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TWO WOMEN BY GEORGINA M. CRAIK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BY

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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T W O W O M E N.

CHAPTER I.

IF Hugh Ludlow had been conscious of having stolen Mrs. Verner's spoons, his sensations as he walked out of Chester Square could hardly have been more wretched. He had escaped from Cicely, yet scarcely had he escaped when he despised himself for having done it; he felt as if the instinct of self-preservation that had prompted him to fly had been an instinct of miserable cowardice. It was true that he had fled in a desperate effort to be true to Dorothy; but, at this moment, he was in the mood to ask himself bitterly what was the good of being true in act to Dorothy, when in his heart he had ceased to have any love for her. For he knew that during these feverish days he had not loved her, that his love, which, perhaps, had long been cooling, had become cold as an extinguished fire since he had known Miss Verner. Till now he had tried manfully to be loyal to her; had he not

been loyal till at last his loyalty had made him a horror to himself?

At the corner of the Square he stood still, and had almost retraced his steps, and it was not any thought of Dorothy then that kept him from making his way back to Cicely. It was only an instinctive, half-acknowledged distrust of her. He told himself that he had been a coward for stealing away from her as he had done, but yet, in his heart, he knew that if he went back to her he should be a fool. So, though he stood still for a few seconds, and even turned his face again towards the house, in the end he did not go back.

Yet he was very unhappy, and miserably at war with himself as he finally walked away. It was not a small thing to Hugh to feel that he treated any woman as he had treated Cicely Verner—to know that he had refused an appeal for help made to him by a woman with tears in her eyes. In all his life he had never done such a thing before, and all that was tender and chivalrous in his nature rose in arms to denounce his act and reproach him for it. It seemed to him as if it was hardly any excuse that he had done it unwillingly; he told himself that the fear which had made him fly from her was a thing as despicable as the act itself.

"If I had had any manliness left, I should have stayed with her," he said to himself, "no matter what

the cost or the embarrassment might be to myself. She had called on me to help her, and what does that man deserve who, when a woman calls on him for help, turns his back on her, and skulks away like a thief?"

In this sort of way, being in a highly excited and imaginative state, it pleased Hugh to go on talking during the next few hours. He was too much upset to allow himself to listen to reason, too remorseful at what he had done to permit himself to believe that it had been right to do it. He had been a brute and a coward; these were the two designations that it almost seemed to give him a certain satisfaction to apply to himself, levelling them at his head every few minutes, as he might have flung a couple of stones.

For the time he had almost put Dorothy out of his thoughts (perhaps because he could not remember her without a kind of rage, as the root of all that had happened, the real cause, however innocent the poor girl might be, why he had treated Cicely so cruelly), and all his consideration was for the woman whom he had left in her trouble. If he could but have got rid of that instinctive doubt he had of her, if he could but have been wholly certain that during their interview this morning she had not been playing with him, undoubtedly before the day was ended he would have made his way again to Chester Square to obtain her pardon. But, happily for himself, his faith in her,