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MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN.

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BY

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PREFACE.

COMPARATIVELY little has been written about the life of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. The two chief authorities upon the subject are William Godwin and Mr. C. Kegan Paul. In writing the following Biography I have relied chiefly upon the Memoir written by the former, and the *Life of Godwin* and Prefatory Memoir to the *Letters to Imlay* of the latter. I have endeavoured to supplement the facts recorded in these books by a careful analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's writings and study of the period in which she lived.

I must here express my thanks to Dr. Richard Garnett, and to Mr. C. Kegan Paul, for the kind assistance they have given me in my work. To the first-named of these gentlemen I am indebted for the loan of a manuscript containing some particulars of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's last illness which have never yet appeared in print, and to the latter for the gift, as well as the loan, of several important books.

E. R. P.

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MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN.

INTRODUCTION.

Few women have worked so faithfully for the cause of humanity as Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and few have been the objects of such censure. She devoted herself to the relief of her suffering fellow-beings with the ardour of a Saint Vincent de Paul, and in return she was considered by them a moral scourge of God. Because she had the courage to express opinions new to her generation, and the independence to live according to her own standard of right and wrong, she was denounced as another Messalina. The young were bidden not to read her books, and the more mature warned not to follow her example, the miseries she endured being declared the just retribution of her actions. Indeed, the infamy attached to her name is almost incredible in the present age, when new theories are more patiently criticised, and when purity of motive has been accepted as the vindication of at least one well-known breach of social laws. The malignant attacks

made upon her character since her death have been too widely known to be ignored, but the Life which follows may serve for their refutation.

As a rule, the notices which were published after she was dead were harsher and more uncompromising than those written during her lifetime. There were happily one or two exceptions. The writer of her obituary in the *Monthly Magazine* for September, 1797, speaks of her in terms of unlimited admiration, but it is more than probable that it was written by a personal friend. A year later the same magazine, in its semi-annual retrospect of British literature, expressed somewhat altered opinions. The notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for October, 1797, the month after her death, was friendly, but guarded in its praise.

In 1798 Godwin published his Memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft, together with her posthumous writings. He hoped, no doubt, by a clear statement of the principal incidents of her life to moderate the popular feeling against her. But he was the last person to have undertaken the task. Outside the small circle of friends and sympathisers who really loved him, he was by no means popular. There were some who even seemed to think that the greatest hardship of Mary's life was to have been his wife. Thus Roscoe, after reading the Memoir, expressed the sentiments it aroused in him in the following lines :—

> Hard was thy fate in all the scenes of life,
> As daughter, sister, mother, friend, and wife;
> But harder still thy fate in death we own,
> Thus mourned by Godwin with a heart of stone.

Moreover, Godwin's views about marriage, as set forth in his *Political Justice*, were held in such abhorrence

that the fact that he approved of Mary's conduct was reason enough for the multitude to disapprove of it. His book, therefore, was not a success as far as Mary's reputation was concerned, and, indeed, increased rather than lessened the asperity of her detractors. It was greeted by the *European Magazine* for April, 1798, almost immediately after its publication, by one of the most scathing denunciations of Mary's character which had yet appeared, and the opinion of the *European Magazine* was the one most generally adopted, and almost invariably re-echoed when Mary Wollstonecraft's name was mentioned in print.

Probably the article which was most influential in perpetuating the ill-repute in which she stood with her contemporaries, is the sketch of her life given in Chalmers's *Biographical Dictionary*. The papers and many books of the day soon passed out of sight, but the Dictionary was long used as a standard work of reference. In this particular article every action of Mary's life was construed unfavourably, and her character shamefully vilified. Beloe, in the *Sexagenarian*, borrowed the scurrilous abuse of the *Biographical Dictionary*, which was furthermore accepted by almost every history of English literature and encyclopædia as the correct estimate of Mary's character and teachings. It is, therefore, no wonder that the immorality of her doctrines and unwomanliness of her conduct came to be believed in implicitly by the too credulous public.

That she fully deserved this disapprobation and contempt seemed to many confirmed by the fact that her daughter, Mary Godwin, consented to live with Shelley before their union could be legalized. The indepen-

She died when this daughter was born

dence of mother and daughter excited private as well as public animosity. During all these years Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was not without defenders, but their number was small. Southey was always enthusiastic in his admiration, and his letters are full of her praises. Shelley, too, offered her the tribute of his praise in verse.

But the mere admiration of Southey and Shelley had little weight against popular prejudice. Year by year Mary's books were less frequently read, and the prediction that in another generation her name would be unknown bade fair to be fulfilled. But the latest of her admirers, Mr. Kegan Paul, has, by his zealous efforts in her behalf, succeeded in vindicating her character and reviving interest in her writings. By his careful history of her life, and noble words in her defence, he has re-established her reputation. As he says himself, "Only eighty years after her death has any serious attempt been made to set her right in the eyes of those who will choose to see her as she was." His attempt has been successful. No one after reading her sad story as he tells it in his *Life of Godwin*, can doubt her moral uprightness. His statement of her case attracted the attention it deserved. Two years after it appeared, Miss Mathilde Blind published, in the *New Quarterly Review*, a paper containing a brief sketch of the incidents he recorded, and expressing an honest recognition of this good but much-maligned woman.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YOUTH.

1759–1778.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born on the 27th of April, 1759, but whether in London or in Epping Forest, where she spent the first five years of her life, is not quite certain. There is no history of her ancestors to show from whom she inherited the intellectual greatness which distinguished her, but which characterised neither of her parents. Her paternal grandfather was a manufacturer in Spitalfields, of whom little is known, except that he was of Irish extraction and that he himself was respectable and prosperous. To his son, Edward John, Mary's father, he left a fortune of ten thousand pounds, no inconsiderable sum in those days for a man of his social position. Her mother was Elizabeth, daughter of a Mr. Dixon, of Ballyshannon, Ireland, member of a good family. Mary was the second of six children. The eldest, Edward, who was more successful in his worldly affairs than the others, and James, who went to sea to seek his fortunes, both passed to a great extent out of her life. But her two sisters, Eliza and Everina, and her youngest brother,

Charles, were so dependent upon her for assistance in their many troubles that their career is intimately associated with hers.

With her very first years Mary Wollstonecraft began a bitter training in the school of experience, which was to no small degree instrumental in developing her character and forming her philosophy. There are few details of her childhood, and no anecdotes indicating a precocious genius. But enough is known of her early life to make us understand what were the principal influences to which she was exposed. Her strength sprang from the very uncongeniality of her home and her successful struggles against the poverty and vice which surrounded her. Her father was a selfish, hot-tempered despot, whose natural bad qualities were aggravated by his dissipated habits. His chief characteristic was his instability. He could persevere in nothing. Apparently brought up to no special profession, he was by turns a gentleman of leisure, a farmer, a man of business. It seems to have been sufficient for him to settle in any one place to almost immediately wish to depart from it. The history of the first fifteen or twenty years of his married life is that of one long series of migrations. The discomforts and petty miseries unavoidable to travellers with large families in pre-railroad days necessarily increased his irascibility. The inevitable consequence of these many changes was loss of money and still greater loss of temper. That his financial experiments proved to be failures, is certain from the abject poverty of his later years. That they were bad for him morally, is shown in the fact that his children, when grown up, found it impossible to live under the same roof with him. His

indifference in one particular to their wishes and welfare led in the end to disregard of them in all matters.

It is more than probable that Mary, in her *Wrongs of Woman*, drew largely from her own experience for the characters therein represented, and we shall not err in identifying the father she describes in this novel with Mr. Wollstonecraft himself. "His orders," she writes, "were not to be disputed; and the whole house was expected to fly at the word of command. . . . He was to be instantaneously obeyed, especially by my mother, whom he very benevolently married for love; but took care to remind her of the obligation when she dared in the slightest instance to question his absolute authority." He was, in a word, an egotist of the worst description, who found no brutality too low once his anger was aroused, and no amount of despotism too odious when the rights and comforts of others interfered with his own desires. When contradicted or thwarted his rage was ungovernable, and he used personal violence not only to his dogs and children, but even to his wife. Drink and unrestrained selfishness had utterly degraded him. Such was Mary's father.

Mrs. Wollstonecraft was her husband's most abject slave, but was in turn somewhat of a tyrant herself. She approved of stern discipline for the young. She was too indolent to give much attention to the education of her children, and devoted what little energy she possessed to enforcing their unquestioning obedience even in trifles, and to making them as afraid of her displeasure as they were of their father's anger. "It is perhaps difficult to give you an idea of the petty cares which obscured the morning of my life," Mary declares

through her heroine,—"continual restraint in the most trivial matters, unconditional submission to orders, which as a mere child I soon discovered to be unreasonable, because inconsistent and contradictory. Thus are we destined to experience a mixture of bitterness with the recollection of our most innocent enjoyment." Edward, as the mother's favourite, escaped her severity; but it fell upon Mary with double force, and was with her carried out with a thoroughness that laid its shortcomings bare, and consequently forced Mrs. Wollstonecraft to modify her treatment of her younger children. This concession on her part shows that she must have had their well-being at heart, even when her policy in their regard was most misguided, and that her unkindness was not, like her husband's cruelty, born of caprice. But it was sad for Mary that her mother did not discover her mistake sooner.

When Mary was five years old, and before she had had time to form any strong impressions of her earliest home, her father moved to another part of Epping Forest near the Chelmsford Road. Then, at the end of a year, he carried his family to Barking in Essex, where he established them in a comfortable home, a little way out of the town. Many of the London markets were then supplied from the farms around Barking, so that the chance for his success here was promising.

This place was the scene of Mary's principal childish recollections and associations. Natural surroundings were with her of much more importance than they usually are to the very young, because she depended upon them for her pleasures. She cared nothing for dolls and the ordinary amusements of girls. Having

received few caresses and little tender nursing, she did not know how to play the part of mother. Her recreation led her out of doors with her brothers. That she lived much in the open air and became thoroughly acquainted with the town and the neighbourhood, seems certain from the eagerness with which she visited it years afterwards with Godwin.

Only too often the victim of her father's cruel fury, and at all times a sufferer because of her mother's theories, she had little chance for happiness during her childhood. She was, like Carlyle's hero of *Sartor Resartus,* one of those children whose sad fate it is to weep "in the playtime of the others." Not even to the David Copperfields and Paul Dombeys of fiction has there fallen a lot so hard to bear and so sad to record, as that of the little Mary Wollstonecraft. She was then the most deserving object of that pity which later, as a woman, she was always ready to bestow upon others. Her affections were unusually warm and deep, but they could find no outlet. She met, on the one hand, indifference and sternness; on the other, injustice and ill-usage.

To whatever town they went, the Wollstonecrafts seem to have given signs of gentility and good social standing, which won for them, if not many at least respectable friends. At Barking an intimacy sprang up between them and the family of Mr. Bamber Gascoyne, a member of Parliament. But Mary was too young to profit by this friendship. It was most ruthlessly interrupted three years later, when, in 1768, the restless head of the house, whose industry in Barking had not equalled the enterprise which brought him there, took his departure for Beverly, in Yorkshire.

This was the most complete change that he had as yet made. Heretofore his wanderings had been confined to Essex. But he either found in his new home more promising occupation and congenial companionship than he had hitherto, or else there was a short respite to his feverish restlessness, for he continued in it for six years. It was here Mary received almost all the education that was ever given her by regular schooling. Beverly was nothing but a small market-town, though she in her youthful enthusiasm thought it large and handsome, and its inhabitants brilliant and elegant, and was much disappointed when she passed through it many years afterwards, on her way to Norway, to see how far the reality fell short of her youthful idealizations. Its schools could not have been of a very high order, and we do not need Godwin's assurance to know that Mary owed little of her subsequent culture to them. But her education may be said to have really begun in 1775, when her father, tired of farming and tempted by commercial hopes, left Beverly for London, and settled in Hoxton.

Mary was at this time in her sixteenth year. The effect of her home life, under which most children would have succumbed, had been to develop her character at an earlier age than is usual with women. In spite of the tyranny and caprice of her parents, and, indeed, perhaps because of them, she had soon asserted her individuality and superiority. When she had recognized the mistaken motives of her mother and the weakness of her father, she had been forced to rely upon her own judgment and self-command. It is a wonderful proof of her fine instincts that, though she must have known her strength, she did not rebel, and

that her keen insight into the injustice of some actions did not prevent her realizing the justice of others. Her mind seems to have been from the beginning too evenly balanced for any such misconceptions. When reprimanded, she deservedly found in the reprimand, as she once told Godwin, the one means by which she became reconciled to herself for the fault which had called it forth. As she matured, her immediate relations could not but yield to the influence which she exercised over all with whom she was brought into close contact. If there be such a thing as animal magnetism, she possessed it in perfection. Her personal attractions commanded love, and her great powers of sympathy drew people, without their knowing why, to lean upon her for moral support. In the end she became an authority in her family. Mrs. Wollstonecraft was in time compelled to bestow upon her the affection which she had first withheld. It was the ugly duckling after all who proved to be the swan of the flock. Mr. Wollstonecraft learned to hold his eldest daughter in awe, and his anger sometimes diminished in her presence.

Pity was always Mary's ruling passion. Feeling deeply the family sorrows, she was quick to forget herself in her efforts to lighten them when this privilege was allowed to her. There were opportunities enough for self-sacrifice. With every year Mr. Wollstonecraft squandered more money, and grew idler and more dissipated. Home became unbearable, the wife's burden heavier. Mary, emancipated from the restraints of childhood, no longer remained a silent spectator of her father's fits of passion. When her mother was the victim of his violence, she interposed boldly between

them, determined that if his blows fell upon any one, it should be upon herself. There were occasions when she so feared the results of his drunken rage that she would not even go to bed at night, but, throwing herself upon the floor outside her room, would wait there, on the alert, to meet whatever horrors darkness might bring forth.

Mary's existence up to 1775 had been, save when disturbed by family storms, quiet, lonely, and uneventful. As yet no special incident had occurred in it, nor had she been awakened to intellectual activity. But in Hoxton she contracted a friendship which, though it was with a girl of her own age, was always esteemed by her as the chief and leading event in her existence. This it was which first aroused her love of study and of independence, and opened a channel for the outpouring of her too long suppressed affections. Her love for Fanny Blood was the spark which kindled the latent fire of her genius. Her arrival in Hoxton, therefore, marks the first important era in her life.

She owed this new pleasure to Mr. Clare, a clergyman, and his wife, who lived next to the Wollstonecrafts in Hoxton. The acquaintanceship formed with their neighbours ripened in Mary's case into intimacy. Mr. Clare was deformed and delicate, and, because of his great physical weakness, led the existence of a hermit. He rarely, if ever, went out, and his habits were so essentially sedentary that a pair of shoes lasted him for fourteen years. It is hardly necessary to add that he was eccentric, but he was a man of a certain amount of culture, and had read largely, his opportunity for so doing being great. He was attracted by Mary, whom he soon discovered to be no ordinary

girl, and he interested himself in forming and training her mind. She, in return, liked him. His deformity alone would have appealed to her, but she found him a congenial companion, and, as she proved herself a willing pupil, he was glad to have her much with him. She was a friend of Mrs. Clare as well; indeed, the latter remained true to her through later storms which wrecked many other less sincere friendships. Mary sometimes spent days and even weeks in the house of these good people; and it was on one of these occasions, probably, that Mrs. Clare took her to Newington Butts, then a village at the extreme southern end of London, and there introduced her to Frances Blood.

The first meeting between them, Godwin says, "bore a resemblance to the first interview of Werter with Charlotte." The Bloods lived in a small, but scrupulously well-kept house, and when its door was first opened for Mary, Fanny, a bright-looking girl about her own age, was busy, like another Charlotte, in superintending the meal of her younger brothers and sisters. It was a scene well calculated to excite Mary's interest. She, better than anyone else, could understand its full worth. It revealed to her at a glance the skeleton in the family closet,—the inefficiency of the parents to care for the children whom they had brought into the world, and the poverty which prevented their hiring others to do their work for them. And at the same time it showed her the noble unselfishness of the daughter, who not only took upon herself the burden so easily shifted by the parents, but who accepted her fate cheerfully. Mary then and there vowed in her heart eternal friendship for her new acquaintance, and the vow was never broken.

Balzac, in his *Cousine Bette*, says that there is no stronger passion than the love of one woman for another. Mary Wollstonecraft's affection for Frances Blood is a striking illustration of the truth of his statement. It was strong as that of a Sappho for an Erinna; tender and constant as that of a mother for her child. From the moment they met until they were separated by poor Fanny's untimely death, Mary never wavered in her devotion and its active expression, nor could the vicissitudes and joys of her later life destroy her loving loyalty to the memory of her first and dearest friend. "When a warm heart has strong impressions," she wrote in a letter long years afterwards, "they are not to be effaced. Emotions become sentiments: and the imagination renders transient sensations permanent, by fondly retracing them. I cannot without a thrill of delight recollect views I have seen, which are not to be forgotten, nor looks I have felt in every nerve, which I shall never more meet. The grave has closed over a dear friend, the friend of my youth; still she is present with me, and I hear her soft voice warbling as I stray over the heath."

There was much to draw the two friends together. They had many miseries and many tastes and interests in common. Fanny's parents were poor, and her father, like Mr. Wollstonecraft, was idle and dissipated. There were young children to be reared, and an incompetent mother to do it. Fanny was only two years older than Mary, but was, at that time, far more advanced mentally. Her education had been more complete. She was in a small way both musician and artist, was fond of reading, and had even tried her powers at writing. But her drawing had proved her

most profitable accomplishment, and by it she supported her entire family. Mary as yet had perfected herself in nothing, and was helpless where money-making was concerned. Her true intellectual education had but just begun under Mr. Clare's direction. She had previously read voluminously, but, having done so for mere immediate gratification, had derived but little profit therefrom. As she lived in Hoxton and Fanny in Newington Butts, they could not see each other very often, and so in the intervals between their visits they corresponded. Mary found that her letters were far inferior to those of her friend. She could not spell so well, and had none of Fanny's ease in shaping her thoughts into words. Her pride was hurt and her ambition stirred. She determined to make herself at least Fanny's intellectual equal. It was humiliating to know herself powerless to improve her own condition, when her friend was already earning an income large enough not only to meet her own wants but those of others depending upon her. To prepare herself for a like struggle with the world, a struggle which in all likelihood she would be obliged to make single-handed, she studied earnestly. Books acquired new value in her eyes. She read no longer for passing amusement, but to strengthen and cultivate her mind for future work. It cannot be doubted that under any circumstances she would, in the course of a few years, have become conscious of her power and the necessity to exercise it. But to Fanny Blood belongs the honour of having given the first incentive to her intellectual energy. This brave, heavily burdened young English girl, accepting toils and tribulations with stout heart, would, with many another silent heroine or hero, have

been forgotten, had it not been for the stimulus her love and example were to an even stronger sister-sufferer. The larger field of interests thus opened for Mary was like the bright dawn after a long and dark night. For the first time she was happy.

There was therefore much in her life at Hoxton to relieve the gloomy influence of the family troubles. Work for a definite end is in itself a great joy. Many pleasant hours were spent with the Clares, and occasional gala-days with Fanny. These last two pleasures, however, were short-lived. The inexorable family tyrant, her father, grew tired of commerce, as indeed he did of everything, and in the spring of 1776 he abandoned it for agriculture, and removed to Pembroke, where he owned some little property. With a heavy heart Mary bade farewell to her new friends.

Of external incidents the year in Wales was barren. The only one on record is the intimacy which sprang up between the Wollstonecrafts and the Allens. Two daughters of this family afterwards married sons of the famous potter, Wedgwood, and the friendship then begun lasted for life. To Mary, herself, however, this year was full and fertile. It was devoted to study and work. Hers was the only true genius,—the genius for industry. She never relaxed in the task she had set for herself, and her progress was rapid. The signs she soon manifested of her mental power added to the respect with which her family now treated her. Realizing that the assistance she could give by remaining at home was but little compared to that which might result from her leaving it for some definite employment, she seems at this period to have announced her intention of seeking her fortunes abroad. But Mrs.

Wollstonecraft looked upon the presence of her daughter as a strong bulwark of defence against the brutal attacks of her husband, and was loath to lose it. Mary yielded to her entreaties to wait a little longer; but her sympathy and tender pity for human suffering fortunately never destroyed her common sense. She knew that the day must come when on her own individual exertions would depend not only her own but a large share of her sisters' and brothers' maintenance, and, in consenting to remain at home, she exacted certain conditions. She insisted upon being allowed freedom in the regulation of her actions. She demanded that she should have a room for her exclusive property, and that, when engaged in study, she should not be interrupted. She would attend to certain domestic duties, and after they were over, her time must be her own. It was little to ask. All she wanted was the liberty to make herself independent of the paternal care which girls of eighteen, as a rule, claim as their right. It was granted her.

At the end of another year, the demon of restlessness again attacked Mr. Wollstonecraft. Wales proved less attractive than it had appeared at a distance. Orders were given to repack the family goods and chattels, and to set out upon new wanderings. On this occasion, Mary interfered with a strong hand. Since a change was to be made, it might as well be turned to her advantage. She had, without a word, allowed herself to be carried to Wales away from the one person she really loved, and she now knew the sacrifice had been useless. It was clear to her that one place was no better for her father than another; therefore he should go where it pleased her. It was better that one

member of the family should be content, than that all should be equally miserable. She prevailed upon him to choose Walworth as his next resting-place. Here she would be near Fanny, and life would again hold some brightness for her.

It was at Walworth that she took the first step in what was fated to be a long life of independence and work. The conditions which she had made with her family seem to have been here neglected, and study at home became more and more impossible. She was further stimulated to action by the personal influence of her energetic friend, by the fact that the younger children were growing up to receive their share of the family sorrow and disgrace, and by her own great dread of poverty. "How writers professing to be friends to freedom and the improvement of morals can assert that poverty is no evil, I cannot imagine!" she exclaims in the *Wrongs of Woman*. She cared nothing for the luxuries and the ease and idleness which wealth gives, but she prized above everything the time and opportunity for self-culture of which the poor, in their struggle for existence, are deprived. The Wollstonecraft fortunes were at low ebb. Her share in them, should she remain at home, would be drudgery and slavery, which would grow greater with every year. Her one hope for the future depended upon her profitable use of the present. The sooner she earned money for herself, the sooner would she be able to free her brothers and sisters from the yoke whose weight she knew full well because of her own eagerness to throw it off. Unselfish as her father was selfish, she thought quite as much of their welfare as of her own. Therefore when, at the age of nineteen, a situation as

lady's companion was offered to her, neither tears nor entreaties could alter her resolution to accept it. She entered at once upon her new duties, and with them her career as woman may be said to have begun.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST YEARS OF WORK.

