerkbare Lücken nicht aufweist.

Humanitarian Novel.

CHAPTER I.

OUR SOCIETY.

In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women. If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears; he is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, distant only twenty miles on a railroad. In short, whatever does become of the gentlemen, they are not at Cranford. Although the ladies of Cranford know all each other's proceedings, they are exceedingly indifferent to each other's opinions. Indeed, as each has her own individuality, not to say eccentricity, pretty strongly developed, nothing is so easy as verbal retaliation; but somehow good-will reigns among them to a considerable degree.

The Cranford ladies have only an occasional little quarrel, spirted out in a few peppery words and angry jerks of the head; just enough to prevent the even tenor of their lives from becoming too

flat. Their dress is very independent of fashion; as they observe, "What does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us?" And if they go from home, their reason is equally cogent: "What does it signify how we dress here, where nobody knows us?" The materials of their clothes are, in general, good and plain, and most of them are nearly as scrupulous as Miss Tyler, of cleanly memory; but I will answer for it, the last gigot, the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford — and seen without a smile.

I can testify to a magnificent family red silk umbrella, under which a gentle little spinster, left alone of many brothers and sisters, used to patter to church on rainy days. Have you any red silk umbrellas in London? We had a tradition of the first that had ever been seen in Cranford; and the little boys mobbed it, and called it "a stick in petticoats." It might have been the very red silk one I have described, held by a strong father over a troop of little ones; the poor little lady — the survivor of all — could scarcely carry it.

I imagine that a few of the gentlefolks of Cranford were poor, and had some difficulty in making both ends meet; but they were like the Spartans, and concealed their smart under a smiling face. We none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic. The Cranfordians had that kindly *esprit de corps* which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when

some among them tried to conceal their poverty. When Mrs. Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, every one took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world; and talked on about household forms and ceremonies, as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward, instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray up-stairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up; though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes.

There were one or two consequences arising from this general but unacknowledged poverty, and this very much acknowledged gentility, which were not amiss, and which might be introduced into many circles of society to their great improvement. For instance, the inhabitants of Cranford kept early hours, and clattered home in their pattens, under the guidance of a lantern-bearer, about nine o'clock at night; and the whole town was abed and asleep by half-past ten. Moreover, it was considered "vulgar" (a tremendous word in Cranford) to give anything expensive, in the way of eatable or

drinkable, at the evening entertainments. Wafer bread-and-butter and sponge-biscuits were all that the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson gave; and she was sister-in-law to the late Earl of Glenmire, although she did practise such "elegant economy."

"Elegant economy!" How naturally one falls back into the phraseology of Cranford! There, economy was always "elegant," and money-spending always "vulgar and ostentatious;" a sort of sour-grapeism, which made us very peaceful and satisfied. I never shall forget the dismay felt when a certain Captain Brown came to live at Cranford, and openly spoke about his being poor — not in a whisper to an intimate friend, the doors and windows being previously closed; but, in the public street! in a loud military voice! alleging his poverty as a reason for not taking a particular house. The ladies of Cranford were already rather moaning over the invasion of their territories by a man and a gentleman. He was a half-pay Captain, and had obtained some situation on a neighbouring railroad, which had been vehemently petitioned against by the little town; and if, in addition to his masculine gender, and his connexion with the obnoxious railroad, he was so brazen as to talk of being poor — why! then, indeed, he must be sent to Coventry. Death was as true and as common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud out in the streets. It was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite. We had tacitly agreed to ignore that any with whom we associated on terms of visiting equality could ever be prevented

by poverty from doing anything that they wished. If we walked to or from a party, it was because the night was *so* fine, or the air *so* refreshing; not because sedan-chairs were expensive. If we wore prints, instead of summer silks, it was because we preferred a washing material; and so on, till we blinded ourselves to the vulgar fact, that we were, all of us, people of very moderate means. Of course, then, we did not know what to make of a man who could speak of poverty as if it was not a disgrace. Yet, somehow, Captain Brown made himself respected in Cranford, and was called upon, in spite of all resolutions to the contrary. I was surprised to hear his opinions quoted as authority, at a visit which I paid to Cranford, about a year after he had settled in the town. My own friends had been among the bitterest opponents of any proposal to visit the Captain and his daughters, only twelve months before; and now he was even admitted in the tabooed hours before twelve. True, it was to discover the cause of a smoking chimney, before the fire was lighted; but still Captain Brown walked up-stairs, nothing daunted, spoke in a voice too large for the room, and joked quite in the way of a tame man, about the house. He had been blind to all the small slights, and omissions of trivial ceremonies, with which he had been received. He had been friendly, though the Cranford ladies had been cool; he had answered small sarcastic compliments in good faith; and with his manly frankness had overpowered all the shrinking which met him as a man who

was not ashamed to be poor. And, at last, his excellent masculine common sense, and his facility in devising expedients to overcome domestic dilemmas, had gained him an extraordinary place as authority among the Cranford ladies. He, himself, went on in his course, as unaware of his popularity, as he had been of the reverse; and I am sure he was startled one day, when he found his advice so highly esteemed, as to make some counsel which he had given in jest, be taken in sober, serious earnest.

It was on this subject; — an old lady had an Alderney cow, which she looked upon as a daughter. You could not pay the short quarter of an hour call, without being told of the wonderful milk or wonderful intelligence of this animal. The whole town knew and kindly regarded Miss Betsy Barker's Alderney; therefore great was the sympathy and regret when, in an unguarded moment, the poor cow tumbled into a lime-pit. She moaned so loudly that she was soon heard, and rescued; but meanwhile the poor beast had lost most of her hair, and came out looking naked, cold, and miserable, in a bare skin. Everybody pitied the animal, though a few could not restrain their smiles at her droll appearance. Miss Betsy Barker absolutely cried with sorrow and dismay; and it was said she thought of trying a bath of oil. This remedy, perhaps, was recommended by some one of the number whose advice she asked; but the proposal, if ever it was made, was knocked on the head by Captain Brown's decided "Get her a

flannel waistcoat and flannel drawers, ma'am, if you wish to keep her alive. But my advice is, kill the poor creature at once."

Miss Betsy Barker dried her eyes, and thanked the Captain heartily; she set to work, and by-and-by all the town turned out to see the Alderney meekly going to her pasture, clad in dark grey flannel. I have watched her myself many a time. Do you ever see cows dressed in grey flannel in London?

Captain Brown had taken a small house on the outskirts of the town, where he lived with his two daughters. He must have been upwards of sixty at the time of the first visit I paid to Cranford, after I had left it as a residence. But he had a wiry, well-trained, elastic figure; a stiff military throwback of his head, and a springing step, which made him appear much younger than he was. His eldest daughter looked almost as old as himself, and betrayed the fact that his real was more than his apparent age. Miss Brown must have been forty; she had a sickly, pained, careworn expression on her face and looked as if the gaiety of youth had long faded out of sight. Even when young she must have been plain and hard-featured. Miss Jessie Brown was ten years younger than her sister, and twenty shades prettier. Her face was round and dimpled. Miss Jenkyns once said, "that she thought it was time for Miss Jessie to leave off her dimples, and not always to be trying to look like a child." It was true, there was something child-like in her face; and there will be, I think, till she dies, though she should live

to a hundred. Her eyes were large blue wondering eyes, looking straight at you; her nose was unformed and snub, and her lips were red and dewy; she wore her hair, too, in little rows of curls, which heightened this appearance. I do not know whether she was pretty or not; but I liked her face, and so did everybody, and I do not think she could help her dimples. She had something of her father's jauntiness of gait and manner; and any female observer might detect a slight difference in the attire of the two sisters — that of Miss Jessie being about two pounds per annum more expensive than Miss Brown's. Two pounds was a large sum in Captain Brown's annual disbursements.

Such was the impression made upon me by the Brown family, when I first saw them all together in Cranford church. The Captain I had met before — on the occasion of the smoky chimney, which he had cured by some simple alteration in the flue.

On coming out of church, the brisk Captain paid the most gallant attention to his two daughters. He nodded and smiled to his acquaintances; but he shook hands with none until he had helped Miss Brown to unfurl her umbrella, had relieved her of her prayer-book, and had waited patiently till she, with trembling nervous hands, had taken up her gown to walk through the wet roads.

I wondered what the Cranford ladies did with Captain Brown at their parties. We had often rejoiced, in former days, that there was no gentle-

man to be attended to, and to find conversation for, at the card-parties. We had congratulated ourselves upon the snugness of the evenings; and, in our love for gentility, and distaste of mankind, we had almost persuaded ourselves that to be a man was to be "vulgar"; so that when I found my friend and hostess, Miss Jenkyns, was going to have a party in my honour, and that Captain and the Miss Browns were invited, I wondered much what would be the course of the evening. Card-tables, with green-baize tops, were set out by daylight, just as usual; it was the third week in November, so the evenings closed in about four. Candles, and clean packs of cards were arranged on each table. The fire was made up; the neat maid-servant had received her last directions; and there we stood dressed in our best, each with a candle-lighter in our hands, ready to dart at the candles as soon as the first knock came. As soon as three had arrived, we sat down to "Preference", I being the unlucky fourth. The next four comers were put down immediately to another table; and presently the tea-trays, which I had seen set out in the store-room as I passed in the morning, were placed each on the middle of a card-table. The china was delicate egg-shell; the old-fashioned silver glittered with polishing; but the eatables were of the slightest description. While the trays were yet on the tables, Captain and the Miss Browns came in; and I could see, that somehow or other the Captain was a favourite with all the ladies present. Ruffled brows were smoothed,

sharp voices lowered at his approach. Miss Brown looked ill, and depressed almost to gloom. Miss Jessie smiled as usual, and seemed nearly as popular as her father. He immediately and quietly assumed the man's place in the room; attended to every one's wants, lessened the pretty maid-servant's labour by waiting on empty cups, and bread-and-butterless ladies; and yet did it all in so easy and dignified a manner, and so much as if it were a matter of course for the strong to attend to the weak, that he was a true man throughout. He played for three-penny points with as grave an interest as if they had been pounds; and yet, in all his attention to strangers, he had an eye on his suffering daughter; for suffering I was sure she was, though to many eyes she might only appear to be irritable. Miss Jessie could not play cards; but she talked to the sitters-out, who, before her coming, had been rather inclined to be cross. She sang, too, to an old cracked piano, which I think had been a spinnet in its youth. Miss Jessie sang "Jock of Hazeldean" a little out of tune; but we were none of us musical, though Miss Jenkyns beat time, out of time, by way of appearing to be so.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTAIN.

It was impossible to live a month at Cranford, and not know the daily habits of each resident;

and long before my visit was ended, I knew much concerning the whole Brown trio. There was nothing new to be discovered respecting their poverty; for they had spoken simply and openly about that from the very first. They made no mystery of the necessity for their being economical. All that remained to be discovered was the Captain's infinite kindness of heart, and the various modes in which, unconsciously to himself, he manifested it. Some little anecdotes were talked about for some time after they occurred. He had met a poor old woman returning from the bake-house as he came from church, and noticed her precarious footing; and, with the grave dignity with which he did everything, he relieved her of her burden and steered along the street by her side, carrying her baked mutton and potatoes safely home. This was thought very eccentric; and it was rather expected that he would pay a round of calls, on the Monday morning, to explain and apologise to the Cranford sense of propriety: but he did no such thing; and then it was decided that he was ashamed, and was keeping out of sight. In a kindly pity for him, we began to say — "After all, the Sunday morning's occurrence showed great goodness of heart;" and it was resolved that he should be comforted on his next appearance amongst us; but, lo! he came down upon us, untouched by any sense of shame, speaking loud and bass as ever, his head thrown back, his wig as jaunty and well-curled as usual, and we were obliged to conclude he had forgotten all about Sunday.

Miss Pole and Miss Jessie Brown had set up a kind of intimacy; so it happened that when I went to visit Miss Pole, I saw more of the Browns than I had done while staying with Miss Jenkyns. I found that Miss Brown was seriously ill of some lingering, incurable complaint, the pain occasioned by which gave the uneasy expression to her face that I had taken for unmitigated crossness. Cross, too, she was at times, when the nervous irritability occasioned by her disease became past endurance. Miss Jessie bore with her at these times even more patiently than she did with the bitter self-upbraidings by which they were invariably succeeded. Miss Brown used to accuse herself, not merely of hasty and irritable temper; but also of being the cause why her father and sister were obliged to pinch, in order to allow her the small luxuries which were necessaries in her condition. She would so fain have made sacrifices for them and have lightened their cares, that the original generosity of her disposition added acerbity to her temper. All this was borne by Miss Jessie and her father with more than placidity — with absolute tenderness. I forgave Miss Jessie her singing out of tune, and her juvenility of dress, when I saw her at home. I came to perceive that Captain Brown's dark Brutus wig and padded coat were remnants of the military smartness of his youth, which he now wore unconsciously. He was a man of infinite resources, gained in his barrack experience. As he confessed, no one could black his boots to please him, except himself; but, indeed, he was not above saving the little

maid-servant's labours in every way, — knowing, most likely, that his daughter's illness made the place a hard one.

Such was the state of things when I left Cranford and went to Drumble. I had, however, several correspondents who kept me *au fait* as to the proceedings of the dear little town.

My next visit to Cranford was in the summer. There had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages since I was there last. Everybody lived in the same house, and wore pretty nearly the same well-preserved, old-fashioned clothes. The greatest event was, that Miss Jenkynses had purchased a new carpet for the drawing-room.

The poor, brave Captain! he looked older, and more worn, and his clothes were very threadbare. But he seemed as bright and cheerful as ever, unless he was asked about his daughter's health.

"She suffers a great deal, and she must suffer more; we do what we can to alleviate her pain; — God's will be done!" He took off his hat at these last words. I found, from Miss Matty Jenkyns, that everything had been done, in fact. A medical man, of high repute in that country neighbourhood, had been sent for, and every injunction he had given was attended to, regardless of expense. Miss Matty was sure they denied themselves many things in order to make the invalid comfortable; but they never spoke about it; and as for Miss Jessie! "I really think she's an angel," said poor Miss Matty, quite overcome. I could only greet Miss Jessie with double respect when I met her next. She

looked faded and pinched; and her lips began to quiver, as if she was very weak, when she spoke of her sister.

Captain Brown called one day to thank Miss Jenkyns for many little kindnesses, which I did not know until then that she had rendered. He had suddenly become like an old man; his deep bass voice had a quavering in it; his eyes looked dim, and the lines on his face were deep. He did not — could not — speak cheerfully of his daughter's state, but he talked with manly pious resignation, and not much. Twice over he said, "What Jessie has been to us, God only knows!" and after the second time, he got up hastily, shook hands all round without speaking, and left the room.

That afternoon we perceived little groups in the street, all listening with faces aghast to some tale or other. Miss Jenkyns wondered what could be the matter for some time before she took the undignified step of sending Jenny out to inquire.

Jenny came back with a white face of terror. "Oh, ma'am! oh, Miss Jenkyns, ma'am! Captain Brown is killed by them nasty cruel railroads!" and she burst into tears. She, along with many others, had experienced the poor Captain's kindness.

"How? — where — where? Good God! Jenny, don't waste time in crying, but tell us something." Miss Matty rushed out into the street at once, and collared the man who was telling the tale.

"Come in — come to my sister at once, — Miss Jenkyns, the rector's daughter. Oh, man, man! say it is not true," — she cried, as she brought the affrighted carter, sleeking down his hair, into the drawing-room, where he stood with his wet boots on the new carpet, and no one regarded it.

"Please mum, it is true. I seed it myself," and he shuddered at the recollection. "The Captain was a-reading some new book as he was deep in, a-waiting for the down train; and there was a little lass as wanted to come to its mammy, and gave its sister the slip, and came toddling across the line. And he looked up sudden, at the sound of the train coming, and seed the child, and he darted on the line and cotched it up, and his foot slipped, and the train came over him in no time. Oh Lord, Lord! Mum, it's quite true — and they've come over to tell his daughters. The child's safe, though, with only a bang on its shoulder, as he threw it to its mammy. Poor Captain would be glad of that, mum, wouldn't he? God bless him!" The great rough carter puckered up his manly face, and turned away to hide his tears. I turned to Miss Jenkyns. She looked very ill, as if she were going to faint, and signed to me to open the window.

"Matilda, bring me my bonnet. I must go to those girls. God pardon me, if ever I have spoken contemptuously to the Captain!"

Miss Jenkyns arrayed herself to go out, telling Miss Matilda to give the man a glass of wine.

While she was away, Miss Matty and I huddled over the fire, talking in a low and awe-struck voice. I know we cried quietly all the time.

Miss Jenkyns came home in a silent mood, and we durst not ask her many questions. She told us that Miss Jessie had fainted, and that she and Miss Pole had had some difficulty in bringing her round: but that, as soon as she recovered, she begged one of them to go and sit with her sister.

"Mr. Hoggins says she cannot live many days, and she shall be spared this shock," said Miss Jessie, shivering with feelings to which she dared not give way.

"But how can you manage, my dear?" asked Miss Jenkyns; "you cannot bear up, she must see your tears."

"God will help me — I will not give way — she was asleep when the news came; she may be asleep yet. She would be so utterly miserable, not merely at my father's death, but to think of what would become of me; she is so good to me." She looked up earnestly in their faces with her soft true eyes, and Miss Pole told Miss Jenkyns afterwards she could hardly bear it, knowing, as she did, how Miss Brown treated her sister.

However, it was settled according to Miss Jessie's wish. Miss Brown was to be told her father had been summoned to take a short journey on railway business. Miss Pole was to stop with Miss Jessie. Mrs. Jamieson had sent to inquire. And this was all we heard that night; and a sorrowful

night it was. The next day a full account of the fatal accident was in the county paper, which Miss Jenkyns took in.

The corpse was to be taken from the station to the parish church, there to be interred. Miss Jessie had set her heart on following it to the grave; and no dissuasives could alter her resolve. Her restraint upon herself made her almost obstinate; she resisted all Miss Pole's entreaties, and Miss Jenkyns's advice. At last Miss Jenkyns gave up the point; and after a silence, which I feared portended some deep displeasure against Miss Jessie, Miss Jenkyns said she should accompany the latter to the funeral.

"It is not fit for you to go alone. It would be against both propriety and humanity were I to allow it."

Miss Jessie seemed as if she did not half like this arrangement. She longed, poor thing! I have no doubt, to cry alone over the grave of the dear father to whom she had been all in all; and to give way, for one little half-hour, uninterrupted by sympathy, and unobserved by friendship. But it was not to be. That afternoon Miss Jenkyns sent out for a yard of black crape, and employed herself busily in trimming her little black silk bonnet. When it was finished she put it on, and looked at us for approbation — admiration she despised. I no sooner saw the bonnet than I was reminded of a helmet; and in that hybrid bonnet, half-helmet, half-jockey cap, did Miss Jenkyns attend Captain Brown's funeral;

and, I believe, supported Miss Jessie with a tender indulgent firmness which was invaluable, allowing her to weep her passionate fill before they left.

Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and I, meanwhile, attended to Miss Brown: and hard work we found it to relieve her querulous and never-ending complaints. But if we were so weary and dispirited, what must Miss Jessie have been! Yet she came back almost calm, as if she had gained a new strength. She put off her mourning dress, and came in, looking pale and gentle; thanking us each with a soft long pressure of the hand. She could even smile — a faint, sweet, wintry smile — as if to reassure us of her power to endure; but her look made our eyes fill suddenly with tears, more than if she had cried outright.

No nursing — no energetic strong-minded woman could help Miss Brown now. There was that in the room as we entered, which was stronger than us all, and made us shrink into solemn awe-struck helplessness. Miss Brown was dying. We hardly knew her voice, it was so devoid of the complaining tone we had always associated with it. Miss Jessie told me afterwards that it, and her face too, were just what they had been formerly, when her mother's death left her the young anxious head of the family, of whom only Miss Jessie survived.

She was conscious of her sister's presence, though not, I think, of ours. We stood a little behind the curtain: Miss Jessie knelt with her face

near her sister's, in order to catch the last soft awful whispers.

"Oh, Jessie! Jessie! How selfish I have been! God forgive me for letting you sacrifice yourself for me as you did. I have so loved you — and yet I have thought only of myself. God forgive me!"

"Hush, love! hush!" said Miss Jessie, sobbing.

"And my father! my dear, dear father! I will not complain now, if God will give me strength to be patient. But, oh, Jessie! tell my father how I longed and yearned to see him at last, and to ask his forgiveness. What a life of sorrow his has been, and I have done so little to cheer him!"

