

hood was secluded and quiet, not to say stagnant. The houses were roomy and old-fashioned, genteel-looking outside, but damp and inconveniently arranged within. The rents asked under such circumstances were by no means exorbitant, and thus a fairly constant supply of tenants was obtained—mostly people with large families and small incomes, who professed to love quiet, and to despise fashion. Such people generally “keep themselves to themselves.” Accordingly, there was not much social intercourse in Leaffy Lane; and in what there was the Jessops had no share.

But poverty was not the little widow's only trouble. She found herself at the head of a divided household. As she herself had lived two lives, so did she feel as though she were the mother of two distinct families. For the division between the two elder and the two younger children was more than one of age. Reggie and Sybil had never shaken off the effects of their early associations. Instead of looking forward, as youth ever should, they were perpetually looking backward. They talked together of the old days and cherished the old memories, till they felt as though they were exiles driven forth from some Garden of Eden to wander through a desolate world. Thus the pair—who were much attached to each other—had grown up discontented and supercilious, and haunted by a sense of wrong endured. Their mother did not deliberately encourage this unhealthy folly; but she was undeniably proud of her elder children, and liked to think that they bore the stamp of their early training. Reggie, who was now almost twenty, closely resembled his father in appearance and disposition. Handsome and plausible, he had obtained several situations without difficulty, and had lost them with at least equal facility. Without being absolutely vicious, he was vain, unreliable, and easily led. He prided himself on being a “gentleman,” and had a strong objection to being ordered about by persons whom he esteemed to be “cads.” The result was that he had more than once found himself “out in the cold.” At present he was working for poor pay in a situation in which he neither felt nor gave satisfaction.

Sybil was made of sterner stuff. She worked hard at millinery, and “kept herself respectable.” But, alas! her chief idea of respectability was to live

haughtily aloof from her neighbours, to affect the style of a fine lady, and to put, as nearly as possible, the whole of her hard-earned money on her back in the shape of showy garments.

The two younger children stood in strongly marked contrast to Reginald and Sybil. They had been brought up in poverty, and had received such education as they boasted in a public elementary school. They were neither of them bad nor troublesome children, but they undeniably bore the stamp of their actual position. Mary was an apple-cheeked, well-grown damsel, blunt in manner, awkward in gait, but boundlessly good-natured, and withal, she was such a self-reliant, helpful girl, that it was hard to realise that she was not yet fourteen. Dick, too, at least so far as physique was concerned, seemed to have thriven on his hard fare and rough schooling. He was a fine little lad, but—for truth must be told—with a good deal of the street-boy about him—a youth who could already maintain his own with tongue or fist.

Reggie and Sybil regarded “the younger ones” with horror, and treated them with habitual disdain. They could not “speak peaceably unto them,” and made no effort either to win their affections or



MARY AND HER KITTEN.