1778–1785.

Mary Wollstonecraft did not become famous at once. She began her career as humbly as many a less gifted woman. Like the heroes of old, she had tasks allotted her before she could attain the goal of her ambition.

It is difficult for a young man without money, influential friends, or professional education to make his way in the world. With a woman placed in similar circumstances the difficulty is increased a hundred-fold. We of to-day, when government and other clerkships are open to women, cannot quite realize their helplessness a few generations back. In Mary Wollstonecraft's time those whose birth and training had unfitted them for the more menial occupations—who could neither bake nor scrub—had but two resources : they must either become governesses or ladies' companions. In neither case was their position enviable. They ranked as little better than upper servants. Mary's first appearance on the world-stage, therefore, was not brilliant.

The lady with whom she went to live was a Mrs. Dawson, a widow who had but one child, a grown-up son. Her residence was in Bath. Mary must then have given at least signs of the beauty which did not reach its full development until many years later, her sorrows had not entirely destroyed her natural gaiety, and she was only nineteen years old. The mission in Bath in those days of young girls of her age was to dance and to flirt, to lose their hearts and to find husbands, to gossip, to listen to the music, to show themselves in the Squares and Circus and on the Parades, or, sometimes, when they were seriously inclined, to drink the waters. Mary's was to cater to the caprices of a cross-grained, peevish woman. There was little sunshine in the morning of her life. She was destined always to see the darkest side of human nature. Mrs. Dawson's temper was bad, and her companions, of whom there seem to have been many, had hitherto fled before its outbreaks, as the leaves wither and fall at the first breath of winter. Mary's home-schooling was now turned to good account. Mrs. Dawson's rage could not, at its worst, equal her father's drunken violence; and long experience of the latter prepared her to bear the former with apparent, if not real, stoicism. We have no particulars of her life as companion nor knowledge of the exact nature of her duties. But of one thing we are certain, the fulfilment of them cost her many a heart-ache. In Bath she was separated from her friends, she was alone in her struggle, and she held a position which did not always command respect. However, her indomitable will and unflagging energy availed her to such good purpose that she continued with Mrs. Dawson for two years,

doubtless to the surprise of the latter, accustomed as she was to easily frightened and hastily retreating companions. Her departure then was due, not to moral cowardice or exhaustion, but to a summons from home.

Mrs. Wollstonecraft's health had begun to fail. Her life had been a hard one, and the drains upon her constitution many. She was the mother of a large family, and had had her full share of the by no means insignificant pains and cares of maternity. In addition to these she had had to contend against poverty, that evil which, says the Talmud, is worse than fifty plagues, and against the vagaries of a good-for-nothing drunken husband. Once she fell beneath her burden, she could not rise with it again. She had no strength left to withstand her illness. Eliza and Everina were both at home to take care of her, but she could not rest without the eldest daughter, upon whom experience had taught her to rely implicitly. She sent for Mary, and the latter hastened at once to her mother's side. Her own hopes and ambitions, her chances and prospects, all were forgotten in her desire to do what she could for the poor patient. She waited upon her mother with untiring care. Mrs. Wollstonecraft's illness was long and lingering, though it declared itself at an early stage to be hopeless. In her pleasure at her daughter's return she received her services with grateful thanks. But, as she grew worse, she became more accustomed to the presence of her nurse, and exacted as a right that which she had first accepted as a favour. She would allow no one else to attend to her, and day and night Mary was with her.

Finally the end came. Mrs. Wollstonecraft died,

happy to be released from a world which had given her nothing but unkindness and sorrow. Her parting words were: "A little patience, and all will be over!" It was not difficult for the dying woman, so soon to have eternity to rest in, to bear quietly time's last agony. But for the weary, heart-sick young girl, before whom there stretched a vista of long years of toil, the lesson of patience was less easy to learn. Mary never forgot these words, nor did she heed their bitter sarcasm. Often and often, in her after trials, they returned to her, carrying with them peace and comfort.

Her mother's death took place in 1780. The family were then living in Enfield, which place had succeeded Walworth in their periodical migrations. After her mother's death Mary, tired out from constant nursing, want of sleep, and anxiety of mind, became ill. She sorely needed quiet and an interval from work. But the necessity to depart from her father's house was imperative. He had fallen so low that his daughters were forced to leave him. The difficulty was to find immediate means to meet the emergency. A return to Mrs. Dawson does not seem to have suggested itself as a possibility. Mary's great ambition was to become a teacher and to establish a school. But this could not be easily or at once accomplished. She must have time to prepare herself for the venture, to make friends, and to give proof of her ability to teach. Fortunately, at this juncture Fanny Blood proved a true friend and offered her at least a temporary home at Walham Green.

Fanny was still gaining a small income from her drawings, to which Mrs. Blood added whatever she could make by her needle. Mary was not one to live

upon another's bread. Too proud to become an additional charge to these two hard-working women, she helped the latter with her sewing and so contributed her share to the family means. Though she was happy because she was with her friend, her life here was well-nigh as tragic as it had been in her father's house. The family sorrows were great and many. Mr. Blood was a ne'er-do-weel and a drunkard. Caroline, one of the daughters, had then probably begun her rapid descent down-hill, moved thereto, poor girl, by the relief which vice alone gave to the poverty and gloom of her home. George, the brother, with whom Mary afterwards corresponded for so many years, was unhappy because of his unrequited love for Everina Wollstonecraft. He was an honest, good-principled young man, but his associates were disreputable, and he was at times compromised by their actions. But still sadder for Mary was the fact that Fanny, in addition to domestic grievances, was tortured by the unkindness of an uncertain lover. She had met, not long before, Mr. Hugh Skeys, a young but already successful merchant. Attracted by her, he had been sufficiently attentive and devoted to warrant her conclusion that his intentions were serious. He seems to have loved her as deeply as he was capable of loving, but discouraged perhaps by the wretched circumstances of the family, he could not make up his mind to marry her. At one moment he was ready to desert her, and at the next to claim her as his wife. Instead of resenting his unpardonable conduct, as a prouder woman would have done, she bore it with the humble patience of a Griselda. When he was kind, she hoped for the best; when he was cold, she dreaded the worst. The

consequence of these alternate states of hope and despair was mental depression, and finally physical ill-health. Through her troubles, Mary, who had given her the warmest and best, because the first, love of her life, was her faithful ally and comforter. Indeed, her friendship grew warmer with Fanny's increasing misfortunes. As she said of herself a few years later, she was not a fair-weather friend. "I think," she wrote once in a letter to George Blood, "I love most people best when they are in adversity, for pity is one of my prevailing passions." She realized that she had made herself her friend's equal, if not superior, intellectually, and that, so far as moral courage and will-power were concerned, she was much the stronger of the two. There is nothing which so deepens a man's or a woman's tenderness, as the knowledge that the object of it looks up to her or to him for support, and Mary's affection increased because of its new inspiration.

It has been said that it was necessary for all Mr. Wollstonecraft's daughters to leave his house. Mary was not yet in a position to help her sisters, and they had but few friends. Their chances of self-support were small. Their position was the trying one of gentlewomen who could not make servants of themselves, and who indeed would not be employed as such, and who had not had the training to fit them for higher occupations. Everina, therefore, was glad to find an asylum with her brother Edward, who was an attorney in London. She became his housekeeper, for, like Mary, she was too independent to allow herself to be supported by the charity of others. Eliza, the youngest sister, who, with greater love of culture

than Everina, had had even less education, solved her present problem by marrying, but she escaped one difficulty only to fall into another still greater and more serious. The history of her married experience is important because of the part Mary played in it. The latter's independent conduct, in her sister's regard, is a foreshadowing of the course she pursued at a later period in the management of her own affairs.

Eliza was the most excitable and nervous of the three sisters. The family sensitiveness was developed in her to a painful degree. She was not only quick to take offence, but was ever on the look-out for slights and insults even from people she dearly loved. She assumed a defensive attitude against the world and mankind, and therefore life went harder with her than with more cheerfully constituted women. Her indignation and rage were not so easily appeased as aroused. Altogether, she was a very impossible person to live with peacefully. Mr. Bishop, the man she married, was as quick-tempered and passionate as she, and, morally, was infinitely beneath her. He was the original of the husband in the *Wrongs of Woman*, who is represented as an unprincipled sensualist, brute, and hypocrite. The worst of it was that, when not carried away by his temper, his address was good and his manners insinuating. As one of his friends said of him, he was "either a lion or a spaniel." Unfortunately, at home he was always the lion, a fact which those who knew him only as the spaniel could not well believe. The marriage of two such people, needless to say, was not happy. They mutually aggravated each other. Eliza, with her sensitive, unforgiving nature, could not make allowances. Mr. Bishop would

not. Much as her waywardness and hastiness were at fault, he was still more to blame in effecting the rupture between them.

The strain upon Eliza's nervous system, caused by almost daily quarrels and scenes of violence, was more than she could bear. Then, to add to her misery, she found herself in that condition in which women are apt to be peculiarly susceptible and irritable. Her prospect of maternity so stimulated her abnormal emotional excitement that her reason gave way, and for months she was insane. Though she had passive intervals, she was at times very violent, and disastrous results were feared. It was necessary for someone to keep constant guard over her, and Mary was asked to undertake this task.

Relentless as Fate in pursuing the hero of Greek Tragedy to his predestined end, were the circumstances which formed Mary's prejudice against the institution of marriage. This was the third domestic tragedy caused by the husband's petty tyranny and the wife's slender resources of defence, of which she was the immediate witness. Her experience was unfortunate. The bright side of the married state was hidden from her. She saw only its shadows, and these darkened until her soul rebelled against the injustice, not of life, but of man's shaping of it. Sad as was the fate of the Bloods, and much as they needed her, the Bishop household was still sadder and its appeals more urgent, and Mary hurried thither at once.

Without a murmur she left Walham Green and established herself as nurse and keeper to the poor mad sister. There could be no greater heroism than this. With a nervous constitution not unlike that of "poor

Bess," she had to watch over the frenzied mania of the wife and to confront the almost equally insane fury of the husband.

To her desire to keep Everina posted as to the progress of affairs, we are indebted for her letters, which give a very life-like picture of herself and her surroundings while she remained in her brother-in-law's house. They are interesting because, by showing the difficulties against which she had to contend, and the effect these had upon her, we can better appreciate the greatness of her nature by which she triumphed over them. There is one written during this sad period which must be quoted here because it throws still more light upon Bishop's true character and his ingenuity in tormenting those who lived with him:—

Monday morning, Jan. 1784.

I have nothing to tell you, my dear girl, that will give you pleasure. Yesterday was a dismal day, long and dreary. Bishop was very ill, &c. &c. He is much better to-day, but misery haunts this house in one shape or other. How sincerely do I join with you in saying that if a person has common sense, they cannot make one completely unhappy. But to attempt to lead or govern a weak mind is impossible; it will ever press forward to what it wishes, regardless of impediments, and, with a selfish eagerness, believes what it desires practicable, though the contrary is as clear as the noon-day. My spirits are hurried with listening to pros and cons; and my head is so confused, that I sometimes say no when I ought to say yes. My heart is almost broken with listening to B. while he reasons the case. I cannot insult him with advice, which he would never have wanted if he was capable of attending to it. May my habitation never be fixed among the tribe that can't look beyond the present gratification, that draw fixed conclusions from general rules, that attend to the literal meaning only, and, because a thing ought to be, expect that it will come to pass. B. has made a confidant of Skeys; and as I can never speak to him in private, I suppose his pity may cloud his judgment. If it does, I should not either wonder at it or blame him. For I that know, and am fixed in my opinion, cannot unwaveringly

adhere to it; and when I reason, I am afraid of being unfeeling. Miracles don't occur now, and only a miracle can alter the minds of some people. They grow old, and we can only discover by their countenances that they are so. To the end of their chapter will their misery last. I expect Fanny next Thursday, and she will stay with us but a few days. Bess desires her love; she grows better, and of course more sad.

Though Mary's heart was breaking and her brain reeling, her closer acquaintance with Bishop convinced her that Eliza must not continue with him. She determined at all hazards to free her sister from a man who was slowly but surely killing her, and she knew she was right in her determination. For some months Eliza's physical and mental illness made it impossible to take a decided step or to form definite plans. But when her child was born, and she returned to a normal, though at the same time sadder, because conscious, state, Mary felt that the time for action had arrived. That she still thought it advisable for her sister to leave her husband, though this necessitated the abandonment of her child, conclusively proves the seriousness of Bishop's faults. It was no easy matter to effect the separation. Bishop objected to it. It is never unpleasant for a man to play the tyrant, and he was averse to losing his victim. Pecuniary assistance was therefore not to be had from him, and the sisters were penniless. Mary applied to Edward, though she was not sure it was desirable for Eliza to take refuge with him. However, he does not seem to have responded warmly, for Mary's suggestion was never acted upon. Theirs was a situation in which friends are not apt to interfere, and besides, Bishop's plausibility had won over not a few to his side. Furthermore, the chance was that if he worked successfully upon Mr.

Skeys' sympathies, the Bloods would be influenced. There was absolutely no one to help them, but Mary knew that it was useless to wait, and that the morrow would not make easier what seemed to her the task of the present day. What she now most wanted for her sister was liberty, and she resolved to secure this at once, and then afterwards to look about her to see how it was to be maintained.

Accordingly, one day, Bishop well out of the way, the sisters left his house for ever. There was a mad, breathless drive, Bess, with her insanity half returned, biting her wedding-ring to pieces, a hurried exchange of coaches to further insure escape from detection, a joyful arrival at modest lodgings in Hackney, a giving in of false names, a hasty locking of doors, and then—the reaction. Eliza, whose excitement had exhausted itself on the way, became quiet and even ready for sleep. Mary, now that immediate necessity for calmness and courage was over, grew nervous and restless. With strained ears she listened to every sound. Her heart beat time to the passing carriages, and she trembled at the lightest knock.

That night, in a wild, nervous letter to Everina, she wrote :—

I hope B. will not discover us, for I would sooner face a lion; yet the door never opens but I expect to see him, panting for breath. Ask Ned how we are to behave if he should find us out, for Bess is determined not to return. Can he force her? but I'll not suppose it, yet I can think of nothing else. She is sleepy, and going to bed; my agitated mind will not permit me. Don't tell Charles or any creature! Oh! let me entreat you to be careful, for Bess does not dread him now as much as I do. Again, let me request you to write, as B.'s behaviour may silence my fears.

The Rubicon was crossed. But the hardships thereby

incurred were but just beginning. The two sisters were obliged to keep in hiding as if they had been criminals, for they dared not risk a chance meeting with Bishop. They had barely money enough to pay their immediate expenses, and their means of making more were limited by the precautions they had to take. It had only been possible in their flight to carry off a few things, and they were without sufficient clothing. Then there came from their friends an outcry against their conduct. The general belief then was, as indeed it unfortunately continues to be, that women should accept without a murmur whatever it suits their husbands to give them, whether it be kindness or blows. Better a thousand times that one human soul should be stifled and killed than that the Philistines of society should be scandalized by its struggles for air and life. Eliza's happiness might have been totally sacrificed had she remained with Bishop; but at least the feelings of her acquaintances, in whom respectability had destroyed the more humane qualities, would have been saved. Her scheme, Mary wrote bitterly to Everina, was contrary to all the rules of conduct that are published for the benefit of new married ladies. Many felt forced to forfeit the friendship of these two social rebels, though it grieved them to the heart to do it. Mrs. Clare, be it said to her honour, remained staunch, but even she only approved cautiously, and Mary had her misgivings that she would advise a reconciliation if she once saw Bishop. To add to the hopelessness of their case, the deserted husband restrained his rage so well, and made so much of Eliza's heartlessness in abandoning her child, that he drew to himself the sympathy which should have been given to

her. Mary feared the effect his pleadings and representations would have upon Edward, the extent of whose egotism she had not yet measured, and she commissioned Everina to keep him firm. As for Eliza, she was so shaken and weak, and so unhappy about the poor motherless infant, that she could neither think nor act. The duty of providing for their wants, immediate and still to come, fell entirely upon Mary. She felt this to be just, since it was chiefly through her influence that they had been brought to their present plight; but the responsibility was great, and it is no wonder that, brave as she was, she longed for someone to share it with her.

Her one source of consolation and strength at this time was her religion. This will seem strange to many, who, knowing but few facts of her life, conclude from her connection with Godwin and her social radicalism that she was an atheist. But the sincerest spirit of piety breathes through her letters written during her early troubles. These passages, evangelical in tone, occur in private letters, meant to be read only by those to whom they were addressed, so that they must be counted as honest expressions of her convictions, and not mere cant. Just as she wrote freely to her sisters and her intimate friends about her temporal matters, so without hesitation she talked to them of her spiritual affairs. Her belief became broader as she grew older. She never was an atheist like Godwin, or an unbeliever of the Voltaire school. But as the years went on, and her knowledge of the world increased, her religion concerned itself more with conduct and less with creed, until she finally gave up going to church altogether. But at the time of which we are

writing she was regular in her attendance, and, though not strictly orthodox, clung to certain forms.

There seem to have been several schemes for work afoot just then. One was that the two sisters and Fanny Blood, who, some time before, had expressed herself willing and anxious to leave home, should join their fortunes. Fanny could paint and draw. Mary and Eliza could take in needlework until more pleasant and profitable employment could be procured. Poverty and toil would be more than compensated for by the joy which freedom and congenial companionship would give them. There was nothing very Utopian in such a plan; but Fanny, when the time came for its accomplishment, grew frightened. Her hard apprenticeship had given her none of the self-confidence and reliance which belonged to Mary by right of birth. Her family, despite their dependence upon her, seemed like a protection against the outer world. And so she held back, pleading the small chances of success by such a partnership, her own poor health, which would make her a burden to them, and, in fact, so many good reasons that the plan was abandoned. She, then, with greater aptitude for suggestion than for action, proposed that Mary and Eliza should keep a haberdashery shop, to be stocked at the expense of the much-called-upon but sadly unsusceptible Edward. Fortunately, Fanny's project was never carried out. Probably Edward, as usual, failed to meet the proposals made to him, and Mary realized that the chains by which she would thus bind herself would be unendurable.

The plan finally adopted was that dearest to Mary's heart. She began her career as teacher. She and Eliza went to Islington, where Fanny was then living,

and lodged in the same house with her. Then they announced their intention of receiving day pupils. Mary was eminently fitted to teach. Her sad experience had increased her natural sympathy and benevolence. She now made her own troubles subservient to those of her fellow-sufferers, and resolved that the welfare of others should be the principal object of her life. Before the word had passed into moral philosophy, she had become an altruist in its truest sense. The task of teacher particularly attracted her because it enabled her to prepare the young for the struggle with the world for which she had been so ill qualified. Because so little attention had been given to her in her early youth, she keenly appreciated the advantage of a good practical education. But her merits were not recognized in Islington. Like the man in the parable, she set out a banquet of which the bidden guests refused to partake. No scholars were sent to her. Therefore, at the end of a few months, she was glad to move to Newington Green, where better prospects seemed to await her. There she had relatives and influential friends, and the encouragement she received from them induced her to begin work on a large scale. She rented a house, and opened a regular school. Her efforts met with success. Twenty children became her pupils, while a Mrs. Campbell, a relative, and her son, and another lady, with three children, came to board with her. Mary was now more comfortable than she had heretofore been. She was, comparatively speaking, prosperous. She had much work to do, but by it she was supporting herself, and at the same time advancing towards her "clear-purposed goal" of self-renunciation. Then she had cause for pleasure in the fact that Eliza

was now really free, Bishop having finally agreed to the separation. Mary Wollstonecraft, at the head of a house, and mistress of a school, was a very different person from Mary Wollstonecraft, simple companion to Mrs. Dawson or dependent friend of Fanny Blood. Her position was one to attract attention, and it was sufficient for her to be known, to be loved and admired. Her social sphere was enlarged. No one could care more for society than she did, when that society was congenial. At Newington Green she already began to show the preference for men and women of intellectual tastes and abilities that she manifested so strongly in her life in London. Foremost among her intimate acquaintances at this time was Dr. Richard Price, a clergyman, a Dissenter, then well known because of his political and mathematical speculations. He was an honest, upright, simple-hearted man, who commanded the respect and love of all who knew him, and whose benevolence was great enough to realize even Mary's ideals. She became deeply attached to him personally, and was a warm admirer of his religious and moral principles. His sermons gave her great delight, and she often went to listen to them. He in return seems to have felt great interest in her, and to have recognized her extraordinary mental force. Mr. John Hewlet, also a clergyman, was another of her friends, and she retained his friendship for many years afterwards. A third friend, mentioned by Godwin in his Memoirs, was Mrs. Burgh, widow of a man now almost forgotten, but once famous as the author of *Political Disquisitions*. In sorrows soon to come, Mrs. Burgh gave practical proof of her affection. If a man can be judged by the character of his associates,

then the age, professions, and serious connections of Mary's friends at Newington Green are not a little significant.

