

LITERARY DEPARTMENT.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAP. I.

'I wish I could find a solution for one mystery,' said Mary Moore to her mother, as during the last hour of the last night of 1835 they sat together, not over the inspiring embers of a nutwood fire, as in good old times, but within the circumbient atmosphere of a grate glowing with Schuylkill coals.

'Is there but one mystery in life that puzzles you, Mary?' asked her mother.

'One more than all others—and that is, why Lizzy Percival is so tormented?'

'Lizzy tormented! she seems to me to be the happiest girl of all our acquaintance.'

'Mother! did she not begin with the greatest of all earthly plagues—a step-mother.'

'A step mother, my dear child, is, not of course a plague.'

'But Lizzy's was, you know, mother.'

'A plague to herself, undoubtedly, but the greatest of all blessings to Lizzy.'

'A blessing to Lizzy! what do you mean, mother?'

'I mean that the trials of Lizzy's childhood and youth developed and strengthened her virtues. Lizzy's matchless sweetness of temper was acquired, or at least perfected, by the continual discipline which it required to endure patiently the exactions and indolence of her step mother. In short, Mary, Lizzy has been made far better by her relation with her step mother. She has overcome evil and not been overpowered by it. I wish, my dear Mary, that you could realise that it is not the circumstances in which we are placed, but the temper in which we meet them; the fruit we reap from them, that makes them either fortunate or unfortunate for us.'

'Well, mother, I suppose if I was as old, and as wise, and, above all, as good as you are, I should think as you do—but, in the meantime, I must account such a step mother as Lizzy Percival's the first and chiefest of all miseries. And then, when it pleased kind heaven to reward Lizzy's virtues by the removal of this gracious lady, you know, she left behind her half a dozen little pledges, to whom poor Lizzy has been obliged to devote and sacrifice herself.'

'And this devotion and self-sacrifice has made her the exemplary and lovely creature she is. Her youth, instead of being wasted in frivolity, has been most profitably employed. Duty is now happiness to her, and she is rewarded a thousand fold for all her exertions by the improvement of her character and the devoted love of her little brothers and sisters.'

'Well, mother, you are very ingenious, but I think it will puzzle you to prove that there is more profit than loss to Lizzy in being thwarted in her affections. Never were there a truer, a deeper, or better merited love than Lizzy's for Harry Stuart; never any thing more unreasonable, nor more obstinate, than Mr. Percival's opposition to their engagement, and if I were Lizzy'—she hesitated, and her mother finished the sentence—

'You would take the matter into your own hand!'

'I do not say that; but I would not submit implicitly, as she does, toiling on and on for that regiment of children, and trying while she is sacrificing her happiness to appear perfectly cheerful, and what provokes me more than all, being so, the greater part of the time in spite of every thing!'

'Ah, Mary, a kind disposition, a gentle temper and approving conscience, an occupation for every moment of a most useful life, must make Lizzy happy, even though the current of true love does not run smooth.'

'But Lizzy does flag, sometimes; I have seen her very sad.'

'For any length of time?'

'Oh, no! because she has always something or other to do.'

'True, Mary, 'tis your idlers that make the most of misery, and create it when it is not ready made for their hands. Lizzy will finally have the reward of her virtue; her father will relent.'

'Never—never, mother. You hope against hope. Mr. Percival is as proud and obstinate as all the Montagues and Capulets together. He is one of the infallibles. He prides himself on never changing a resolve, nor even an opinion—on never unsaying what he has once said, and you know he not only said, but swore, and that in Lizzy's presence, too, that she should never marry a son of Gilbert Stuart.'

'Yes, I know. But continual dropping wears the rock, and the sun, if it were to shine long enough, would melt polar ice. Mr.'