A light came into Miss Jessie's face. "Would it comfort you, dearest, to think that he does know — would it comfort you, love, to know that his cares, his sorrows — —" Her voice quivered, but she steadied it into calmness, — "Mary! he has gone before you to the place where the weary are at rest. He knows now how you loved him."

A strange look which was not distress, came over Miss Brown's face. She did not speak for some time, but then we saw her lips form the words, rather than heard the sound — "Father, mother, Harry, Archy!" — then, as if it was a new idea throwing a filmy shadow over her darkening mind — "But you will be alone — Jessie!"

Miss Jessie had been feeling this all during the silence, I think; for the tears rolled down her

cheeks like rain, at these words; and she could not answer at first. Then she put her hands together tight, and lifted them up, and said, — but not to us —

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

In a few moments more, Miss Brown lay calm and still; never to sorrow or murmur more.

After this second funeral, Miss Jenkyns insisted that Miss Jessie should come to stay with her, rather than go back to the desolate house; which, in fact, we learned from Miss Jessie, must now be given up, as she had not wherewithal to maintain it. She had something above twenty pounds a-year, besides the interest of the money for which the furniture would sell; but she could not live upon that: and so we talked over her qualifications for earning money.

"I can sew neatly," said she, "and I like nursing. I think, too, I could manage a house, if any one would try me as housekeeper; or I would go into a shop, as saleswoman, if they would have patience with me at first."

Miss Jenkyns declared, in an angry voice, that she should do no such thing; and talked to herself about "some people having no idea of their rank as a Captain's daughter," nearly an hour afterwards, when she brought Miss Jessie up a basin of delicately-made arrowroot, and stood over her like a dragoon until the last spoonful was finished: then she disappeared. Miss Jessie began to tell me some more of the plans which had suggested themselves to her, and insensibly fell into talking

of the days that were past and gone, and interested me so much, I neither knew nor heeded how time passed. We were both startled when Miss Jenkyns reappeared, and caught us crying. I was afraid lest she would be displeased, as she often said that crying hindered digestion, and I knew she wanted Miss Jessie to get strong; but, instead, she looked queer and excited, and fidgeted round us without saying anything. At last she spoke. "I have been so much startled — no, I've not been at all startled — don't mind me, my dear Miss Jessie — I've been very much surprised — in fact, I've had a caller, whom you knew once, my dear Miss Jessie — —"

Miss Jessie went very white, then flushed scarlet, and looked eagerly at Miss Jenkyns —

"A gentleman, my dear, who wants to know if you would see him."

"Is it? — it is not — —" stammered out Miss Jessie — and got no farther.

"This is his card," said Miss Jenkyns, giving it to Miss Jessie; and while her head was bent over it, Miss Jenkyns went through a series of winks and odd faces to me, and formed her lips into a long sentence, of which, of course, I could not understand a word.

"May he come up?" asked Miss Jenkyns at last.

"Oh, yes! certainly!" said Miss Jessie, as much as to say, this is your house, you may show any visitor where you like. She took up some knitting

of Miss Matty's and began to be very busy, though I could see how she trembled all over.

Miss Jenkyns rang the bell, and told the servant who answered it to show Major Gordon up-stairs; and, presently, in walked a tall, fine, frank-looking man of forty, or upwards. He shook hands with Miss Jessie; but he could not see her eyes, she kept them so fixed on the ground. Miss Jenkyns asked me if I would come and help her to tie up the preserves in the store-room; and, though Miss Jessie plucked at my gown, and even looked up at me with begging eye, I durst not refuse to go where Miss Jenkyns asked. Instead of tying up preserves in the store-room, however, we went to talk in the dining-room; and there Miss Jenkyns told me what Major Gordon had told her; — how he had served in the same regiment with Captain Brown, and had become acquainted with Miss Jessie, then a sweet-looking, blooming girl of eighteen; how the acquaintance had grown into love, on his part, though it had been some years before he had spoken; how, on becoming possessed, through the will of an uncle, of a good estate in Scotland, he had offered, and been refused, though with so much agitation, and evident distress, that he was sure she was not indifferent to him; and how he had discovered that the obstacle was the fell disease which was, even then, too surely threatening her sister. She had mentioned that the surgeons foretold intense suffering; and there was no one but herself to nurse her poor Mary, or cheer and comfort her father during the time of

illness. They had had long discussions; and, on her refusal to pledge herself to him as his wife, when all should be over, he had grown angry, and broken off entirely, and gone abroad, believing that she was a cold-hearted person, whom he would do well to forget. He had been travelling in the East, and was on his return home when, at Rome, he saw the account of Captain Brown's death in "Galignani."

Just then Miss Matty, who had been out all the morning, and had only lately returned to the house, burst in with a face of dismay and outraged propriety:

"Oh, goodness me!" she said. "Deborah, there's a gentleman sitting in the drawing-room, with his arm round Miss Jessie's waist!" Miss Matty's eyes looked large with terror.

Miss Jenkyns snubbed her down in an instant:

"The most proper place in the world for his arm to be in. Go away, Matilda, and mind your own business." This from her sister, who had hitherto been a model of feminine decorum, was a blow for poor Miss Matty, and with a double shock she left the room.

The last time I ever saw poor Miss Jenkyns was many years after this. Mrs. Gordon had kept up a warm and affectionate intercourse with all at Cranford. Miss Jenkyns, Miss Matty, and Miss Pole had all been to visit her, and returned with wonderful accounts of her house, her husband, her dress, and her looks. For, with happiness, something of her early bloom returned; she had

been a year or two younger than we had taken her for. Her eyes were always lovely, and, as Mrs. Gordon, her dimples were not out of place. At the time to which I have referred, when I last saw Miss Jenkyns, that lady was old and feeble, and had lost something of her strong mind. Little Flora Gordon was staying with the Misses Jenkyns, and when I came in she was reading aloud to Miss Jenkyns, who lay feeble and changed on the sofa.

"Ah!" said Miss Jenkyns, "you find me changed, my dear. I can't see as I used to do. If Flora were not here to read to me, I hardly know how I should get through the day."

CHAPTER III.

A NEW MAID-SERVANT.

I thought that probably my connexion with Cranford would cease after Miss Jenkyns's death; at least, that it would have to be kept up by correspondence, which bears much the same relation to personal intercourse that the books of dried plants I sometimes see do to the living and fresh flowers in the lanes and meadows. I was pleasantly surprised, therefore, by receiving a letter from Miss Pole (who had always come in for a supplementary week, after my annual visit to Miss Jenkyns) proposing that I should go and stay with her; and then, in a couple of days after my acceptance, came a note from Miss Matty, in which,

in a rather circuitous and very humble manner, she told me how much pleasure I should confer, if I could spend a week or two with her, either before or after I had been at Miss Pole's; "for," she said, "since my dear sister's death, I am well aware I have no attractions to offer; it is only to the kindness of my friends that I can owe their company."

Of course, I promised to come to dear Miss Matty, as soon as I had ended my visit to Miss Pole; and the day after my arrival at Cranford, I went to see her, much wondering what the house would be like without Miss Jenkyns, and rather dreading the changed aspect of things. Miss Matty began to cry as soon as she saw me. She was evidently nervous from having anticipated my call. I comforted her as well as I could; and I found the best consolation I could give was the honest praise that came from my heart as I spoke of the deceased.

My visit to Miss Pole was very quiet. Miss Jenkyns had so long taken the lead in Cranford, that, now she was gone, they hardly knew how to give a party. The Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, to whom Miss Jenkyns herself had always yielded the post of honour, was fat and inert, and very much at the mercy of her old servants. If they chose that she should give a party, they reminded her of the necessity for so doing; if not, she let it alone. There was all the more time for me to hear old-world stories from Miss Pole, while she sat knitting, and I making my father's shirts. I

always took a quantity of plain sewing to Cranford; for, as we did not read much, or walk much, I found it a capital time to get through my work.

Presently, the time arrived when I was to remove to Miss Matilda's house. I found her timid and anxious about the arrangements for my comfort. Many a time, while I was unpacking, did she come backwards and forwards to stir the fire, which burned all the worse for being so frequently poked.

"Have you drawers enough, dear?" asked she. "I don't know exactly how my sister used to arrange them. She had capital methods. I am sure she would have trained a servant in a week to make a better fire than this, and Fanny has been with me four months."

It so fell out that Fanny had to leave; and Miss Matilda begged me to stay and "settle her" with the new maid; to which I consented, after I had heard from my father that he did not want me at home. The new servant was a rough, honest-looking country-girl, who had only lived in a farm place before; but I liked her looks when she came to be hired; and I promised Miss Matilda to put her in the ways of the house. The said ways were religiously such as Miss Matilda thought her sister would approve. Many a domestic rule and regulation had been a subject of plaintive whispered murmur to me, during Miss Jenkyns's life; but now that she was gone, I do not think that even I, who was a favourite, durst have

suggested an alteration. To give an instance: we constantly adhered to the forms which were observed, at meal times, in "my father, the Rector's house." Accordingly, we had always wine and dessert; but the decanters were only filled when there was a party. When oranges came in, a curious proceeding was gone through. Miss Jenkyns did not like to cut the fruit; for, as she observed, the juice all ran out nobody knew where; sucking was in fact the only way of enjoying oranges; but then there was the unpleasant association with a ceremony frequently gone through by little babies; and so, after dessert, in orange season, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty used to rise up, possess themselves each of an orange in silence, and withdraw to the privacy of their own rooms, to indulge in sucking oranges.

I had once or twice tried, on such occasions, to prevail on Miss Matty to stay; and had succeeded in her sister's lifetime. I held up a screen, and did not look, and, as she said, she tried not to make the noise very offensive; but now that she was left alone, she seemed quite horrified when I begged her to remain with me in the warm dining-parlour, and enjoy her orange as she liked best. And so it was in everything. Miss Jenkyns's rules were made more stringent than ever, because the framer of them was gone where there could be no appeal. In all things else Miss Matilda was meek and undecided to a fault. I have heard Fanny turn her round twenty times in a morning about dinner, just as the little hussy

chose. I determined that I would not leave her till I had seen what sort of a person Martha was; and, if I found her trustworthy, I would tell her not to trouble her mistress with every little decision.

Martha was blunt and plain-spoken to a fault; otherwise she was a brisk, well-meaning, but very ignorant girl.

At length I took my leave, giving many an injunction to Martha to look after her mistress, and to let me know if she thought that Miss Matilda was not so well; in which case I would volunteer a visit to my old friend, without noticing Martha's intelligence to her.

Accordingly I received a line or two from Martha every now and then; and, about November, I had a note to say her mistress was "very low and sadly off her food;" and the account made me so uneasy, that, although Martha did not decidedly summon me, I packed up my things and went.

I received a warm welcome, in spite of the little flurry produced by my impromptu visit, for I had only been able to give a day's notice. Miss Matilda looked miserably ill; and I prepared to comfort and cosset her.

I went down to have a private talk with Martha.

"How long has your mistress been so poorly?" I asked, as I stood by the kitchen fire.

"Well! I think it's better than a fortnight; it is, I know: it was one Tuesday, after Miss Pole

had been, that she went into this moping way. I thought she was tired, and it would go off with a night's rest; but, no! she has gone on and on ever since, till I thought it my duty to write to you, ma'am."

"You did quite right, Martha. It is a comfort to think she has so faithful a servant about her. And I hope you find your place comfortable?"

"Well, ma'am, missus is very kind, and there's plenty to eat and drink, and no more work but what I can do easily, — but — —" Martha hesitated.

"But what, Martha?"

"Why, it seems so hard of missus not to let me have any followers; there's such lots of young fellows in the town; and many a one has as much as offered to keep company with me; and I may never be in such a likely place again, and it's like wasting an opportunity. Many a girl as I know would have 'em unbeknownst to missus; but I've given my word, and I'll stick to it; or else this is just the house for missus never to be the wiser if they did come: and it's such a capable kitchen — there's such good dark corners in it — I'd be bound to hide any one. I counted up last Sunday night — for I'll not deny I was crying because I had to shut the door in Jem Hearn's face; and he's a steady young man, fit for any girl; only I had given missus my word." Martha was all but crying again; and I had little comfort to give her, for I knew, from old experience, of the horror with which both the Miss Jenkynses looked upon "followers;" and in Miss Matty's

present nervous state this dread was not likely to be lessened.

After prayers she called Martha back, and then she stood uncertain what to say.

"Martha!" she said at last; "you are young," — and then she made so long a pause that Martha, to remind her of her half-finished sentence, dropped a courtesy, and said —

"Yes, please, ma'am; two-and-twenty last third of October, please, ma'am."

"And perhaps, Martha, you may some time meet with a young man you like, and who likes you. I did say you were not to have followers; but if you meet with such a young man, and tell me, and I find he is respectable, I have no objection to his coming to see you once a week. Godf forbid!" said she, in a low voice, "that I should grieve any young hearts." She spoke as if she were providing for some distant contingency, and was rather startled when Martha made her ready eager answer:

"Please, ma'am, there's Jem Hearn, and he's a joiner, making three-and-sixpence a-day, and six foot one in his stocking-feet, please, ma'am; and if you'll ask about him to-morrow morning, every one will give him a character for steadiness; and he'll be glad enough to come to-morrow night, I'll be bound."

Though Miss Matty was startled, she submitted to Fate and Love.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD LETTERS.

I have often noticed that almost every one has his own individual small economies — careful habits of saving fractions of pennies in some one peculiar direction — any disturbance of which annoys him more than spending shillings or pounds on some real extravagance.

Now Miss Matty Jenkyns was chary of candles. We had many devices to use as few as possible. In the winter afternoons she would sit knitting for two or three hours; she could do this in the dark, or by fire-light; and when I asked if I might not ring for candles to finish stitching my wristbands, she told me to "keep blind man's holiday." They were usually brought in with tea; but we only burnt one at a time. As we lived in constant preparation for a friend who might come in any evening (but who never did), it required some contrivance to keep our two candles of the same length, ready to be lighted, and to look as if we burnt two always. The candles took it in turns; and, whatever we might be talking about or doing, Miss Matty's eyes were habitually fixed upon the candle, ready to jump up and extinguish it, and to light the other before they had become too uneven in length to be restored to equality in the course of the evening.

One night, I remember, this candle economy particularly annoyed me. I had been very much tired of my compulsory "blind man's holiday," —

especially as Miss Matty had fallen asleep, and I did not like to stir the fire, and run the risk of awakening her. I fancied Miss Matty must be dreaming of her early life; for she spoke one or two words, in her uneasy sleep, bearing reference to persons who were dead long before. When Martha brought in the lighted candle and tea, Miss Matty started into wakefulness, with a strange bewildered look around, as if we were not the people she expected to see about her. But immediately afterwards she tried to give me her usual smile. All through tea-time, her talk ran upon the days of her childhood and youth. Perhaps this reminded her of the desirableness of looking over all the old family letters, and destroying such as ought not to be allowed to fall into the hands of strangers; for she had often spoken of the necessity of this task, but had always shrunk from it, with a timid dread of something painful. To-night, however, she rose up after tea, and went for them. When she returned, there was a faint pleasant smell of Tonquin beans in the room. I had always noticed this scent about any of the things which had belonged to her mother; and many of the letters were addressed to her — yellow bundles of love-letters, sixty or seventy years old.

Miss Matty undid the packet with a sigh; but she stifled it directly, as if it were hardly right to regret the flight of time, or of life either. We agreed to look them over separately, each taking a different letter out of the same bundle, and

describing its contents to the other, before destroying it. I never knew what sad work the reading of old letters was before that evening, though I could hardly tell why. The letters were as happy as letters could be — at least those early letters were. There was in them a vivid and intense sense of the present time, which seemed so strong and full, as if it could never pass away, and as if the warm, living hearts that so expressed themselves could never die, and be as nothing to the sunny earth. I saw the tears stealing down the well-worn furrows of Miss Matty's cheeks, and her spectacles often wanted wiping. I trusted at last that she would light the other candle, for my own eyes were rather dim, and I wanted more light to see the pale, faded ink; but no — even through her tears, she saw and remembered her little economical ways.

The earliest set of letters were two bundles, tied together and ticketed (in Miss Jenkyns's handwriting), "Letters interchanged between my ever-honoured father and my dearly-beloved mother, prior to their marriage, in July, 1774." I should guess that the Rector of Cranford was about twenty-seven years of age when he wrote those letters; and Miss Matty told me that her mother was just eighteen at the time of her wedding. With my idea of the Rector, derived from a picture in the dining-parlour, stiff and stately, in a huge full-bottomed wig, with gown, cassock, and bands, and his hand upon a copy of the only sermon he ever published, — it was strange to read these

letters. They were full of eager, passionate ardour; short homely sentences, right fresh from the heart — (very different from the grand Latinised, Johnsonian style of the printed sermon, preached before some judge at assize time). His letters were a curious contrast to those of his girl-bride. She was evidently rather annoyed at his demands upon her for expressions of love, and could not quite understand what he meant by repeating the same thing over in so many different ways; but what she was quite clear about was her longing for a white "Paduasoy," — whatever that might be; and six or seven letters were principally occupied in asking her lover to use his influence with her parents (who evidently kept her in good order) to obtain this or that article of dress, more especially the white "Paduasoy." He cared nothing how she was dressed; she was always lovely enough for him, as he took pains to assure her, when she begged him to express in his answers a predilection for particular pieces of finery, in order that she might show what he said to her parents. But at length he seemed to find out that she would not be married till she had a "trousseau" to her mind; and then he sent her a letter, which had evidently accompanied a whole box full of finery, and in which he requested that she might be dressed in everything her heart desired. This was the first letter, ticketed in a frail, delicate hand, "From my dearest John." Shortly afterwards they were married, — I suppose, from the intermission in their correspondence.

"We must burn them, I think," said Miss Matty, looking doubtfully at me. "No one will care for them when I am gone." And one by one she dropped them into the middle of the fire; watching each blaze up, die out, and rise away, in faint, white, ghostly semblance, up the chimney, before she gave another to the same fate. The room was light enough now; but I, like her, was fascinated into watching the destruction of those letters, into which the honest warmth of a manly heart had been poured forth.

There was a great gap before any of the Rector's letters appeared. And then his wife had changed her mode of endorsement. It was no longer from "My dearest John;" it was from "My honoured Husband." The letters were written on occasion of the publication of the same Sermon which was represented in the picture. It had been necessary for him to go up to London to superintend it through the press.

Her letters back to her husband were more satisfactory to an absent husband and father than his could ever have been to her. Matty was now the mother's darling, and promised (like her sister at her age) to be a great beauty. I was reading this aloud to Miss Matty, who smiled and sighed a little at the hope, so fondly expressed, that "little Matty might not be vain, even if she were a bewty."

"I had very pretty hair, my dear," said Miss Matilda; "and not a bad mouth." And I saw

her soon afterwards adjust her cap and draw herself up.

Soon after the publication of the Sermon a little boy was born.

It seemed curious that I should never have heard of this brother before; but I concluded that he had died young; or else surely his name would have been alluded to by his sisters.

By-and-by we came to packets of Miss Jenkyns's letters. These, Miss Matty did regret to burn.

She took them from me, and even lighted the second candle, in order to read them aloud with a proper emphasis, and without stumbling over the big words. Oh dear! how I wanted facts instead of reflections, before those letters were concluded! They lasted us two nights; and I won't deny that I made use of the time to think of many other things, and yet I was always at my post at the end of each sentence.

I can't quite rember the date, but I think it was in 1805 that Miss Jenkyns wrote the longest series of letters; on occasion of her absence on a visit to some friends near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. These friends were intimate with the commandant of the garrison there, and heard from him of all the preparations that were being made to repel the invasion of Buonaparte, which some people imagined might take place at the mouth of the Tyne.

Peter Marmaduke Arley Jenkyns ("poor Peter!" as Miss Matty began to call him) was at school

at Shrewsbury by this time. The Rector took up his pen, and rubbed up his Latin, once more, to correspond with his boy. It was very clear that the lad's were what are called show-letters. They were of a highly mental description, giving an account of his studies, and his intellectual hopes of various kinds, with an occasional quotation from the classics; but, now and then, the animal nature broke out in such a little sentence as this, evidently written in a trembling hurry, after the letter had been inspected: "Mother, dear, do send me a cake, and put plenty of citron in." The "mother, dear," probably answered her boy in the form of cakes and "goody," for there were none of her letters among this set; but a whole collection of the Rector's, to whom the Latin in his boy's letters was like a trumpet to the old war-horse. Presently it became very evident that "poor Peter" got himself into many scrapes. There were letters of stilted penitence to his father, for some wrong-doing; and, among them all, was a badly-written, badly-sealed, badly-directed, blotted note — "My dear, dear, dear, dearest mother, I will be a better boy — I will, indeed; but don't, please, be ill for me; I am not worth it; but I will be good, darling mother."