Much as she cared for these older friends, however, they could not be so dear to her as Fanny and George Blood. She had begun by pitying the latter for his hopeless passion for Everina, and had finished by loving him for himself with true sisterly devotion. To brother and sister both, she could open her heart as she could to no one else. They were young with her, and that in itself is a strong bond of union. They, too, were but just beginning life, and they could sympathise with all her aspirations and disappointments. It was, therefore, an irreparable loss to her when they, at almost the same time, but for different reasons, left England. Fanny's health had finally become so wretched that even her uncertain lover was moved to pity. Mr. Skeys seems to have been one of the men who only appreciate that which they think they cannot have. Not until the ill-health of the woman he loved warned him of the possibility of his losing her altogether did he make definite proposals to her. Her love for him had not been shaken by his unkindness, and in February, 1785, she married him, and went with him to Lisbon, where he was established in business. A few years earlier he might, by making her his wife, have secured her a long life's happiness. Now, as it turned out, he succeeded but in making her path smooth for a few short months. Mary's love for Fanny made her much more sensitive to Mr. Skeys' shortcomings as a lover than Fanny had been. Shortly after the marriage she wrote indignantly to George:—

Skeys has received congratulatory letters from most of his friends

and relations in Ireland, and he now regrets that he did not marry sooner. All his mighty fears had no foundation, so that if he had had courage to brave the world's opinion, he might have spared Fanny many griefs, the scars of which will never be obliterated. Nay, more, if she had gone a year or two ago, her health might have been perfectly restored, which I do not now think will ever be the case. Before true passion, I am convinced, everything but a sense of duty moves; true love is warmest when the object is absent. How Hugh could let Fanny languish in England, while he was throwing money away at Lisbon, is to me inexplicable, if he had a passion that did not require the fuel of seeing the object. I much fear he loves her not for the qualities that render her dear to my heart. Her tenderness and delicacy are not even dreamed of by a man who would be satisfied with the fondness of one of the general run of women.

George Blood's departure was due to less pleasant circumstances than Fanny's. One youthful escapade which had come to light was sufficient to attach to his name the blame for another, of which he was innocent. Some of his associates had become seriously compromised; and he, to avoid being implicated with them, had literally taken flight, and had made Ireland his place of refuge.

Mary's friends left her just when she most needed them. Unfortunately, the interval of peace inaugurated by the opening of the school was but short-lived. Encouraged by the first success of her enterprise, she rented a larger house, hoping that in it she would do even better. But this step proved the prelude to an inexhaustible mine of difficulties. The expense involved by the change was greater than she had expected, and her means of meeting it smaller; more pupils were not forthcoming to avail themselves of the new accommodations provided for them. Moreover, her boarders neglected to pay their bills regularly. Instead of being a source of profit, they were an ad-

ditional burden. Her life now became unspeakably sad. Her whole day was spent in teaching. This in itself would not have been hard. She always interested herself in her pupils, and the consciousness of good done for others was her most highly prized pleasure. Had the physical fatigue entailed by her work been her only hardship, she would have borne it patiently and perhaps gaily. But from morning till night, waking and sleeping, she was haunted by thoughts of unpaid bills and of increasing debts. Poverty and creditors were the two unavoidable evils which stared her in the face. Then, when she did hear from Fanny, it was to know that the chances for her recovery were diminishing rather than increasing. Reports of George Blood's ill-conduct, repeated for her benefit, hurt and irritated her. On one occasion, her house was visited by men sent thither in his pursuit by the girl who had vilely slandered him. Mrs. Campbell, with the meanness of a small nature, reproached Mary for the encouragement which she had given his vices. She loved him so truly that this must have been gall and wormwood to her sensitive heart. Mr. and Mrs. Blood continued poor and miserable, he drinking and idling, and she faring as it must ever fare with the wives of such men. Mary saw nothing before her but a dreary pilgrimage through the wide Valley of the Shadow of Death, from which there seemed no escape to the Mount Zion beyond. If she dragged herself out of the deep pit of mental despondency, it was to fall into a still deeper one of physical prostration. The bleedings and blisters ordered by her physician could help her but little. What she needed to make her well was new pupils and honest

boarders, and these the most expert physician could not give her. Is it any wonder that she came in time to hate Newington Green—"the grave of all my comforts," she called it—to lose relish for life, and to feel cheered only by the prospect of death? She had nothing to reproach herself with. In sorrow and sickness alike she had toiled to the best of her abilities. That which her hand had found to do, she had done with all her might. The result of her labours and long-sufferance had hitherto been but misfortune and failure. Though her difficulties accumulated with alarming rapidity, there was no relaxation in her attentions to Mr. and Mrs. Blood, in her care for her sister, nor in the sympathy she gave to George Blood.

Perhaps the greatest joy that came to her during this year was the news that Mr. Skeys had found a position for his brother-in-law in Lisbon. But this pleasure was more than counterbalanced by the discouraging bulletins of Fanny's health. Mr. Skeys was alarmed at his wife's increasing weakness, and was anxious to gratify her every desire. Fanny expressed a wish to have Mary with her during her confinement. The latter, with characteristic unselfishness, consented, when Mr. Skeys asked her to go to Lisbon, though in so doing she was obliged to leave school and house. This shows the sincerity of her opinion that before true passion everything but duty moves. To her, Fanny's need seemed greater than her own; and she thought to fulfil her duty towards her sister, and to provide for her welfare by giving her charge of her scholars and boarders while she was away from them. Mary's decision was vigorously questioned by her friends. Indeed, there were many reasons against it. It was feared her

absence from the school for a necessarily long period would be injurious to it, and this eventually proved to be the case. The journey was a long one for a woman to make alone. And last, but not least, she had not the ready money to pay her expenses. But, despite all her friends could say, she could not be moved from her original resolution. When they saw their arguments were useless, they manifested their friendship in a more practical manner. Mrs. Burgh lent her the necessary sum of money for the journey. Godwin, however, thinks that in doing this she was acting in behalf of Dr. Price, who modestly preferred to conceal his share in the transaction. All impediments having thus been removed, Mary, in the autumn of 1785, started upon the saddest, up to this date, of her many missions of charity.

The reunion of the friends was a joyless pleasure. When Mary arrived in Lisbon, she found Fanny in the last stages of her illness, and before she had time to rest from her journey she began her work as sick-nurse. Four hours after her arrival Fanny's child was born. It had been sad enough for Mary to watch her mother's last moments and Eliza's insanity; but this new duty was still more painful. She loved Fanny Blood with a passion whose depth is beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals. Her affection for her was the one romance of her youth, and she lavished upon it all the sweetness and tenderness, the enthusiasm and devotion of her nature, which make her seem to us lovable above all women. And now this friend, the best gift life had so far given her, was to be taken from her. She saw Fanny grow weaker and weaker day by day, and knew that she was powerless

to avert the coming calamity. Yet whatever could be done, she did. There never has been, and there never can be, a more faithful, gentle nurse. The following letter gives a graphic description of her journey, of the sad welcome which awaited her at its termination, and the still sadder duties she fulfilled in Lisbon:—

Lisbon, Nov. or Dec. 1785.

My dear Girls,—I am beginning to awake out of a terrifying dream, for in that light do the transactions of these two or three last days appear. Before I say more, let me tell you that, when I arrived here, Fanny was in labour, and that four hours after she was delivered of a boy. The child is alive and well, and considering the *very, very* low state to which Fanny was reduced she is better than could be expected. I am now watching her and the child. My active spirits have not been much at rest ever since I left England. I could not write to you on shipboard, the sea was so rough; and we had such hard gales of wind, the captain was afraid we should be dismasted. I cannot write to-night or collect my scattered thoughts, my mind is so unsettled. Fanny is so worn out, her recovery would be almost a resurrection, and my reason will scarce allow me to think it possible. I labour to be resigned, and by the time I am a little so, some faint hope sets my thoughts again afloat, and for a moment I look forward to days that will, alas! never come.

I will try to-morrow to give you some little regular account of my journey, though I am almost afraid to look beyond the present moment. Was not my arrival providential? I can scarce be persuaded that I am here, and that so many things have happened in so short a time. My head grows light with thinking on it.

Friday morning.—Fanny has been so alarmingly ill since I wrote the above, I entirely gave her up, and yet I could not write and tell you so: it seemed like signing her death-warrant. Yesterday afternoon some of the most alarming symptoms a little abated, and she had a comfortable night; yet I rejoice with trembling lips, and am afraid to indulge hopes. She is very low. The stomach is so weak it will scarce bear to receive the slightest nourishment; in short, if I were to tell you all her complaints you would not wonder at my fears. The child, though a puny one, is well. I have got a wet-nurse for it. The packet does not sail till the latter end of next week, and I send this by a ship. I shall write by every opportunity. We arrived last Monday. We were only thirteen days at sea. The wind was so high

and the sea so boisterous the water came in at the cabin windows; and the ship rolled about in such a manner, it was dangerous to stir. The women were sea-sick the whole time, and the poor invalid so oppressed by his complaints, I never expected he would live to see Lisbon. I have supported him for hours together gasping for breath, and at night, if I had been inclined for sleep, his dreadful cough would have kept me awake. You may suppose that I have not rested much since I came here, yet I am tolerably well, and calmer than I could expect to be. Could I not look for comfort where only 'tis to be found, I should have been mad before this, but I feel that I am supported by that Being who alone can heal a wounded spirit. May He bless you both.

Yours,

MARY.

Her state of uncertainty about poor Fanny did not last long. Shortly after the above letter was written, Mrs. Skeys died. Just as life was beginning to smile upon her, she was called from it. She had worked so long that when happiness at length came, she had no strength left to bear it.

Godwin, in his Memoirs, says that Mary's trip to Portugal probably enlarged her understanding. "She was admitted," he writes, "to the very best company the English colony afforded. She made many profound observations on the character of the natives and the baleful effects of superstition." But it seems doubtful whether she really saw many people in Lisbon, or gave great heed to what was going on around her. Arrived there just in time to see her friend die, she remained but a short time after all was over. There was no inducement for her to make a longer stay. Her feelings for Mr. Skeys were not friendly. She could not forget that had he but treated Fanny as she, for example, would have done had she been in his place, this early death might have been prevented. Her school, intrusted to Mrs. Bishop's care, was a

strong reason for her speedy return to England. The cause which had called her from it being gone, she was anxious to return to her post.

An incident highly characteristic of her is told of the journey home. She had nursed a poor sick man on the way to Portugal; on the way back she was instrumental in saving the lives of many men. The ship in which she sailed met at mid-sea a French vessel so dismantled and storm-beaten that it was in imminent risk of sinking, and its stock of provisions was almost exhausted. Its officers hailed the English ship, begging its captain to take them and its entire crew on board. The latter hesitated. This was no trifling request. He had his own crew and passengers to consider, and he feared to lay such a heavy tax on the provisions provided for a certain number only. This was a case which aroused Mary's tenderest sympathy. It was impossible for her to witness it unmoved. She could not without a protest allow her fellow-creatures to be so cruelly deserted. Like another Portia come to judgment, she clinched the difficulty by representing to the captain that if he did not yield to their entreaties she would expose his inhumanity upon her return to England. Her arguments prevailed. The sufferers were saved, and the intercessor in their behalf added one more to the long list of her good deeds.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE AS GOVERNESS.

1786–1788.

THERE was little pleasure for Mary in her home-coming. The school, whose difficulties had begun before her departure, had prospered still less under Mrs. Bishop's care. Many of the pupils had been taken away. Eliza, her quick temper and excitability aggravated at that time by her late misfortunes, was not a fitting person to have the control of children. She had thoughtlessly quarrelled with their most profitable boarder, the mother of the three boys, who had in consequence given up her rooms. As yet no one else had been found to occupy them. The rent of the house was so high that these losses left the sisters without the means to pay it. They were therefore in debt, and that deeply, for people with no immediate, or even remote, prospects of an addition to their income. Then the Bloods during Mary's absence had fallen further into the Slough of Despond, out of which, now their daughter was dead, there was no one to help them. George could not aid them, because, though they did

not know it, he was just then without employment. Unable to live amicably with his brother-in-law after Fanny's death, he had resigned his position in Lisbon and gone to Ireland, where for a long while he could find nothing to do. Mr. Skeys simply refused to satisfy the never-ceasing wants of his wife's parents. He cannot be severely censured when their shiftlessness is borne in mind. He probably had already received many appeals from them. But Mary could not accept their troubles so passively.

To add to her distress, she was weakened by the painful task she had just completed. She was low-spirited and broken-hearted, and really ill. Her eyes gave out; and no greater inconvenience could have just then befallen her. Her mental activity was temporarily paralyzed, and yet she knew that prompt measures were necessary to avert the evils crowding upon her.

There was no chance of relief from her own family. Her father had married again, but his second marriage had not improved him. He had descended to the lowest stage of drunkenness and insignificance. His home was in Laugharne, Wales, where he barely managed to exist. James, the second son, had gone to sea in search of better fortune. Charles, the youngest, was not old enough to seek his, and hence had to endure as best he could the wretchedness of the Wollstonecraft household. Instead of Mary's receiving help from this quarter, she was called upon to give it. Kinder to her father than he had ever been to her, she never ignored his difficulties. When she had money, she shared it with him. When she had none, she did all she could to force Edward, the one prosperous

member of the family, to send his father the pecuniary assistance which, it seems, he had promised.

In whatever direction she looked, she saw misery and unhappiness. The present was unendurable, the future hopeless. For a brief interval she was almost crushed by her circumstances. To George Blood, now even dearer to her than he had been before, she laid bare the weariness of her heart. Shortly after her return she wrote him this letter, pathetic in its despair:—

Newington Green, Feb. 4, 1786.

I write to you, my dear George, lest my silence should make you uneasy; yet what have I to say that will not have the same effect? Things do not go well with me, and my spirits seem for ever flown. I was a month on my passage, and the weather was so tempestuous we were several times in imminent danger. I did not expect ever to have reached land. If it had pleased Heaven to have called me hence, what a world of care I should have missed! I have lost all relish for pleasure, and life seems a burden almost too heavy to be endured. My head is stupid, and my heart sick and exhausted. But why should I worry you? and yet, if I do not tell you my vexations, what can I write about?

Your father and mother are tolerably well, and inquire most affectionately concerning you. They do not suspect that you have left Lisbon, and I do not intend informing them of it till you are provided for. I am very unhappy on their account, for though I am determined they shall share my last shilling, yet I have every reason to apprehend extreme distress, and of course they must be involved in it. The school dwindles to nothing, and we shall soon lose our last boarder, Mrs. Disney. She and the girls quarrelled while I was away, which contributed to make the house very disagreeable. Her sons are to be whole boarders at Mrs. Cockburn's. Let me turn my eyes on which side I will, I can only anticipate misery. Are such prospects as these likely to heal an almost broken heart? The loss of Fanny was sufficient of itself to have thrown a cloud over my brightest days; what effects then, must it have when I am bereft of every other comfort? I have, too, many debts. I cannot think of remaining any longer in this house, the rent is so enormous; and where to go, without money or friends, who can point out? My eyes

are very bad and my memory gone. I am not fit for any situation; and as for Eliza, I don't know what will become of her. My constitution is impaired. I hope I shan't live long, yet I may be a tedious time dying. . . .

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

"There is but one true cure for suffering, and that," says Dr. Maudsley, "is action." The first thing Mary did in her misery was to undertake new work, this time a literary venture, not for herself, but for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. Blood. Their son-in-law having refused to contribute from his plenty, their daughter's friend came forward and gave her labour.

At the instigation of Mr. Hewlet, one of her friends already mentioned, she wrote a small pamphlet called *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.* This gentleman rated her powers so high that he felt sure of her success as a writer. As he was well acquainted with Mr. Johnson, a prominent bookseller in Fleet Street, he could promise that her manuscript would be dealt with fairly. Her choice of subject was, in one way, fortunate. Being a teacher she could speak on educational matters with authority. But this first work is not striking or remarkable. Indeed, it is chiefly worth notice because it was the means of introducing her to Mr. Johnson, who was a true friend to her through her darkest, as well as through her brightest days, and whose influence was strong in shaping her career. He paid her ten guineas for her pamphlet, and these she at once gave to Mr. and Mrs. Blood, who were thereby enabled to leave England and go to Dublin. There, they thought, because they and their disgrace were not yet known, the chances of their starting in life afresh were greater.

It was now time for Mary to turn her attention to her own affairs. It was absolutely necessary to give up the school. Her presence could not recall the pupils who had left it, and her debts were pressing. The success of the sisters had been too slight to tempt them to establish a similar institution in another town. They determined to separate, and each to earn her livelihood alone. Mary was not loath to do this. Because of her superior administrative ability, too large a share of the work in the school had devolved upon her, while her sisters' society was a hindrance rather than a comfort. She was ready to sacrifice herself for others, but she had enough common sense to realize that too great unselfishness in details would in the end destroy her power of aiding in larger matters. She could do more for Eliza and Everina away from them, than if she continued to live with them.

What she desired most earnestly was to devote all her time to literary work. Mr. Hewlet had represented to her that she would be certain to make an ample support by writing. Mr. Johnson had received her pamphlet favourably, and had asked for further contributions. But her present want was urgent, and she could not wait on a probability. She had absolutely no money to live upon while she made a second experiment. She had learned thoroughly the lesson of patience and of self-restraint, and she resolved for the present to continue to teach. By doing this, she could still find a few spare hours for literary purposes, while she could gradually save enough money to warrant her beginning the life for which she longed. One plan, abandoned, however, before she attempted to put it into execution, she describes in the following letter to

George Blood. The tone in which she writes is much less hopeless than that of the letter last quoted from. Already the remedy of activity was beginning to have its effect :—

Newington Green, May 22, 1787.

By this time, my dear George, I hope your father and mother have reached Dublin. I long to hear of their safe arrival. A few days after they set sail, I received a letter from Skeys. He laments his inability to assist them, and dwells on his own embarrassments. How glad I am they are gone! My affairs are hastening to a crisis. . . . Some of my creditors cannot afford to wait for their money; as to leaving England in debt, I am determined not to do it. . . . Everina and Eliza are both endeavouring to go out into the world, the one as a companion, and the other as a teacher, and I believe I shall continue some time on the Green. I intend taking a little cheap lodging, and living without a servant; and the few scholars I have will maintain me. I have done with all worldly pursuits and wishes; I only desire to submit without being dependent on the caprice of our fellow-creatures. I shall have many solitary hours, but I have not much to hope for in life, and so it would be absurd to give way to fear Besides, I try to look on the best side, and not to despond. While I am trying to do my duty in that station in which Providence has placed me, I shall enjoy some tranquil moments, and the pleasures I have the greatest relish for are not entirely out of my reach. . . . I have been trying to muster up my fortitude, and labouring for patience to bear my many trials. Surely, when I could determine to survive Fanny, I can endure poverty and all the lesser ills of life. I dreaded, oh! how I dreaded this time, and now it is arrived I am calmer than I expected to be. I have been very unwell; my constitution is much impaired; the prison walls are decaying, and the prisoner will ere long get free. . . . Remember that I am your truly affectionate friend and sister,

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

Perhaps the uncertainty of keeping her pupils, or the double work necessitated by this project, discouraged her. At all events, it was relinquished when other and seemingly better proposals were made to her. Some of her friends at Newington Green recommended her to the notice of Mr. Prior, then Assistant Master

at Eton, and his wife. Through them she was offered the situation of governess to the children of Lord Kingsborough, an Irish nobleman. If she accepted it, she would be spared the anxiety which a school of her own had heretofore brought her. The salary would be forty pounds a year, out of which she calculated she could pay her debts and then assist Mrs. Bishop. But she would lose her independence, and would expose herself to the indifference or contempt then the portion of governesses. "I should be shut out from society," she explained to George Blood, "and be debarred the pleasures of imperfect friendship, as I should on every side be surrounded by unequals. To live only on terms of civility and common benevolence, without any interchange of little acts of kindness and tenderness, would be to me extremely irksome." The prospect, it must be admitted, was not pleasant. But still the advantages outweighed the drawbacks, and Mary agreed to Lady Kingsborough's terms.

Mr. and Mrs. Prior intended taking a trip to Ireland, and they suggested that she should accompany them. Travelling was not easy in those days, and she decided to wait and go with them. But, for some reason, they did not start as soon as they had expected. She had already joined them in their home at Eton, in which place their delay detained her for some time. This gave her an opportunity to study the school and the principles upon which it was conducted. The entire system met with her disapprobation, and afterwards, in her *Rights of Women*, she freely and strongly expressed her unfavourable opinion. Judging from what she there saw, she concluded that schools regulated accord-

ing to such rules were but hot-beds of vice. Nothing disgusted her so much in this institution as the false basis upon which religion was established. The slavery to forms, demanded of the boys, seemed to her to at once undermine their moral uprightness. What, indeed, could be expected of a boy who would take the sacrament for no other reason than to avoid the fine of half-a-guinea imposed upon those who would not conform to this ceremony? Her visit did much towards developing and formulating her ideas on the subject of education.

Finally the time came for her departure. In October, 1787, she set out with Mr. and Mrs. Prior for Ireland, and towards the end of the month arrived at the castle of Lord Kingsborough in Mitchelstown. Her first impressions were gloomy. But, indeed, her depression and weakness were so great, that she looked at all things, as if "through a glass, darkly." Her sorrows were still too fresh to be forgotten in idle curiosity about the inhabitants and customs of her new home. Even if she had been in the best of spirits, her arrival at the castle would have been a trying moment. It is never easy for one woman to face alone several of her sex, who, she knows, are waiting to criticise her. There were then staying with Lady Kingsborough her step-mother and her three unmarried step-sisters and several guests. Governesses in this household had fared much as companions in Mrs. Dawson's. They had come and gone in rapid succession. Therefore Mary was examined by these ladies much as a new horse is inspected by a racer, or a new dog by a sportsman. She passed through the ordeal successfully, but it left her courage at low ebb.

Her first report to her sister is not cheerful:—

The Castle, Mitchelstown, Oct. 30, 1787.

Well, my dear girl, I am at length arrived at my journey's end. I sigh when I say so, but it matters not, I must labour for content, and try to reconcile myself to a state which is contrary to every feeling of my soul. I can scarcely persuade myself that I am awake; my whole life appears like a frightful vision, and equally disjointed. I have been so very low-spirited for some days past, I could not write. All the moments I could spend in solitude were lost in sorrow and unavailing tears. There was such a solemn kind of stupidity about this place as froze my very blood. I entered the great gates with the same kind of feeling as I should have if I was going into the Bastille. You can make allowance for the feelings which the General would term ridiculous or artificial. I found I was to encounter a host of females—My Lady, her step-mother and three sisters, and Mrses. and Misses without number, who, of course, would examine me with the most minute attention. I cannot attempt to give you a description of the family, I am so low; I will only mention some of the things which particularly worry me. I am sure much more is expected from me than I am equal to. With respect to French, I am certain Mr. P. has misled them, and I expect in consequence of it to be very much mortified. Lady K. is a shrewd, clever woman, a great talker. I have not seen much of her, as she is confined to her room by a sore throat; but I have seen half-a-dozen of her companions. I mean not her children, but her dogs. To see a woman, without any softness in her manners, caressing animals, and using infantine expressions, is, you may conceive, very absurd and ludicrous, but a fine lady is a new species to me of animal. I am, however, treated like a gentlewoman by every part of the family, but the forms and parade of high life suit not my mind. . . . I hear a fiddle below, the servants are dancing, and the rest of the family are diverting themselves. I only am melancholy and alone. To tell the truth, I hope part of my misery arises from disordered nerves, for I would fain believe my mind is not so very weak. The children are, literally speaking, wild Irish, unformed and not very pleasing; but you shall have a full and true account, my dear girl, in a few days. . . .

