

MIRIAM'S MARRIAGE.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1872.

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MIRIAM'S MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

Norah's Advice.

MRS. HUGH LLEWELLYN had bid her visitor sit down, but Nancy took no heed of the permission.

She had told her story standing beside the table, with drooping head, and arms hanging listlessly. It had been hard to tell Miriam's disgrace to this lady. Something—that indescribable thing which is instinct rather than perception, for perception is the special property of shallow natures, akin to a superficial tact; whereas instinct has a deep and wholly inner growth, rather to be symbolized by Ithuriel's spear; while the other quality, so often confounded with it, may be likened to the feelers of a cat or the antennæ of a butterfly—instinct then had made Nancy aware that she must not expect too much of her companion; gentleness, kindness, sweetness—all these in a certain measure she might count on; but anything like the magnanimity which would enable Mrs. Hugh Llewellyn to look on Miriam still as a sister now that her false position and homely

parentage had been revealed, was more than Nancy felt Norah to be capable of. And yet, with all the warmth of her large soul, she loved Norah for the patience with which she had listened, and for the delicacy with which she had restrained any word or gesture of blame.

Even when she had finished her story her listener kept silence. Norah was puzzled what to say, and while she sat studying how best to spare Nancy's feelings, the girl stood like a criminal, crushed by the words she had herself spoken.

It may be said that Nancy's was an exaggerated view, that after all Miriam was only wronged, not sinning. Nancy had been reared in much purity of thought and in a special horror of evil influence, and she truly held Miriam to be guiltless; but she knew that she might as well try to replace the bloom on a plum, as to try and set her sister's innocence where it had been before she married Godfrey Brendon.

"Except to father and to me," she said, "and we will uphold her against the world; but only by shielding and hiding her, not by helping her to hold her head up as if there was nought weighing it down."

She was the first to speak.

"You justify me now, madam, and you will help me to tell my poor darling the truth."

There was a strange tumult in Norah's gentle