Miss Matty could not speak for crying, after she had read this note. She gave it to me in silence, and then got up and took it to her sacred recesses in her own room, for fear, by any chance, it might get burnt. "Poor Peter!"

she said; "he was always in scrapes, he was too easy. They led him wrong, and then left him in the lurch. But he was too fond of mischief. He could never resist a joke. Poor Peter!"

CHAPTER V.

POOR PETER.

Poor Peter's career lay before him rather pleasantly mapped out by kind friends. He was to win honours at Shrewsbury School, and carry them thick to Cambridge, and after that, a living awaited him, the gift of his godfather, Sir Peter Arley. Poor Peter! his lot in life was very different to what his friends had hoped and planned. Miss Matty told me all about it, and I think it was a relief to her when she had done so.

He was the darling of his mother, who seemed to dote on all her children. Deborah was the favourite of her father, and when Peter disappointed him, she became his pride. The sole honour Peter brought away from Shrewsbury, was the reputation of being the best good fellow that ever was, and of being the captain of the school in the art of practical joking. His father was disappointed, but set about remedying the matter in a manly way. He could not afford to send Peter to read with any tutor, but he could read with him himself; and Miss Matty told me much

of the awful preparations in the way of dictionaries and lexicons that were made in her father's study the morning Peter began.

"My poor mother!" said she. "I remember how she used to stand in the hall, just near enough the study-door to catch the tone of my father's voice. I could tell in a moment if all was going right, by her face. And it did go right for a long time."

"What went wrong at last?" said I. "That tiresome Latin, I dare say."

"No! it was not the Latin. Peter was in high favour with my father, for he worked up well for him. But he seemed to think that the Cranford people might be joked about, and made fun of, and they did not like it; nobody does. He was always hoaxing them. But he was a very gentlemanly boy in many things. Still, he did like joking and making fun; and he seemed to think the old ladies in Cranford would believe anything. He even took in my father once, by dressing himself up as a lady that was passing through the town and wished to see the Rector of Cranford, 'who had published that admirable Assize Sermon.' Peter said, he was awfully frightened himself when he saw how my father took it all in. He did not think my father would have believed him; and yet if he had not, it would have been a sad thing for Peter. And yet I could hardly keep from laughing at the little curtseys Peter kept making, quite slyly, whenever my father

spoke of the lady's excellent taste and sound discrimination.

"At last there was a terrible sad thing happened." She got up, went to the door, and opened it; no one was there. She rang the bell for Martha; and when Martha came, her mistress told her to go for eggs to a farm at the other end of the town.

"We'll put out the candle, my dear. We can talk just as well by fire-light, you know. There! well! you see, Deborah had gone from home for a fortnight or so; it was a very still, quiet day, I remember, overhead; and the lilacs were all in flower, so I suppose it was spring. My father had gone out to see some sick people in the parish; I recollect seeing him leave the house, with his wig and shovelhat, and cane. What possessed our poor Peter I don't know; he had the sweetest temper, and yet he always seemed to like to plague Deborah. She never laughed at his jokes, and thought him ungenteel, and not careful enough about improving his mind; and that vexed him.

"Well! he went to her room, it seems, and dressed himself in her old gown, and shawl, and bonnet; just the things she used to wear in Cranford, and was known by everywhere; and he made the pillow into a little — you are sure you locked the door, my dear, for I should not like any one to hear — into — into — a little baby, with white long clothes. And he went and walked up and down in the Filbert walk — just half hidden by the rails, and half seen; and he cuddled his pillow,

iust like a baby; and talked to it all the nonsense people do. Oh dear! and my father came stepping stately up the street, as he always did; and what should he see but a little black crowd of people — I dare say as many as twenty — all peeping through his garden rails. So he thought, at first, they were only looking at a new rhododendron that was in full bloom, and that he was very proud of. My poor father! When he came nearer, he began to wonder that they did not see him; but their heads were all so close together, peeping and peeping! My father was amongst them, meaning, he said, to ask them to walk into the garden with him, and admire the beautiful vegetable production, when — oh, my dear! I tremble to think of it — he looked through the rails himself, and saw — I don't know what he thought he saw, but old Clare told me his face went quite grey-white with anger, and his eyes blazed out under his frowning black brows; and he spoke out — oh, so terribly! — and bade them all stop where they were — not one of them to go, not one to stir a step; and, swift as light, he was in at the garden door, and down the Filbert walk, and seized hold of poor Peter, and tore his clothes off his back — bonnet, shawl, gown, and all — and threw the pillow among the people over the railings: and then he was very, very angry indeed; and before all the people he lifted up his cane, and flogged Peter!

"My dear! Old Clare said, Peter looked as white as my father; and stood as still as a statue

to be flogged; and my father struck hard! When my father stopped to take breath, Peter said, 'Have you done enough, Sir?' quite hoarsely, and still standing quite quiet. I don't know what my father said — or if he said anything. But old Clare said, Peter turned to where the people outside the railings were, and made them a low bow, as grand and as grave as any gentleman; and then walked slowly into the house. I was in the store-room helping my mother to make cowslip-wine, when Peter came in, looking as haughty as any man — indeed, looking like a man, not like a boy. 'Mother!' he said, 'I am come to say, God bless you for ever.' He did not smile or speak, but put his arms round her, and kissed her as if he did not know how to leave off; and before she could speak again, he was gone. We talked it over, and could not understand it, and she bade me go and seek my father, and ask what it was all about. I found him walking up and down, looking very highly displeased.

"'Tell your mother I have flogged Peter, and that he richly deserved it.'

"I durst not ask any more questions. When I told my mother, she sat down, quite faint, for a minute. I remember, a few days after, I saw the poor, withered cowslip-flowers thrown out to the leaf-heap, to decay and die there. There was no making of cowslip-wine that year at the Rectory — nor, indeed, ever after.

"Presently, my mother went to my father. Some time after, they came out together; and then my

mother told me what had happened, and that she was going up to Peter's room, at my father's desire — though she was not to tell Peter this — to talk the matter over with him. But no Peter was there. We looked over the house; no Peter was there! Even my father, who had not liked to join in the search at first, helped us before long. The Rectory was a very old house: steps up into a room, steps down into a room, all through. At first, my mother went calling low and soft — as if to reassure the poor boy — 'Peter! Peter, dear! it's only me;' but she found he was not in the garden, nor the hayloft, nor anywhere about — my mother's cry grew louder and wilder — 'Peter! Peter, my darling! where are you?' for then she felt and understood that that long kiss meant some sad kind of 'good-by.' The afternoon went on — my mother never resting, but seeking again and again in every possible place that had been looked into twenty times before; nay, that she had looked into over and over again herself. My father sat with his head in his hands, not speaking, except when his messengers came in, bringing no tidings. At last (and it was nearly dark), my father rose up. He took hold of my mother's arm, as she came with wild, sad pace, through one door, and quickly towards another. She started at the touch of his hand, for she had forgotten all in the world but Peter.

"'Molly!' said he, 'I did not think all this would happen.' He looked into her face for comfort —

her poor face, all wild and white; for neither she nor my father had dared to acknowledge — much less act upon — the terror that was in their hearts, lest Peter should have made away with himself. My father saw no conscious look in his wife's hot, dreary eyes, and he missed the sympathy that she had always been ready to give him — strong man as he was; and at the dumb despair in her face, his tears began to flow. But when she saw this, a gentle sorrow came over her countenance, and she said, 'Dearest John! don't cry; come with me, and we'll find him,' almost as cheerfully as if she knew where he was. And she took my father's great hand in her little soft one, and led him along, the tears dropping, as he walked on that same unceasing, weary walk, from room to room, through house and garden.

"Oh! it was an awful time; coming down like a thunderbolt on the still sunny day, when the lilacs were all in bloom."

"Where was Mr. Peter?" said I.

"He had made his way to Liverpool; and there was war then; and some of the king's ships lay off the mouth of the Mersey; and they were only too glad to have a fine likely boy such as him (five foot nine he was) come to offer himself. The captain wrote to my father, and Peter wrote to my mother.

"And my mother wrote to Peter. 'Come back, she said, and make us happy, who love you so much.'

"But Peter did not come back. That spring day was the last time he ever saw his mother's face.

"But my father and mother set off in our own gig, — and oh! my dear, they were too late — the ship was gone!"

We sat in silence. At length I asked Miss Matty to tell me how her mother bore it.

"Oh!" she said, "she was patience itself. She had never been strong, and this weakened her terribly. My father used to sit looking at her: far more sad than she was. He seemed as if he could look at nothing else when she was by; and he was so humble, — so very gentle now.

"And she would smile at him and comfort him, not in words but in her looks and tones, which were always cheerful when he was there. And she would speak of how she thought Peter stood a good chance of being admiral very soon — he was so brave and clever. But, oh, my dear! the bitter, bitter crying she had when she was alone! — and at last, as she grew weaker, she could not keep her tears in when Deborah or me was by, and would give us message after message for Peter — (his ship had gone to the Mediterranean, or somewhere down there, and then he was ordered off to India, and there was no overland route then); — but she still said that no one knew where their death lay in wait, and that we were not to think hers was near. We did not think it, but we knew it, as we saw her fading away.

"And only think, love! the very day after her death — for she did not live quite a twelvemonth after Peter went away — the very day after —

came a parcel for her from India — from her poor boy. It was a large, soft, white India shawl, with just a little narrow border all round; just what my mother would have liked.

"We thought it might rouse my father, for he had sat with her hand in his all night long; so Deborah took it in to him, and Peter's letter to her, and all. At first, he took no notice; and we tried to make a kind of light careless talk about the shawl, opening it out and admiring it. Then, suddenly, he got up, and spoke: — 'She shall be buried in it,' he said; 'Peter shall have that comfort; and she would have liked it.'

"My mother looked so lovely in her death! We decked her in the long soft folds; she lay, smiling, as if pleased; and people came — all Cranford came — to beg to see her, for they had loved her dearly — as well they might; and the country-women brought posies: old Clare's wife brought some white violets, and begged they might lie on her breast.

"My father missed my mother sorely; the whole parish noticed it. Not that he was less active; I think he was more so, and more patient in helping every one. I did all I could to set Deborah at liberty to be with him; for I knew I was good for little, and that my best work in the world was to do odd jobs quietly, and set others at liberty. But my father was a changed man."

"Did Mr. Peter ever come home?"

"Yes, once. He came home a Lieutenant; he did not get to be Admiral. And he and my father were such friends! My father took him into every house in the parish, he was so proud of him. He never walked out without Peter's arm to lean upon. Deborah used to smile (I don't think we ever laughed again after my mother's death), and say she was quite put in a corner."

"And then?" said I, after a pause.

"Then Peter went to sea again; and by-and-by, my father died, blessing us both, and thanking Deborah for all she had been to him; and, of course, our circumstances were changed; and, instead of living at the Rectory, and keeping three maids and a man, we had to come to this small house, and be content with a servant-of-all-work; but, as Deborah used to say, we have always lived genteelly, even if circumstances have compelled us to simplicity. — Poor Deborah!"

"And, Mr. Peter?" asked I.

"Oh, there was some great war in India — I forget what they call it — and we have never heard of Peter since then. I believe he is dead myself; and it sometimes fidgets me that we have never put on mourning for him. And then, again, when I sit by myself, and all the house is still, I think I hear his step coming up the street, and my heart begins to flutter and beat; but the sound always goes past — and Peter never comes."

CHAPTER VI.

VISITING.

One day, when we were at a party, Mrs. Jamieson told us of a coming event, respecting which she had been quite silent till that moment.

"My sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, is coming to stay with me."

There was a chorus of "Indeed!" and then a pause. Each one rapidly reviewed her wardrobe, as to its fitness to appear in the presence of a Baron's widow; for, of course, a series of small festivals were always held in Cranford on the arrival of a visitor at any of our friends' houses. We felt very pleasantly excited on the present occasion.

Early the next morning — directly after twelve — Miss Pole made her appearance at Miss Matty's. Some very trifling piece of business was alleged as a reason for the call; but there was evidently something behind. At last out it came.

"By the way, you'll think I'm strangely ignorant; but, do you really know, I am puzzled how we ought to address Lady Glenmire. Do you say, 'Your Ladyship,' where you would say 'you' to a common person? I have been puzzling all morning; and are we to say 'My lady,' instead of 'Ma'am?' Now, you knew Lady Arley — will you kindly tell me the most correct way of speaking to the Peerage?"

Poor Miss Matty! she took off her spectacles, and she put them on again — but how Lady Arley was addressed, she could not remember.

"Well, I really think," said Miss Pole, "I had better just go and tell Mrs. Forrester about our little difficulty. One sometimes grows nervous; and yet one would not have Lady Glenmire think we were quite ignorant of the etiquettes of high life in Cranford."

"And will you just step in here, dear Miss Pole, as you come back, please; and tell me what you decide upon. Whatever you and Mrs. Forrester fix upon, will be quite right, I'm sure. 'Lady Arley,' 'Sir Peter,'" said Miss Matty, to herself, trying to recall the old forms of words.

"Who is Lady Glenmire?" asked I.

"Oh! she's the widow of Mr. Jamieson — that's Mrs. Jamieson's late husband, you know — widow of his eldest brother. Mrs. Jamieson was a Miss Walker, daughter of Governor Walker."

It was really a relief to Miss Matty when Mrs. Jamieson came on a very unpolite errand. I notice that apathetic people have more quiet impertinence than any others; and Mrs. Jamieson came now to insinuate pretty plainly, that she did not particularly wish that the Cranford ladies should call upon her sister-in-law. For she wished to appear to her noble sister-in-law as if she only visited "county" families.

But perhaps Mrs. Jamieson found out that most of the county families were in London, and that those who remained in the country were not so

alive as they might have been to the circumstance of Lady Glenmire being in their neighbourhood. So she altered her determination of excluding the Cranford ladies, and sent notes of invitation all round for a small party, on the following Tuesday.

At first Miss Matty and I were resolved to decline Mrs. Jamieson's invitation; but we were finally prevailed upon by Miss Pole to accept it.

For Miss Pole possessed a very smart cap, which she was anxious to show to an admiring world; and so she seemed to be ready to act on what she called the great Christian principle of "Forgive and forget;" and she lectured dear Miss Matty so long on this head, that she absolutely ended by assuring her it was her duty, as a deceased Rector's daughter, to buy a new cap, and go to the party at Mrs. Jamieson's. So "we were most happy to accept," instead of "regretting that we were obliged to decline."

With three new caps, and a greater array of brooches than had ever been seen together at one time, since Cranford was a town, did Mrs. Forrester, and Miss Matty, and Miss Pole appear on that memorable Tuesday evening.

Mrs. Jamieson lived in a large house just outside the town. The living-rooms were at the back, looking on to a pleasant garden; the front windows only belonged to kitchens and housekeepers' rooms, and pantries; and in one of them Mr. Mulliner was reported to sit. Indeed, looking askance, we often saw the back of a head, covered with hair-powder, which also extended itself over his coat-

collar down to his very waist; and this imposing back was always engaged in reading the "St. James's Chronicle."

Mr. Mulliner was an object of great awe to all of us. He seemed never to have forgotten his condescension in coming to live at Cranford.

Mrs. Jamieson's drawing-room was cheerful; the evening sun came streaming into it, and the large square window was clustered round with flowers. The chairs were all a-row against the walls, with the exception of four or five which stood in a circle round the fire. Carlo, the dog, lay on the worsted-worked rug, and ungraciously barked at us as we entered. Mrs. Jamieson stood up, giving us each a torpid smile of welcome, and looking helplessly beyond us at Mr. Mulliner, as if she hoped he would place us in chairs, for if he did not, she never could. I suppose he thought we could find our way to the circle round the fire, which reminded me of Stonehenge, I don't know why. Lady Glenmire came to the rescue of our hostess; and, somehow or other, we found ourselves for the first time placed agreeably, and not formally, in Mrs. Jamieson's house. Lady Glenmire, now we had time to look at her, proved to be a bright little woman of middle age, who had been very pretty in the days of her youth, and who was even yet very pleasant-looking.

We were all very silent at first. We were thinking what we could talk about, that should be high enough to interest My Lady. At last, Miss Pole, who had always a great deal of courage and

savoir faire, spoke to Lady Glenmire, who on her part had seemed just as much puzzled to know how to break the silence as we were.

"Has your ladyship been to Court lately?" asked she; and then gave a little glance round at us, half timid and half triumphant, as much as to say, "See how judiciously I have chosen a subject befitting the rank of the stranger!"

"I never was there in my life," said Lady Glenmire, with a broad Scotch accent, but in a very sweet voice. And then, as if she had been too abrupt, she added, "We very seldom went to London; only twice, in fact, during all my married life; and before I was married, my father had far too large a family to take us often from our home, even to Edinburgh. Ye'll have been in Edinburgh, maybe?" said she, suddenly brightening up with the hope of a common interest. We had none of us been there; but Miss Pole had an uncle who once had passed a night there, which was very pleasant.

Mrs. Jamieson, meanwhile, was absorbed in wonder why Mr. Mulliner did not bring the tea; and at length the wonder oozed out of her mouth. "I had better ring the bell, my dear, had not I?" said Lady Glenmire, briskly.

"No — I think not — Mulliner does not like to be hurried."

We should have liked our tea, for we dined at an earlier hour than Mrs. Jamieson. I suspect Mr. Mulliner had to finish the "St. James's Chronicle" before he chose to trouble himself about

tea. His mistress fidgeted and fidgeted, and kept saying, "I can't think why Mulliner does not bring tea. I can't think what he can be about." And Lady Glenmire at last grew quite impatient; but it was a pretty kind of impatience after all; and she rung the bell rather sharply, on receiving a half permission from her sister-in-law to do so. Mr. Mulliner appeared in dignified surprise. "Oh!" said Mrs. Jamieson, "Lady Glenmire rang the bell; I believe it was for tea."

In a few minutes tea was brought. Very delicate was the china, very old the plate, very thin the bread and butter, and very small the lumps of sugar. Sugar was evidently Mrs. Jamieson's favourite economy. I question if the little filigree sugar-tongs, made something like scissors, could have opened themselves wide enough to take up an honest, vulgar, good-sized piece; and when I tried to seize two little minikin pieces at once, so as not to be detected in too many returns to the sugar-basin, they absolutely dropped one, with a little sharp clatter, quite in a malicious and unnatural manner.

After tea we thawed down into common-life subjects. We were thankful to Lady Glenmire for having proposed some more bread and butter, and this mutual want made us better acquainted with her than we should ever have been with talking about the Court.

The friendship, begun over bread and butter, extended on to cards. Lady Glenmire played Preference to admiration, and was a complete

authority as to Ombre and Quadrille. Even Miss Pole quite forgot to say "my lady," and "your ladyship," and said "Basto! ma'am;" "you have Spadille, I believe," just as quietly as if we had never held the great Cranford parliament on the subject of the proper mode of addressing a peeress.

We found out, in the course of the evening, that Lady Glenmire was going to pay Mrs. Jamieson a long visit, as she had given up her apartments in Edinburgh, and had no ties to take her back there in a hurry. On the whole, we were rather glad to hear this, for she had made a pleasant impression upon us; and it was also very comfortable to find, from things which dropped out in the course of conversation, that, in addition to many other genteel qualities, she was far removed from the vulgarity of wealth.

In our pattens, we picked our way home with extra care that night; so refined and delicate were our perceptions after drinking tea with "my lady."

CHAPTER VII.

SIGNOR BRUNONI.

Soon after the events of which I gave an account in my last paper, I was summoned home by my father's illness; and for a time I forgot, in anxiety about him, to wonder how my dear friends at Cranford were getting on, or how Lady Glenmire could reconcile herself to the dulness of the

long visit which she was still paying to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Jamieson.

Late in November — when my father was once more in good health — I received a letter from Miss Matty; and a very mysterious letter it was. She began many sentences without ending them, running them one into another, in much the same confused sort of way in which written words run together on blotting-paper. All I could make out was, that if my father was better (which she hoped he was), and would take warning and wear a great-coat from Michaelmas to Lady-day, if turbans were in fashion, could I tell her? such a piece of gaiety was going to happen as had not been seen or known of since Wombwell's lions came, when one of them ate a little child's arm; and she was, perhaps, too old to care about dress, but a new cap she must have; and, having heard that turbans were worn, and some of the county families likely to come, she would like to look tidy, if I would bring her a cap from the milliner I employed; and oh, dear! how careless of her to forget that she wrote to beg I would come and pay her a visit next Tuesday; when she hoped to have something to offer me in the way of amusement, which she would not now more particularly describe, only sea-green was her favourite colour. So she ended her letter; but in a P. S. she added, she thought she might as well tell me what was the peculiar attraction to Cranford just now; Signor Brunoni was going to exhibit his wonderful magic in the Cranford Assembly Rooms,

on Wednesday and Friday evening in the following week.