I am your affectionate sister and sincere friend,

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

It was at least fortunate that she escaped, with Lady Kingsborough, the indignities which she had feared

she, as governess, would receive. Instead of being placed on a level with the servants, as was often the fate of gentlewomen in her position, she was treated as one of the family, but she had little else to be thankful for. There was absolutely no congeniality between herself and her employers. She had no tastes or views in common with them. Lady Kingsborough was a thorough woman of the world. She was clever but cold, and her natural coldness had been increased by the restraints and exactions of her social rank. If she rouged to preserve her good looks, and talked to exhibit her cleverness, she was fulfilling all the requirements of her station in life. Her character and conduct were in every way opposed to Mary's ideals. The latter, who was instinctively honest, and who never stooped to curry favour with anyone, must have found it difficult to treat Lady Kingsborough with a deference she did not feel, but which her subordinate position obliged her to show. The struggle between impulse and duty thus caused was doubtless one of the chief factors in making her experiences in Ireland so painful. How great this struggle was can be best estimated when it is known what she thought of the mother of her pupils. She was never thrown into such intimate relations with any other woman of fashion, and therefore it is not illogical to believe that many passages in the *Rights of Women*, relating to women of this class, are descriptions of Lady Kingsborough. The allusion to pet dogs in the following seems to establish the identity beyond dispute:—

> . . . She who takes her dogs to bed, and nurses them with a parade of sensibility when sick, will suffer her babes to grow up crooked in a nursery. This illustration of my argument is drawn

from a matter of fact. The woman whom I allude to was handsome, reckoned very handsome by those who do not miss the mind when the face is plump and fair; but her understanding had not been led from female duties by literature, nor her innocence debauched by knowledge. No, she was quite feminine according to the masculine acceptation of the word; and so far from loving these spoiled brutes that filled the place which her children ought to have occupied, she only lisped out a pretty mixture of French and English nonsense, to please the men who flocked round her. The wife, mother, and human creature were all swallowed up by the factitious character which an improper education and the selfish vanity of beauty had produced.

I do not like to make a distinction without a difference, and I own that I have been as much disgusted by the fine lady who took her lap-dog to her bosom, instead of her child, as by the ferocity of a man, who, beating his horse, declared that he knew as well when he did wrong as a Christian.

If Lady Kingsborough was a representative lady of fashion, her husband was quite as much the typical country lord. Tom Jones was still the ideal hero of fiction, and Squire Westerns had not disappeared from real life. Lord Kingsborough was good-natured and kind, but, like the rest of the species, coarse. "His countenance does not promise more than good humour and a little *fun*, not refined," Mary told Mrs. Bishop. The three step-sisters were too preoccupied with matrimonial calculations to manifest their character, if indeed they had any. Clearly, in such a household Mary Wollstonecraft was as a child of Israel among the Philistines.

The society of the children, though they were "wild Irish," was more to her taste than that of the grown-up members of the family. Three were given into her charge. At first she thought them not very pleasing, but after a better acquaintance she grew fond of them. The eldest, Margaret, afterwards Lady Mountcashel,

was then fourteen years of age. She was very talented, and a "sweet girl," as Mary called her in a letter to Mrs. Bishop. She became deeply attached to her new governess, not with the passing fancy of a child, but with a lasting devotion. The other children also learned to love her, but being younger there was less friendship in their affection. They were afraid of their mother, who lavished her caresses upon her dogs, until she had none left for them. Therefore, when Mary treated them affectionately and sympathised with their interests and pleasures, they naturally turned to her and gave her the love which no one else seemed to want. That this was the case was entirely Lady Kingsborough's fault, but she resented it bitterly, and it was later a cause of serious complaint against the too competent governess. The affection of her pupils, which was her principal pleasure during her residence in Ireland, thus became in the end a misfortune.

A more prolific source of trouble to her was, strangely enough, her interest in them. Lady Kingsborough had very positive ideas upon the subject of her children's education, and by insisting upon adherence to them she made Mary's task doubly hard. Had she not been interfered with, her position would not have been so unpleasant. She could put her whole soul into her work, whatever it might be, and find in its success one of her chief joys. She wished to do her utmost for Margaret and her sisters, but this was impossible, since she knew the system Lady Kingsborough exacted to be vicious. The latter cared more for a show of knowledge than for knowledge itself, and laid the greatest stress upon the acquirement of accomplishments. This was not in accord with Mary's theories,

who prized reality and not appearances. A less conscientious woman might have contented herself with the thought that she was carrying out the wishes of her employer. But Mary could not quiet her scruples in this way. She was tormented by the sense of duty but half fulfilled. She realized, by her own sad experience, how much depends upon the training received in childhood, and yet she was powerless to bring up her pupils in the way she knew to be best. She had, besides, constantly before her in Lady Kingsborough and her sisters a but too melancholy example of the result of the methods she was asked to adopt. They had been carefully taught many different languages and much history, but had been as carefully instilled with the idea that their studies were but means to social success and to a brilliant marriage. The consequence was that their education, despite its thoroughness, had made them puppets, self-interest being the wire which moved them. She did not want this to be the fate of her pupils, but she could see no escape for them.

In addition to her honest anxiety for their future, she must have been worried by the certainty that, if she remained with them, she would be held responsible for their character and conduct in after-life. Though she had charge of them only for a year, this eventually proved to be the case. Margaret's reputation as Lady Mountcashel was not wholly unsullied, and when it was remembered that she had, at one time, been under the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of the *Rights of Women*, the fault was attributed to the immoral and irreligious teaching of the latter. Never was any woman so unjustly condemned. In the first place, Mary was not her governess long enough to

actually change her nature, or to influence her for life; and, in the second place, she was not allowed to have her own way with her pupils. Had she been free she would have been more apt to encourage a spirit of piety, and inculcate a fine moral sense. For she was at that period in a deeply religious frame of mind, while she did all she could to counteract what she considered the deteriorating tendencies of the children's home training. Her sorrow was deep that her pupils' lives were such as to render sustained study and and religious habits of mind alike difficult.

This caused her much unhappiness. Her anxiety developed into positive illness. After she had been with them some months, the strain seemed more than she could bear, as she confessed to Mr. Johnson, to whom she wrote from Dublin on the 4th of April :—

I am still an invalid, and begin to believe that I ought never to expect to enjoy health. My mind preys on my body, and, when I endeavour to be useful, I grow too much interested for my own peace. Confined almost entirely to the society of children, I am anxiously solicitous for their future welfare, and mortified beyond measure when counteracted in my endeavours to improve them. I feel all a mother's fears for the swarm of little ones which surround me, and observe disorders, without having power to apply the proper remedies. How can I be reconciled to life, when it is always a painful warfare, and when I am deprived of all the pleasures I relish? I allude to rational conversations and domestic affections. Here, alone, a poor solitary individual in a strange land, tied to one spot, and subject to the caprice of another, can I be contented? I am desirous to convince you that I have *some* cause for sorrow, and am not without reason detached from life. I shall hope to hear that you are well, and am yours sincerely,

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

The family troubles followed Mary to Ireland. The news which reached her from home was discouraging. Edward Wollstonecraft at this period declared he

would do nothing more for his father. Prudent, and with none of his sister's unselfishness, he grew tired of the drain upon his purse. There was also difficulty about some money which Mary and her sisters considered theirs by right, but which the eldest brother, with shameless selfishness, refused to give up. What the exact circumstances were is not certain; but it could have been no light tax upon Mary to contribute the necessary amount for her father's support, and no small disappointment to be deprived of money which she thought to be legally hers. Money cares were to her what the Old Man of the Sea was to Sindbad. They were a burden from which she was never free. When from forty pounds a year she had to take half to pay her debts, and then give from the remainder to her father, her share of her earnings was not large. And yet she counted upon her savings to purchase her future release from a life of dependence.

Though she wrote to Mr. Johnson that she was almost entirely confined to the society of children, she really did see much of the family, often taking part in their amusements. Judging from the attractions and conversational powers which made her a favourite in London society, it is natural to conclude she was a pleasant addition to the household. She seems at times to have exerted herself to be agreeable. Godwin records the extreme discomfiture of a fine lady of quality, when, on one occasion, after having singled her out and treated her with marked friendliness, she discovered that she had been entertaining the children's governess! Mary cared nothing for these people, but as they were civil to her, she returned their politeness by showing them she was well worth being polite

to. Low-spirited as she was, she mustered up sufficient courage to discuss the husband-hunts of the young ladies and even to notice the dogs. This was, indeed, a concession. To Everina she sent a bulletin—not untouched with humour—of her wonderful and praiseworthy progress with the inmates of the castle :—

Mitchelstown, Nov. 17, 1787.

. . . Confined to the society of a set of silly females, I have no social converse, and their boisterous spirits and unmeaning laughter exhaust me, not forgetting hourly domestic bickerings. The topics of matrimony and dress take their turn, not in a very sentimental style, —alas ! poor sentiment, it has no residence here. I almost wish the girls were novel-readers and romantic. I declare false refinement is better than none at all ; but these girls understand several languages, and have read *cartloads* of history, for their mother was a prudent woman. Lady K.'s passion for animals fills up the hours which are not spent in dressing. All her children have been ill,—very disagreeable fevers. Her ladyship visited them in a formal way, though their situation called forth my tenderness, and I endeavoured to amuse them, while she lavished awkward fondness on her dogs. I think now I hear her infantine lisp. She rouges, and, in short, is a fine lady, without fancy or sensibility. I am almost tormented to death by dogs. But you will perceive I am not under the influence of my darling passion—pity ; it is not always so. I make allowance and adapt myself, talk of getting husbands for the *ladies*—and the *dogs*, and am wonderfully entertaining ; and then I retire to my room, form figures in the fire, listen to the wind, or view the Gotties, a fine range of mountains near us, and so does time waste away in apathy or misery. . . . I am drinking asses' milk, but do not find it of any service. I am very ill, and so low-spirited my tears flow in torrents almost insensibly. I struggle with myself, but I hope my Heavenly Father will not be extreme to mark my weakness, and that He will have compassion upon a poor bruised reed, and pity a miserable wretch, whose sorrows He only knows. . . . I almost wish my warfare was over.

The religious tone of this letter calls for special notice, since it was written at the very time she was supposed to be imparting irreligious principles to her pupils.

Mary had none of the false sentiment of a Sterne, and could not waste sympathy over brutes, when she felt that there were human beings who needed it. Her ladyship's dogs worried her because of the contrast between the attention they received and the indifference which fell to the lot of the children. Besides, the then distressing condition of the labouring population in Ireland made the luxuries and silly affectations of the rich doubly noticeable. Mary saw for herself the poverty of the peasantry. Margaret was allowed to visit the poor, and she accompanied her on her charitable rounds. The almost bestial squalor in which these people lived was another cruel contrast to the pampered existence led by the dogs at the Castle. She had none of Strap's veneration for the epithet of gentleman. Eliza owned to a "sneaking kindness for people of quality." But Mary cared only for a man's intrinsic merit. His rank could not cover his faults. Therefore, with the misery and destitution of so many men and women staring her in the face, the amusements and occupations of the few within Lady Kingsborough's household continually grated upon her finer instincts.

In the winter of 1788 the family went to Dublin, and Mary accompanied them. She liked the society of the capital no better than she had that of the country. She, however, occasionally shared in its frivolities, her relations to Lady Kingsborough obliging her to do this. She was still young enough to possess the capacity for enjoyment, though her many hardships and sorrows had made her think this impossible, and she was sometimes carried away by the gaiety around her. But, a hater of shams, she was disgusted

with herself once the passing excitement was over. From Dublin she wrote to Everina giving her a description of a masked ball to which she had gone, and of which she had evidently been a conspicuous feature :—

Dublin, March 14, 1788.

. . . I am very weak to-day, but I can account for it. The day before yesterday there was a masquerade; in the course of conversation some time before, I happened to wish to go to it. Lady K. offered me two tickets for myself and Miss Delane to accompany me. I refused them on account of the expense of dressing properly. She then, to obviate that objection, lent me a black domino. I was out of spirits, and thought of another excuse; but she proposed to take me and Betty Delane to the houses of several people of fashion who saw masks. We went to a great number, and were a tolerable, nay, a much-admired, group. Lady K. went in a domino with a smart cockade; Miss Moore dressed in the habit of one of the females of the new discovered islands; Betty D. as a forsaken shepherdess; and your sister Mary in a black domino. As it was taken for granted the stranger who had just arrived could not speak the language, I was to be her interpreter, which afforded me an ample field for satire. I happened to be very melancholy in the morning, as I am almost every morning, but at night my fever gives me false spirits; this night the lights, the novelty of the scene, and all things together contributed to make me *more* than half mad. I gave full scope to a satirical vein, and suppose. . . .

Unfortunately, the rest of the letter is lost.

In the midst of her duties and dissipations she managed to find some little time for more solid pleasures and more congenial work. In her letters she speaks of nothing with so much enthusiasm as of Rousseau, whose *Emile* she read while she was in Dublin. She wrote to Everina on the 24th of March:

I believe I told you before that as a nation I do not admire the Irish; and as to the great world and its frivolous ceremonies, I cannot away with them; they fatigue me. I thank Heaven I was not so unfortunate as to be born a lady of quality. I am now reading Rousseau's *Emile*, and love his paradoxes. He chooses a common

capacity to educate, and gives as a reason that a genius will educate itself. However, he rambles into that chimerical world in which I have too often wandered, and draws the usual conclusion that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. He was a strange, inconsistent, unhappy, clever creature, yet he possessed an uncommon portion of sensibility and penetration. . . .

Adieu, yours sincerely,
MARY.

It was also during this period that she wrote a novel called *Mary*. It is a narrative of her acquaintance and friendship with Fanny Blood—her *In Memoriam* of the friend she so dearly loved. In writing it she sought relief for the bitter sorrow with which her loss had filled her heart.

The Irish gaieties lasted through the winter. In the spring the family crossed over to England and went to Bristol Hotwells and Bath. In all these places Mary saw more of the gay world, but it was only to deepen the disgust with which it inspired her. Those were the days when men drank at dinner until they fell under the table; when young women thought of nothing but beaux, and were exhibited by their fond mothers as so much live-stock to be delivered to the highest bidder; and when dowagers, whose flirting season was over, spent all their time at the card-table. Nowhere were the absurdities and emptiness of polite society so fully exposed as at these fashionable resorts. Even the frivolity of Dublin paled in comparison. Mary's health improved in England. The Irish climate seems to have specially disagreed with her. But notwithstanding the much-needed improvement in her physical condition, and despite her occasional concessions to her circumstances, her life became more unbearable every day, while her sympathies and tastes grew farther apart from those of her employers.

But while even the little respect she felt for Lord and Lady Kingsborough lessened, her love for the children increased. This they returned with interest. Once, when one of them had to go into the country with her mother and without her governess, she cried so bitterly that she made herself ill. The strength of Margaret's affection can be partly measured by the following passage from a letter written by Mary shortly after their separation :—

> I had, the other day, the satisfaction of again receiving a letter from my poor dear Margaret. With all the mother's fondness, I could transcribe a part of it. She says, every day her affection to me, and dependence on heaven, increase, &c. I miss her innocent caresses, and sometimes indulge a pleasing hope that she may be allowed to cheer my childless age, if I am to live to be old. At any rate, I may hear of the virtues I may not contemplate.

Lady Kingsborough made no effort to win her children's affection, but she was unwilling that they should bestow it upon a stranger. She could not forgive the governess who had taken her place in their hearts. She and her eldest daughter had on this account frequent quarrels. Mary's position was therefore untenable. Her surroundings were uncongenial, her duties distasteful, and she was disapproved of by her employer. Nothing was needed but a decent pretext for the latter to dismiss her. This she before long found when, Mary being temporarily separated from her pupils, Margaret showed more regret than her mother thought the occasion warranted. Lady Kingsborough seized the opportunity to give the governess her dismissal. This was in the autumn of 1788, and the family were in London. Mary had for some weeks known that this end was inevitable, but still her departure, when the time came, was sudden. It was a

trial to her to leave the children, but escape from the household was a joyful emancipation. Again she was obliged to face the world, and again she emerged triumphant from her struggles. With each new change she advanced a step in her intellectual progress. After she left Lady Kingsborough she began the literary life which was to make her famous.

CHAPTER IV.

LITERARY LIFE.

1788-1791.

During her residence with the family of Lady Kingsborough in Ireland, Mary, as has been seen, corresponded with Mr. Johnson the publisher. In her hour of need she went to him for advice and assistance. He strongly recommended, as he had more than once before, that she should give up teaching altogether, and devote her time to literary work.

Mr. Johnson was a man of considerable influence and experience, and he was enterprising and progressive. He published most of the principal books of the day. The Edgeworths sent him their novels from Ireland, and Cowper his poetry from Olney: one day he gave the reading world Mrs. Barbauld's works for the young, and the next, the speculations of reformers and social philosophers whose rationalism had deterred many other publishers. It was for printing the Rev. Gilbert Wakefield's too plain-spoken writings that he was, at a later date, fined and imprisoned. Quick to discern true merit, he was equally prompt in encou-

raging it. As Mary once said of him, he was a man before he was a bookseller. His kind, generous nature made him as ready to assist needy and deserving authors with his purse as he was to publish their works. From the time he had seen Mary's pamphlet on the *Education of Daughters,* he had been deeply and honestly interested in her. It had convinced him of her power to do something greater. Her letters had sustained him in this opinion, and her novel still further confirmed it. He now, in addition to urging her to try to support herself by writing, promised her continual employment if she would settle in London.

To-day there would seem no possible reason for anyone in her position hesitating before accepting such an offer; but in her time it was an unusual occurrence for a woman to adopt literature as a profession. It is true there had been a great change since Swift declared that "not one gentleman's daughter in a thousand has been brought to read or understand her own natural tongue." Women had learned not only to read, but to write. Miss Burney had written her novels, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu her Letters, and Mrs. Inchbald her *Simple Story* and her plays, before Mary came to London. Though the Amelias and Lydia Melfords of fiction were still favourite types, the blue-stocking was gaining ascendency. Because she was such a *rara avis* she received a degree of attention and devotion which now appears extraordinary. Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Opie, Maria Edgeworth and Mrs. Barbauld, at the end of the last and beginning of this century, were fêted and praised as seldom falls to the lot of their successors of the pre-

sent generation. But, despite this fact, they were not quite sure that they were keeping within the limits of feminine modesty by publishing their writings. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had considered it necessary to apologise for having translated Epictetus. Miss Burney shrank from publicity, and preferred the slavery of a court to the liberty of home life, which meant time for writing. Good Mrs. Barbauld feared she "stepped out of the bounds of female reserve" when she became an author. They all wrote either for amusement, or as a last resource to eke out a slender income. But Mary would, by agreeing to Mr. Johnson's proposition, deliberately throw over other chances of making a livelihood to rely entirely upon literature. She was young, unmarried, and, to all intents and purposes, alone in the world. Such a step was unprecedented in English literary annals. She would really be, as she wrote to her sister, the first of a new genus. Her conduct would unquestionably be criticised and censured. She would have to run the gauntlet of public opinion, a much more trying ordeal than that through which she had passed at the castle in Mitchelstown.

But, on the other hand, she would thereby gain freedom and independence, for which she had always yearned above all else; her work would be congenial; and, what to her was even more important, she would obtain better means to further the welfare of her sisters and brothers, and to assist her father. Compared to these inducements, the fact that people would look upon her askance was a very insignificant consideration. She believed in a woman's right to independence; and, the first chance she had, she acted according to her lights.

At the same time, she knew that if her friends heard of her determination before she had carried it into effect, they would try to dissuade her from it. She was firmly resolved not to be influenced in this matter by anyone; and therefore, to avoid the unpleasant discussions and disputes that might arise from a difference of opinion, she maintained strict secrecy as to her plans. From her letters it seems probable that she had made definite arrangements with Mr. Johnson before her formal dismissal by Lady Kingsborough. In September of 1788 she stayed at Henley for a short time with Mrs. Bishop; and it was doubtless this visit that caused Margaret's unhappiness and hence her mother's indignation. At Henley Mary enjoyed a short interval of rest. The quiet of the place and temporary idleness were the best of tonics for her disordered nerves, and an excellent preparation for her new labours. She was determined to give up teaching for literature, but did not take her sister into her confidence, as is shown by this letter to Mr. Johnson:—

Henley, Thursday, Sept. 13.

My dear Sir,—Since I saw you I have, literally speaking, *enjoyed* solitude. My sister could not accompany me in my rambles; I therefore wandered alone by the side of the Thames, and in the neighbouring beautiful fields and pleasure grounds: the prospects were of such a placid kind, I *caught* tranquillity while I surveyed them; my mind was *still*, though active. Were I to give you an account how I have spent my time, you would smile. I found an old French Bible here, and amused myself with comparing it with our English translation; then I would listen to the falling leaves, or observe the various tints the autumn gave to them. At other times, the singing of a robin or the noise of a water-mill engaged my attention; for I was at the same time, perhaps, discussing some knotty point, or straying from this *tiny* world to new systems. After these excursions I returned to the family meals, told the children stories (they think me *vastly* agree-

able), and my sister was amused. Well, will you allow me to call this way of passing my days pleasant? . . . Have you yet heard of an habitation for me? I often think of my new plan of life; and lest my sister should try to prevail on me to alter it, I have avoided mentioning it to her. . . .

