

414 52-43
187

HECKINGTON.

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. GORE.



COPYRIGHT EDITION.

15 553 44
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1858.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

HECKINGTON.

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

"TINY does not seem to have returned in better spirits from the wedding at Clevelands. — I was in hopes, my dear, that seeing something of the world, particularly in so gay a scene, would brighten her up," said Mr. Corbet to his invalid wife, as they sat together over the cindery fire of a dark parlour, on a cheerless winter day.

"Her spirits are never high. But she enjoyed herself excessively; and a civil line which she brought back to me from Mrs. Horsford, mentioned that in her brides-maid's dress she really looked lovely."

"Which, if one didn't know that Mrs. Horsford's civil lines are mere flummery, would be a pleasant hearing. But I wish she had brought back, instead, a cheerful face; or was sitting chatting with us here, instead of moping in her own room."

"She is only gone to write a letter to her Aunt Enmore, my dear. Probably, to give her an account of

the wedding. Tiny has seldom much to write about, — poor thing! —”

“Nearly as much as Mrs. Enmore has to answer, I suspect.”

“But Tiny will have something to cheer her up, next year,” added Mrs. Corbet, in whose monotonous life a year was as a day. “Edgar will then be old enough for lessons.”

Mr. Corbet could not but hint that a spelling-book, and a dull child, were not exactly the objects calculated to enliven a pretty young girl of seventeen. — But his gentle-hearted wife was not to be convinced.

“Tiny was so fond of the children! — She had never been the same girl since Alfred was taken from her hands to go to school! —”

There was some excuse for her prejudice in favour of the boys and their spelling-books. — They were her own, and the pretty young girl of seventeen only her step-daughter.

A tenderer stepmother, however, never existed; and, till six years old, Tiny not only remained ignorant that her own mother had died in child-bed; but, though two little brothers were already born from her father's second marriage, was still the spoiled child of the family. Nay, of her two parents, Mrs. Corbet was decidedly the fondest; and, but that the expected arrival of a third olive branch, rendering it desirable that Grenfield House should be kept quiet for a time, determined her father

to accept for her an often-declined invitation to visit her maternal grandmother; in London, she would never have surmised that her "dear, dear mamma" was only a mamma by courtesy.

Not all the groundless complaints, however, which she heard uttered to the old lady by the nursemaid who had attended her from her birth, and who accompanied her to town, could persuade her to fancy herself aggrieved by the number of nurselings who crowded her nursery, and caused "poor little Miss Sophy to be so terribly put upon." Even her grandmother, who had somewhat resented her son-in-law's precipitate re-marriage (on the usual plea of wanting some one to take care of his motherless infant), was forced to admit that the care had been admirably taken.

Still, as Mrs. Corbet's young progeny was annually increasing, and her health becoming daily more infirm, it was clear that as the dimensions and income of Grenfield House did not increase with the family, the comfort of poor little Tiny was in danger; and at the end of a two months' visit, the child had so endeared herself to Mrs. Rawdon, that she finally obtained the sanction of the Corbets to retain her as an inmate.

Still, it was the stepmother who most regretted, and longest resisted, the concession. It was only on learning from her husband that Tiny was wholly unprovided for, and that Mrs. Rawdon, if she took a fancy to her grandchild, would most likely secure her an independence,

that she withdrew her opposition. Considering all she was doing to encroach upon the little girl's prospects, she must not stand in her light.

The heart of the infirm young crowder of the Grenfield House nursery was so much better than her head, that she was not likely to surmise how far greater might be the advantage to her stepchild of being reared as little Tiny, by her father's homely fireside, than as the Miss Corbet of her grandmother's formal mansion in Harley Street. Her frocks might have displayed less embroidery; but, instead of being prematurely governessed into headaches, the child would have been tearing about the Grenfield garden, with her little brothers; and escaped many a languid, dreary hour, yearning after the caresses which, in early childhood, had softened her little heart.

For grandmamma was as cold as a stone. She had claimed the care of "poor Sophia's little girl" far more as a duty than a pleasure. Her pride, which had revolted against her daughter's derogatory marriage with a yeoman's son, revolted equally against a grandchild of her's being "put upon" in Mr. Corbet's shabby household. But she chose to bring her up in the same dry, disagreeable manner she had brought up "poor Sophia and her sister Jane;" both of whom her crotchety husband, the late Mr. Rawdon, detested, because they were girls; and whom she had not the grace to compensate by extra affection for their father's unnatural estrange-