I was very glad to accept the invitation from my dear Miss Matty, independently of the conjuror; and most particularly anxious to prevent her from disfiguring her small gentle mousey face with a great Saracen's-head turban; and accordingly, I bought her a pretty, neat, middle-aged cap, which, however, was rather a disappointment to her when, on my arrival, she followed me into my bedroom, ostensibly to poke the fire, but in reality, I do believe, to see if the sea-green turban was not inside the cap-box with which I had travelled. It was in vain that I twirled the cap round on my hand to exhibit back and side fronts: her heart had been set upon a turban, and all she could do was to say, with resignation in her look and voice:

"I am sure you did your best, my dear. It is just like the caps all the ladies in Cranford are wearing, and they have had theirs for a year, I dare say. I should have liked something newer, I confess; but it is very pretty, my dear. And I dare say lavender will wear better than sea-green. Well, after all, what is dress, that we should care about it! You'll tell me if you want anything, my dear. Here is the bell. I suppose turbans have not got down to Drumble yet?"

The next evening we were all in a little gentle flutter at the idea of the gaiety before us. Miss Matty went up to dress betimes, and hurried me until I was ready, when we found we had an hour

and a half to wait before the "doors opened at seven precisely."

At length we set off; and at the door, under the carriage-way at the George, we met Mrs. Forrester and Miss Pole.

We went into the cloak-room adjoining the Assembly Room; Miss Matty gave a sigh or two to her departed youth, and the remembrance of the last time she had been there, as she adjusted her pretty new cap before the strange, quaint old mirror in the cloak-room. A dusty recollection of the days that were gone made Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester bridle up as they entered, and walk mincingly up the room, as if there were a number of genteel observers, instead of two little boys, with a stick of toffy between them with which to beguile the time.

We stopped short at the second front row; I could hardly understand why, until I heard Miss Pole ask a stray waiter if any of the county families were expected; and when he shook his head, and believed not, Mrs. Forrester and Miss Matty moved forwards, and our party represented a conversational square. The front row was soon augmented and enriched by Lady Glenmire and Mrs. Jamieson. We six occupied the two front rows, and our aristocratic seclusion was respected by the groups of shopkeepers who strayed in from time to time, and huddled together on the back benches.

At length the curtain flew up, revealing to our sight a magnificent gentleman in the Turkish

costume, seated before a little table, gazing at us with calm and condescending dignity, "like a being of another sphere," as I heard a sentimental voice ejaculate behind me.

The Grand Turk, as Miss Pole chose to call him, arose and announced himself as Signor Brunoni.

He spoke very broken English — so broken that there was no cohesion between the parts of his sentences; a fact which he himself perceived at last, and so left off speaking and proceeded to action.

Now we *were* astonished. How he did his tricks I could not imagine. Mrs. Jamieson kept taking her spectacles off and wiping them, as if she thought it was something defective in them which made the legerdemain; and Lady Glenmire, who had seen many curious sights in Edinburgh, was very much struck with the tricks.

At last, Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester became perfectly awe-struck. They whispered together. I sat just behind them, so I could not help hearing what they were saying. Miss Matty asked Mrs. Forrester "if she thought it was quite right to have come to see such things? She could not help fearing they were lending encouragement to something that was not quite — —" a little shake of the head filled up the blank. Mrs. Forrester replied, that the same thought had crossed her mind; she, too, was feeling very uncomfortable; it was so very strange. She was quite certain that it was her pocket-handkerchief which was in that loaf

just now; and it had been in her own hand not five minutes before. She wondered who had furnished the bread? She was sure it could not be Dakin, because he was the churchwarden. Suddenly, Miss Matty half turned towards me:

"Will you look, my dear — you are a stranger in the town, and it won't give rise to unpleasant reports — will you just look round and see if the Rector is here? If he is, I think we may conclude that this wonderful man is sanctioned by the Church, and that will be a great relief to my mind."

I looked, and I saw the tall, thin, dry, dusty Rector, sitting surrounded by National School boys, guarded by troops of his own sex from any approach of the many Cranford spinsters. His kind face was all agape with broad smiles, and the boys around him were in chinks of laughing. I told Miss Matty that the Church was smiling approval, which set her mind at ease.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PANIC.

I think a series of circumstances dated from Signor Brunoni's visit to Cranford, which seemed at the time connected in our minds with him, though I don't know that he had anything really to do with them. All at once all sorts of uncomfortable rumours got afloat in the town. There were one or two robberies — real *bonâ fide*

robberies; men had up before the magistrates and committed for trial; and that seemed to make us all afraid of being robbed; and for a long time at Miss Matty's, I know, we used to make a regular expedition all round the kitchens and cellars every night, Miss Matty leading the way, armed with the poker, I following with the hearthbrush, and Martha carrying the shovel and fire-irons with which to sound the alarm.

Miss Pole, who affected great bravery herself, was the principal person to collect and arrange strange stories and reports, so as to make them assume their most fearful aspect. But we discovered that she had begged one of Mr. Hoggin's worn-out hats to hang up in her lobby, and we (at least I) had my doubts as to whether she really would enjoy the little adventure of having her house broken into, as she protested she should.

Cranford had so long piqued itself on being an honest and moral town, that it had grown to fancy itself too genteel and well-bred to be otherwise, and felt the stain upon its character at this time doubly. But we comforted ourselves with the assurance which we gave to each other, that the robberies could never have been committed by any Cranford person.

Therefore, we must believe that the robbers were strangers — if strangers, why not foreigners? — if foreigners, who so likely as the French? Signor Brunoni spoke broken English like a Frenchman, and, though he wore a turban like a Turk, Mrs. Forrester had seen a print of Madame de

Staël with a turban on, and another of Mr. Denon in just such a dress as that in which the conjuror had made his appearance; showing clearly that the French, as well as the Turks, wore turbans: there could be no doubt Signor Brunoni was a Frenchman — a French spy, come to discover the weak and undefended places of England; and, doubtless, he had his accomplices.

One afternoon, about five o'clock, we were startled by a hasty knock at the door. Miss Matty bade me run and tell Martha on no account to open the door till she (Miss Matty) had reconnoitered through the window; and she armed herself with a footstool to drop down on the head of the visitor, in case he should show a face covered with black crape, as he looked up in answer to her inquiry of who was there. But it was nobody but Miss Pole and Betty. The former came up-stairs, carrying a little hand-basket, and she was evidently in a state of great agitation.

"Take care of that!" said she to me, as I offered to relieve her of her basket. "It's my plate. I am sure there is a plan to rob my house to-night. I am come to throw myself on your hospitality, Miss Matty. Betty is going to sleep with her cousin at the George. I can sit up here all night, if you will allow me; but my house is so far from any neighbours; and I don't believe we could be heard if we screamed ever so!"

"But," said Miss Matty, "what has alarmed you so much? Have you seen any men lurking about the house?"

"Oh yes!" answered Miss Pole. "Two very bad-looking men have gone three times past the house, very slowly; and an Irish beggar-woman came not half an hour ago, and all but forced herself in past Betty, saying her children were starving, and she must speak to the mistress. But Betty shut the door in her face, and came up to me, and we got the spoons together, and sat in the parlour-window watching, till we saw Thomas Jones going from his work, when we called to him and asked him to take care of us into the town."

We might have triumphed over Miss Pole, who had professed such bravery until she was frightened; but we were too glad to perceive that she shared in the weaknesses of humanity to exult over her; and I gave up my room to her very willingly, and shared Miss Matty's bed for the night. But before we retired, the two ladies rummaged up, out of the recesses of their memory, such horrid stories of robbery and murder, that I quite quaked in my shoes.

We parted for the night with an awe-struck wonder as to what we should hear of in the morning — and, on my part, with a vehement desire for the night to be over and gone: I was so afraid lest the robbers should have seen, from some dark lurking-place, that Miss Pole had carried off her plate, and thus have a double motive for attacking our house.

But until Lady Glenmire came to call next day we heard of nothing unusual.

She told us Mrs. Jamieson's house had really been attacked; at least there were men's footsteps to be seen on the flower-borders, underneath the kitchen windows, "where nae men should be;" and Carlo had barked all through the night as if strangers were abroad. Mrs. Jamieson had been awakened by Lady Glenmire, and they had rung the bell which communicated with Mr. Mulliner's room, in the third story, and when his night-capped head had appeared over the bannisters, in answer to the summons, they had told him of their alarm, and the reasons for it; whereupon he retreated into his bedroom, and locked the door (for fear of draughts, as he informed them in the morning), and opened the window, and called out valiantly to say, if the supposed robbers would come to him he would fight them. Lady Glenmire, after waiting and listening for some time in the drawing-room, had proposed to Mrs. Jamieson that they should go to bed; but that lady said she should not feel comfortable unless she sat up and watched; and, accordingly, she packed herself warmly up on the sofa, where she was found by the house-maid, when she came into the room at six o'clock, fast asleep; but Lady Glenmire went to bed, and kept awake all night.

When Miss Pole heard of this, she nodded her head in great satisfaction. She had been sure we should hear of something happening in Cranford that night; and we had heard. It was clear enough they had first proposed to attack her house; but when they saw that she and Betty were on their

guard, and had carried off the plate, they had changed their tactics and gone to Mrs. Jamieson's, and no one knew what might have happened if Carlo had not barked, like a good dog as he was!

Poor Carlo! his barking days were nearly over. Two days after this eventful night, Carlo was found dead, with his poor little legs stretched out stiff in the attitude of running, as if by such unusual exertion he could escape the sure pursuer, Death.

We were all sorry for Carlo, the old familiar friend who had snapped at us for so many years; and the mysterious mode of his death made us very uncomfortable. Could Signor Brunoni be at the bottom of this? He had apparently killed a canary with only a word of command; his will seemed of deadly force; who knew but what he might yet be lingering in the neighbourhood willing all sorts of awful things!

In a week's time we had got over the shock of Carlo's death; all but Mrs. Jamieson. She, poor thing, felt it as she had felt no event since her husband's death; indeed Miss Pole said, that as the Honourable Mr. Jamieson drank a good deal, and occasioned her much uneasiness, it was possible that Carlo's death might be the greater affliction. But there was always a tinge of cynicism in Miss Pole's remarks. However, one thing was clear and certain; it was necessary for Mrs. Jamieson to have some change of scene; and Mr. Mulliner was very impressive on this point, shaking his head whenever we inquired after his mistress, and speaking of her loss of appetite and bad nights very ominously.

So Mrs. Jamieson went to Cheltenham, escorted by Mr. Mulliner; and Lady Glenmire remained in possession of the house, her ostensible office being to take care that the maid-servants did not pick up followers. She made a very pleasant-looking dragon: and, as soon as it was arranged for her stay in Cranford, she found out that Mrs. Jamieson's visit to Cheltenham was just the best thing in the world. She had let her house in Edinburgh, and was for the time houseless, so the charge of her sister-in-law's comfortable abode was very convenient and acceptable.

Miss Pole was very much inclined to instal herself as a heroine, because of the decided steps she had taken in flying from the two men and one woman, whom she entitled "that murderous gang." She described their appearance in glowing colours, and I noticed that every time she went over the story some fresh trait of villany was added to their appearance. One was tall — he grew to be gigantic in height before we had done with him; he of course had black hair — and by-and-by, it hung in elf-locks over his forehead and down his back. The other was short and broad — and a hump sprouted out on his shoulder before we heard the last of him; he had red hair — which deepened into carroty; and she was almost sure he had a cast in his eye — a decided squint. As for the woman, her eyes glared, and she was masculine-looking — a perfect virago; most probably a man dressed in woman's clothes:

afterwards, we heard of a beard on her chin, and a manly voice and a stride.

When Miss Pole called, we soon before had got round to the subject about which we had been talking when Miss Pole came in — namely, how far, in the present disturbed state of the country, we could venture to accept an invitation which Miss Matty had just received from Mrs. Forrester, to come as usual and keep the anniversary of her wedding-day, by drinking tea with her at five o'clock, and playing a quiet pool afterwards. We would all much rather have declined this invitation; but we felt that it would not be quite kind to Mrs. Forrester, who would otherwise be left to a solitary retrospect of her not very happy or fortunate life. Miss Matty and Miss Pole had been visitors on this occasion for many years; and now they gallantly determined to nail their colours to the mast, and to go through Darkness-lane rather than fail in loyalty to their friend.

But when the evening came, Miss Matty (for it was she who was voted into the chair, as she had a cold), before being shut down in the sedan, like jack-in-a-box, implored the chairmen, whatever might befall, not to run away and leave her fastened up there, to be murdered. However, we got there safely, only rather out of breath, for it was who could trot hardest through Darkness-lane, and I am afraid poor Miss Matty was sadly jolted.

Mrs. Forrester had made extra preparations, in ackowledgment of our exertion in coming to see her through such dangers. The usual forms of

genteel ignorance as to what her servants might send up were all gone through; and harmony and Preference seemed likely to be the order of the evening, but for an interesting conversation that began I don't know how, but which had relation, of course, to the robbers who infested the neighbourhood of Cranford.

Having braved the dangers of Darkness-lane, and thus having a little stock of reputation for courage to fall back upon, we began to relate our individual fears, and the private precautions we each of us took. I owned that my pet apprehension was eyes — eyes looking at me, and watching me, glittering out from some dull flat wooden surface; and that if I dared to go up to my looking-glass when I was panic-stricken, I should certainly turn it round, with its back towards me, for fear of seeing eyes behind me looking out of the darkness. I saw Miss Matty nerving herself up for a confession; and at last out it came. She owned that, ever since she had been a girl, she had dreaded being caught by her last leg, just as she was getting into bed, by some one concealed under it. So she had bethought herself of something — perhaps I had noticed that she had told Martha to buy her a penny ball, such as children play with — and now she rolled this ball under the bed every night; if it came out on the other side, well and good; if not, she always took care to have her hand on the bell-rope, and meant to call out John and Harry, just as if she expected men-servants to answer her ring.

We all applauded this ingenious contrivance, and Miss Matty sank back into satisfied silence, with a look at Mrs. Forrester as if to ask for *her* private weakness.

Mrs. Forrester looked askance at Miss Pole, and tried to change the subject a little; however we urged her to tell us what she thought would frighten her more than anything. She paused, and stirred the fire, and snuffed the candles, and then she said, in a sounding whisper,

"Ghosts!"

She looked at Miss Pole, as much as to say she had declared it, and would stand by it. Such a look was a challenge in itself. Miss Pole came down upon her with indigestion, spectral illusions, and optical delusions. Mrs. Forrester protested that ghosts were a part of her religion; that surely she, the widow of a Major in the army, knew what to be frightened at, and what not; in short, I never saw Mrs. Forrester so warm either before or since, for she was a gentle, meek, enduring old lady in most things. Not all the elder-wine that ever was mulled could this night wash out the remembrance of this difference between Miss Pole and her hostess. Indeed, when the elder-wine was brought in, it gave rise to a new burst of discussion: for Jenny, the little maiden who staggered under the tray, had to give evidence of having seen a ghost with her own eyes, not so many nights ago, in Darkness-lane — the very lane we were to go through on our way home.

In spite of the uncomfortable feeling which this last consideration gave me, I could not help

being amused at Jenny's position, which was exceedingly like that of a witness being examined and cross-examined by two counsel who are not at all scrupulous about asking leading questions. The conclusion I arrived at was, that Jenny had certainly seen something beyond what a fit of indigestion would have caused. A lady all in white, and without her head, was what she deposed and adhered to, supported by a consciousness of the secret sympathy of her mistress under the withering scorn with which Miss Pole regarded her. And not only she, but many others, had seen this headless lady, who sat by the roadside wringing her hands as in deep grief.

While we were putting on our things to go home, instead of the busy clatter usual in the operation, we tied on our cloaks as sadly as mutes at a funeral. Miss Matty drew the curtains round the windows of the chair to shut out disagreeable sights; and the men (either because they were in spirits that their labours were so nearly ended, or because they were going down hill) set off at such a round and merry pace, that it was all Miss Pole and I could do to keep up with them. She had breath for nothing beyond an imploring "Don't leave me!" uttered as she clutched my arm so tightly that I could not have quitted her, ghost or no ghost. What a relief it was when the men, weary of their burden and their quick trot, stopped just where Headingley-causeway branches off from Darkness-lane! Miss Pole unloosed me and caught at one of the men.

"Could not you — could not you take Miss Matty round by Headingley-causeway? — the pavement in Darkness-lane jolts so, and she is not very strong."

A smothered voice was heard from the inside of the chair:

"Oh! pray go on! What is the matter? What is the matter? I will give you sixpence more to go on very fast; pray don't stop here."

"And I'll give you a shilling," said Miss Pole, with tremulous dignity, "if you'll go by Headingley-causeway."

The two men grunted acquiescence and took up the chair and went along the causeway, which certainly answered Miss Pole's kind purpose of saving Miss Matty's bones; for it was covered with soft thick mud, and even a fall there would have been easy, till the getting up came, when there might have been some difficulty in extrication.

CHAPTER IX.

SAMUEL BROWN.

One morning I met Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole, setting out on a long walk to find some old woman who was famous in the neighbourhood for her skill in knitting woollen stockings.

In the afternoon Miss Pole called on Miss Matty to tell her of the adventure — the real adventure they had met with on their morning's walk. They had been perplexed about the exact

path which they were to take across the fields, in order to find the knitting old woman, and had stopped to inquire at a little wayside public-house, standing on the high road to London, about three miles from Cranford.

The good woman had asked them to sit down and rest themselves, while she fetched her husband, who could direct them better than she could; and, while they were sitting in the sanded parlour, a little girl came in. They thought that she belonged to the landlady, and began some trifling conversation with her; but, on Mrs. Roberts's return, she told them that the little thing was the only child of a couple who were staying in the house. And then she began a long story, out of which Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole could only gather one or two decided facts; which were that, about six weeks ago, a light spring-cart had broken down just before their door, in which there were two men, one woman, and this child. One of the men was seriously hurt — no bones broken, only "shaken," the landlady called it; but he had probably sustained some severe internal injury, for he had languished in their house ever since, attended by his wife, the mother of this little girl. Miss Pole had asked what he was, what he looked like. And Mrs. Roberts had made answer that he was not like a gentleman, nor yet like a common person; if it had not been that he and his wife were such decent, quiet people, she could almost have thought he was a mountebank, or something of that kind, for they had a great box in the

cart, full of she did not know what. She had helped to unpack it, and take out their linen and clothes, when the other man — his twin brother, she believed he was — had gone off with the horse and cart.

Good Mrs. Roberts bethought her of begging the ladies to see the wife; and, as Miss Pole said, there was no doubting the honest, worn, bronze face of the woman, who, at the first tender word from Lady Glenmire, burst into tears, which she was too weak to check, until some word from the landlady made her swallow down her sobs, in order that she might testify to the Christian kindness shown by Mr. and Mrs. Roberts. Miss Pole found out that he, and no other, was our Signor Brunoni, to whom all Cranford had been attributing all manner of evil this six weeks past! Yes! his wife said his proper name was Samuel Brown — "Sam," she called him — but to the last we preferred calling him "the Signor;" it sounded so much better.

The end of their conversation with the Signora Brunoni was, that it was agreed that he should be placed under medical advice, and for any expense incurred in procuring this Lady Glenmire promised to hold herself responsible; and had accordingly gone to Mr. Hoggins to beg him to ride over to the Rising Sun that very afternoon, and examine into the Signor's real state; and as Miss Pole said, if it was desirable to remove him to Cranford to be more immediately under Mr. Hoggins's eye, she would undertake to see for

lodgings, and arrange about the rent. Mrs. Roberts had been as kind as could be all throughout; but it was evident that their long residence there had been a slight inconvenience.

Before Miss Pole left us, Miss Matty and I were as full of the morning's adventure as she was. We talked about it all the evening, turning it in every possible light, and we went to bed anxious for the morning, when we should surely hear from some one what Mr. Hoggins thought and recommended. Indeed, we were rather proud of our doctor at Cranford, as a doctor; but as a man — or rather, I should say, as a gentleman — we could only shake our heads over his name and himself, and wished that he had read Lord Chesterfield's Letters in the days when his manners were susceptible of improvement. Nevertheless, we all regarded his dictum in the Signor's case as infallible; and when he said, that with care and attention he might rally, we had no more fear for him.

