

CHAPTER II

To begin, Mrs. D——, my master's better-half, though she seldom condescended to our house, and when engaged in her kitchen premises affected to ignore the proximity of ours, enjoyed in Ware the reputation of a shrewd and capable house-wife. Whether she owed this solely to the possession of a sharp temper and voluble voice, I cannot say; but only that during all the time I was there I scarcely ever passed an hour in our miserable playground without my ears being deafened and my brain irritated by the sound of her chiding. She had the advantage, when I first came to the school, of an elderly servant, who went about her work under an even flow of scolding, and, it may be, had become so accustomed to the infliction as to be neither the better nor worse for it. But about the time of which I am writing, when, as I have said, I had been there twelve months, I remarked a change in Mrs. D——'s voice, and judged from the increased acerbity and rising shrillness of her tone that she had passed from drilling an old servant to informing a new one. To confirm this theory, before long, "Lazy slut!" and "Dirty baggage!" and "Take that, Insolence," were the best of the terms I heard; and these so frequently mingled with blows and slaps, and at times with the sound of sobbing, that my gall rose. I had listened indifferently enough, and if with irritation, without much pain, to the chiding of the old servant; and I knew no more of this one. But by the instinct which draws youth to youth, or by reason of Mrs. D——'s increased severity, I began to feel for her, to pity her, and at last to wonder what she was like, and her age, and so forth.

Nothing more formidable than a low paling-separated the garden of Mrs. D——'s house from our yard; but