Hopeful for herself and her sisters, she started out upon a new road, which, smoother than any she had yet trodden, was not without its many thorns and pitfalls. For a little while she stayed with Mr. Johnson, whose house was then, as ever, open to her. But as soon as possible she moved to lodgings he found for her in George Street, in the neighbourhood of Blackfriars' Bridge. Here she was near him; and this was a consideration, as the work he proposed to give her necessitated frequent intercourse between them, and it was also an advantage for her to be within reasonable distance of the only friend she possessed in London.

Mr. Johnson made her his "reader"; that is to say, he gave her the manuscripts sent to him to read and criticise; he also required that she should translate for him foreign works, for which there was then a great demand, and that she should contribute to the *Analytical Review,* which had just been established. Her position was a good one. It is true it left her little time for original work, and Godwin thought that it contracted rather than enlarged her genius for the time being. But it gave her a certain valuable experience and much practise which she would not otherwise have obtained, and it insured her steady employment. She was to the publisher what a staff contributor is to a newspaper. Whenever anything was to be done she was called upon to do it. Therefore, there was no danger of her dying of starvation in a garret, like Chatterton, or of her offering her manuscripts to one

unwilling bookseller after another, as happened to Carlyle.

She did not disappoint Mr. Johnson's expectations. She worked well and diligently, being thoroughly conscientious in whatever she did. The office of "reader" is no mere sinecure; it requires a keen critical sense, an impartial mind, and not a little moral courage. The first of these qualifications Mary possessed naturally, and her honesty enabled her to cultivate the two last. She was as fearless in her criticisms as she was just; she praised and found fault with equal temerity. This disagreeable duty was the indirect cause of the happiest event of her life. The circumstance in question belongs to a later date, but it may more appropriately be mentioned here in connection with this branch of her work. On one occasion she had to read a volume of Essays written by Miss Hayes. The preface displeased her, and this she told the author, stating her reasons with unhesitating frankness. Miss Hayes was a woman capable of appreciating such candour of speech; and the business transaction led to a sincere and lasting friendship. Miss Hayes was the mutual friend who succeeded in producing a better feeling between Godwin and Mary, who, as the sequel will show, were not very friendly when they first met.

She was principally occupied in translating. Following Mr. Johnson's advice, she had, while in Ireland, perfected her French. She was tolerably familiar with Italian; and she now devoted all her spare minutes —and these could not have been many—to mastering German.

Before long Mary undertook, for practice, to translate

Salzmann's *Elements of Morality,* and her exercise proved so masterly that she, with a few corrections and additions, published it. This gave rise to a correspondence between the author and herself; and after several years the former returned the compliment by translating the *Rights of Women* into German. Some idea will be given of her industry when it is stated that during the five years of her London life, she, in addition to the work already mentioned, re-wrote a translation from the Dutch of *Young Grandison*; translated from the German *Young Robinson,* and from the French Necker on *Religious Opinions,* and Lavater's *Physiognomy*; wrote a volume of *Original Stories from Real Life for Children,* and compiled a *Female Reader.* As these works were undertaken for money rather than for fame, she did not through them exert any personal influence on contemporary thought, or leave any impression on posterity.

She never degenerated, however, into a mere hack writer, nor did she accept the literary tasks which came in her way, unless she felt able to accomplish them. She was too conscientious to fall into a fault unfortunately common among men and women in a similar position. She did not shrink from any work if she knew she was capable of doing it justice. When it was beyond her powers, she frankly admitted this to be the case.

When she settled in London, she was in no humour for social pleasures. Her sole ambition was to be useful, and she worked incessantly. She at first hid herself from almost everybody. When she expected her sisters to stay with her, she begged them beforehand, "If you pay any visits you will comply with my

whim, and not mention my place of abode or mode of life." She lived in very simple fashion; her rooms were furnished with the merest necessities. Another warning she had to give Everina and Mrs. Bishop was, "I have a room, but no furniture. J. offered you both a bed in his house, but that would not be pleasant. I believe I must try to purchase a bed, which I shall reserve for my poor girls while I have a house." It has been recorded that Talleyrand visited her in her lodgings in George Street, and that while the two discussed social and political problems, they drank their tea and then their wine from tea-cups, wine-glasses being an elegance beyond Mary's means. Her dress was as plain as her furniture. Her gowns were mean in material and often shabby, and her hair hung loosely on her shoulders, instead of being twisted and looped as was then fashionable. Knowles, in his *Life of Fuseli,* finds fault with her on this account. She was not, however, a *philosophical sloven,* with *romantic* ideas of benevolence, as he intimates. Either he or Fuseli strangely misjudged her. The reason she paid so little heed to the luxuries and frivolities which custom then exacted, was because other more pressing demands were made upon her limited income. Then, as usual, she was troubled by the wretched complications and misfortunes of her family. The entire care and responsibility fell upon her shoulders. None of the other members seemed to consider that she was as destitute as they were—that what she *did* was literally her one source of revenue. Assistance would have been as welcome to her as it was to them. But they accepted what she had to give, and were never deterred by reflecting upon the difficulty with which she re-

sponded to their needs. The amount of practical help she gave them is almost incredible. Eliza and Everina had, when the school at Newington Green failed, become governesses, but their education had been so sadly neglected that they were not competent for their work. Mary, knowing this, sent Everina to France, that she might study to be a good French teacher. The tide of emigration caused by the Revolution had only just begun, and French governesses and tutors were not the drug on the market they became later. Everina remained two years in France at her eldest sister's expense. Mary found a place for Eliza, first as parlour boarder, and then as assistant, in an excellent school near London. For most of the time, however, both sisters were birds of passage. Everina was for a while at Putney, and then in Ireland, where she probably learned for herself the discomforts which Mary had once endured. Eliza was now at Market Harborough, then at Henley, again at Putney, and finally she obtained a situation in Pembrokeshire, which she retained longer than any she had hitherto held. During these years there were occasional intermissions when both sisters were out of work, and there were holiday seasons to be provided for. To their father's house it was still impossible for them to go. Its wretchedness was so great, it could no longer be called a home. Eliza, soon to see it, found it unbearable. Edward, it appears, was willing to give shelter to Everina; but this brother, of whom less mention is made in the sisters' letters, was never a favourite, and residence with him was an evil to be avoided. The one place, therefore, where they were sure of a warm welcome was the humble lodging near Blackfriars'

Bridge. Mary fulfilled her promise of being a mother to them both. She stinted herself that she might make their lot more endurable.

When Eliza went to begin her Welsh engagement at Upton Castle, she spent a night on the way with her father. Her report of this visit opened a new channel for Mary's benevolence. Mr. Wollstonecraft was then living at Laugharne, where he had taken his family many years before, and where his daughters had made several very good friends. But Eliza, as she lamented to Everina, went sadly from one old beloved haunt to another, without meeting an eye which glistened at seeing her. Old acquaintances were dead, or had sought a home elsewhere. The few who were left would not, probably because of the father's disgrace, come to see her. The step-mother, the second Mrs. Wollstonecraft, was helpful and economical; but her thrift availed little against the drunken follies of her husband. The latter had but just recovered from an illness. He was worn to a skeleton, he coughed and groaned all night in a way to make the listener's blood run cold, and he could not walk ten yards without pausing to pant for breath. His poverty was so abject that his clothes were barely decent, and his habits so low that he was indifferent to personal cleanliness. For days and weeks after she had seen him, Eliza was haunted by the memory of his unkempt hair and beard, his red face and his beggarly shabbiness. Poor unfortunate Charles, the last child left at home, was half-naked, and his time was spent in quarrelling with his father. Eliza, who knew how to be independent, was irritated by her brother's idleness. "I am very cool to Charles, and have said all I can to rouse

him," she wrote to Everina; but then immediately she added, forced to do him justice, "But where can he go in his present plight?" Through all, Mr. Wollstonecraft's one cry was for money. He threatened to go to London in his rags, and compel the obdurate Edward to comply with his demands. When Eliza told him of the sacrifices Mary made in order to help him, he only flew into a rage.

It was not long before Mary had Charles to London, and her initiatory act in his behalf was to clothe him. She took him to her house, where he lived, if not elegantly and extravagantly, at least decently, a new experience for the poor lad. She then had him articled to Edward, the attorney; but this experiment, as might have been expected, proved a failure. Mary next consulted with Mr. Barlow about the chances of settling him advantageously on a farm in America; and to prepare him for this life, which seemed full of promise, she sent him to serve a sort of apprenticeship with an English farmer. About this time James, the second son, who had been at sea, came home, and for him also Mary found room in her lodgings until, through her influence, he went to Woolwich, where for a few months he was under the instruction of Mr. Bonnycastle, the mathematician. Eventually he entered the navy, and rose to the rank of lieutenant.

Mary, as if this were not enough, also undertook the care of her father's estate, or rather of the little left of it. Mr. Wollstonecraft had long since been incapable of managing his own affairs, and had intrusted them to some relations, with whose management Mary was not satisfied. She consequently took matters into her own hands, though she could ill afford to spare the

time for this new duty. She did all that was possible to disembarrass the property, so that it might produce sufficient for her father's maintenance. She was ably assisted by Mr. Johnson. "During a part of this period," he wrote of her residence in George Street, "which certainly was the most active part of her life, she had the care of her father's estate, which was attended with no little trouble to both of us. She could not," he adds, "during this time, I think, expend less than £200 on her brothers and sisters." Their combined efforts were in vain. Mr. Wollstonecraft had succeeded too well in ruining himself; and for the remainder of her life all Mary could do for him was to help him with her money. Godwin says that, in addition to these already burdensome duties, she took charge, in her own house, of a little girl of seven years of age, a relation of Mr. Skeys.

She struggled bravely, but there were times when it required superhuman efforts to persevere. She was subject to attacks of depression which usually resulted in physical illness.

In these dark days it was always to Mr. Johnson she turned for sympathy and advice. She had never been on very confidential terms with either of her sisters, and her friendship with George Blood had grown cooler. Their paths in life had so widely diverged that this was unavoidable.

Good friends as they continued to be, he was far away in Dublin, with different interests; and Mary craved immediate and comprehensive sympathy. Mr. Johnson was ever ready to administer to her spiritual wants; he was a friend in very truth. He evidently understood her nature, and knew how best to deal with

her when she was in these moods. Sometimes her mental condition threatened to interfere seriously with her work, and then Mr. Johnson knew how to stimulate and encourage her. When she was writing her answer to Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution,* and when the first half of her paper had been sent to the printer, her interest in her subject and her power of writing suddenly deserted her. It was important to publish all that was written in the controversy while public attention was still directed to it. And yet, though Mary knew this full well, it was simply impossible for her to finish what she had eagerly begun. In this frame of mind she called upon Mr. Johnson, and told him her troubles. Instead of finding fault with her, he was sympathetic and bade her not to worry, for if she could not continue her pamphlet he would throw aside the printed sheets. This roused her pride. It was a far better stimulus than abuse would have been, and it sent her home to write the second half immediately.

The dry morsel and quietness which were now her portion were infinitely better than the house full of strife which she had just left. She was happier than she had ever been before, but she was only happy by comparison. Solitude was preferable to the society of Lady Kingsborough and her friends, but for anyone of Mary's temperament it could not be esteemed as a good in itself. Her unnatural isolation fortunately did not last very long. Her friendship with Mr. Johnson was sufficient in itself to break through her barrier of reserve. She was constantly at his house, and it was one of the gayest and most sociable in London. It was the rendezvous of the *literati* of the day. Persons

of note, foreigners as well as Englishmen, frequented it. There one could meet Fuseli, impetuous, impatient, and overflowing with conversation; Paine, somewhat hard to draw out of his shell; Bonnycastle, Dr. George Fordyce, Mr. George Anderson, Dr. Geddes, and a host of other prominent artists, scientists, and literary men. Their meetings were informal. They gathered together to talk about what interested them, and not to simper and smirk, and give utterance to platitudes and affectations, as was the case with the society to which Mary had lately been introduced. It is no wonder that Mrs. Barbauld found the evenings she spent with her publisher lively. "We protracted them sometimes till ——" she wrote to her brother in the course of one of her visits to London; "but I am not telling tales. Ask —— at what time we used to separate." Mary was also a welcome guest at Mrs. Trimmer's house, which, like that of Mr. Johnson, was a centre of attraction for clever people. This Mrs. Trimmer had acquired some little literary reputation, and had secured the patronage of the royal family and the clergy. She and Mary differed greatly, both in character and creed, but they became very good friends. "I spent a day at Mrs. Trimmer's, and found her a truly respectable woman," was the verdict the latter sent to Everina; nor had she ever reason to alter it. Her intimacy with Miss Hayes also brought her into contact with many of the same class.

As soon as she began to be known in London she was admired. She was young—being only twenty-nine when she came there to live—and she was handsome. Her face was very striking. She had a profusion of auburn hair; her eyes were brown and beautiful,

despite a slight droop in one of them; and her complexion, as is usually the case in connection with such Titianesque colouring of hair and eyes, was rich and clear. The strength and unutterable sadness of her expression combined with her other charms to make her face one which a stranger would turn to look at a second time. She possessed to a rare degree the power of attracting people. Few could resist the influence of her personality. Added to this she talked cleverly, and even brilliantly, although, at times, the tone of her conversation was acrid and gloomy. Long years of toil in a hard world had borne the fruit of pessimism. She was too apt to overlook the bright for the dark side of a picture. But this was a fault which was amply counterbalanced by her talents. For the first time she made friends who were competent to justly measure her merits. She was recognised to be a woman of more than ordinary talents, and she was treated accordingly. Mean clothes and shabby houses were no drawbacks to clever women in those days. Mrs. Inchbald, in gowns "always becoming, and very seldom worth so much as eightpence," as one of her admirers described them, was surrounded as soon as she entered a crowded room, even when powdered and elegantly attired ladies of fashion were deserted. And Mary, though she had not glasses out of which to drink her wine, and though her coiffure was unfashionable, became a person of consequence in literary circles.

Under the influence of congenial social surroundings she gave up her habits of retirement. She began to find enjoyment in society, and her interest in life revived. She could even be gay, nor was there so much

sorrow in her laughter as there had been of yore. Among the most intimate of her new acquaintances were Mr. and Mrs. Fuseli; and the account has been preserved of at least one pleasure party to which she accompanied them. This was a masked ball, and young Lavater, then in England, was with them. Masquerades were then at the height of popularity. All sorts and conditions of men went to them. Beautiful Amelia Opie, in her poorest days, spent five pounds to gain admittance to one given to the Russian ambassadors. Mrs. Inchbald, when well advanced in years, could enter so thoroughly into the spirit of another as to beg a friend to lend her a faded blue silk handkerchief or sash, that she might represent her real character of a *passée* blue-stocking. Mary's gaiety on the present occasion was less artificial than it had been at the Dublin mask.

As a rule, the most regular frequenters of Mr. Johnson's house, and the leaders of conversation during his evenings, were Reformers. Men like Paine and Fuseli and Dr. Priestley were, each in his own fashion, seeking to discover the true nature of human rights. As the Reformation in the sixteenth century had aimed at freeing the religion of Christ from the abuses and errors of centuries, and thus restoring it to its original purity, so the political movement of the latter half of the eighteenth century had for object the destruction of arbitrary laws and the re-establishment of government on primary principles. The French Revolution and the American Rebellion were but means to the greater end. Philosophers, who systematised the dissatisfaction which the people felt without being able to trace it to its true source,

preached the necessity of distinguishing between right and wrong *per se*, and right and wrong as defined by custom. This was the doctrine which Mary heard most frequently discussed, and it was but the embodiment of the motives which had invariably governed her actions from the time she had urged her sister to leave her husband. She had never, even in her most religious days, been orthodox in her beliefs, nor conservative in her conduct.

Her first public profession of her political and social faith was her answer to Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, which had summoned all the liberals and reformers in England to arms. Many came forward boldly and refuted his arguments in print. Mary was among the foremost, her pamphlet in reply to his being the first published. Later authorities have given precedence to Dr. Priestley's, but this fact is asserted by Godwin in his Memoirs, and he would hardly have made the statement at a time when there were many living to deny it, had it not been true. Naturally, these answers were received with abuse and sneers by the Tories. Burke denounced his female opponents as "viragoes and English *poissardes*"; and Horace Walpole wrote of them as "Amazonian allies," who "spit their rage at eighteen-pence a head, and will return to Fleet-ditch, more fortunate in being forgotten than their predecessors, immortalized in the 'Dunciad.'" Peter Burke, in his *Life of Burke*, says that the replies made by Dr. Price, Mrs. Macaulay, and Mary Wollstonecraft were merely attempts and nothing more. Yet all three were writers of too much force to be ignored. They were thrown into the shade because Paine's *Rights of Man*, written for the same purpose,

was so much more startling in its wholesale condemnation of government that the principal attention of the public was drawn to it.

Mary's pamphlet, however, added considerably to her reputation, especially among the reformers. It was her first really important work. Her success encouraged her greatly. It increased her confidence in her powers and possibilities to influence the reading public, and it proved, therefore, an incentive to fresh exertions in the same field. Much as she was interested in the rights of men, she was even more concerned with the rights of women: the former had obtained many able defenders, but no one had as yet thought of saying a word for the latter. Her own experience had been so bitter that she realized the disadvantages of her sex as others, whose path had been easier, never could. She saw that women were hindered and hampered in a thousand and one ways by obstacles created not by nature, but by man. And she also saw that long suffering had blinded them to their, in her estimation, humiliating and too often painful condition.

Clearly, since she had found the light, it was her duty to illuminate with it those who were groping in darkness. She could not with a word revolutionize womankind, but she could at least be the herald to proclaim the dawn of the day during which the good seed was to be sown. She had discovered her life's mission, and, in her enthusiasm, she wrote the *Vindication of the Rights of Women.*

CHAPTER V.

LITERARY WORK.

1788–1791.

As has been stated, Mary Wollstonecraft began her literary career by writing a small pamphlet on the subject of education. Its title, in full, is *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct in the more Important Duties of Life.* It is interesting as her first work, but otherwise it is of no great value.

The pamphlet consists of a number of short treatises, indicating certain laws and principles which Mary thought needed to be more generally understood and more firmly established. Many passages show that as early as 1787 she had seriously considered the problems which, in 1791, she attempted to solve. She was even then perplexed by the unfortunate situation of women of the upper classes who, having received but the pretence of an education, eventually become dependent on their own exertions. Her sad experience probably led her to these thoughts. Reflection upon them made her the champion of her sex. Already in this little pamphlet she declares her belief that, by a

rational training of their intellectual powers, women can be prepared at one and the same time to meet any emergencies of fortune and to fulfil the duties of wife and mother, and demonstrates that good mental discipline, instead of interfering with feminine occupations, increases a woman's fitness for them.

The next work Mary published was a volume called *Original Stories from Real Life*; *with Conversations calculated to regulate the Affections and form the Mind to Truth and Goodness.* This was written while her experience as school-mistress and governess was still fresh in her memory. As she explained in the preface, her object was to make up, in some measure, for the defective education or moral training which, as a rule, children in those days received from their parents.

In addressing a youthful audience, Mary was as deeply inspired by her love of goodness, *per se*, and her detestation of conventional conceptions of virtue, as she was afterwards in appealing to older readers. She represents, in her book, two little girls, aged respectively twelve and fourteen, who have been sadly neglected during their early years, but fall, fortunately, at this period of their life, under the care of a Mrs. Mason, who at once undertakes to form their character and train their intellect. This good lady, in whose name Mary sermonizes, seizes upon every event of the day to teach her charges a moral lesson. The defects she attacks are those most common to childhood. Cruelty to animals, peevishness, lying, greediness, indolence, procrastination, are in turn censured, and their opposite virtues praised. Mary is careful to explain in the preface that she writes to assist teachers. She wishes to give them hints which they must apply to

the children under their care as they think best. The religious tone of the *Stories* is even more pronounced than that of the *Education of Daughters*.

The book is, on the whole, well written, and was popular enough in its day, and, to make it still more attractive, Mr. Johnson engaged Blake, whom he was then befriending, to illustrate it.

Of the several translations Mary made at this period, but the briefest mention is necesssary. It often happens that the book translated is in a great degree indicative of the mental calibre of its translator; but Mary's case was entirely different. The choice of foreign works rendered into English was not hers, but Mr. Johnson's. By adhering to it she was simply fulfilling the contract she had entered into with him, and there were times when she had but a poor opinion of the books he put into her hands. There was at least one book the translation of which must have been a pleasure to her. This was the Rev. C. G. Salzmann's *Elements of Morality, for the use of Children*. Its object, like that of the *Original Stories*, was to teach the young, by practical illustration, why virtue is good, why vice is evil.

Mary never pretended to produce perfectly literal translations. Her version of Lavater's *Physiognomy*, now unknown, was but an abridgment. She purposely "naturalized" the *Elements of Morality*, she explains, in order not to "puzzle children by pointing out modifications of manners, when the grand principles of morality were to be fixed on a broad basis." She made free with the originals that they might better suit English readers, and this she frankly confesses in her prefaces. Her translations are, in consequence,

proofs of her industry and varied talents, and not demonstrations of her own mental character.

Her novel, *Mary*, has disappeared. There are a few men and women of the present generation who remember having seen it, but it is now not to be found either in public libraries or in book-stores. It was the record of a happy friendship, and to write it had been a labour of love. As Mary always wrote most eloquently on subjects which were of heartfelt interest, its disappearance is to be regretted.

However, after she had been in London about two years, constant writing and translating having by that time made her readier with her pen, she undertook another task, in which her feelings were as strongly interested. This was her answer to Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Love of humanity was an emotion which moved her quite as deeply as affection for individual friends. Burke, by his disregard for the sufferings of that portion of the human race which especially appealed to her, excited her wrath. Carried away by the intensity of her indignation, she at once set about proving to him and the world that the reasoning which led to such insensibility, plausible as it might seem, was wholly unsound. She never paused for reflection, but her chief arguments, the result of previous thought, being already prepared, she wrote before her excitement had time to cool. As she explains in the Advertisement to her *Letter* to Burke, the *Reflections* had first engaged her attention as the transient topic of the day. Commenting upon it as she read, her remarks increased to such an extent that she decided to publish them as a short *Vindication of the Rights of Man*.