But although we had no more fear, everybody did as much as if there was great cause for anxiety — as indeed there was, until Mr. Hoggins took charge of him. Miss Pole looked out clean and comfortable, if homely, lodgings; Miss Matty sent the sedan chair for him; and Martha and I aired it well before it left Cranford, by holding a warming-pan full of red-hot coals in it, and then shutting it up close, smoke and all, until the time when he should get into it at the Rising Sun. Lady Glenmire undertook the medical department under

Mr. Hoggins's directions; and rummaged up all Mrs. Jamieson's medicine glasses, and spoons, and bed-tables, in a free and easy way. Indeed, it was wonderful to see what kind feelings were called out by this poor man's coming amongst us. And also wonderful to see how the great Cranford panic, which had been occasioned by his first coming in the Turkish dress, melted away into thin air on his second coming — pale and feeble, and with his heavy filmy eyes, that only brightened a very little when they fell upon the countenance of his faithful wife, or their pale and sorrowful little girl.

Miss Pole came with her little basket at all hours of the evening, as if her lonely house, and the unfrequented road to it, had never been infested by that "murderous gang."

I found Miss Matty covering a penny ball — the ball that she used to roll under her bed — with gay-coloured worsted in rainbow stripes.

"My dear," said she, "my heart is sad for that little careworn child. Although her father is a conjuror, she looks as if she had never had a good game of play in her life. I used to make very pretty balls in this way when I was a girl, and I thought I would try if I could not make this one smart and take it to Phœbe this afternoon. I think 'the gang' must have left the neighbourhood, for one does not hear any more of their violence and robbery now."

The Signora told me, one day, a good deal about their lives up to this period.

"Sam was a sergeant in the 31st; and when the regiment was ordered to India, I drew a lot to go, and I was more thankful than I can tell; for it seemed as if it would only be a slow death to me to part from my husband. But, indeed, ma'am, if I had known all, I don't know whether I would not rather have died there and then, than gone through what I have done since. To be sure, I've been able to comfort Sam, and to be with him; but, ma'am, I've lost six children," said she, looking up at me with those strange eyes, that I have never noticed but in mothers of dead children — with a kind of wild look in them, as if seeking for what they never more might find. "Yes! Six children died off, like little buds nipped untimely, in that cruel India. I thought, as each died, I never could — I never would — love a child again; and when the next came, it had not only its own love, but the deeper love that came from the thoughts of its little dead brothers and sisters. And when Phœbe was coming, I said to my husband, 'Sam, if this baby dies too, I shall go mad; the madness is in me now; but if you let me go down to Calcutta, carrying my baby step by step, it will may-be work itself off; and I will save, and I will hoard, and I will beg, — and I will die, to get a passage home to England, where our baby may live!' God bless him! he said I might go; and he saved up his pay, and I saved every piece I could get for washing or any way; and when Phœbe came, and I grew strong again, I set off. It was very lonely; through the thick

forests, dark again with their heavy trees — along by the rivers' side — from station to station, from Indian village to village, I went along, carrying my child. And the natives were very kind. We could not understand one another; but they saw my baby on my breast, and they came out to me, and brought me rice and milk, and sometimes flowers. Then, the next morning, I was so tired! and they wanted me to stay with them — but it seemed to me as if Death was following me to take my baby away from me; and as if I must go on, and on — and I thought how God had cared for mothers ever since the world was made, and would care for me; so I bade them good-by, and set off afresh. And once when my baby was ill, and both she and I needed rest, He led me to a place where I found a kind Englishman lived, right in the midst of the natives."

"And you reached Calcutta safely at last?"

"Yes! safely."

"Poor little Phœbe!" said I, my thoughts going back to the baby she carried all those hundred miles.

"Ah! you may say so! I never thought I should have reared her, though, when she fell ill at Chunderabaddad; but that good, kind Aga Jenkyns took us in, which I believe was the very saving of her."

"Jenkyns!" said I.

"Yes! Jenkyns. I shall think all people of that name are kind; for here is that nice old lady who comes every day to take Phœbe a walk!"

But an idea had flashed through my head: could the Aga Jenkyns be the lost Peter? True, he was reported by many to be dead. But, equally true, some had said that he had arrived at the dignity of great Lama of Thibet. Miss Matty thought he was alive. I would make further inquiry.

CHAPTER X.

ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED!

Was the "poor Peter" of Cranford the Aga Jenkyns of Chunderabaddad, or was he not?

In my own home, whenever people had nothing else to do, they blamed me for want of discretion. Indiscretion was my bugbear fault. Everybody has a bugbear fault; a sort of standing characteristic — a *pièce de résistance* for their friends to cut at; and in general they cut and come again. I was tired of being called indiscreet and incautious. I would not even hint my suspicions respecting the Aga. I would collect evidence and carry it home to lay before my father, as the family friend of the two Miss Jenkynses.

The only fact I gained from the Cranford ladies was that certainly Peter had last been heard of in India, "or that neighbourhood;" and that this scanty intelligence of his whereabouts had reached Cranford in the year when Miss Pole had bought her India muslin gown, long since worn out; — and in a year when Wombwell came to Cranford,

because Miss Matty had wanted to see an elephant in order that she might the better imagine Peter riding on one.

I suppose, all these inquiries of mine, and the consequent curiosity excited in the minds of my friends, made us blind and deaf to what was going on around us. It seemed to me as if the sun rose and shone, and as if the rain rained on Cranford just as usual, and I did not notice any sign of the times that could be considered as a prognostic of any uncommon event; even Miss Pole was breathless with astonishment when she came to tell us of the astounding piece of news.

We were sitting — Miss Matty and I — much as usual; she in the blue chintz easy-chair, with her back to the light, and her knitting in her hand — I reading aloud the "St. James's Chronicle." A few minutes more, and we should have gone to make the little alterations in dress usual before calling time (twelve o'clock) in Cranford. We had been talking of the Signor's rapid recovery since the warmer weather had set in, and praising Mr. Hoggins's skill, and lamenting his want of refinement and manner, when a knock was heard; a caller's knock — three distinct taps — and we were flying to our rooms, to change cap and collars, when Miss Pole arrested us by calling out as she came up the stairs, "Don't go — I can't wait — it is not twelve, I know — but never mind your dress — I must speak to you." We did our best to look as if it was not we who had made the hurried movement, the sound of which she had

heard; for, of course, we did not like to have it supposed that we had any old clothes that it was convenient to wear out in the "sanctuary of home," as Miss Jenkyns once prettily called the back parlour, where she was tying up preserves.

"What do you think, Miss Matty? What *do* you think? Lady Glenmire is to marry — is to be married, I mean — Lady Glenmire — Mr. Hoggins — Mr. Hoggins is going to marry Lady Glenmire!"

"Marry!" said we. "Marry! Madness!"

"Marry!" said Miss Pole, with the decision that belonged to her character. "*I* said marry! as you do; and I also said, 'What a fool my lady is going to make of herself!' I could have said 'Madness!' but I controlled myself, for it was in a public shop that I heard of it."

"But," said Miss Matty, sighing as one recovering from a blow, "perhaps it is not true. Perhaps we are doing her injustice."

"No!" said Miss Pole. "I have taken care to ascertain that. I went straight to Mrs. Fitz-Adam, to borrow a cookery book which I knew she had; and I introduced my congratulations *à propos* of the difficulty gentlemen must have in housekeeping; and Mrs. Fitz-Adam bridled up, and said that she believed it was true, though how and where I could have heard it she did not know. She said her brother and Lady Glenmire had come to an understanding at last. 'Understanding!' such a coarse word! But my lady will have to come down to many a want of refinement. I have reason

to believe Mr. Hoggins sups on bread-and-cheese and beer every night."

"Marry!" said Miss Matty once again. "Well! I never thought of it. Two people that we know going to be married. It's coming very near!"

"So near that my heart stopped beating, when I heard of it, while you might have counted twelve," said Miss Pole.

"One does not know whose turn may come next. Here, in Cranford, poor Lady Glenmire might have thought herself safe," said Miss Matty, with a gentle pity in her tones.

"Bah!" said Miss Pole, with a toss of her head.

"Well! there is a kind of attraction about Lady Glenmire that I, for one, should be ashamed to have."

I put in my wonder. "But how can she have fancied Mr. Hoggins? I am not surprised that Mr. Hoggins has liked her."

"Oh! I don't know. Mr. Hoggins is rich, and very pleasant-looking," said Miss Matty, "and very good-tempered and kind-hearted."

"She has married for an establishment, that's it." And we turned to speculate on the way in which Mrs. Jamieson would receive the news. The person whom she had left in charge of her house to keep off followers from her maids, to set up a follower of her own! And that follower a man whom Mrs. Jamieson had tabooed as vulgar, and inadmissible to Cranford society; not merely on account of his name, but because of his voice, his complexion, his boots, smelling of the stable,

and himself, smelling of drugs. What would Mrs. Jamieson say? We looked into the darkness of futurity as a child gazes after a rocket up in the cloudy sky, full of wondering expectation of the rattle, the discharge, and the brilliant shower of sparks and light. Then we brought ourselves down to earth and the present time, by questioning each other (being all equally ignorant, and all equally without the slightest data to build any conclusions upon) as to when IT would take place? Where? How much a year Mr. Hoggins had? Whether she would drop her title? And how Martha and the other correct servants in Cranford would ever be brought to announce a married couple as Lady Glenmire and Mr. Hoggins? But would they be visited? Would Mrs. Jamieson let us? Or must we choose between the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson and the degraded Lady Glenmire? We all liked Lady Glenmire the best. She was bright, and kind, and sociable, and agreeable: and Mrs. Jamieson was dull, and inert, and pompous, and tiresome. But we had acknowledged the sway of the latter so long, that it seemed like a kind of disloyalty now even to meditate disobedience to the prohibition we anticipated.

When Miss Pole left us we endeavoured to subside into calmness; but Miss Matty was really upset by the intelligence she had heard. She reckoned it up, and it was more than fifteen years since she had heard of any of her acquaintance going to be married, with the one exception of Miss Jessie Brown; and, as she said, it gave her

quite a shock, and made her feel as if she could not think what would happen next.

It had not been Lady Glenmire's dress that had won Mr. Hoggins's heart, for she went about on her errands of kindness more shabby than ever. Although in the hurried glimpses I caught of her at church or elsewhere she appeared rather to shun meeting any of her friends, her face seemed to have almost something of the flush of youth in it; her lips looked redder, and more trembling full than in their old compressed state, and her eyes dwelt on all things with a lingering light, as if she was learning to love Cranford and its belongings. Mr. Hoggins looked broad and radiant, and creaked up the middle aisle at church in a bran-new pair of top-boots — an audible, as well as visible, sign of his purposed change of state; for the tradition went, that the boots he had worn till now were the identical pair in which he first set out on his rounds in Cranford twenty-five years ago; only they had been new-pieced, high and low, top and bottom, heel and sole, black leather and brown leather, more times than any one could tell.

None of the ladies in Cranford chose to sanction the marriage by congratulating either of the parties. We wished to ignore the whole affair until our liege lady, Mrs. Jamieson, returned. This restraint upon our tongues was beginning to be irksome, and our idea of the dignity of silence was paling before our curiosity, when another direction was given to our thoughts, by an announcement on the part of the principal shopkeeper of Cranford, who

ranged the trades from grocer and cheesemonger to man-milliner, as occasion required, that the Spring Fashions were arrived, and would be exhibited on the following Tuesday, at his rooms in High-street. Now Miss Matty had been only waiting for this before buying herself a new silk gown. I had offered, it is true, to send to Drumble for patterns, but she had rejected my proposal, gently implying that she had not forgotten her disappointment about the sea-green turban. I was thankful that I was on the spot now, to counteract the dazzling fascination of any yellow or scarlet silk.

I must say a word or two here about myself. I have spoken of my father's old friendship for the Jenkyns family; indeed, I am not sure if there was not some distant relationship. He had willingly allowed me to remain all the winter at Cranford, in consideration of a letter which Miss Matty had written to him about the time of the panic, in which I suspect she had exaggerated my powers and my bravery as a defender of the house. But, now that the days were longer and more cheerful, he was beginning to urge the necessity of my return; and I only delayed in a sort of odd forlorn hope that if I could obtain any clear information, I might make the account given by the Signora of the Aga Jenkyns tally with that of "poor Peter," his appearance and disappearance, which I had winnowed out of the conversation of Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester.

CHAPTER XI.

STOPPED PAYMENT.

The very Tuesday morning on which Mr. Johnson was going to show fashions, the post-woman brought two letters to the house.

Mine was from my father. Miss Matty's was printed. My father's was just a man's letter; I mean it was very dull, and gave no information beyond that he was well, that they had had a good deal of rain, that trade was very stagnant, and there were many disagreeable rumours afloat. He then asked me if I knew whether Miss Matty still retained her shares in the Town and County Bank, as there were very unpleasant reports about it; though nothing more than he had always foreseen, and had prophesied to Miss Jenkyns years ago, when she would invest their little property in it — the only unwise step that clever woman had ever taken, to his knowledge — (the only time she ever acted against his advice, I knew). However, if anything had gone wrong, of course I was not to think of leaving Miss Matty while I could be of any use, &c.

"Who is your letter from, my dear? Mine is a very civil invitation, signed Edwin Wilson, asking me to attend an important meeting of the shareholders of the Town and County Bank, to be held in Drumble, on Thursday the twenty-first. I am sure, it is very attentive of them to remember me."

I did not like to hear of this "important meeting," for though I did not know much about busi-

ness, I feared it confirmed what my father said; however, I thought, ill news always came fast enough, so I resolved to say nothing about my alarm, and merely told her that my father was well, and sent his kind regards to her. She kept turning over and admiring her letter. At last she spoke:

"I remember their sending one to Deborah just like this; but that I did not wonder at, for everybody knew she was so clear-headed. I am afraid I could not help them much; indeed, if they came to accounts, I should be quite in the way, for I never could do sums in my head. Deborah, I know, rather wished to go, and went so far as to order a new bonnet for the occasion; but when the time came, she had a bad cold; so they sent her a very polite account of what they had done. Chosen a Director, I think it was. Do you think they want me to help them to choose a Director? I am sure, I should choose your father at once."

"My father has no shares in the Bank," said I.

"Oh, no! I remember! He objected very much to Deborah's buying any, I believe. But she was quite the woman of business, and always judged for herself; and here, you see, they have paid eight per cent. all these years."

It was a very uncomfortable subject to me, with my half knowledge; so I thought I would change the conversation, and I asked at what time she thought we had better go and see the Fashions.

"Well, my dear," she said, "the thing is this; it is not etiquette to go till after twelve, but then,

you see, all Cranford will be there, and one does not like to be too curious about dress and trimmings and caps, with all the world looking on. So I thought we would just slip down this morning, soon after breakfast; for I do want half a pound of tea; and then we could go up and examine the things at our leisure, and see exactly how my new silk gown must be made; and then, after twelve, we could go with our minds disengaged, and free from thoughts of dress."

We began to talk of Miss Matty's new silk gown. I discovered that it would be really the first time in her life that she had had to choose anything of consequence for herself. Miss Matty anticipated the sight of the glossy folds with as much delight as if the five sovereigns, set apart for the purchase, could buy all the silks in the shop.

If a happy sea-green could be met with, the gown was to be sea-green: if not, she inclined to maize, and I to silver grey; and we discussed the requisite number of breadths until we arrived at the shop-door.

When we entered the shop it was pretty well filled, for it was Cranford market-day, and many of the farmers and country people from the neighbourhood round came in, sleeking down their hair, and glancing shyly about from under their eyelids, as if anxious to take back some notion of the unusual gaiety to the mistress or the lasses at home. One honest-looking man, however, made his way up to the counter at which we stood, and boldly asked to look at a shawl or two. The other

country folk confined themselves to the grocery side; but our neighbour was evidently too full of some kind intention towards mistress, wife, or daughter, to be shy; and it soon became a question with me, whether he or Miss Matty would keep their shopman the longest time. He thought each shawl more beautiful than the last; and, as for Miss Matty, she smiled and sighed over each fresh bale that was brought out.

"I am afraid," said she, hesitating, "whichever I choose I shall wish I had taken another. Look at this lovely crimson! it would be so warm in winter. But spring is coming on, you know. I wish I could have a gown for every season," said she, dropping her voice — as we all did in Cranford whenever we talked of anything we wished for but could not afford. "However," she continued in a louder and more cheerful tone, "it would give me a great deal of trouble to take care of them if I had them; so, I think, I'll only take one."

At that moment our attention was called off to our neighbour. He had chosen a shawl of about thirty shillings' value; and his face looked broadly happy, under the anticipation, no doubt, of the pleasant surprise he should give to some Molly or Jenny at home; he had tugged a leathern purse out of his breeches-pocket, and had offered a five-pound note in payment for the shawl, and for some parcels which had been brought round to him from the grocery counter; and it was just at this point that he attracted our notice. The

shopman was examining the note with a puzzled, doubtful air:

"Town and County Bank! I am not sure, sir, but I believe we have received a warning against notes issued by this bank only this morning. I will just step and ask Mr. Johnson, sir; but I'm afraid I must trouble you for payment in cash, or in a note of a different bank."

I never saw a man's countenance fall so suddenly into dismay and bewilderment. It was almost piteous to see the rapid change.

"Dang it!" said he, striking his fist down on the table, as if to try which was the harder, "the chap talks as if notes and gold were to be had for the picking up."

Miss Matty had forgotten her silk gown in her interest for the man.

"What bank was it? I mean, what bank did your note belong to?"

"Town and County Bank."

"Let me see it," said she quietly to the shopman, gently taking it out of his hand, as he brought it back to return it to the farmer.

Mr. Johnson was very sorry, but, from information he had received, the notes issued by that bank were little better than waste paper.

"I don't understand you, sir," said Miss Matty, turning now to the shopman, who had been attending to the farmer. "Is this a forged note?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. It is a true note of its kind; but you see, ma'am, it is a Joint-Stock Bank, and there are reports out that it is likely to break. Mr.

Johnson is only doing his duty, ma'am, as I am sure Mr. Dobson knows."

But Mr. Dobson could not respond to the appealing bow by any answering smile. He was turning the note absently over in his fingers, looking gloomily enough at the parcel containing the lately chosen shawl.

"It's hard upon a poor man," said he, "as earns every farthing with the sweat of his brow. However, there's no help for it. You must take back your shawl, my man; Lizzie must do on with her cloak for a while. And yon figs for the little ones — I promised them to 'em — I'll take them; but the 'bacco, and the other things — —"

"I will give you five sovereigns for your note, my good man," said Miss Matty. "I think there is some great mistake about it, for I am one of the share-holders, and I'm sure they would have told me if things had not been going on right."

The shopman whispered a word or two across the table to Miss Matty. She looked at him with a dubious air.

"Perhaps so," said she. "But I don't pretend to understand business; I only know, that if it is going to fail, and if honest people are to lose their money because they have taken our notes — I can't explain myself," said she, suddenly becoming aware that she had got into a long sentence with four people for audience — "only I would rather exchange my gold for the note, if you please," turning to the farmer, "and then you can take your wife the shawl. It is only going without my

gown a few days longer," she continued, speaking to me. "Then, I have no doubt, everything will be cleared up."

"But if it is cleared up the wrong way?" — said I.

"Why! then it will only have been common honesty in me, as a shareholder, to have given this good man the money. I am quite clear about it in my own mind; but, you know, I can never speak quite as comprehensibly as others can; — only you must give me your note, Mr. Dobson, if you please, and go on with your purchases with these sovereigns."

The man looked at her with silent gratitude — too awkward to put his thanks into words, but he hung back for a minute or two, fumbling with his note.

"I'm loth to make another one lose instead of me, if it is a loss; but, you see, five pounds is a deal of money to a man with a family; and, as you say, ten to one in a day or two the note will be as good as gold again."

"No hope of that, my friend," said the shopman.

"The more reason why I should take it," said Miss Matty, quietly. She pushed her sovereigns towards the man, who slowly laid his note down in exchange. "Thank you. I will wait a day or two before I purchase any of these silks; perhaps you will then have a greater choice. My dear! will you come up-stairs?"

We inspected the Fashions with as minute and curious an interest as if the gown to be made

after them had been bought. I could not see that the little event in the shop below had in the least damped Miss Matty's curiosity as to the make of sleeves, or the sit of skirts.

