

WITHOUT AN OBJECT.

"It is raining again, I declare," said Mary Anne. "Oh, is it not tiresome?"

"Well, I am rather glad of it," said Felicia, "for now I shall be able to do a little more drawing."

There was profound silence for about five minutes, when Miss Polehampton, looking up from her Berlin-work, said, "My dear, has it left off raining?"

"No, aunt; nor does it seem likely to do so."

"Then have you any object in keeping on your things?"

"No, aunt," and yet she still continued to linger.

"There!" said Miss Polehampton, after another pause, "I do believe I shall be able to finish my urn-stand without waiting for any more wool, after all. The half needleful I have left will just do. Stay, where is it?" and she looked about her in perplexity.

"Oh dear, is this it?" said Mary Anne, rather contritely, and holding out half-a-dozen little morsels of wool as she spoke.

"Why, my dear, you have broken it all into bits. What could you be about?"

"Oh, I'd no particular object," and Mary Anne again turned towards the window, more to hide a little awkwardness than to resume her observations of the weather.

"Let me go and get you a skein, aunt," cried Felicia, jumping up from her drawing.

"No, my dear, it rains."

"Not enough to kill a fly; and I never mind a little sprinkling when I've an object."

Off ran the good-natured girl, though she left off in the midst of "a broad wash."

"Dear me, if any one goes, I think it ought to be me," said Mary Anne, lazily.

"Indeed, I think so too," said her aunt, rather nettled, "especially as you are already equipped."

"But, aunt, it really is raining."

"Well, then, you had better tell Felicia she must not go."

"But it is not raining much."

"Then, my dear, you can go yourself."

"Well, then, I will; but I've no umbrella."

"Then you may take mine."

"There goes Felicia!" cried Mary Anne, as her cousin ran past the window. "How quick she is about everything!"

"Felicia knows the value of time," observed Miss Polehampton.

"She might as well have looked in here, and given me the opportunity of going with her," said Mary Anne, rather discontentedly.

"Nay, my dear, you cannot make a grievance of that, when she is gone out in the rain to do *your* errand."

A few minutes afterwards Felicia came in, fresh as a rose.

"Oh, I have had such a nice run!" exclaimed she. "It does not rain now. Will this wool do, aunt?"

"Yes, my love; I thank you very much." "If you had asked me I would have gone with you," said Mary Anne, reproachfully.

"Would you?" said Felicia in surprise. "Come now, then; we can still have a short walk before tea."

"Then, my dears, if you are going," said Miss Polehampton, "I wish you would leave the Athenæum at the vicarage, and thank Mrs. Harford for letting me see it."

"Yes, aunt, that will give us an object," said Felicia, and away they went. A few moments afterwards, Mr. Grantley, the doctor, came to see Miss Polehampton.

"I met your nieces just now," said he; "Miss Felicia grows quite pretty, and looks bright and cheerful; but Miss Lintot is not equally improved. What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing, I believe," said Miss Polehampton, "except that she wants rousing out of her idle, desultory habits. She wastes her time so that it is quite provoking. I can't think what she will be when she grows up, for if she does not get better she will get worse. It was a sad misfortune to her to lose her mother so early! her father spoils her, I am afraid. She is too young to be without guidance; but he will not send her to school, so she reads a little bit out of one book, and then a little bit out of another, does a little bit of work and then a little bit of drawing, but without any energy or perseverance. In fact, she never has an object."

"She will get quite out of my good graces if that is the case," said Mr. Grantley. "Without an object? when there are so many—"

'Life is real, life is earnest,
And this world is not its goal.'

And then he left off talking of Mary

Anne Lintot, and began to speak of the distress in the cotton districts. Miss Polehampton said she did not think it was entirely owing to the American War, because she understood that many manufacturers had so much more calico on their hands than they could sell, that they would have been obliged to close their mills at any rate. But however that might be, the distress of the poor, unemployed people remained the same, and they were bearing it so well, that it made every one pity them and eager to help them.

"I remember," said she, "the terrible distress among the working classes of Lancashire in 1839 and the two following years. Trade had gradually been getting worse and worse, while the price of provisions rose higher and higher, so that whole families wasted away with starvation. But what made their sufferings more difficult to bear, was that they did not seem to be sufficiently appreciated by the rich, who accused them of discontent and disaffection. Now, on the contrary, this sad trial may prove a blessing in disguise by drawing the hearts of rich and poor together."

"Ah, it is very sad," said Mr. Grantley, sighing deeply. "But it is very beautiful to see how the poor creatures are helping one another. Did you see that letter, dated August 28th, from the Times correspondent at Blackburn? He found one single street entirely occupied by the people of a mill which had been stopped more than a year ago, and who had now got to the end of their savings. In hardly a single cottage was to be seen more than a couple of chairs and a table, though the walls were still decorated with a few gaily-coloured pictures, as if in mockery of their want."

"I was particularly touched," said Miss Polehampton, "by the account of that good old woman who kept a shop in the 'general line' at the corner of the street, with whom all the street had dealt for fifteen years, and who now let them have things on credit, saying she knew they would pay her as soon as they could. She deserved to have her name written in letters of gold—and yet, no, that would be a poor reward. Her name is in God's book of remembrance we may be sure."

"Such instances of humanity, I am told, are not uncommon there," said Mr. Grantley. "There have been cases in