A sermon preached by Dr. Richard Price was the immediate reason which moved Burke to write the *Reflections*. The Revolutionists were in the habit of meeting every 4th of November, the anniversary of the arrival of the Prince of Orange in England, to commemorate the Revolution of 1688. Dr. Price was, in 1789, the orator of the day. He, on this occasion, expressed his warm approbation of the actions of the French Republicans, in which sentiment he was warmly seconded by all the other members of the society. Burke seized upon these demonstrations as a pretext for expounding his own views upon the proceedings in France.

In her detestation of his insensibility to the natural equality of mankind, Mary was too impatient to consider the minor points of his reasoning. She announced in her Advertisement that she intended to confine her strictures, in a great measure, to the grand principles at which he levels his ingenious arguments. Her object, therefore, as well as Burke's, is to demonstrate what are the rights of men; but she reasons from a very different stand-point. Burke defends the claims of those who inherit rights from long generations of ancestors; Mary cries aloud in defence of men whose one inheritance is the deprivation of all rights. Burke is moved by the misery of a Marie Antoinette, shorn of her greatness; Mary, by the wretchedness of the poor peasant woman who has never possessed even its shadow. The former knows no birthright for individuals save that which results from the prescription of centuries; the latter contends that every man has a right, as a human being, to "such a degree of liberty, civil and religious, as is compatible with the liberty of the other indivi-

duals with whom he is united in social compact." Burke asserts that the present rights of man cannot be decided by reason alone, since they are founded on laws and customs long established. But Mary asks, How far back are we to go to discover their first foundation?

Burke's contempt for the poor, which Mary thought the most conspicuous feature of his treatise, was the chief cause of her indignation. She could not endure silently his admonitions to the labouring class to respect the property which they could not possess, and his exhortations to them to find their consolation for ill-rewarded labour in the "final proportions of eternal justice." "It is, Sir, possible," she tells him with some dignity, "to render the poor happier in this world, without depriving them of the consolation which you gratuitously grant them in the next." To her mind, the oppression which the lower classes had endured for ages, until they had become in the end beings scarcely above the brutes, made the losses of the French nobility and clergy seem by comparison very insignificant evils. The horrors of the 6th of October, the discomforts and degradation of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, and the destitution to which many French refugees had been reduced, blinded Burke to the long suffering of the multitude which now rendered the distress of the few imperative.

The chief fault of her *Letter* is undue haste in its composition. It was written on the spur of the moment, and is without the method indispensable to such a work. There is no order in the arguments advanced, and too often reasoning gives place to exhortation and meditation. Another serious error is the personal abuse with which her *Letter* abounds.

She treats Burke in the very same manner with which she reproves him for treating Dr. Price.

Vituperation is not argument, and abuse proves nothing. This is a fault, however, into which youth readily falls. Mary was young when she wrote the *Vindication of the Rights of Man,* and feeling was still too strong to be forgotten in calm discussion. It was a mistake, too, to dwell, as she did, on the inconsistency between Burke's earlier and present policy. This was a powerful weapon against him at the time, but posterity has recognized the consistency which, in reality, underlays his seemingly diverse political creeds.

CHAPTER VI.

VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN.

THE *Vindication of the Rights of Women* is the work on which Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's fame as an author rests. It is more than probable that, but for it, her other writings would long since have been forgotten. In it she speaks the first word in behalf of female emancipation. Her book is the forerunner of a movement which, whatever may be its results, will always be ranked as one of the most important of the nineteenth century. Many of her propositions are, to the present advocates of the cause, foregone conclusions. Hers was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, to prepare the way. What she had to do was to awaken mankind to the knowledge that women are human beings, and then to insist that they should be given the opportunity to assert themselves as such, and that their sex should become a secondary consideration. It would have been useless for her to analyze their rights in detail until she had established the premises upon which their claims must rest. It is true she contends for their political emancipation. "I really think," she writes, "that women ought to have repre-

sentatives instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of Government." And she also maintains their ability for the practice of many professions, especially of medicine. But this she says, as it were, in parenthesis. These necessary reforms cannot be even begun until the equality of the sexes as human beings is proved beyond a doubt. The object of the *Vindication* is to demonstrate this equality, and to point out the preliminary measures by which it may be secured.

Women, it is said, are not so strong physically as men. True; but this does not imply that they have no strength whatsoever. Because they are weak relatively, it does not follow that they should be made so absolutely. The sedentary life to which they are condemned weakens them, and then their weakness is accepted as an inherent, instead of an artificial, quality.

The truth is, were girls allowed the same freedom in the choice of amusements as boys, they would manifest an equal fondness for out-of-door sports, to the neglect of dolls and frivolous pastimes. But it is denied to them. Directors of their education have, as a rule, been blind adherents to the doctrine that whatever is is right, and hence have argued that, because women have always been brought up in a certain way, they should continue to be so trained.

The worst of it is that the artificial delicacy of constitution thus produced is the cause of a corresponding weakness of mind; and women are in actual fact *fair defects* in creation, as they have been called. And yet, after having been unfitted for action, they are expected to be competent to take charge of a family. The woman who is well-disposed, and whose husband is a

sensible man, may act with propriety so long as he is alive to direct her. But if he were to die how could she alone educate her children and manage her household with discretion?

Mary, after having given the picture of woman as she is now, describes her as she ought to be. This description is worth quoting; but not because it contains any originality of thought or charm of expression. It is interesting as showing exactly what the first sower of the seeds of female enfranchisement expected to reap for her harvest. People who are frightened by a name are apt to suppose that women who defend their rights would have the world filled with uninspired Joans of Arc, and unrefined Portias. Those who judge Mary Wollstonecraft by her conduct, without inquiring into her motives or reading her book, might conclude that what she desired was the destruction of family ties and, consequently, of moral order. Therefore, in justice to her, the purity of her ideals of feminine perfection and her respect for the sanctity of domestic life should be clearly established.

From the primal source of their wrongs—that is, the undue importance attached to the sexual character—Mary next explains that minor causes have arisen to prevent women from realizing this ideal. The narrowness of mind engendered by their vicious education hinders them from looking beyond the interests of the present. They consider immediate rather than remote effects, and prefer to be "short-lived queens than to labour to attain the sober pleasures that arise from equality." Then, again, the desire to be loved or respected for something, which is instinctive in all human beings, is gratified in women by the homage paid to charms

born of indolence. They thus, like the rich, lose the stimulus to exertion which this desire gives to men of the middle class, and which is one of the chief factors in the development of rational creatures. A man with a profession struggles to succeed in it. A woman struggles to marry advantageously. With the former, pleasure is a relaxation; with the latter, it is the main purpose of life. Therefore, while the man is forced to forget himself in his work, the woman's attention is more and more concentrated upon her own person. The great evil of this self-culture is that the emotions are developed instead of the intellect. Women become a prey to what is delicately called sensibility. They feel and do not reason, and, depending upon men for protection and advice, the only effort they make is to give their weakness a graceful covering. They require, in the end, support even in the most trifling circumstances. Their fears are perhaps pretty and attractive to men, but they reduce them to such a degree of imbecility that they will start "from the frown of an old cow or the jump of a mouse," and a rat becomes a serious danger. These fair, fragile creatures are the objects of Mary Wollstonecraft's deepest contempt, and she gives a good wholesome prescription for their cure, which, despite modern co-education and Women Conventions, female doctors and lawyers, might still be more generally adopted to great advantage.

The chapter on Paternal Affection introduces an important section of the treatise. It is not enough for a reformer to pull down. He must build up as well, or at least lay the foundation-stone of a new structure. The missionary does not only tell the heathen that his religion is false, but he instructs him in the

new one which is to take its place. The scientist, besides maintaining that old theories are exploded, explains to the student new facts which have superseded them. Mary, after demonstrating the viciousness of existing educational systems, suggests wherein they may be improved, so that women, their understandings trained and developed, may have the chance to show what they really are.

Family duties necessarily precede those of society. As the "formation of the mind must be begun very early, and the temper, in particular, requires the most judicious attention," a child's training should be undertaken, not from the time it is sent to school, but almost from the moment of its birth. Therefore a few words as to the relations between parents and children are an indispensable introduction to the larger subject of education, properly so called, which prepares the young for social life.

Father and mother are rightful protectors of their child, and should accept the charge of it, instead of hiring a substitute for this purpose. It is not even enough for them to be regulated in this matter by the dictates of natural affection. They must be guided by reason. Parents have a right to expect their children throughout their lives to pay them due respect, give heed to their advice, and take care of them should illness or old age make it impossible for them to do this for themselves; but they should never desire to subjugate their sons and daughters to their own will, after they have arrived at years of discretion and can answer for their actions. To obey a parent, "only on account of his being a parent, shackles the mind, and prepares it for a slavish submission to any power but reason." These remarks

are particularly applicable to girls, who "from various causes are more kept down by their parents, in every sense of the word, than boys," though in the case of the latter there is still room for improvement.

The first step in solving the great problem of education—and here both sexes are referred to—is to decide whether it should be public or private. The objections to private education are serious. It is not good for children to be too much in the society of men and women; for they then "acquire that kind of premature manhood which stops the growth of every vigorous power of mind or body." By growing accustomed to have their questions answered by older people instead of being obliged to seek the answers for themselves, as they are forced to do when thrown with other children, they do not learn how to think for themselves. The very groundwork of self-reliance is thus destroyed. "Besides, in youth the seeds of every affection should be sown, and the respectful regard which is felt for a parent is very different from the social affections that are to constitute the happiness of life as it advances." "Frank ingenuousness" can only be attained by young people being frequently in society where they dare to speak what they think. To know how to live with their equals when they are grown up, children must learn to associate with them when they are young.

The evils which result from the boarding-school system are almost as great as those of private education. The tyranny established among the boys is demoralizing, while the acquiescence to the forms of religion demanded of them, encourages hypocrisy. Children who live away from home are unfitted for

domestic life. "Public education of every denomination should be directed to form citizens, but if you wish to make good citizens, you must first exercise the affections of a son and a brother." Home-training on the one hand, and boarding-schools on the other, being equally vicious, the only way out of the difficulty is to combine the two systems, retaining what is best in each, and doing away with what is evil. This combination could be obtained by the establishment of national day-schools.

They must be supported by Government, because the school-master who is dependent upon the parents of children committed to his charge, necessarily caters to them. In schools for the upper classes, where the number of pupils is small and select, he spends his energies in giving them a show of knowledge wherewith they may startle friends and relations into admiration of his superior system. In common schools, where the charges are small, he is forced, in order to support himself, to multiply the number of pupils until it is impossible for him to do any one of them justice. But if education were a national affair, school-masters would be responsible to a board of directors, whose interest would be given to the children collectively and not individually, while the number of pupils to be received would be strictly regulated.

To perfect national schools the sexes must be educated together. By this means only can they be prepared for their after relations to each other, women thus becoming enlightened citizens and rational companions for men. The experiment of co-education is at all events worth making. Even should it fail, women would not be injured thereby, "for it is not in the

power of man to render them more insignificant than they are at present."

Mary is very practical in this branch of her subject, and suggests an admirable educational scheme. In her levelling of rank among the young, she shows the influence of Plato; in her hint as to the possibility of uniting play and study in elementary education, she anticipates Froebel.

A plainness of speech, amounting in some places to coarseness, and a deeply religious tone, are to many modern readers the most curious features of the book. A just estimate of it could not be formed if these two facts were overlooked. A century ago men and women were much more straightforward in their speech than we are to-day. They were not squeamish. In real life Amelias listened to raillery from Squire Westerns not a whit more refined than Fielding's good country gentleman. Therefore, when it came to serious discussions for moral purposes, there was little reason for writers to be timid. It was impossible for Mary to avoid certain subjects not usually spoken of in polite conversation. Had she done so, she would but have half stated her case. She was not to be deterred because she was a woman. Such mock-modesty would at once have undermined her arguments. According to her own theories, there was no reason why she should not think and speak as unhesitatingly as men, when her sex was as vitally interested as theirs. And therefore, with her characteristic consistency, she did so.

Even more remarkable than this boldness of expression is the strong vein of piety running through her arguments. Religion was to her as important as it was to a Wesley or a Bishop Watts. The equality of man,

in her eyes, would have been of small importance had it not been instituted by man's Creator. It is because there is a God, and because the soul is immortal, that men and women must exercise their reason. Otherwise, they might, like animals, yield to the rule of their instincts and emotions. If women were without souls, they would, notwithstanding their intellects, have no rights to vindicate. But, though sincerely pious, she despised the meaningless forms of religion as much as she did social conventionalities, and was as free in denouncing them. The clergy, who from custom cling to old rites and ceremonies, were, in her opinion, "indolent slugs, who guard, by liming it over, the snug place which they consider in the light of an hereditary estate," and "idle vermin who two or three times a day perform, in the most slovenly manner, a service which they think useless, but call their duty." She believed in the spirit, but not in the letter of the law.

Even the warmest admirers of Mary Wollstonecraft must admit that the faults of the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* are many. Criticised from a literary stand-point, they exceed its merits. Perfection of style was not, it is true, the aim of the writer, as she at once explains in her Introduction. She there says, that being animated by a far greater end than that of fine writing,—

> . . . I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style. I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments than to dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, nor in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach the heart. I shall be employed about things, not words! and, anxious to render my sex

more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slided from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation.

Yet she errs principally from the fault she determines to avoid, as the very sentence in which she announces this determination proves. Despite her sincerity, she is affected, and her arguments are often weakened by meretricious forms of expression. No one can for a moment doubt that her feelings are real, but neither can the turgidity and bombast of her language be denied. She borrows, unconsciously perhaps, the "flowery diction" which she so heartily condemns.

She is too ready to moralize, and her moralizing degenerates unfortunately often into commonplace platitudes. She is even at times disagreeably pompous and authoritative, and preaches rather than argues. This was due partly to a then prevailing tendency in literature. Every writer—essayist, poet, and novelist—preached in those days.

Great as are these faults, they are more than counterbalanced by the merits of the book. All the flowers of rhetoric cannot conceal its genuineness. As is always the case with the work of honest writers, it commands respect even from those who disapprove of its doctrine and criticise its style. Despite its moralizing it is strong with the strength born of an earnest purpose. It was written neither for money nor for amusement, too often the inspiration of book-making. The one she had not time to seek; the other she could have obtained with more certainty by translating for Mr. Johnson, or by contributing to the *Analytical Review*. She wrote it because she thought it her duty to do so,

and hence its vigour and eloquence. All her pompous platitudes cannot conceal the earnestness of her denunciation of shams. The *Rights of Women* is an outcry against them. The age was an artificial one: ladies played at being shepherdesses, and men wept over dead donkeys. Sensibility was a cultivated virtue, and philanthropy a pastime. The excess of sentimentalism had given rise to the other extreme of naturalism. In France the reaction against arbitrary laws, empty forms, and the unjust privileges of rank, led to the French Revolution. In England its outcome was a Wesley in religious speculation, a Wilkes in political action, and a Godwin and a Paine in social and political theorizing. But those who were most eager to uphold reason as a guide to the conduct of men, had nothing to say in behalf of women.

Mary's enthusiasm did not make her blind; she knew that women were wronged by the existing state of affairs; but she did not for this reason believe that they must be removed to a new sphere of action. She defended their rights, not to unfit them for duties assigned them by natural and social necessities, but that they might fulfil them the better. She eloquently denied their inferiority to men, not that they might claim superiority, but simply that they might show themselves to be the equals of the other sex. Woman was to fight for liberty that she might in deed and in truth be worthy to have her children and her husband rise up and call her blessed!

CHAPTER VII.

VISIT TO PARIS.

1792-1793.

The *Vindication of the Rights of Women* made Mary still more generally known. Its fame spread far and wide, not only at home but abroad, where it was translated into German and French. Like Paine's *Rights of Man*, or Malthus' *Essay on the Theory of Population*, it advanced new doctrines which threatened to overturn existing social relations, and it consequently struck men with fear and wonder, and evoked more censure than praise. Some were disgusted with such a bold breaking of conventional chains; a few were startled into admiration. Much of the public amazement was due not only to the principles of the book, but to its warmth and earnestness. As Miss Thackeray says, the English authoresses of those days "kept their readers carefully at pen's length, and seemed for the most part to be so conscious of their surprising achievement in the way of literature, as never to forget for a single minute that they were in print." But here was a woman who wrote eloquently from her heart, who told people boldly what she thought upon subjects of which

her sex, as a rule, pretended to know nothing, and who forgot herself in her interest in her work. It was natural that curiosity was felt as to what manner of being she was, and that curiosity changed into surprise when, instead of the virago expected, she was found to be, to use Godwin's words, "lovely in her person, and, in the best and most engaging sense, feminine in her manners." The fable was in this case reversed; it was the sheep who had appeared in wolf's clothing.

In her own circle of friends and acquaintances she was lionized. Some of her readers were converted into enthusiasts. The reputation she had won by her answer to Burke was now firmly established. She was respected as an independent thinker and a bold dealer with social problems.

But conservatives avoided her and her book as moral plagues. Many people would not even look at what she had written. Satisfied with the old-fashioned way of treating the subjects therein discussed, they would not run the risk of finding out that they were wrong. They dreaded the increase of knowledge which would bring with it greater sorrow. Mrs. Barbauld, eloquent in her defence of men's rights, could conceive no higher aim for women than the attainment of sufficient knowledge to make them *agreeable* companions to their husbands and brothers. Should there be any deviation from the methods of education which insured this end, they would, she feared, become like the *Précieuses* or *Femmes Savantes* of Molière. Mary's vigorous appeal for improvement could, therefore, have no meaning for her. Hannah More, enthusiastic in her denunciations of slavery, but unconscious that her liberty was in the least restricted, did not hesitate to form an opinion of

the *Rights of Women* without examining it, thus necessarily missing its true significance. In this she doubtless represented a large majority of her sex. She wrote to Horace Walpole in 1793 :—

I have been much pestered to read the *Rights of Women*, but am invincibly resolved not to do it. Of all jargon, I hate metaphysical jargon; beside, there is something fantastic and absurd in the very title. How many ways there are of being ridiculous! I am sure I have as much liberty as I can make a good use of, now I am an old maid; and when I was a young one I had, I dare say, more than was good for me. If I were still young, perhaps I should not make this confession; but so many women are fond of government, I suppose, because they are not fit for it. To be unstable and capricious, I really think, is but too characteristic of our sex; and there is, perhaps, no animal so much indebted to subordination for its good behaviour as woman. I have soberly and uniformly maintained this doctrine ever since I have been capable of observation, and I used horridly to provoke some of my female friends—*maîtresses femmes*—by it, especially such heroic spirits as poor Mrs. Walsingham.

Men, on the other hand, thought Mary was unsexing herself by her arguments, which seemed to interfere with *their* rights,—an interference they could not brook. Walpole, when he answered the letter from which the above extract is taken, wrote with warmth :—

. . . It is better to thank Providence for the tranquillity and happiness we enjoy in this country, in spite of the philosophizing serpents we have in our bosom, the Paines, the Tookes, and the Wollstonecrafts. I am glad you have not read the tract of the last-mentioned writer. I would not look at it, though assured it contains neither metaphysics nor politics; but as she entered the lists of the latter, and borrowed her title from the demon's book which aimed at spreading the *wrongs* of men, she is excommunicated from the pale of my library. We have had enough of new systems, and the world a great deal too much already.

She seems always to have incurred Walpole's deepest scorn and wrath He could not speak of her without heaping scorn upon her name. A year or two later,

when she had published her book on the French Revolution, writing again to Hannah More, he thus concludes his letter :—

Adieu, thou excellent woman! thou reverse of that hyena in petticoats, Mrs. Wollstonecraft, who to this day discharges her ink and gall on Marie Antoinette, whose unparalleled sufferings have not yet staunched that Alecto's blazing ferocity.

There was at least one man in London whose opinion was worth having who, it is known, treated the book with indifference, and he, by a strange caprice of fate, was William Godwin. It was at this time, when she was in the fulness of her fame, that Mary first met him. She was dining at Johnson's with Paine and Shovet, and Godwin had come purposely to meet the American philosopher and to hear him talk. But Paine was at best a silent man; and Mary, it seems, monopolized the conversation. Godwin was disappointed, and consequently the impression she made upon him was not pleasing. He afterwards wrote an account of this first meeting, which is interesting because of the closer relationship to which an acquaintance so unpropitiously begun was to lead. He says :—

The interview was not fortunate. Mary and myself parted mutually displeased with each other. I had not read her *Rights of Women*. I had barely looked into her answer to Burke, and been displeased, as literary men are apt to be with a few offences against grammar and other minute points of composition. I had therefore little curiosity to see Mrs. Wollstonecraft, and a very great curiosity to see Thomas Paine. Paine, in his general habits, is no great talker; and, though he threw in occasionally some shrewd and striking remarks, the conversation lay principally between me and Mary. I, of consequence, heard her very frequently when I wished to hear Paine.

We touched on a considerable variety of topics, and particularly on the character and habits of certain eminent men. Mary, as has already been observed, had acquired, in a very blameable degree, the practice of seeing everything on the gloomy side, and bestowing

censure with a plentiful hand, where circumstances were in any degree doubtful. I, on the contrary, had a strong propensity to favourable construction, and, particularly where I found unequivocal marks of genius, strongly to incline to the supposition of generous and manly virtue. We ventilated in this way the character of Voltaire and others, who have obtained from some individuals an ardent admiration, while the greater number have treated them with extreme moral severity. Mary was at last provoked to tell me that praise, lavished in the way that I lavished it, could do no credit either to the commended or the commender. We discussed some questions on the subject of religion, in which her opinions approached much nearer to the received ones than mine. As the conversation proceeded, I became dissatisfied with the tone of my own share in it. We touched upon all topics without treating forcibly or connectedly upon any. Meanwhile, I did her the justice, in giving an account of the conversation to a party in which I supped, though I was not sparing of my blame, to yield her the praise of a person of active and independent thinking. On her side she did me no part of what perhaps I considered as justice.

We met two or three times in the course of the following year, but made a very small degree of progress towards a cordial acquaintance.

Not until Mary had lived through the tragedy of her life were they destined to become more to each other than mere fellow mortals. There was much to be learned, and much to be forgotten, before the time came to her to give herself into his keeping.