As we came down through the shop, the civil Mr. Johnson was awaiting us; he had been informed of the exchange of the note for gold, and with much good feeling and real kindness, but with a little want of tact, he wished to condole with Miss Matty, and impress upon her the true state of the case. I could only hope that he had heard an exaggerated rumour, for he said that her shares were worse than nothing, and that the bank could not pay a shilling in the pound. I was glad that Miss Matty seemed still a little incredulous; but I could not tell how much of this was real or assumed, with that self-control which seemed habitual to ladies of Miss Matty's standing in Cranford, who would have thought their dignity compromised by the slightest expression of surprise, dismay, or any similar feeling to an inferior in station, or in a public shop. However, we walked home very silently. I am ashamed to say, I believe I was rather vexed and annoyed at Miss Matty's conduct, in taking the note to herself so decidedly. I had so set my heart upon her having a new silk gown, which she wanted sadly.

Somehow, after twelve o'clock, we both acknowledged a sated curiosity about the Fashions; and to a certain fatigue of body (which was, in fact, depression of mind) that indisposed us to go out again. But still we never spoke of the note; till,

all at once, something possessed me to ask Miss Matty if she would think it her duty to offer sovereigns for all the notes of the Town and County Bank she met with? I could have bitten my tongue out the minute I had said it. She looked up rather sadly, and as if I had thrown a new perplexity into her already distressed mind; and for a minute or two she did not speak. Then she said — my own dear Miss Matty — without a shade of reproach in her voice:

"My dear! I never feel as if my mind was what people call very strong; and it's often hard enough work for me to settle what I ought to do with the case right before me. I was very thankful to — I was very thankful, that I saw my duty this morning, with the poor man standing by me; but it's rather a strain upon me to keep thinking and thinking what I should do if such and such a thing happened; and, I believe, I had rather wait and see what really does come; and I don't doubt I shall be helped then, if I don't fidget myself, and get too anxious beforehand."

We had neither of us much appetite for dinner, though we tried to talk cheerfully about indifferent things. When we returned into the drawing-room, Miss Matty unlocked her desk and began to look over her account-books. By-and-by she shut the book, locked her desk, and came and drew a chair to mine, where I sat in moody sorrow over the fire. I stole my hand into hers; she clasped it, but did not speak a word. At last she said, with forced composure in her voice, "If that bank goes

wrong, I shall lose one hundred and forty-nine pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence a year; I shall only have thirteen pounds a-year left." I squeezed her hand hard and tight. I did not know what to say. Presently (it was too dark to see her face) I felt her fingers work convulsively in my grasp; and I knew she was going to speak again. I heard the sobs in her voice as she said, "I hope it's not wrong — not wicked — but oh! I am so glad poor Deborah is spared this. She could not have borne to come down in the world, — she had such a noble, lofty spirit."

This was all she said about the sister who had insisted upon investing their little property in that unlucky bank. We were later in lighting the candle than usual that night, and until that light shamed us into speaking, we sat together very silently and sadly.

However, we took to our work after tea with a kind of forced cheerfulness (which soon became real as far as it went), talking of that never-ending wonder, Lady Glenmire's engagement. Miss Matty was almost coming round to think it a good thing.

I did not interrupt her, I was so busy maturing a plan I had had in my mind for some days, but which this threatened failure of the bank had brought to a crisis. That night, after Miss Matty went to bed, I treacherously lighted the candle again, and sat down in the drawing-room to compose a letter to the Aga Jenkyns — a letter, which should affect him if he were Peter, and

yet seem a mere statement of dry facts if he were a stranger. The church clock pealed out two before I had done.

The next morning news came, both official and otherwise, that the Town and County Bank had stopped payment. Miss Matty was ruined.

She tried to speak quietly to me; but when she came to the actual fact, that she would have but about five shillings a week to live upon, she could not restrain a few tears.

"I am not crying for myself, dear," said she, wiping them away; "I believe I am crying for the very silly thought of how my mother would grieve if she could know — she always cared for us so much more than for herself. But many a poor person has less; and I am not very extravagant, and, thank God, when the neck of mutton, and Martha's wages, and the rent are paid, I have not a farthing owing. Poor Martha! I think she'll be sorry to leave me."

Miss Matty smiled at me through her tears, and she would fain have had me see only the smile, not the tears.

CHAPTER XII.

MARTHA.

It was an example to me, and I fancy it might be to many others, to see how immediately Miss Matty set about the retrenchment which she knew to be right under her altered circumstances. While

she went down to speak to Martha, and break the intelligence to her, I stole out with my letter to the Aga Jenkyns, and went to the Signor's lodgings to obtain the exact address. I bound the Signora to secrecy; and, indeed, her military manners had a degree of shortness and reserve in them which made her always say as little as possible, except when under the pressure of strong excitement.

At last I got the address, spelt by sound; and very queer it looked! I dropped it in the post on my way, and then I hastened home, that Miss Matty might not miss me. Martha opened the door to me, her face swollen with crying. As soon as she saw me she burst out afresh, and taking hold of my arm she pulled me in, and banged the door to, in order to ask me if indeed it was all true that Miss Matty had been saying.

"I'll never leave her! No! I won't. I telled her so, and said I could not think how she could find in her heart to give me warning. I could not have had the face to do it, if I'd been her."

"But Martha," said I, cutting in while she wiped her eyes.

"Don't 'but Martha' me," she replied to my deprecatory tone.

"Listen to reason —"

"I'll not listen to reason," she said, now in full possession of her voice, which had been rather choked with sobbing. "Reason always means what some one else has got to say. Now I think what I've got to say is good enough reason. But,

reason or not, I'll say it, and I'll stick to it. I've money in the Savings Bank, and I've a good stock of clothes, and I'm not going to leave Miss Matty. No! not if she gives me warning every hour in the day!"

She put her arms akimbo, as much as to say she defied me.

"Well!" said I. "I know you would be a great loss to Miss Matty, Martha —"

"I telled her so. A loss she'd never cease to be sorry for," broke in Martha, triumphantly.

"Still, she will have so little — so very little — to live upon, that I don't see just now how she could find you food — she will even be pressed for her own. I tell you this, Martha, because I feel you are like a friend to dear Miss Matty — but you know she might not like to have it spoken about."

Apparently this was even a blacker view of the subject than Miss Matty had presented to her; for Martha just sat down on the first chair that came to hand, and cried out loud — (we had been standing in the kitchen).

At last she put her apron down, and looking me earnestly in the face, asked, "Was that the reason Miss Matty wouldn't order a pudding to-day? She said she had no great fancy for sweet things, and you and she would just have a mutton-chop. But I'll be up to her. Never you tell, but I'll make her a pudding, and a pudding she'll like, too, and I'll pay for it myself; so mind you see she eats it. Many a one has been comforted

in their sorrow by seeing a good dish come upon the table."

She began to tie on a clean apron, and otherwise prepare herself for going to the shop for the butter, eggs, and what else she might require; she would not use a scrap of the articles already in the house for her cookery, but went to an old teapot in which her private store of money was deposited, and took out what she wanted.

I found Miss Matty very quiet, and not a little sad; but by-and-by she tried to smile for my sake. It was settled that I was to write to my father, and ask him to come over and hold a consultation; and as soon as this letter was despatched, we began to talk over future plans. Miss Matty's idea was to take a single room, and retain as much of her furniture as would be necessary to fit up this, and sell the rest; and there to quietly exist upon what would remain after paying the rent. For my part, I was more ambitious and less contented. I thought of all the things by which a woman, past middle age, and with the education common to ladies fifty years ago, could earn or add to a living, without materially losing caste; but at length I put even this last clause on one side, and wondered what in the world Miss Matty could do.

Teaching was, of course, the first thing that suggested itself. If Miss Matty could teach children anything, it would throw her among the little elves in whom her soul delighted. I ran over her accomplishments.

But alas! there was nothing she could teach to the rising generation of Cranford; unless they had been quick learners and ready imitators of her patience, her humility, her sweetness, her quiet contentment with all that she could not do. I pondered and pondered until dinner was announced by Martha, with a face all blubbered and swollen with crying.

Miss Matty had a few little peculiarities, which Martha was apt to regard as whims below her attention, and appeared to consider as childish fancies, of which an old lady of fifty-eight should try and cure herself. But to-day everything was attended to with the most careful regard. The bread was cut to the imaginary pattern of excellence that existed in Miss Matty's mind, as being the way which her mother had preferred; the curtain was drawn so as to exclude the dead brick-wall of a neighbour's stables, and yet left so as to show every tender leaf of the poplar which was bursting into spring beauty. Martha's tone to Miss Matty was just such as that good, rough-spoken servant usually kept sacred for little children, and which I had never heard her use to any grown-up person.

I had forgotten to tell Miss Matty about the pudding, and I was afraid she might not do justice to it for she had evidently very little appetite this day; so I seized the opportunity of letting her into the secret while Martha took away the meat. Miss Matty's eyes filled with tears, and she could not speak, either to express surprise or delight,

when Martha returned, bearing it aloft, made in the most wonderful representation of a lion *couchant* that ever was moulded. Martha's face gleamed with triumph, as she set it down before Miss Matty with an exultant "There!" Miss Matty wanted to speak her thanks, but could not; so she took Martha's hand and shook it warmly, which set Martha off crying, and I myself could hardly keep up the necessary composure. Martha burst out of the room; and Miss Matty had to clear her voice once or twice before she could speak. At last she said, "I should like to keep this pudding under a glass shade, my dear!" and the notion of the lion *couchant*, with his currant eyes, being hoisted up to the place of honour on a mantel-piece, tickled my hysterical fancy, and I began to laugh, which rather surprised Miss Matty.

"I am sure, dear, I have seen uglier things under a glass shade before now," said she.

So had I, many a time and oft; and I accordingly composed my countenance (and now I could hardly keep from crying), and we both fell to upon the pudding, which was indeed excellent — only every morsel seemed to choke us, our hearts were so full.

We had too much to think about to talk much that afternoon. It passed over very tranquilly. But when the tea-urn was brought in, a new thought came into my head. Why should not Miss Matty sell tea — be an agent to the East India Tea Company which then existed? I could see no objections to this plan, while the advantages

were many — always supposing that Miss Matty could get over the degradation of condescending to anything like trade. No shop-window would be required. A small genteel notification of her being licensed to sell tea, would, it is true, be necessary; but I hoped that it could be placed where no one would see it. Neither was tea a heavy article, so as to tax Miss Matty's fragile strength. The only thing against my plan was the buying and selling involved.

While I was giving but absent answers to the questions Miss Matty was putting — almost as absently — we heard a clumping sound on the stairs, and a whispering outside the door. After a little while, Martha came in, dragging after her a great tall young man, all crimson with shyness, and finding his only relief in perpetually sleeking down his hair.

"Please, ma'am, he's only Jem Hearn," said Martha, by way of an introduction; and so out of breath was she, that I imagine she had had some bodily struggle before she could overcome his reluctance to be presented on the courtly scene of Miss Matilda Jenkyns's drawing-room.

"And please, ma'am, he wants to marry me off-hand. And please, ma'am, we want to take a lodger — just one quiet lodger, to make our two ends meet; and we'd take any house conformable; and, oh dear Miss Matty, if I may be so bold, would you have any objections to lodging with us? Jem wants it as much as I do. [To Jem:] — You great oaf! why can't you back me? —

But he does want it, all the same, very bad — don't you, Jem? — only you see, he's dazed at being called on to speak before quality."

"It's not that," broke in Jem. "It's that you've taken me all on a sudden, and I didn't think for to get married so soon. It's not that I'm against it, ma'am" (addressing Miss Matty), "only Martha has such quick ways with her, when once she takes a thing into her head; and marriage, ma'am — marriage nails a man, as one may say. I dare say I shan't mind it after it's once over."

"Please, ma'am," said Martha — who had plucked at his sleeve, and nudged him with her elbow, "don't mind him, he'll come to; 'twas only last night he was an-axing me, and all the more because I said I could not think of it for years to come, and now he's only taken aback with the suddenness of the joy; but you know, Jem, you are just as full as me about wanting a lodger." (Another great nudge.)

"Ay! if Miss Matty would lodge with us — otherwise I've no mind to be cumbered with strange folk in the house," said Jem, with a want of tact which I could see enraged Martha, who was trying to represent a lodger as the great object they wished to obtain.

Miss Matty herself was bewildered by the pair: their, or rather Martha's sudden resolution in favour of matrimony staggered her, and stood between her and the contemplation of the plan which Martha had at heart. Miss Matty began:

"Marriage is a very solemn thing, Martha."

"It is indeed, ma'am," quoth Jem. "Not that I've no objections to Martha."

"You've never let me a-be for asking me for to fix when I would be married," said Martha — her face all a-fire, and ready to cry with vexation — "and now you're shaming me before my missus and all."

"Nay, now! Martha, don't ee! don't ee! only a man likes to have breathing-time," said Jem, trying to possess himself of her hand, but in vain. Then seeing that she was more seriously hurt than he had imagined, he seemed to try to rally his scattered faculties. He turned to Miss Matty, and said, "I hope, ma'am, you know that I am bound to respect every one who has been kind to Martha. I always looked on her as to be my wife — some time; and she has often and often spoken of you as the kindest lady that ever was; and though the plain truth is I would not like to be troubled with lodgers of the common run, yet if, ma'am, you'd honour us by living with us, I'm sure Martha would do her best to make you comfortable; and I'd keep out of your way as much as I could, which I reckon would be the best kindness such an awkward chap as me could do."

Miss Matty had been very busy with taking off her spectacles, wiping them, and replacing them; but all she could say was, "Don't let any thought of me hurry you into marriage; pray don't! Marriage is such a very solemn thing!"

"But Miss Matilda will think of your plan, Martha," said I, struck with the advantages that

it offered, and unwilling to lose the opportunity of considering about it. "And I'm sure neither she nor I can ever forget your kindness; nor yours either, Jem."

"Why, yes, ma'am! I'm sure I mean kindly, though I'm a bit fluttered by being pushed straight a-head into matrimony, as it were, and mayn't express myself conformable. But I'm sure I'm willing enough, and give me time to get accustomed; so, Martha, wench, what's the use of crying so, and slapping me if I come near?"

This last was *sotto voce*, and had the effect of making Martha bounce out of the room, to be followed and soothed by her lover. Whereupon Miss Matty sat down and cried very heartily, and accounted for it by saying that the thought of Martha being married so soon gave her quite a shock, and that she should never forgive herself if she thought she was hurrying the poor creature. I think my pity was more for Jem, of the two: but both Miss Matty and I appreciated to the full the kindness of the honest couple, although we said little about this, and a good deal about the chances and dangers of matrimony.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

The next morning, very early, I received a note from Miss Pole, so mysteriously wrapped up, and with so many seals on it to secure secrecy, that

I had to tear the paper before I could unfold it. And when I came to the writing I could hardly understand the meaning, it was so involved and oracular. I made out, however, that I was to go to Miss Pole's at eleven o'clock. There was no signature except Miss Pole's initials, reversed, P. E.; but as Martha had given me the note, "with Miss Pole's kind regards," it needed no wizard to find out who sent it.

I went, as requested, to Miss Pole's. The door was opened to me by her little maid Lizzy, in Sunday trim, as if some grand event was impending over this work-day. And the drawing-room upstairs was arranged in accordance with this idea. The table was set out, with the best green card-cloth, and writing materials upon it. On the little chiffonier was a tray with a newly-decanted bottle of cowslip wine, and some ladies'-finger biscuits. Miss Pole herself was in solemn array, as if to receive visitors, although it was only eleven o'clock. Mrs. Forrester was there, crying quietly and sadly, and my arrival seemed only to call forth fresh tears. Before we had finished our greetings, performed with lugubrious mystery of demeanour, there was another rat-tat-tat, and Mrs. Fitz-Adam appeared, crimson with walking and excitement. Then Miss Pole arranged us all round the table, taking care to place me opposite to her; and last of all, she inquired of me if the sad report was true, as she feared it was, that Miss Matty had lost all her fortune?

Of course, I had but one answer to make; and I never saw more unaffected sorrow depicted on

any countenances than I did there on the three before me.

"I wish Mrs. Jamieson was here!" said Mrs. Forrester at last; but to judge from Mrs. Fitz-Adam's face, she could not second the wish.

"But without Mrs. Jamieson," said Miss Pole, with just a sound of offended merit in her voice, "we, the ladies of Cranford, in my drawing-room assembled, can resolve upon something. I imagine we are none of us what may be called rich, though we all possess a genteel competency, sufficient for tastes that are elegant and refined, and would not, if they could, be vulgarly ostentatious." (Here I observed Miss Pole refer to a small card concealed in her hand, on which I imagine she had put down a few notes.)

"Miss Smith," she continued, addressing me, "I have conversed in private with these ladies on the misfortune which has happened to our friend, — and one and all of us have agreed that, while we have a superfluity, it is not only a duty but a pleasure, — a true pleasure, Mary!" — her voice was rather choked just here, and she had to wipe her spectacles before she could go on — "to give what we can to assist her — Miss Matilda Jenkyns. Only, in consideration of the feelings of delicate independence existing in the mind of every refined female," — I was sure she had got back to the card now — "we wish to contribute our mites in a secret and concealed manner, so as not to hurt the feelings I have referred to. And our object in requesting you to meet us this morning,

is, that believing you are the daughter — that your father is, in fact, her confidential adviser in all pecuniary matters, we imagined that, by consulting with him, you might devise some mode in which our contribution could be made to appear the legal due which Miss Matilda Jenkyns ought to receive from — —. Probably, your father, knowing her investments, can fill up the blank."

Miss Pole concluded her address, and looked round for approval and agreement.

"I have expressed your meaning, ladies, have I not? And while Miss Smith considers what reply to make, allow me to offer you some little refreshment."

I had no great reply to make; I had more thankfulness at my heart for their kind thoughts than I cared to put into words; and so I only mumbled out something to the effect "that I would name what Miss Pole had said to my father, and that if anything could be arranged for dear Miss Matty," — and here I broke down utterly, and had to be refreshed with a glass of cowslip wine before I could check the crying which had been repressed for the last two or three days. The worst was, all the ladies cried in concert. I think Miss Pole was a little vexed that I could not make a speech back in return for hers; and if I had known beforehand what was to be said, and had a card on which to express the probable feelings that would rise in my heart, I would have tried to gratify her. As it was, Mrs. Forrester was the person to speak when we had recovered our composure.

"I don't mind, among friends, stating that I — no! I'm not poor exactly, but I don't think I'm what you may call rich; I wish I were, for dear Miss Matty's sake, — but, if you please, I'll write down, in a sealed paper, what I can give. I only wish it was more: my dear Mary, I do indeed."

Now I saw why paper, pens, and ink were provided. Every lady wrote down the sum she could give annually, signed the paper, and sealed it mysteriously. If their proposal was acceded to, my father was to be allowed to open the papers, under pledge of secrecy. If not, they were to be returned to their writers.

When this ceremony had been gone through, I rose to depart; but each lady seemed to wish to have a private conference with me. Miss Pole kept me in the drawing-room to explain why, in Mrs. Jamieson's absence, she had taken the lead in this "movement," as she was pleased to call it, and also to inform me that she had heard from good sources that Mrs. Jamieson was coming home directly in a state of high displeasure against her sister-in-law, who was forthwith to leave her house; and was, she believed, to return to Edinburgh that very afternoon. Of course this piece of intelligence could not be communicated before Mrs. Fitz-Adam, more especially as Miss Pole was inclined to think that Lady Glenmire's engagement to Mr. Hoggins could not possibly hold against the blaze of Mrs. Jamieson's displeasure. A few hearty inquiries after Miss Matty's health concluded my interview with Miss Pole.

On coming down-stairs, I found Mrs. Forrester waiting for me at the entrance to the dining parlour; she drew me in, and trembling all the time as if it were a great crime which she was exposing to daylight she told me how very, very little she had to live upon; a confession which she was brought to make from a dread lest we should think that the small contribution named in her paper bore any proportion to her love and regard for Miss Matty. And yet that sum which she so eagerly relinquished was, in truth, more than a twentieth part of what she had to live upon, and keep house, and a little serving-maid, all as became one born a Tyrrell. And when the whole income does not nearly amount to a hundred pounds, to give up a twentieth of it will necessitate many careful economies, and many pieces of self-denial — small and insignificant in the world's account, but bearing a different value in another account-book that I have heard of.

It was some time before I could console her enough to leave her; and then, on quitting the house, I was waylaid by Mrs. Fitz-Adam, who had also her confidence to make of pretty nearly the opposite description. She had not liked to put down all that she could afford, and was ready to give. She told me she thought she never could look Miss Matty in the face again if she presumed to be giving her so much as she should like to do. "If you can think, she continued, of any way in which I might be allowed to give a little more without any one knowing it, I should be so much

obliged to you, my dear. And my brother would be delighted to doctor her for nothing — medicines, leeches, and all. I know that he and her ladyship — (my dear! I little thought that I should ever come to be sister-in-law to a ladyship!) — would do anything for her. We all would."

