



LIVERPOOL FROM THE MERSEY.]

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## CHAPTER I.

## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT.

**A**T the time when this story opens Mrs. Jessop was a faded but still pretty little woman, verging on forty. She was fragile rather than delicate, very retiring, very quiet. She had lived with her children ten years in Heather Terrace, off Leaffy Lane, Liverpool, and few of the neighbours had seen her as many times during that period. Therefore they called her proud, and the majority disliked the widow, and that for no better reason than that they knew so little about her.

Poor Mrs. Jessop! Hers had been a blighted life, and her pinched yet pretty face bore pathetic traces of the sudden and cruel storm that had pierced her through and shrivelled her up, just as a few hours of east wind will nip and scorch the tender buds of a premature spring.

Let us draw back for a brief glance the sombre veil that had hung across the background of the family life of the Jessops now for ten bitter years. For the younger children all behind that veil was vague and confused; and even the elder ones cherished a recollection that was distorted and exaggerated. To the poor mother alone the past was a reality. That veil was for her as a dividing line between day and night, a point where one life ended and another began. In cases of this sort it seems to be sometimes mercifully ordered, that the sense of personal identity is blunted; people, as the saying is, "do not know them-

selves." So it was with Mrs. Jessop. She scarce realised that she was the same woman as of yore. Let us draw back the curtain softly, sympathetically.

Everybody thought Mary Pemberton a fortunate girl when she secured Frank Jessop for a husband. He was a handsome, brilliant young fellow, and a general favourite. Everybody said that he was doing an excellent business on the Liverpool Flags, and he certainly set up in first-rate style when he married. The young wife was perfectly happy. She loved her husband, and she also loved the comfort and pretty things that his thoughtfulness and liberality procured for her. If Frank were a bit "gay"—well, she liked her husband to be "in the swim." She never felt herself neglected; and as years went on domestic interests of necessity occupied a large and wholesome share of time and thought.

There were four children, two older and two younger—that is to say, between the firstborn, Reginald, and his sister, Sybil, there was but a year and a half difference in age, while an interval of nearly five years separated Sybil from Mary. The baby of the family, Dick, came almost two years after Mary.

Thus nearly a dozen years of wedded life slipped by, and Mrs. Jessop, who had married in her teens, looked young to be the mother of two such handsome, well-grown children as Reginald and Sybil. The little woman thoroughly enjoyed her life. She lived for the world, her husband, and her children, and with all three she was well content.