Her family were naturally interested in her book from personal motives; but Eliza and Everina heartily disapproved of it, and their feelings for their eldest sister became, from this period, less and less friendly. Both were now in good situations. Mary felt free, therefore, to consider her own comforts a little. Besides, she had attained a position which it became her to sustain with dignity. She was now known as *Mrs.* Wollstonecraft, and was a prominent figure in the literary world. Shortly after the publication of the *Rights of*

Women, she moved from the modest lodgings in George Street, to larger, better rooms in Store Street, Bedford Square, and these she furnished comfortably. Necessity was no longer her only standard. She also gave more care to her dress. Her stern apprenticeship was over. She had so successfully trampled upon the thorns in her path that she could pause to enjoy the flowers. To modern readers her new furniture and gowns are welcome signs of the awakening of the springtime in her cold and wintry life. But her sisters resented them, particularly because, while they, needing less, received less from her bounty, and Charles, waiting for a good opening in America, was living at her expense. He, with thoughtless ingratitude, sent them semi-satirical accounts of her new mode of living, and thus unconsciously kindled their jealousy into a fierce flame. When the extent of Mary's kindness and self-sacrifice in their regard is remembered, the petty ill-nature of brother and sisters, as expressed in the following letter from Mrs. Bishop to Everina, is unpardonable:—

Upton Castle, July 3, 1792.

. . He [Charles] informs me too that *Mrs. Wollstonecraft* is grown quite handsome; he adds likewise that, being conscious she is on the wrong side of thirty, she now endeavours to set off those charms she once despised, to the best advantage. This, *entre nous,* for he is delighted with her affection and kindness to him.

So the author of the *Rights of Women* is going to France! I daresay her chief motive is to promote poor Bess's comfort, or thine, my girl, or at least I think she will so reason. Well, in spite of reason, when Mrs. W. reaches the Continent she will be but a woman! I cannot help painting her in the height of all her wishes, at the very summit of happiness, for will not ambition fill every chink of her great soul (for such I really think hers) that is not occupied by love? After having drawn this sketch, you can hardly suppose me so sanguine as to expect my pretty face will be thought of when

matters of State are in agitation, yet I know you think such a miracle not impossible. I wish I could think it at all probable, but, alas! it has so much the appearance of castle-building that I think it will soon disappear like the "baseless fabric of a vision, and leave not a wrack behind."

And you actually have the vanity to imagine that in the National Assembly, personages like M. and F.[useli] will bestow a thought on two females whom nature meant to "suckle fools and chronicle small beer."

Only a few days before Mary had written to Everina to discuss with her a matter relative to Mrs. Bishop's prospects. This letter explains the allusions of the latter to Mary's proposed trip to France, and shows how little reason she had for her ill-natured conclusions :—

London, June 20, 1792.

. . . I have been considering what you say respecting Eliza's residence in France. For some time past Mr. and Mrs. Fuseli, Mr. Johnson, and myself have talked of a summer excursion to Paris; it is now determined on, and we think of going in about six weeks. I shall be introduced to many people. My book has been translated, and praised in some popular prints, and Mr. Fuseli of course is well known; it is then very probable that I shall hear of some situation for Eliza, and I shall be on the watch. We intend to be absent only six weeks; if then I fix on an eligible situation for her she may avoid the Welsh winter. This journey will not lead me into any extraordinary expense, or I should put it off to a more convenient season, for I am not, as you may suppose, very flush of money, and Charles is wearing out the clothes which were provided for his voyage. Still I am glad he has acquired a little practical knowledge of farming. . . .

The French trip was, however, put off until the following December; and when the time came for her departure, neither Mr. Johnson nor the Fuselis accompanied her. Since the disaffection of the latter has been construed in a way which reflects upon Mary's character, it is necessary to pause here to consider the nature of the friendship which existed between them.

The shadow unfairly cast upon her reputation must be dissipated.

Mary valued Fuseli as one of her dearest friends. He, like her, was an enthusiast. He was a warm partisan of justice and a rebel against established institutions. He would take any steps to see that the rights of the individual were respected. His interference in a case where men in subordinate positions were defrauded by those in authority, but which did not affect him personally, was the cause of his being compelled to leave Zurich, his home, and thus, eventually, of his coming to England. Besides their unity of thought and feeling, their work often lay in the same direction. Fuseli, as well as Mary, translated for Johnson, and contributed to the *Analytical Review*. He was an intimate friend of Lavater, whose work on Physiognomy Mary had translated with the liveliest interest. There was thus a strong bond of sympathy between them, and many ways in which they could help and consult with each other in their literary tasks. Mary was devoid of the coquetry which is so strong with some women that they carry it even into their friendships. She never attempted to conceal her liking for Fuseli. His sex was no drawback. Why should it be? It had not interfered with her warm feelings for George Blood and Mr. Johnson. She was the last person in the world to be deterred from what she thought was right for the sake of appearances.

However, another construction was given to her friendly demonstrations. The story told both by Knowles, the biographer of Fuseli, and by Godwin, is that Mary was in love with the artist; and that the necessity of suppressing, even if she could not destroy,

her passion—hopeless since its object was a married man—was the immediate reason of her going to France alone. But they interpret the circumstances very differently. The incidents, as given by Godwin, are in no wise to Mary's discredit, though his account of them was later on twisted and distorted by Beloe in his *Sexagenarian*. The latter writer, however, is so prejudiced that his words have but little value. Godwin, in the *Memoirs*, after demonstrating the strength of the intimacy between Mary and Fuseli, says :—

Notwithstanding the inequality of their years, Mary was not of a temper to live upon terms of so much intimacy with a man of merit and genius without loving him. The delight she enjoyed in his society, she transferred by association to his person. What she experienced in this respect was no doubt heightened by the state of celibacy and restraint in which she had hitherto lived, and to which the rules of polished society condemn an unmarried woman. She conceived a personal and ardent affection for him. Mr. Fuseli was a married man, and his wife the acquaintance of Mary. She readily perceived the restrictions which this circumstance seemed to impose upon her ; but she made light of any difficulty that might arise out of them. Not that she was insensible to the value of domestic endearments between persons of an opposite sex, but that she scorned to suppose that she could feel a struggle in conforming to the laws she should lay down to her conduct.

. . . There is no reason to doubt that if Mr. Fuseli had been disengaged at the period of their acquaintance, he would have been the man of her choice.

. . . One of her principal inducements to this step [her visit to France], related, I believe, to Mr. Fuseli. She had at first considered it as reasonable and judicious to cultivate what I may be permitted to call a platonic affection for him ; but she did not, in the sequel, find all the satisfaction in this plan which she had originally expected from it. It was in vain that she enjoyed much pleasure in his society, and that she enjoyed it frequently. Her ardent imagination was continually conjuring up pictures of the happiness she should have found if fortune had favoured their more intimate union. She felt herself formed for domestic affection, and all those tender charities which

men of sensibility have constantly treated as the dearest bond of human society. General conversation and society could not satisfy her. She felt herself alone, as it were, in the great mass of her species, and she repined when she reflected that the best years of her life were spent in this comfortless solitude. These ideas made the cordial intercourse of Mr. Fuseli, which had at first been one of her greatest pleasures, a source of perpetual torment to her. She conceived it necessary to snap the chain of this association in her mind; and, for that purpose, determined to seek a new climate, and mingle in different scenes.

Mr. Kegan Paul, Mary's able defender of modern times, denies the whole story. He writes in his Prefatory Memoirs to her *Letters to Imlay* :—

. . . Godwin knew extremely little of his wife's earlier life, nor was this a subject on which he had sought enlightenment from herself. I can only here say that I fail to find any confirmation whatever of this preposterous story, as told in Knowles's *Life of Fuseli*, or in any other form, while I find much which makes directly against it, the strongest fact being that Mary remained to the end the correspondent and close friend of Mrs. Fuseli.

Her character is the best refutation of Knowles's charges. She was too proud to demean herself to any man. She was too sensitive to slights to risk the repulses he says she accepted. And since always before and after this period she had nothing more at heart than the happiness of others, it is not likely that she would have deliberately tried to step in between Fuseli and his wife, and gain, at the latter's expense, her own ends. She could not have changed her character in a day. She never played fast and loose with her principles. These were in many ways contrary to the standard of the rest of mankind, but they were also equally opposed to the conduct imputed to her. The testimony of her actions is her acquittal. That she did not for a year produce any work of importance is no argument against her. It was only after three years

of uninterrupted industry that she found time to write the *Rights of Women.* On account of the urgency of her every-day needs, she had no leisure for work whose financial success was uncertain.

However this may have been, it is certain that Mr. Johnson and the Fuselis decided to remain at home when Mary in December started for Paris.

The excitement in the French capital was then at fever heat. But the outside world hardly comprehended how serious the troubles were. Princes and their adherents trembled at the blow given to royalty in the person of Louis XVI. Liberals rejoiced at the successful revolt against monarchical tyranny. But neither one party nor the other for a moment foresaw what a terrible weapon reform was to become in the hands of the excitable French people. If, in the city where the tragedy was being enacted, the customary baking and brewing, the promenading under the trees, and dog-dancing and the shoe-blacking on the *Pont-Neuf* could still continue, it is not strange that those who watched it from afar mistook its real weight.

The terrible night of the 10th of August had come and gone. The September massacres, the details of which had not yet reached England, were over. The Girondists were in the ascendency and had restored order. There were fierce contentions in the National Convention, but, on the whole, its attitude was one to inspire confidence. The English, who saw in the arrest of the king, and in the popular feeling against him, just such a crisis as their nation had passed through once or twice, were not deterred from visiting the country by its unsettled state. The French prejudice against

England, it is true, was strong. Lafayette had some time before publicly expressed his belief that she was secretly conspiring against the peace of France. But his imputation had been vigorously denied, and nominally the two governments were friendly. English citizens had no reason to suppose they would not be safe in Paris, and those among them whose opinions brought them *en rapport* with the French Republicans felt doubly secure. Consequently Mary's departure for that capital, alone and unprotected, did not seem so hazardous then as it does now that the true condition of affairs is better understood.

She knew in Paris a Madame Filiettaz, daughter of the Madame Bregantz at whose school in Putney Eliza and Everina had been teachers, and to her house she went, by invitation. Monsieur and Madame Filiettaz were absent, and she was for some little time its sole occupant, save the servants. The object of her visit was twofold. She wished to study French, for though she could read and translate this language fluently, from want of practice she could neither speak nor understand it when it was spoken; and she also desired to watch for herself the development of the cause of freedom. Their love of liberty had made the French, as a nation, peculiarly attractive to her. She had long since openly avowed her sympathy by her indignant reply to Burke's outcry against them. It was now a great satisfaction to be where she could follow day by day the progress of their struggle. She had excellent opportunities not only to see what was on the surface of society, which is all visitors to a strange land can usually do, but to study the actual forces at work in the movement. Thomas Paine was then in Paris. He

was a member of the National Convention, and was on terms of intimacy with Condorcet, Brissot, Madame Roland, and other Republican leaders. Mary had known him well in London. She now renewed the acquaintance, and was always welcomed to his house near the Rue de Richelieu. Later, when, worn out by his numerous visitors, he retired to the Faubourg St. Denis, to a hotel where Madame de Pompadour had once lived, and allowed it to be generally believed that he had gone into the country for his health, Mary was one of the few favoured friends who knew of his whereabouts. She thus, through him, was brought into close contact with the leading spirits of the day. She also saw much of Helen Maria Williams, the poetess, already notorious for her extreme liberalism, and who had numerous friends and acquaintances among the Revolutionary party in Paris. Mrs. Christie was still another friend of this period. Her husband's business having kept them in France, they had become thoroughly nationalized. At their house many Americans congregated, among others a Captain Gilbert Imlay, of whom more hereafter. In addition to these English friends, Mary had letters of introduction to several prominent French citizens.

She arrived in Paris just before Louis XVI.'s trial. The city was comparatively quiet, but there was in the air an oppression which betokened the coming storm. She felt the people's suspense as if she, too, had been personally interested. Between her studies and her efforts to obtain the proper clue by which she could in her own mind reduce the present political chaos to order, she found more than enough wherewith to fill her days. As always happened with her, the mental

strain reacted upon her physical health, and her old enemies, depression of spirits and headaches, returned to harass her.

She wrote to Everina on the 24th of December :—

To-morrow I expect to see Aline [Madame Filiettaz]. During her absence the servants endeavoured to render the house—a most excellent one—comfortable to me ; but as I wish to acquire the language as fast as I can, I was sorry to be obliged to remain so much alone. I apply so closely to the language, and labour so continually to understand what I hear, that I never go to bed without a headache, and my spirits are fatigued with endeavouring to form a just opinion of public affairs. The day after to-morrow I expect to see the King at the bar, and the consequences that will follow I am almost afraid to anticipate.

I have seen very little of Paris, the streets are so dirty ; and I wait till I can make myself understood before I call upon Madame Laurent, &c. Miss Williams has behaved very civilly to me, and I shall visit her frequently because I *rather* like her, and I meet French company at her house. Her manners are affected, yet the simple goodness of her heart continually breaks through the varnish, so that one would be more inclined, at least I should, to love than admire her. Authorship is a heavy weight for female shoulders, especially in the sunshine of prosperity. Of the French I will not speak till I know more of them. They seem the people of all others for a stranger to come amongst, yet sometimes when I have given a commission, which was eagerly asked for, it has not been executed, and when I ask for an explanation—I allude to the servant-maid, a quick girl, who, an 't please you, has been a teacher in an English boarding-school—dust is thrown up with a self-sufficient air, and I am obliged to appear to see her meaning clearly, though she puzzles herself, that I may not make her feel her ignorance ; but you must have experienced the same thing. I will write to you soon again. Meantime, let me hear from you, and believe me yours sincerely and affectionately,

M. W.

When the dreaded 26th came, there was no one in Paris more excited and interested than Mary. From her window she saw the King as he rode by with calm dignity to his trial. Throughout the entire day she

waited anxiously, uncertain as to what would be the effects of the morning's proceedings. Then, when evening came, and all continued quiet and the danger was over, she grew nervous and fearful, as she had that other memorable night when she kept her vigil in the little room at Hackney. She was absolutely alone with her thoughts, and it was a relief to write to Mr. Johnson. It gave her a sense of companionship. This "hyena in petticoats," this "philosophizing serpent," was at heart as feminine as Hannah More or any other "excellent woman."

Paris, Dec. 26, 1792.

I should immediately on the receipt of your letter, my dear friend, have thanked you for your punctuality, for it highly gratified me, had I not wished to wait till I could tell you that this day was not stained with blood. Indeed, the prudent precautions taken by the National Convention to prevent a tumult made me suppose that the dogs of faction would not dare to bark, much less to bite, however true to their scent; and I was not mistaken; for the citizens, who were all called out, are returning home with composed countenances, shouldering their arms. About nine o'clock this morning the King passed by my window, moving silently along, excepting now and then a few strokes on the drum, which rendered the stillness more awful, through empty streets, surrounded by the National Guards, who, clustering round the carriage, seemed to deserve their name. The inhabitants flocked to their windows, but the casements were all shut; not a voice was heard, nor did I see anything like an insulting gesture. For the first time since I entered France I bowed to the majesty of the people, and respected the propriety of behaviour, so perfectly in unison with my own feelings. I can scarcely tell you why, but an association of ideas made the tears flow insensibly from my eyes, when I saw Louis sitting, with more dignity than I expected from his character, in a hackney-coach, going to meet death where so many of his race have triumphed. My fancy instantly brought Louis XIV. before me, entering the capital with all his pomp, after one of the victories most flattering to his pride, only to see the sunshine of prosperity overshadowed by the sublime gloom of misery. I have been alone ever since; and though my mind is calm, I cannot dismiss the lively images that have filled my imagination all the day. Nay.

do not smile, but pity me, for, once or twice, lifting my eyes from the paper, I have seen eyes glare through a glass door opposite my chair, and bloody hands shook at me. Not the distant sound of a footstep can I hear. My apartments are remote from those of the servants, the only persons who sleep with me in an immense hotel, one folding-door opening after another. I wish I had even kept the cat with me! I want to see something alive—death in so many frightful shapes has taken hold of my fancy. I am going to bed, and for the first time in my life I cannot put out the candle.

M. W.

These imaginary terrors gave way to real ones soon enough. The execution of Louis was followed by the declaration of war between France and England and the complete demoralization of the French people, especially of the Parisians. The feeling against England grew daily more bitter, and the position of English residents in Paris more precarious. It was next to impossible for them to send letters home, and therefore their danger was not realized by their countrymen on the other side of the Channel. Mrs. Bishop, in the far-away Welsh castle, grew impatient at Mary's silence. Politics was a subject dear to her heart, but one tabooed at Upton. At her first word upon the topic the family, her employers, left the room, and she was consequently obliged to ignore it when she was with them. But when, some months later on, two or three French refugees came to Pembroke, she was quick to go to them, ostensibly for French lessons, but in reality to hear their accounts of the scenes through which they had passed. Forced to live in quiet, remote places, she longed for the excitement only to be had in the large centres of action, and at one time, in her discontent, began to make plans to join her sister in France. While Eliza was thus contemplating a journey to Paris, Mary was wondering how it would be possible either

to continue living there or to leave the country. It was equally out of the question to obtain fresh supplies of money from England or a passport to carry her safely back. She had, when she left London, only intended to be absent for a few weeks, and had not even given up her rooms in George Street. But the weeks had lengthened into months, and now her return was an impossibility.

For motives of economy she left the large Filiettaz mansion. At first she thought of making a trip to Switzerland, but this plan had to be abandoned because of the difficulty in procuring a passport. She therefore went to Neuilly, where, her ready money well-nigh exhausted, she lived as simple as she could. Economy was doubly necessary at a time when heavy taxes were sending a hungry multitude into the streets, clamouring for bread. She was now more alone than ever. Her sole attendant was an old man, a gardener. He became her warm friend, succumbing completely to her power of attraction. With the gallantry of his race he could not do enough for Madame. He waited upon her with unremitting attention; he even disputed for the honour of making her bed. He served up at her table, unasked, the grapes from his garden which he absolutely refused to give to her guests. He objected to her English independence; her lonely walks through the woods of Neuilly met with his serious disapproval, and he besought her to allow him the privilege of accompanying her, painting in awful colours the robbers and other dangers with which the place abounded. But Mary persisted in going alone; and when, evening after evening, she returned unharmed, it must have seemed to him as if she bore a charmed life. Such incidents as

these show, better than volumes of praise, the true kindliness of her nature which was not influenced by distinctions of rank.

Those who knew her but by name, however, dealt with her in less gentle fashion. Her fame had been carried even into Pembroke; and while she was living her solitary and inoffensive life in Paris, Mrs. Bishop was writing to Everina: "The conversation [at Upton Castle] turns on Murphy, on Irish potatoes, or Tommy Paine, whose effigy they burnt at Pembroke the other day. Nay, they talk of immortalizing Miss Wollstonecraft in like manner, but all end in damning all politics: What good will they do men? and what rights have men that three meals a day will not supply?" After all, perhaps they were wise, these Welshmen. Were not their brethren in France purchasing their rights literally at the price of their three meals a day?

Sometimes, perhaps to please her friend, the gardener, instead of her rambles through the woods, Mary walked towards and even into Paris, and then she saw sights which made Pembroke logic seem true wisdom, and freedom a farce. Once, in so doing, she passed by chance a place of execution, just at the close of one of its too frequent tragic scenes. The blood was still fresh upon the pavement; the crowd of lookers-on not yet dispersed. She heard them as they stood there rehearsing the day's horror, and she chafed against the cruelty and inhumanity of the deed. In a moment—her French so improved that she could make herself understood—she was telling the people near her something of what she thought of their new tyrants. Those were dangerous times for freedom of speech. So far

the champions of liberty had proved themselves more inexorable masters than the Bourbons. Some of the bystanders, who, though they dared not speak their minds, sympathized with Mary's indignation, warned her of her danger and hurried her away from the spot. Horror at the ferocity of men's passions, wrath at injustices committed in the name of freedom, and impatience at her own helplessness to right the evils by which she was surrounded, no doubt inspired her, as saddened and sobered she walked back alone to Neuilly.

During all this time she continued her literary work. She proposed to write a series of letters upon the present character of the French nation, and with this end in view she silently studied the people and the course of political action. She was quick and observant, and nothing escaped her notice. She came to Paris prepared to continue a firm partisan of the French Revolution; but she could not be blind to the national defects. She saw the frivolity and sensuality of the people, their hunger for all things sweet, and the unrestrained passions of the greater number of the Republican leaders, which made them love liberty more than law itself. She valued their cause, but she despised the means by which they sought to gain it. Thus, in labouring to grasp the meaning of the movement, not as it appeared to petty factions, but as it was as a whole, she was confronted by the greatest of all mysteries, the relation of good and evil. Again, as when she had analyzed the rights of women, she recognized evil to be a power which eventually works for righteousness, thereby proving the clearness of her mental vision. Only one of these letters, however, was

written and published. It is dated Feb. 15, 1793, so that the opinions therein expressed were not hastily formed. As its style is that of a familiar letter, and as it gives a good idea of the thoroughness with which she had applied herself to her task, it may appropriately be quoted from here. She writes:—

. . . The whole mode of life here tends indeed to render the people frivolous, and, to borrow their favourite epithet, amiable. Ever on the wing, they are always sipping the sparkling joy on the brim of the cup, leaving satiety in the bottom for those who venture to drink deep. On all sides they trip along, buoyed up by animal spirits, and seemingly so void of care that often, when I am walking on the Boulevards, it occurs to me that they alone understand the full import of the term leisure; and they trifle their time away with such an air of contentment, I know not how to wish them wiser at the expense of gaiety. They play before me like motes in a sunbeam, enjoying the passing ray; whilst an English head, searching for more solid happiness, loses in the analysis of pleasure the volatile sweets of the moment. Their chief enjoyment, it is true, rises from vanity; but it is not the vanity that engenders vexation of spirit: on the contrary, it lightens the heavy burden of life, which reason too often weighs, merely to shift from one shoulder to the other. . . .

