

personal service they might perform for her; she made no changes in the order of the household; when Mina—always busy in her friend's interest—suggested re-arrangement of furniture or of curios, Cecily's manner implied that she was prepared to take no such liberties in another man's house. It would have been all very well-bred if Harry had put his house at her disposal for a fortnight. Seeing that the place was her own, and that she had accepted it as being her own, Mina declared that her conduct was little less than an absurdity. This assertion was limited to Mina's own mind; it had not been made to the offender herself. The fear she had felt of Harry threatened to spread to his successor; she did not feel equal to a remonstrance. But she grew gradually into a state of extreme irritation and impatience. This provisional, this ostentatiously provisional, attitude could not be maintained permanently. Something must happen one way or the other. Now what was it to be? She could not pretend to guess. These Tristrams were odd folk. There was the same blood in Cecily as had run in Addie Tristram's veins. On the other hand, the Gainsboroughs seemed to have been ordinary. Was this period of indecision or of suspended action a time of struggle between the Tristram in Cecily and the Gainsborough? Mina on the look-out for entertainment, had no doubt which of the two she wished to be victorious; the Gainsborough promised nothing, the Tristram—well—effects! The strain made Mina excited, restless, and at times exceedingly short with Major Duplay.

The neighbourhood waited too, but for the end of Lady Tristram's mourning, not of her indecision. As a result of much discussion, based on many rumours and an incredible number of authentic reports, it was settled that at the end of six months Blent was to be thrown open, visitors received, and a big house-warming given. A new era was to begin. Splendour and respectability were to lie down together. Blent was to pay a new homage to the proprieties. Miss Swinkerton was strongly of opinion that by-gones should be allowed to be