I told her I was quite sure of it, and promised all sorts of things, in my anxiety to get home to Miss Matty, who might well be wondering what had become of me, — absent from her two hours without being able to account for it. She had taken very little note of time, however, as she had been occupied in numberless little arrangements preparatory to the great step of giving up her house. It was evidently a relief to her to be doing something in the way of retrenchment; for, as she said, whenever she paused to think, the recollection of the poor fellow with his bad five-pound note came over her, and she felt quite dishonest; only if it made her so uncomfortable, what must it not be doing to the directors of the Bank, who must know so much more of the misery consequent upon this failure? Indeed, of the two, she seemed to think poverty a lighter burden than self-reproach; but I privately doubted if the directors would agree with her.

Old hoards were taken out and examined as to their money value, which luckily was small, or else I don't know how Miss Matty would have prevailed upon herself to part with such things as her mother's wedding-ring, the strange uncouth brooch with which her father had disfigured his

shirt-frill, &c. However, we arranged things a little in order as to their pecuniary estimation, and were all ready for my father when he came the next morning.

I am not going to weary you with the details of all the business we went through; and one reason for not telling about them is, that I did not understand what we were doing at the time, and cannot recollect it now. Miss Matty and I sat assenting to accounts, and schemes, and reports, and documents, of which I do not believe we either of us understood a word; for my father was clear-headed and decisive, and a capital man of business, and if we made the slightest inquiry, or expressed the slightest want of comprehension, he had a sharp way of saying, "Eh? eh? it's as clear as daylight. What's your objection?" But, in justice to him, I must say, he had come over from Drumble to help Miss Matty when he could ill spare the time, and when his own affairs were in a very anxious state.

While Miss Matty was out of the room, giving orders for luncheon, I told him of the meeting of the Cranford ladies at Miss Pole's the day before. He kept brushing his hand before his eyes as I spoke; — and when I went back to Martha's offer the evening before, of receiving Miss Matty as a lodger, he fairly walked away from me to the window, and began drumming with his fingers upon it. Then he turned abruptly round, and said, "See, Mary, how a good innocent life makes friends all around. Confound it! I could make a

good lesson out of it if I were a parson; but as it is, I can't get a tail to my sentences — only I'm sure you feel what I want to say. You and I will have a walk after lunch, and talk a bit more about these plans."

The lunch — a hot savoury mutton-chop, and a little of the cold loin sliced and fried — was now brought in. Every morsel of this last dish was finished, to Martha's great gratification. Then my father bluntly told Miss Matty he wanted to talk to me alone, and that he would stroll out and see some of the old places, and then I could tell her what plan we thought desirable. Just before we went out, she called me back and said, "Remember, dear, I'm the only one left — I mean, there's no one to be hurt by what I do. I'm willing to do anything that's right and honest. Only let me see what I can do, and pay the poor people as far as I'm able."

I gave her a hearty kiss, and ran after my father. The result of our conversation was this. If all parties were agreeable, Martha and Jem were to be married with as little delay as possible, and they were to live on in Miss Matty's present abode; the sum which the Cranford ladies had agreed to contribute annually being sufficient to meet the greater part of the rent, and leaving Martha free to appropriate what Miss Matty should pay for her lodgings to any little extra comforts required. About the sale, my father was dubious at first. He said the old rectory furniture, however carefully used and reverently treated, would fetch

very little; and that little would be but as a drop in the sea of the debts of the Town and County Bank. But when I represented how Miss Matty's tender conscience would be soothed by feeling that she had done what she could, he gave way; especially after I had told him the five-pound note adventure, and he had scolded me well for allowing it. I then alluded to my idea that she might add to her small income by selling tea; and, to my surprise (for I had nearly given up the plan), my father grasped at it with all the energy of a tradesman. I think he reckoned his chickens before they were hatched, for he immediately ran up the profits of the sales that she could effect in Cranford to more than twenty pounds a-year. The small dining parlour was to be converted into a shop, without any of its degrading characteristics; a table was to be the counter; one window was to be retained unaltered, and the other changed into a glass door. I evidently rose in his estimation for having made this bright suggestion. I only hoped we should not both fall in Miss Matty's.

But she was patient and content with all our arrangements. She knew, she said, that we should do the best we could for her; and she only hoped, only stipulated, that she should pay every farthing that she could be said to owe, for her father's sake, who had been so respected in Cranford. When we came to the proposal that she should sell tea, I could see it was rather a shock to her; not on account of any personal loss of gentility involved, but only because she distrusted her own

powers of action in a new line of life, and would timidly have preferred a little more privation to any exertion for which she feared she was unfitted. However, when she saw my father was bent upon it, she sighed, and said she would try; and if she did not do well, of course she might give it up. One good thing about it was, she did not think men ever bought tea; and it was of men particularly she was afraid.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HAPPY RETURN.

Before I left Miss Matty at Cranford everything had been comfortably arranged for her. Even Mrs. Jamieson's approval of her selling tea had been gained. That oracle had taken a few days to consider whether by so doing Miss Matty would forfeit her right to the privileges of society in Cranford. I think she had some little idea of mortifying Lady Glenmire by the decision she gave at last; which was to this effect: that whereas a married woman takes her husband's rank by the strict laws of precedence, an unmarried woman retains the station her father occupied. So Cranford was allowed to visit Miss Matty; and, whether allowed or not, it intended to visit Lady Glenmire.

But what was our surprise — our dismay — when we learnt that Mr. and *Mrs. Hoggins* were returning on the following Tuesday. Mrs. Hoggins!

Had she absolutely dropped her title, and so, in a spirit of bravado, cut the aristocracy to become a Hoggins? She, who might have been called Lady Glenmire to her dying day! Mrs. Jamieson was pleased. She said it only convinced her of what she had known from the first, that the creature had a low taste. But "the creature" looked very happy on Sunday at church; nor did we see it necessary to keep our veils down on that side of our bonnets on which Mr. and Mrs. Hoggins sat, as Mrs. Jamieson did; thereby missing all the smiling glory of his face, and all the becoming blushes of hers. I am not sure if Martha and Jem looked more radiant in the afternoon, when they too made their first appearance. Mrs. Jamieson soothed the turbulence of her soul by having the blinds of her windows drawn down, as if for a funeral, on the day when Mr. and Mrs. Hoggins received callers.

Miss Matty's sale went off famously. She retained the furniture of her sitting-room and bedroom; the former of which she was to occupy till Martha could meet with a lodger who might wish to take it; and into this sitting-room and bedroom she had to cram all sorts of things, which were (the auctioneer assured her) bought in for her at the sale by an unknown friend. I always suspected Mrs. Fitz-Adam of this; but she must have had an accessory, who knew what articles were particularly regarded by Miss Matty on account of their associations with her early days. The rest of the house looked rather bare,

to be sure; all except one tiny bedroom, of which my father allowed me to purchase the furniture for my occasional use in case of Miss Matty's illness.

I had expended my own small store in buying all manner of comfits and lozenges, in order to tempt the little people whom Miss Matty loved so much, to come about her. Tea in bright green canisters — and comfits in tumblers — Miss Matty and I felt quite proud as we looked round us on the evening before the shop was to be opened. Martha had scoured the boarded floor to a white cleanness, and it was adorned with a brilliant piece of oil-cloth, on which customers were to stand before the table-counter. The wholesome smell of plaster and whitewash pervaded the apartment. A very small "Matilda Jenkyns, licensed to sell tea," was hidden under the lintel of the new door, and two boxes of tea with cabalistic inscriptions all over them stood ready to disgorge their contents into the canisters.

It was really very pleasant to see how her unselfishness and simple sense of justice called out the same good qualities in others. She never seemed to think any one would impose upon her, because she should be so grieved to do it to them.

I just stayed long enough to establish Miss Matty in her new mode of life.

The money produced by the sale was partly expended in the stock of tea, and part of it was invested against a rainy day; *i. e.* old age or illness. It was but a small sum, it is true; and

it occasioned a few evasions of truth and white lies, for we knew Miss Matty would be perplexed as to her duty if she were aware of any little reserve-fund being made for her while the debts of the Bank remained unpaid.

I left Miss Matty with a good heart. Her sales of tea during the first two days had surpassed my most sanguine expectations. The whole country round seemed to be all out of tea at once.

I went over from Drumble once a quarter at least, to settle the accounts, and see after the necessary business letters.

I cast up her accounts, and examined into the state of her canisters and tumblers. I helped her too, occasionally, in the shop; and it gave me no small amusement, and sometimes a little uneasiness, to watch her ways there. If a little child came in to ask for an ounce of almond-comfits (and four of the large kind which Miss Matty sold weighed that much), she always added one more by "way of make-weight" as she called it, although the scale was handsomely turned before; and when I remonstrated against this, her reply was, "The little things like it so much!" There was no use in telling her that the fifth comfit weighed a quarter of an ounce, and made every sale into a loss to her pocket. So I told her how unwholesome almond-comfits were; and how ill excess in them might make the little children. This argument produced some effect; for, henceforward, instead of the fifth comfit, she always told them to hold out their tiny palms, into which she shook either

peppermint or ginger lozenges, as a preventive to the dangers that might arise from the previous sale. Altogether the lozenge trade, conducted on these principles, did not promise to be remunerative; but I was happy to find she had made more than twenty pounds during the last year by her sales of tea; and, moreover, that now she was accustomed to it, she did not dislike the employment, which brought her into kindly intercourse with many of the people round about. If she gave them good weight, they, in their turn, brought many a little country present to the "old Rector's daughter;" — a cream cheese, a few new-laid eggs, a little fresh ripe fruit, a bunch of flowers. The counter was quite loaded with these offerings sometimes, as she told me.

As for Cranford in general, it was going on much as usual. The Jamieson and Hoggins feud still raged, if a feud it could be called, when only one side cared much about it. Mr. and Mrs. Hoggins were very happy together; and, like most very happy people, quite ready to be friendly: indeed, Mrs. Hoggins was really desirous to be restored to Mrs. Jamieson's good graces, because of the former intimacy. But Mrs. Jamieson considered their very happiness an insult to the Glenmire family, to which she had still the honour to belong; and she doggedly refused and rejected every advance.

I had already fixed a limit, not very far distant, to my visit, when one afternoon, as I was sitting in the shop-parlour with Miss Matty, we saw a

gentleman go slowly past the window, and then stand opposite to the door, as if looking out for the name which we had so carefully hidden. He took out a double eye-glass and peered about for some time before he could discover it. Then he came in. And, all on a sudden, it flashed across me that it was the Aga himself! For his clothes had an out-of-the-way foreign cut about them; and his face was deep brown, as if tanned and re-tanned by the sun. His complexion contrasted oddly with his plentiful snow-white hair; his eyes were dark and piercing, and he had an odd way of contracting them, and puckering up his cheeks into innumerable wrinkles when he looked earnestly at objects. He did so to Miss Matty when he first came in. His glance had first caught and lingered a little upon me; but then turned, with the peculiar searching look I have described, to Miss Matty. She was a little fluttered and nervous, but no more so than she always was when any man came into her shop. Miss Matty was on the point of asking him what he wanted (as she told me afterwards), when he turned sharp to me: "Is your name Mary Smith?"

"Yes!" said I.

All my doubts as to his identity were set at rest; and I only wondered what he would say or do next, and how Miss Matty would stand the joyful shock of what he had to reveal. Apparently he was at a loss how to announce himself; for he looked round at last in search of something to buy, so as to gain time; and, as it happened,

his eye caught on the almond-comfits, and he boldly asked for a pound of "those things." I doubt if Miss Matty had a whole pound in the shop; and besides the unusual magnitude of the order, she was distressed with the idea of the indigestion they would produce, taken in such unlimited quantities. She looked up to remonstrate. Something of tender relaxation in his face struck home to her heart. She said, "It is — oh sir! can you be Peter?" and trembled from head to foot. In a moment he was round the table, and had her in his arms, sobbing the tearless cries of old age. I brought her a glass of wine; for indeed her colour had changed so as to alarm me, and Mr. Peter, too. He kept saying, "I have been too sudden for you, Matty, — I have, my little girl."

I proposed that she should go at once up into the drawing-room, and lie down on the sofa there; she looked wistfully at her brother, whose hand she had held tight, even when nearly fainting; but on his assuring her that he would not leave her, she allowed him to carry her up-stairs.

I thought that the best I could do was to run and put the kettle on the fire for early tea, and then to attend to the shop, leaving the brother and sister to exchange some of the many thousand things they must have to say. I had also to break the news to Martha, who received it with a burst of tears, which nearly infected me. She kept recovering herself to ask if I was sure it was indeed Miss Matty's brother; for I had mentioned that he had grey hair, and she had always heard

that he was a very handsome young man. Something of the same kind perplexed Miss Matty at tea-time, when she was installed in the great easy-chair opposite to Mr. Jenkyns's, in order to gaze her fill. She could hardly drink for looking at him; and as for eating, that was out of the question.

"I suppose hot climates age people very quickly," said she, almost to herself. "When you left Cranford you had not a grey hair in your head."

"But how many years ago is that?" said Mr. Peter, smiling.

"Ah! true! yes! I suppose you and I are getting old. But still I did not think we were so very old! But white hair is very becoming to you, Peter," she continued — a little afraid lest she had hurt him by revealing how his appearance had impressed her.

"I suppose I forgot dates too, Matty, for what do you think I have brought for you from India? I have an Indian muslin gown and a pearl necklace for you somewhere in my chest at Portsmouth." He smiled as if amused at the idea of the incongruity of his presents with the appearance of his sister; but this did not strike her all at once, while the elegance of the articles did. I could see that for a moment her imagination dwelt complacently on the idea of herself thus attired. At length, however, she said, "I'm afraid I'm too old; but it was very kind of you to think of it. They are just what I should have liked years ago — when I was young!"

"So I thought, my little Matty. I remembered your tastes; they were so like my dear mother's." At the mention of that name, the brother and sister clasped each other's hands yet more fondly; and although they were perfectly silent, I fancied they might have something to say if they were unchecked by my presence, and I got up to arrange my room for Mr. Peter's occupation that night, intending myself to share Miss Matty's bed. But at my movement he started up. "I must go and settle about a room at the George. My carpet-bag is there too."

"No!" said Miss Matty, in great distress — "you must not go; please, dear Peter — pray, Mary — oh! you must not go!"

She was so much agitated, that we both promised everything she wished. Peter sat down again, and gave her his hand, which, for better security, she held in both of hers, and I left the room to accomplish my arrangements.

Long, long into the night, far, far into the morning, did Miss Matty and I talk. She had much to tell me of her brother's life and adventures, which he had communicated to her, as they had sat alone. She said all was thoroughly clear to her; but I never quite understood the whole story. What I heard from Miss Matty was, that he had been a volunteer at the siege of Rangoon; had been taken prisoner by the Burmese; had somehow obtained favour and eventual freedom from knowing how to bleed the chief of the small tribe in some case of dangerous illness; that on

his release from years of captivity he had had his letters returned from England with the ominous word "Dead" marked upon them; and, believing himself to be the last of his race, he had settled down as an indigo planter, and had proposed to spend the remainder of his life in the country to whose inhabitants and modes of life he had become habituated, when my letter had reached him; and with the odd vehemence which characterised him in age as it had done in youth, he had sold his land and all his possessions to the first purchaser, and come home to the poor old sister, who was more glad and rich than any princess when she looked at him.

I don't believe Mr. Peter came home from India as rich as a Nabob; he even considered himself poor, but neither he nor Miss Matty cared much about that. At any rate, he had enough to live upon "very genteelly" at Cranford; he and Miss Matty together. And a day or two after his arrival, the shop was closed, while troops of little urchins gleefully awaited the showers of comfits and lozenges that came from time to time down upon their faces as they stood up-gazing at Miss Matty's drawing-room windows. Occasionally Miss Matty would say to them (half hidden behind the curtains), "My dear children, don't make yourselves ill;" but a strong arm pulled her back, and a more rattling shower than ever succeeded. A part of the tea was sent in presents to the Cranford ladies; and some of it was distributed among the old people who remembered Mr. Peter in the

days of his frolicsome youth. The India muslin gown was reserved for darling Flora Gordon (Miss Jessie Brown's daughter). The Gordons had been on the Continent for the last few years, but were now expected to return very soon; and Miss Matty, in her sisterly pride, anticipated great delight in the joy of showing them Mr. Peter. The pearl necklace disappeared; and about that time many handsome and useful presents made their appearance in the households of Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester; and some rare and delicate Indian ornaments graced the drawing-rooms of Mrs. Jamieson and Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I myself was not forgotten, nor was any one; and what was more, every one, however insignificant, who had shown kindness to Miss Matty at any time, was sure of Mr. Peter's cordial regard.

CHAPTER XV.

PEACE TO CRANFORD.

It was not surprising that Mr. Peter became such a favourite at Cranford. The ladies vied with each other who should admire him most; and no wonder; for their quiet lives were astonishingly stirred up by the arrival from India — especially as the person arrived told more wonderful stories than Sindbad the Sailor; and, as Miss Pole said, was quite as good as an Arabian Night any evening. For my own part, I had vibrated all my life between Drumble and Cranford, and I

thought it was quite possible that all Mr. Peter's stories might be true although wonderful; but when I found, that if we swallowed an anecdote of tolerable magnitude one week, we had the dose considerably increased the next, I began to have my doubts; especially as I noticed that when the Rector came to call, Mr. Peter talked in a different way about the countries he had been in. But I don't think the ladies in Cranford would have considered him such a wonderful traveller if they had only heard him talk in the quiet way he did to him.

There has been some talk of establishing Martha and Jem in another house; but Miss Matty would not hear of this. As long as Martha would remain with Miss Matty, Miss Matty was only too thankful to have her about her; yes, and Jem too, who was a very pleasant man to have in the house, for she never saw him from week's end to week's end.

I left Miss Matty and Mr. Peter most comfortable and contented; the only subject for regret to the tender heart of the one and the social friendly nature of the other being the unfortunate quarrel between Mrs. Jamieson and the plebeian Hogginses and their following. In joke I prophesied one day that this would only last until Mrs. Jamieson or Mr. Mulliner were ill, in which case they would only be too glad to be friends with Mr. Hoggins; but Miss Matty did not like my looking forward to anything like illness in so light a manner; and, before the year was

out, all had come round in a far more satisfactory way.

I received two Cranford letters on one auspicious October morning. Both Miss Pole and Miss Matty wrote to ask me to come over and meet the Gordons, who had returned to England alive and well, with their two children, now almost grown up. Dear Jessie Brown had kept her old kind nature, although she had changed her name and station; and she wrote to say that she and Major Gordon expected to be in Cranford on the fourteenth, and she hoped and begged to be remembered to Mrs. Jamieson (named first, as became her honourable station), Miss Pole, and Miss Matty — could she ever forget their kindness to her poor father and sister? — Mrs. Forrester, Mr. Hoggins (and here again came in an allusion to kindness shown to the dead long ago), his new wife, who as such must allow Mrs. Gordon to desire to make her acquaintance, and who was moreover an old Scotch friend of her husband's. In short, every one was named, from the Rector — who had been appointed to Cranford in the interim between Captain Brown's death and Miss Jessie's marriage, and was now associated with the latter event — down to Miss Betty Barker; all were asked to the luncheon; all except Mrs. Fitz-Adam, who had come to live in Cranford since Miss Jessie Brown's days, and whom I found rather moping on account of the omission.

But when I arrived in Cranford, nothing was as yet ascertained of Mrs. Jamieson's own inten-

tions; would the honourable lady go, or would she not? Mr. Peter declared that she should and she would; Miss Pole shook her head and desponded. But Mr. Peter was a man of resources. In the first place, he persuaded Miss Matty to write to Mrs. Gordon, and to tell her of Mrs. Fitz-Adam's existence, and to beg that one so kind, and cordial, and generous, might be included in the pleasant invitation. An answer came back by return of post, with a pretty little note for Mrs. Fitz-Adam, and a request that Miss Matty would deliver it herself and explain the previous omission. Mrs. Fitz-Adam was as pleased as could be, and thanked Miss Matty over and over again. Mr. Peter had said, "Leave Mrs. Jamieson to me;" so we did; especially as we knew nothing that we could do to alter her determination if once formed.

I did not know, nor did Miss Matty, how things were going on, until Miss Pole asked me, just the day before Mrs. Gordon came, if I thought there was anything between Mr. Peter and Mrs. Jamieson in the matrimonial line, for that Mrs. Jamieson was really going to the lunch at the George. She had sent Mr. Mulliner down to desire that there might be a foot-stool put to the warmest seat in the room, as she meant to come, and knew that their chairs were very high. Miss Pole had picked this piece of news up, and from it she conjectured all sorts of things, and bemoaned yet more. "If Peter should marry, what would become of poor dear Miss Matty! And Mrs. Jamieson, of all

people!" Miss Pole seemed to think there were other ladies in Cranford who would have done more credit to his choice.

When I got back to Miss Matty's, I really did begin to think that Mr. Peter might be thinking of Mrs. Jamieson for a wife; and I was as unhappy as Miss Pole about it. He had the proof-sheet of a great placard in his hand. "Signor Brunoni, Magician to the King of Delhi, the Rajah of Oude, and the Great Lama of Thibet, &c. &c." was going to "perform in Cranford for one night only," — the very next night; and Miss Matty, exultant, showed me a letter from the Gordons, promising to remain over this gaiety, which Miss Matty said was entirely Peter's doing. He had written to ask the Signor to come, and was to be at all the expenses of the affair. Tickets were to be sent gratis to as many as the room would hold. In short, Miss Matty was charmed with the plan. But I — I looked only at the fatal words:

"*Under the Patronage of the* HONOURABLE MRS. JAMIESON."

She, then, was chosen to preside over this entertainment of Mr. Peter's; she was perhaps going to displace my dear Miss Matty in his heart, and make her life lonely once more! I could not look forward to the morrow with any pleasure; and every innocent anticipation of Miss Matty's only served to add to my annoyance.

So, angry, and irritated, and exaggerating every little incident which could add to my irritation, I went on till we were all assembled in the great parlour at the George. Major and Mrs. Gordon and pretty Flora and Mr. Ludovic were all as bright and handsome and friendly as could be; but I could hardly attend to them for watching Mr. Peter, and I saw that Miss Pole was equally busy. I had never seen Mrs. Jamieson so roused and animated before; her face looked full of interest in what Mr. Peter was saying. I drew near to listen. My relief was great when I caught that his words were not words of love, but that, for all his grave face, he was at his old tricks. He was telling her of his travels in India, and describing the wonderful height of the Himalaya mountains: one touch after another added to their size; and each exceeded the former in absurdity; but Mrs. Jamieson really enjoyed all in perfect good faith. I suppose she required strong stimulants to excite her to come out of her apathy. Mr. Peter wound up his account by saying that, of course, at that altitude there were none of the animals to be found that existed in the lower regions; the game — everything was different. Firing one day at some flying creature, he was very much dismayed, when it fell, to find that he had shot a cherub! Mr. Peter caught my eye at this moment, and gave me such a funny twinkle, that I felt sure he had no thoughts of Mrs. Jamieson as a wife, from that time. She looked uncomfortably amazed:

"But, Mr. Peter — shooting a cherub — don't you think — I am afraid that was sacrilege!"

Mr. Peter composed his countenance in a moment, and appeared shocked at the idea! which, as he said truly enough, was now presented to him for the first time; but then Mrs. Jamieson must remember that he had been living for a long time among savages — all of whom were heathens — some of them, he was afraid, were downright Dissenters. Then, seeing Miss Matty draw near, he hastily changed the conversation, and after a little while, turning to me, he said, "Don't be shocked, prim little Mary, at all my wonderful stories; I consider Mrs. Jamieson fair game, and besides, I am bent on propitiating her, and the first step towards it is keeping her well awake. I bribed her here by asking her to let me have her name as patroness for my poor conjuror this evening; and I don't want to give her time enough to get up her rancour against the Hogginses, who are just coming in. I want everybody to be friends, for it harasses Matty so much to hear of these quarrels. I shall go at it again by-and-by, so you need not look shocked. I intend to enter the Assembly Room to-night with Mrs. Jamieson on one side, and my lady Mrs. Hoggins on the other. You see if I don't."

Somehow or another he did; and fairly got them into conversation together. Major and Mrs. Gordon helped at the good work with their perfect ignorance of any existing coolness between any of the inhabitants of Cranford.

Ever since that day there has been the old friendly sociability in Cranford society; which I am thankful for, because of my dear Miss Matty's love of peace and kindliness. We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us.

Druck von Velhagen & Klasing in Bielefeld.

*Feuillet, Roman d'un jeune Homme pauvre. 160 Pf.
*— Le Village. 120 Pf.
*France, Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard. 160 Pf.
*Französische Lebensweisheit. Montaigne, Pascal, etc. 100 Pf.
†Frédéric le Grand, Histoire de la Guerre de sept Ans. I. 120 Pf.
†— Dasselbe. II. 140 Pf.
†— Dasselbe. III. 140 Pf.
*§Fuchs, Tableau de l'Histoire de la Littérature française. 180 Pf.
†*Galland, Sindbad le Marin. 70 Pf.
†— Histoire d'Ali Baba. 70 Pf.
†*— Histoire d'Aladdin. 140 Pf.
*Gaspard, Les Pays de France. I. 180 Pf.
*— Fêtes de famille et fêtes publiques en France. 160 Pf.
†*Girardin, La Joie fait Peur. 70 Pf.
*§Girault, Tony à Paris. 180 Pf.
*Goncourt, Histoire de la Société française. 110 Pf.
*§— Marie-Antoinette. 120 Pf.
*Good, La Science amusante. 80 Pf.
*Gréville, Dosia. 160 Pf.
*— Hline. 130 Pf.
*Guerre de 1870/71. 110 Pf.
†*Guizot, Récits historiques. I. 80 Pf.
†— Dasselbe. II. 100 Pf.
†*— Histoire de Charles I. 100 Pf.
†— Louis XI. 100 Pf.
*— Hist. de la Civil. en Europe. 120 Pf.
*Halévy, L'Invasion. 160 Pf.
*— L'Abbé Constantin. 160 Pf.
*D'Hérisson, Journal d'un Officier d'Ordonnance. 120 Pf.
*Historiens Modernes. 130 Pf.
†*Hugo, Hernani. 120 Pf.
*— Ausw. v. 40 Gedichten. 100 Pf.
*Kriegsnovellen. 130 Pf.
†La Fontaine, 60 Fabeln. 80 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. Ausgabe B. 100 Pf.
†*Lamartine, Voyage. I. 120 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 100 Pf.
*— Procès et Mort de Louis XVI. 120 Pf.
*Lamé Fleury, Hist. de France. 140 Pf.
*Lanfrey, Expéd. d'Égypte. 100 Pf.
*— La campagne de 1806/7. 130 Pf.
*§Laurie, Mém. d'un Collégien. 140 Pf.
*Lavisse, Récits de l'Histoire de France. 110 Pf.
*Lectures pédagogiques. 130 Pf.
†*Le Sage, Hist. de Gil Blas. 120 Pf.
*Loti, Pêcheur d'Islande. 160 Pf.
*Maeterlinck, La Vie des Abeilles. 80 Pf.
*Mairet, Petite Princesse. 90 Pf.
†*Maistre, L'épreux de la Cité d'Aoste. Les Prisonniers du Caucase. 70 Pf.
†*— La jeune Sibérienne. 70 Pf.
*Malin, Collégien de Paris. 120 Pf.
*Malot, Sans famille. 130 Pf.
*Marbot, Mémoires. 140 Pf.
*Margueritte, Poum. 75 Pf.
*Mem. der Revolutionszeit. 90 Pf.
*Mérimée, Colomba. 130 Pf.
†*Michaud, Croisades. I. 120 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 120 Pf.
*Michelet, Histoire moderne. 75 Pf.
†*Mignet, Histoire de la Révolution française. Ausg. A. 140 Pf.
Ausg. B. (illustriert). 160 Pf.
†*Mirabeau, Discours choisis. 110 Pf.
†*§Molière, L'Avare. 90 Pf.
*— Les Fourberies de Scapin. 75 Pf.
†*— Le Bourg. Gentilhomme. 100 Pf.
†*§— Les Femmes savantes. 100 Pf.
†*— Le Malade imaginaire. 90 Pf.
†*— Le Misanthrope. 90 Pf.
†*— L'École des femmes. 90 Pf.
†*— Le Tartuffe. 100 Pf.
†*— Les Précieuses ridicules. 75 Pf.
†*— L'École des Maris. 90 Pf.
*§Monod, Histoire de France. 160 Pf.
*— Allemands et Français. 110 Pf.
†Montesquieu, Considérations. 140 Pf.
†— Lettres Persanes. 100 Pf.
*De Musset, Pages choisies. 100 Pf.
*Nouvel, Pierre et Jacques. 160 Pf.
*Paganel, Jeunesse de Frédéric le Grand. 75 Pf.
*— La Guerre de sept Ans. 100 Pf.
*Pailleron, Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie. 160 Pf.
*Paris. A travers Paris. 140 Pf.
*Parissous la Commune. 100 Pf.
†Ponsard, L'Honneur et l'Argent. 100 Pf.
*Pressensé, Petite mère. 110 Pf.
†*Racine, Athalie. 90 Pf.
†*— Iphigénie. 90 Pf.
†*— Britannicus. 90 Pf.
†*— Esther. 90 Pf.
*— Andromaque. 90 Pf.
†*— Mithridate. 90 Pf.
†*— Phèdre. 90 Pf.
†— Les Plaideurs. 70 Pf.
*Rambaud, Histoire de la Civilisation en France. I. Band. 130 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. II. Band. 120 Pf.
*Reclus, La Belgique. 140 Pf.
†*Recueil de Contes et Récits pour la Jeunesse. I. Bändchen. 90 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. II. Bändchen. 90 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. III. Bändchen. 90 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. IV. Bändchen. 90 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. V. Bändchen. 90 Pf.
*Révolution française, La. 120 Pf.
†*Rollin, Histoire de la seconde Guerre punique. 90 Pf.
†*— Alexandre le Grand. 120 Pf.
†*— Hommes célèbres de l'Antiquité. 100 Pf.
*Rostand, La Samaritaine. 100 Pf.
*Rousseau, Morceaux choisis. 120 Pf.

*Rousset, Histoire de la Guerre franco-allemande. 120 Pf.
*de Saint-Hilaire, La Fille du Braconnier. 100 Pf.
†*St-Pierre, Paul et Virginie. 110 Pf.
†*de Saintes, Thérèse. 70 Pf.
*Sand, La Petite Fadette. 110 Pf.
*§Sandeau, Mlle de la Seiglière. 160 Pf.
†*— Roche aux Mouettes. 80 Pf.
*— Madeleine. 120 Pf.
*§Sarcey, Le Siège de Paris. 140 Pf.
†*Scribe, Bertrand et Raton. 90 Pf.
†*— La Camaraderie. 90 Pf.
†*— Le Verre d'Eau. 90 Pf.
†*— Mon Étoile 70 Pf.
*Scribe et Legouvé, Bataille de Dames. 160 Pf.
*— Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre. 160 Pf.
*— Les Doigts de Fée. 160 Pf.
†*Ségur, Histoire de Napoléon en 1812. I. Teil. 140 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 140 Pf.
*— Moscou et le Passage de la Bérézina. 120 Pf.
†— Histoire ancienne. 140 Pf.
*Ségur, Mémoires d'un Ane. 100 Pf.
*Sévigné, Mme de, Lettres. 110 Pf.
†*Souvestre, 5 Erzähl. aus Au Coin du Feu. 100 Pf.
†*— 6 Erzählungen aus Au Coin du Feu u. aus Les Clairières. 90 Pf.
†*— Un Philosophe sous les Toits. 140 Pf.
†*— Sous la Tonnelle. 80 Pf.
†*— 2 Erzählungen aus Les derniers Paysans. 80 Pf.
*— Confessions d'un Ouvrier. 100 Pf.
*— Théâtre de la Jeunesse. 90 Pf.
†*— Au Bord du Lac. 110 Pf.
†*Staël, De L'Allemagne. 120 Pf.
*Stahl, Maroussia. 110 Pf.
*§Tableau de l'Histoire. 180 Pf.
*Taine, L'Ancien Régime. 140 Pf.
*— Napoléon Bonaparte. 120 Pf.
*— La Révolution. 110 Pf.
*Théâtre moderne. 100 Pf.
*Theuriet, Raymonde. 120 Pf.
*— Ausgewählte Erzähl. 100 Pf.
†*Thierry, Am., Attila. 140 Pf.
†*—, Aug., Conquête de l'Angleterre. 90 Pf.
†*Thiers, Campagne d'Italie en 1800. 100 Pf.
†— Quatre Bras et Ligny. 100 Pf.
*— Waterloo. 120 Pf.
†*— Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène. 110 Pf.
†*— Expédition d'Égypte. 110 Pf.
*Tocqueville, L'Ancien Régime. 100 Pf.
†*Töpffer, Nouv. G. 1. La Bibliothèque de mon Oncle. 120 Pf.
†*— Nouv. G. 2: Le Lac de Gers. Le Col d'Anterne. Le Grand St-Bernard. 80 Pf.
†— Nouv. G. 3: La Vallée de Trient. La Peur. 75 Pf.
†— Nouv. G. 4: La Traversée. Les deux Scheidegg. Elisa et Widmer. 100 Pf.
†*Verne, 5 semaines en Ballon. 120 Pf.
†*— Le Tour du Monde. 140 Pf.
†— Voyage au Centre de la Terre. 140 Pf.
*de Vigny, 2 Erzähl. aus Servitude et Grandeur Militaires. 80 Pf.
†*Voltaire, Charles XII. I. Teil. 140 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 110 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. Auszug in 1 Bde. 110 Pf.
†— Mérope. 70 Pf.
†*— Zaïre. 90 Pf.
†*— Siècle de Louis XIV. I. 140 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 140 Pf.
*Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Morceaux choisis. 130 Pf.
*Voyageurs et Inventeurs des Temps Modernes. 130 Pf.
*Zola, La Débâcle. 150 Pf.

II. Englisch.

†Aladdin or the wonderful Lamp. 110 Pf.
*Alcott, Good Wives. 120 Pf.
*— Little Women. 120 Pf.
†Ali Baba. 100 Pf.
*Austin, New-Engl. Novels. 100 Pf.
*§Besant, History of London. 140 Pf.
†*Bulwer, The Lady of Lyons. 80 Pf.
*§Burnett, Little Lord Fauntleroy. 110 Pf.
*— Sara Crewe. 80 Pf.
*Byron, Childe Harold. 120 Pf.
†*— The Prisoner of Chillon. 70 Pf.
*— The Siege of Corinth. 70 Pf.
*§Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History. 130 Pf.
*Chambers's English Hist. 130 Pf.
*Collection of Tales and Sketches. I. Bändchen. 90 Pf.
*Collection of Tales and Sketches. II. Bändchen. 100 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. III. Bändchen. 110 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. IV. Bändchen. 110 Pf.
*Collection of longer English Poems. 130 Pf.
†Cooper, The Pathfinder. 120 Pf.
*Creighton, Queen Elizabeth. 120 Pf.
†*§Dickens, Christmas Carol. 110 Pf.
*— A Child's history of Engl. 110 Pf.
†*— Sketches. 110 Pf.
†*— Cricket on the Hearth. 100 Pf.
*— Pickwick Club. 120 Pf.
*§— A Tale of two Cities. 140 Pf.
†*Edgeworth, 2 Erzählungen aus Popular Tales. 75 Pf.
†*— 3 Erzählungen. 75 Pf.
*Eliot, Silas Marner. 110 Pf
*Eminent Englishmen. 140 Pf.
*English Historians. 100 Pf.

*Escott, England, its People, Polity and Pursuits. 110 Pf.
*Essays Engl. Schriftsteller. 120 Pf.
†*Fairy and other Tales. 110 Pf.
*§Ferrars, Greater Britain. 140 Pf.
†*De Foe, Robinson Crusoe. 110 Pf.
†Franklin's Autobiogr. 100 Pf.
*Fraser-Tytler, Leila. 100 Pf.
*Freeman, History of the Norman Conquest of England. 110 Pf.
*From Linc. to MacKinley. 120 Pf.
*Fyfe, Merchant Enterprise. 100 Pf.
*Gardiner, Hist. Biographies. 120 Pf.
*Gaskell, Cranford. 100 Pf.
*Giberne, Sun, Moon and Stars. 140 Pf.
*Goadby, The England of Shakespeare. 110 Pf.
†*Goldsmith, Hist. of Engl. 120 Pf.
†*— The Vicar of Wakefield. 140 Pf.
*Green, England under the Reign of George III. 150 Pf.
*Habberton, Helen's Babies. 100 Pf.
*Harraden, Things will take a Turn. 75 Pf.
*Henty, With Clive in India. 120 Pf.
*— Both Sides the Border. 140 Pf.
*History of English Lit. 160 Pf.
*Hope, Select Stories. 130 Pf.
*Hughes, Tom Brown's School-Days. 130 Pf.
*Hume, Queen Elizabeth. 120 Pf.
*— King Charles the First. 140 Pf.
*James, Talks to Students. 80 Pf.
*§Jerome, Three Men in a Boat. 130 Pf.
†*Irving, Alhambra. I. Teil. 75 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 90 Pf.
*— Abbotsford. 90 Pf.
†*§— Sketch Book. I. Teil. 110 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 110 Pf.
*— Christopher Columbus. 100 Pf.
*Keller, The Story of my Life. 80 Pf.
*Kinglake, Siege of Sebastopol. 120 Pf.
*Kipling, Stories from the Jungle Book. 110 Pf.
†*Lamb, Tales from Shakspere. 110 Pf.
*Lives of eminent Explorers and Inventors. 160 Pf.
†*Longfellow, Evangeline. 100 Pf.
†*Macaulay, England before the Restoration. 90 Pf.
†*— The Siege of Londonderry and Enniskillen in 1689. 90 Pf.
†*§— Lord Clive. 100 Pf.
†*— Warren Hastings. 140 Pf.
†*— Duke of Monmouth. 100 Pf.
†*Macharness, A Trap to catch a Sunbeam. 70 Pf.
†*— Old Jolliffe. 70 Pf.
†*— Amy's Kitchen. 70 Pf.
†Marryat, The Children of the New Forest. 100 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. Ausgabe B. 110 Pf.
†*— Peter Simple. 140 Pf.
†Marryat, The three Cutters. 80 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. 90 Pf.
†*— The Settlers in Canada. 140 Pf.
†— Masterman Ready. I. Teil. 90 Pf.
†— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 100 Pf.
*Marshall, Our Island Story. 140 Pf.
*Mason, Counties of Engl. 130 Pf
*Milton, Paradise Lost. 120 Pf.
*Mitford, Stories. 90 Pf.
*Montgomery, Misunderstood. 110 Pf.
*Parlamentary Eden, Engl. 130 Pf.
*Prosa-Schriftsteller, Englische, des 17.—19. Jahrhunderts. I. 120 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. II. 120 Pf.
*— Dasselbe. III. 120 Pf.
*Prose Selections, Engl. 300 Pf.
*§Rambles through London Streets. 130 Pf.
*Reed, Talbot Baines, The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's. 130 Pf.
*Ruskin, Readings. 110 Pf.
†*Scott, The Lady of the Lake. 110 Pf.
†*— Tales of a Grandfather. 90 Pf.
*— Quentin Durward. I. Teil 140 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 120 Pf.
*— The Lay of the last Minstrel. 100 Pf.
*— History of Scotland. 140 Pf.
†*— Marmion. 110 Pf.
*— Waverley. I. Teil. 100 Pf.
†*— Dasselbe. II. Teil. 100 Pf.
†*— Kenilworth. 110 Pf.
*§Seeley, Expansion of Engl. 140 Pf.
*§Selections from Engl. Poetry. 220 Pf.
*Shakspere, Merchant of Venice. 90 Pf.
†*— King Richard II. 100 Pf.
*— King Richard III. 120 Pf.
†*— Julius Caesar. 120 Pf.
†*— Macbeth. 100 Pf
†*— King Lear. 130 Pf.
*— Coriolanus. 110 Pf.
*— The Tempest. 100 Pf.
*§Sharp, Architects of Eng. Literature. 120 Pf.
*Sheridan, The Rivals. 100 Pf.
*Simple Stories for young Folks. 90 Pf.
*Southey, Life of Nelson. 140 Pf.
†*Story of Sindb. d. 75 Pf.
*Story of Engl. Literature. 150 Pf.
†*Swift, A Voyage to Lilliput. 90 Pf.
†— A Voyage to Brobdingnag. 100 Pf.
*Tennyson, Enoch Arden. 100 Pf.
*The United States. Their Origin and Growth. 120 Pf.
*Tip Cat. 130 Pf.
*Twain, The Prince and the Pauper. 140 Pf.
*§Webster, The Island Realm of Günter's Manderyear. 140 Pf.
*Witchell, Nature's Story of the Year. 100 Pf
*Woolf, Little Miss Prue. 110 Pf.

Abgeschlossen Juni 1913. — Die Sammlung wird fortgesetzt