Before I came to France, I cherished, you know, an opinion that strong virtues might exist with the polished manners produced by the progress of civilisation; and I even anticipated the epoch, when, in the course of improvement, men would labour to become virtuous, without being goaded on by misery. But now the perspective of the golden age, fading before the attentive eye of observation, almost eludes my sight; and, losing thus in part my theory of a more perfect state, start not, my friend, if I bring forward an opinion which, at the first glance, seems to be levelled against the existence of God! I am not become an atheist, I assure you, by residing at Paris; yet I begin to fear that vice or, if you will, evil is the grand mobile of action, and that, when the passions are justly poised, we become harmless, and in the same proportion useless. . . .

You may think it too soon to form an opinion of the future government, yet it is impossible to avoid hazarding some conjectures, when everything whispers me that names, not principles, are changed, and when I see that the turn of the tide has left the dregs of the old system to corrupt the new. For the same pride of office, the same

desire of power, are still visible; with this aggravation, that, fearing to return to obscurity after having but just acquired a relish for distinction, each hero or philosopher, for all are dubbed with these new titles, endeavours to make hay while the sun shines; and every petty municipal officer, become the idol, or rather the tyrant of the day, stalks like a cock on a dunghill.

The letters were discontinued, probably because Mary thought letter-writing too easy and familiar a style in which to treat so weighty a subject. She only gave up the one work, however, to undertake another still more ambitious. At Neuilly she began and wrote almost all that was ever finished of her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution.*

While she was thus living the quiet life of a student in the midst of excitement, her own affairs, as well as those of France, were hastening to a crisis.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE WITH IMLAY.

1793–1794.

While Mary was living at Neuilly, the terrors of the French Revolution growing daily greater, she took a step to which she was prompted by pure motives, but which has left a blot upon her fair fame. The outcry raised by her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* has ceased, since its theories have found so many champions; but that which followed her assertion of her individual rights has never yet been hushed. Mr. Kegan Paul speaks the truth when he says, "The name of Mary Wollstonecraft has long been a mark for obloquy and scorn"; and the least that can be done to clear her memory of stains is to state impartially the facts of her case.

As has been said in the previous chapter, Mary often spent her free hours with Mrs. Christie, and at her house she met Captain Gilbert Imlay. He was one of the many Americans then living in Paris; was an attractive man personally, and by his position and abilities entitled to respect. He had taken an active part in the American rebellion, having then risen to the

rank of captain, and, after the war, had been sent as commissioner to survey still unsettled districts of the western States. On his return from this work he wrote *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America,* which is remarkable for its thoroughness and its clear, condensed style. It passed through several editions and increased his reputation. His business in France is not very explicitly explained. His head-quarters seem to have been at Havre, while he had certain commercial relations with Norway and Sweden. He was most probably in the timber trade, and was, at least at this period, successful. Godwin says that he had no property whatever, but his speculations apparently brought him plenty of ready money.

Foreigners in Paris, especially Americans and English, were naturally drawn together. Mary and Imlay had mutual acquaintances, and they saw much of each other. His republican sentiments alone would have appealed to her. But the better she learned to know him, the more she liked him personally. He, on his side, was equally attracted, and his kindness and consideration for her were greatly in his favour. Their affection in the end developed into a feeling stronger than mere friendship. Its consequence, since both were free, would, under ordinary circumstances, have been marriage.

But her circumstances just then were extraordinary. Godwin says that she objected to a marriage with Imlay because she did not wish to "involve him in certain family embarrassments to which she conceived herself exposed, or make him answerable for the pecuniary demands that existed against her." There were, however, more formidable objections, not of her own

making. The English who remained in Paris ran the chance from day to day of being arrested with the priests and aristocrats, and even of being carried to the guillotine. Their only safeguard lay in obscurity. They had, above all else, to evade the notice of Government officers. Mary, if she married Imlay, would be obliged to proclaim herself a British subject, and would thus be risking imprisonment, and perhaps death. Besides, it was very doubtful whether a marriage ceremony performed by the French authorities would be recognized in England as valid.

To Mary, however, this did not seem an insurmountable obstacle to their union. "Her view had now become," Mr. Kegan Paul says, "that mutual affection was marriage, and that the marriage tie should not bind after the death of love, if love should die." In her *Vindication* she had upheld the sanctity of marriage because she believed that the welfare of society depends upon the order maintained in family relations; but her belief also was that the form the law demands is nothing, the feeling which leads those concerned to desire it, everything. What she had hitherto seen of married life, as at present instituted, was not calculated to make her think highly of it. Her mother and her friend's mother had led the veriest dogs' lives because the law would not permit them to leave brutal and sensual husbands, whom they had ceased to honour or love. Her sister had been driven mad by the ill-treatment of a man to whom she was bound by legal, but not by natural ties. Probably in London other cases had come within her notice. Love was the one unimportant element in the marriage compact. The artificial tone of society had disgusted all the more earnest thinkers

of the day. The one extreme to which existing evils were carried drove reformers to the other. Mary reasoned in the same spirit as they did, and from no desire to uphold the doctrine of free love. Fearless in her practice as in her theories, she did not hesitate in this emergency to act in a way that seemed to her conscience right. She loved Imlay honestly and sincerely; but because she loved him she could not think evil of him, nor suppose for a moment that his passion was not as pure and true as hers. Therefore she consented to live with him as his wife, though no religious nor civil ceremony could sanction their union.

That this, according to the world's standard, was wrong, is a fact beyond dispute. But before the first stones are thrown, the *pros* as well as the *cons* must be remembered. If Mary had held the conventional beliefs as to the relations of the sexes, she would be judged by them. Had she thought her connection with Imlay criminal, then she would be condemned by her own conviction. But she did not think so. Moreover, her opinions to the contrary were very decided. When she gave herself to Imlay without waiting for a minister's blessing or a legal permit, she acted in strict adherence to her moral ideals; and this at once places her in a far different rank from that of the Mrs. Robinsons and Mrs. Jordans, with whom men have been too ready to class her. To Mary love was literally her whole existence, and fidelity a virtue to be cultivated above all others. Mary Wollstonecraft might rely upon her friends and acquaintances for recognition of her virtue, but she should have remembered that to the world at large her conduct would appear immoral; that by it she would become a pariah

in society, and her work lose much of its efficacy; while she would be giving to her children, if she had any, an inheritance of shame that would cling to them for ever.

She may probably have realized this drawback and determined to avoid the evil consequences of her defiance to social usages. For the first few months it seems that she kept her intimacy with Imlay secret, and she may have intended concealing it until such time as she could make it legal in the eyes of the world. Godwin dates its beginning in April, 1793. The only information in this respect is to be had from her published letters to Imlay, the first of which was written in June of the same year, though, it must be added, Mr. Kegan Paul queries the date. This and the following note, dated August, prove the secrecy she had for a time maintained. The latter seems to have been written after she had determined to live openly with Imlay in Paris, but just before she carried her determination into practice:—

Past Twelve o'clock, Monday night.

I obey an emotion of my heart which made me think of wishing thee, my love, good-night! before I go to rest, with more tenderness than I can to-morrow, when writing a hasty line or two under Colonel ——'s eye. You can scarcely imagine with what pleasure I anticipate the day when we are to begin almost to live together; and you would smile to hear how many plans of employment I have in my head, now that I am confident my heart has found peace in your bosom. Cherish me with that dignified tenderness which I have only found in you, and your own dear girl will try to keep under a quickness of feeling that has sometimes given you pain. Yes, I will be *good*, that I may deserve to be happy; and whilst you love me, I cannot again fall into the miserable state which rendered life a burden almost too heavy to be borne.

But good-night! God bless you! . . . I will be at the barrier a little after ten o'clock to-morrow.

The reason for this step was probably the fact that it was not safe to her to continue in Paris alone and unprotected. The robbers in the woods at Neuilly might be laughed at; but the red-capped *citoyens* and *citoyennes,* drunk from the first drop of aristocratic blood, were no old man's dangers. The peril of the English in the city increased with every new development of the struggle; but Americans were looked upon as staunch brother citizens, and a man who had fought for the American Republic was esteemed as the friend and honoured guest of the French Republic. As Imlay's wife, Mary's safety would therefore be assured. The murderous greed of the people, to break out in September in the *Law of the Suspect,* was already felt in August, and at the end of that month she sought protection under Imlay's roof, and shielded herself by his name.

She could not at once judge of the manner in which this expedient would be received. It was impossible to hold any communication with England. For eighteen months after her letter to Mr. Johnson not a word from her reached her friends at home. As for those in Paris, so intense was the great human tragedy of which they were the witnesses, that they probably forgot to gossip about each other. The crimes and horrors that stared them in the face were so appalling that desire to seek out imaginary ones in their neighbours was lost. As far as can be known from Mary's letters, her connection with Imlay did not take from her the position she had held in the English colony. No door was closed against her; no scandal was spread about her. The truth is, these people must have understood her difficulties as well as she did. They knew

the impossibility of a legal ceremony and the importance in her case of an immediate union; and, understanding this, they seem to have considered her Imlay's wife. At least the rumours which months afterwards came to her sisters treated her marriage as a certainty. Charles Wollstonecraft, now settled in Philadelphia, wrote on June 16, 1794, to Eliza, a year after Mary and Imlay had begun their joint life: "I heard from Mary six months ago by a gentleman who knew her at Paris, and since that have been informed she is married to Captain Imlay of this country." The same report had found its way to Mr. Johnson, and through him again to Mrs. Bishop. It was hard to doubt its truth, and yet Mrs. Bishop knew as well if not better than any one Mary's views about marriage. She had, happily for herself, reaped the benefit of them. In her surprise she sent Charles's letter to Everina, accompanied by her own reflections upon the startling news.

The only record of Mary's connection with Imlay, which lasted for about two years, are the letters which she wrote to him while he was away from her, his absences being frequent and long. Fortunately, these letters have been preserved. They were published by Godwin almost immediately after her death, and were republished in 1879 by Mr. Kegan Paul. "They are," says Godwin, "the offspring of a glowing imagination, and a heart penetrated with the passion it essays to describe." She was thirty-five when she met Imlay. Her passion for him was strong with the strength of full womanhood, nor had it been weakened by the flirtations in which so many women fritter away what ever deep feeling they may have originally possessed. Her letters contain the unreserved expression of her

feelings. Those written before she had cause to doubt her lover are full of wifely devotion and tenderness; those written from the time she was forced to question his sincerity, through the gradual realization of his faithlessness, until the bitter end, are the most pathetic and heart-rending that have ever been given to the world. They are the cry of a human soul in its death-agony, and are the more tragic because they belong to real life and not to fiction.

Imlay's love was to Mary what the kiss of the Prince was to the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy tale. It awakened her heart to happiness, leading her into that new world which is the old. Hitherto the love which had been her portion was that which she had sought

> . . . In the pity of other's woe,
> In the gentle relief of another's care.

And yet she had always believed that the pure passion which a man gives to a woman is the greatest good in life. That she was without it had been to her a heavier trial than an unhappy home and overwhelming debts. Now, when she least expected it, it had come to her. While women in Paris were either trembling with fear for what the morrow might bring forth, or else caught in the feverish whirl of rebellion, one at least had found rest. But human happiness can never be quite perfect. Sensitiveness was a family fault with the Wollstonecrafts. It had been developed rather than suppressed in Mary by her circumstances. She was therefore keenly susceptible not only to Imlay's love, but to his failings. Of these he had not a few. He does not seem to have been a refined man. From some remarks in Mary's letters it may be concluded that he had at

one time been very dissipated, and that the society of coarse men and women had blunted his finer instincts. His faults were peculiarly calculated to offend her. His passion had to be stimulated. His business called him away often, and his absences were unmistakably necessary to the maintenance of his devotion. The sunshine of her new life was therefore not entirely unclouded. She was by degrees obliged to lower the high pedestal on which she had placed her lover, and to admit to herself that he was not much above the level of ordinary men. This discovery did not lessen her affection, though it made her occasionally melancholy. But she was, on the whole, happy.

In September he was compelled to leave her to go to Havre, where he was detained for several months. Love had cast out all fear from her heart. She was certain that he considered himself, in every sense of the word, her husband ; and therefore, during his absence, she frankly told him how much she missed him, and in her letters shared her troubles and pleasures with him. She wrote the last thing at night to tell him of her love and her loneliness. She could not take his slippers from their old place by the door. She would not look at a package of books sent to her, but said she would keep them until he could read them to her while she was mending her stockings. She drew pictures of the happy days to come, when in the farm, either in America or France, to which they both looked forward as their *Ultima Thule,* they would spend long evenings by their fireside, perhaps with children about their knees. If Eliza sent her a worrying letter, half the worry was gone when she had confided it to him. If ne'er-do-weel Charles, temporarily prosperous, or promising to

be so, wrote her one that pleased her, straightway she described the delight with which he would make a friend of Imlay. When the latter had been away but a short time, she found there was to be a new tie between them. As the father of her unborn child he became doubly dear to her, while the consciousness that another life depended upon her made her more careful of her health. "This thought," she told him, "has not only produced an overflowing of tenderness to you, but made me very attentive to calm my mind and take exercise, lest I should destroy an object in whom we are to have a mutual interest, you know." As Mr. Kegan Paul says, "No one can read her letters without seeing that she was a pure, high-minded, and refined woman, and that she considered herself, in the eyes of God and man, his wife."

During the first part of his absence, Imlay appears to have been as devoted as she could have wished him to be. When her letters to him did not come regularly, —as, indeed, how could they in those troubled days?— he grew impatient. His impatience Mary greeted as a good sign.

The business at Havre apparently could not be easily settled. The date of Imlay's return became more and more uncertain, and Mary grew restless at his prolonged stay. This she let him know soon enough. She was not a silent heroine willing to let concealment prey on her spirits. It was as impossible for her to smile at grief as it was to remain unconscious of her lover's shortcomings. Her first complaints, however, are half playful, half serious. They were inspired by her desire to see him more than by any misgiving as to the cause of his detention.

On the 29th of December she wrote:—

> You seem to have taken up your abode at Havre. Pray, sir! when do you think of coming home? or, to write very considerately, when will business permit you? I shall expect (as the country people say in England) that you will make a *power* of money to indemnify me for your absence. . . .
>
> Well! but, my love, to the old story,—am I to see you this week, or this month? I do not ask what you are about, for as you did not tell me, I would not ask Mr. ——, who is generally pretty communicative.

But the playfulness quickly disappeared. Mary was ill, and her illness aggravated her normal sensitiveness, while the terrible death-drama of the Revolution was calculated to deepen rather than to relieve her gloom.

Imlay's answers to her letters were kind and reassuring, and contained ample explanation of his apparent coldness. To give him the benefit of the doubt, he was probably at this time truthful in pleading business as an excuse for his long absence. His reasons, at all events, not only satisfied Mary but made her ashamed of what seemed to her a want of faith in him. She was as humble in her penitence as if she had been grievously at fault.

As it continued impossible for Imlay to leave Havre, it was arranged that Mary should join him there. She could not go at once on account of her health. While she had been so unhappy, she had neglected to take that care of herself which her condition necessitated, and she was suffering the consequences. Once her mind was at rest, she made what amends she could by exercise in the bracing winter air, in defiance of dirt and intense cold, and by social relaxation, at least such as could be had while the guillotine was executing daily tasks to the tune of *Ça ira*, and women were madly

turning in the mazes of the *Carmagnole.* Though she could not boast of being quite recovered, she was soon able to report to Imlay, "I am so *lightsome,* that I think it will not go badly with me." Her health sufficiently restored, and an escort—the excited condition of the country making one more than usually indispensable—having been found, she began her welcome journey. It was doubly welcome. One could breathe more freely away from Paris, the seat of the Reign of Terror, where the Revolution, as Vergniaud said, was, Saturn-like, devouring its own children ; and for Mary the journey had likewise the positive pleasure of giving her her heart's desire. Before Imlay's warm assurances of his love, her uneasiness melted away as quickly as the snow at the first breath of spring.

She arrived in Havre in the February of 1794. About a fortnight later Imlay left for Paris, but many proofs of his affection had greeted her, and during these few days he had completely calmed her fears. Judging from the letters she sent him during this absence, he must have been as lover-like as in the first happy days of their union. One was written the very day after his departure.

Imlay's absence was brief, nor did he again leave Mary until the following August. In April their child, a daughter, was born, whom Mary called Fanny in memory of her first and dearest friend. Despite her past imprudences, she was so well that she remained in bed but a day. Eight days later she was out again. Though she felt no ill effects at the time, her rashness had probably something to do with her illness when her second child was born. These months at Havre were a pleasant oasis in the dreary desert of her existence.

She seems to have had a house of her own in Havre, and to have seen a little of the Havrais, whom she found "ugly without doubt," and their houses smelling too much of commerce. They were, in a word, *bourgeois*. But her husband and child were all the society she wanted. With them any wilderness would have been a paradise. Her affection increased with time, and Imlay, though discovered not to be a demigod, grew ever dearer to her. Her love for her child, which she confessed was at first the effect of a sense of duty, developed soon into a deep and tender feeling. With Imlay's wants to attend to, the little Fanny, at one time ill with small-pox, to nurse, and her book on the Revolution to write, the weeks and months passed quickly and happily. In August Imlay was summoned to Paris, and at once the sky of her paradise was overcast. She wrote to him,—

> You too have somehow clung round my heart. I found I could not eat my dinner in the great room, and when I took up the large knife to carve for myself, tears rushed into my eyes. Do not, however, suppose that I am melancholy, for, when you are from me, I not only wonder how I can find fault with you, but how I can doubt your affection.

CHAPTER IX.

IMLAY'S DESERTION.

1794–1795.

Unfortunately, as a rule, the traveller on life's journey has but as short a time to stay in the pleasant green resting-places, as the wanderer through the desert. In September Mary followed Imlay to Paris. But before the end of the month he had bidden her farewell and had gone to London. Against the fascination of money-making, her charms had little chance. His estrangement dates from this separation. When Mary met him again he had forgotten love and honour, and had virtually deserted her. While her affection became stronger, his weakened until finally it perished altogether.

Her confidence in him, however, was confirmed by the months spent at Havre, and she little dreamed his departure was the prelude to their final parting. For a time she was lighter-hearted than she had ever before been while he was away. The memory of her late happiness reassured her. Her little girl was an unceasing source of joy, and she never tired of writing to Imlay about her. Her maternal tenderness over-

flows in her letters. She said in one of them, not doubting his interest to be as great as hers :—

. . . You will want to be told over and over again that our little Hercules is quite recovered.

Besides looking at me, there are three other things which delight her: to ride in a coach, to look at a scarlet waistcoat, and hear loud music. Yesterday at the fête she enjoyed the two latter ; but, to honour J. J. Rousseau, I intend to give her a sash, the first she has ever had round her. . . .

In a second she writes :—

I have been playing and laughing with the little girl so long, that I cannot take up my pen to address you without emotion. Pressing her to my bosom, she looked so like you (*entre nous*, your best looks, for I do not admire your commercial face), every nerve seemed to vibrate to her touch, and I began to think that there was something in the assertion of man and wife being one, for you seemed to pervade my whole frame, quickening the beat of my heart, and lending me the sympathetic tears you excited.

As the devout go on pilgrimage to places once sanctified by the presence of a departed saint, so she visited alone the haunts of the early days of their love, living over again the incidents which had made them sacred. "My imagination," she wrote to him, ". . . chooses to ramble back to the barrier with you, or to see you coming to meet me and my basket of grapes. With what pleasure do I recollect your looks and words, when I have been sitting on the window, regarding the waving corn." She begged him to bring back his "barrier face," as she thus fondly recalled their interviews at the barrier. She told him of a night passed at Saint Germains, in the very room which had once been theirs, and, glowing with these recollections, she warned him that, if he should return changed in aught, she would fly from him to cherish remembrances which must be ever dear to her. Occasion-

ally a little humorous pleasantry interrupted the more tender outpourings in her letters. On the 26th of October, Imlay having now been absent for over a month, she writes :—

I have almost *charmed* a judge of the tribunal, R., who, though I should not have thought it possible, has humanity, if not *beaucoup d'esprit*. But, let me tell you, if you do not make haste back, I shall be half in love with the author of the *Marseillaise*, who is a handsome man, a little too broad-faced or so, and plays sweetly on the violin.

What do you say to this threat?—why, *entre nous*, I like to give way to a sprightly vein when writing to you. "The devil," you know, is proverbially said to "be in a good humour when he is pleased."

Many of her old friends in the capital had been numbered among the children devoured by the insatiable monster. A few, however, were still left, and she seems to have made new ones and to have again gone into Parisian society. The condition of affairs was more conducive to social pleasures than it had been the year before. Robespierre was dead. There were others besides Mary who feared "the last flap of the tail of the beast"; but, as a rule, the people, now the reaction had come, were over-confident, and the season was one of merry-making. There were fêtes and balls. Even mourning for the dead became the signal for rejoicing; and gay Parisians, their arms tied with crape, danced to the memory of the victims of the late national delirium. The Reign of Terror was over, but so was Mary's happiness. Public order was partly restored, but her own short-lived peace was rudely interrupted. Imlay in London became more absorbed in his immediate affairs, a fact which he could not conceal in his letters; and Mary realised that, compared to business, she was of little or no importance

to him. She expostulated earnestly with him on the folly of allowing money cares and ambitions to preoccupy him. She sincerely sympathised with him in his disappointments, but she could not understand his willingness to sacrifice sentiment and affection to sordid cares. "It appears to me absurd," she told him, "to waste life in preparing to live."

But by degrees the dark shades increased until they had completely blotted out the light made by the past. Imlay's letters were fewer and shorter, more taken up with business, and less concerned with her. Ought she to endure his indifference, or ought she to separate from him for ever? was the question which now tortured her. She had tasted the higher pleasures, and the present pain was intense in proportion. Her letters became mournful as dirges.

Once, but only once, the light shone again. On the 15th of January she received a kind letter from Imlay, and her anger died away. "It is pleasant to forgive those we love," she said to him simply. But it was followed by his usual hasty business notes or by complete silence, and henceforward she knew hope only by name. Her old habit of seeing everything from the dark side returned. She could not find one redeeming point in his conduct. Despair seized her soul. Other discomforts contributed their share to her burden. A severe cold had settled upon her lungs, and she imagined she was in a galloping consumption. Her lodgings were not very convenient, but she had put up with them, waiting day by day for Imlay's return. Weary of her life as Job was of his, she, like him, spake out in the bitterness of her soul. Her letters from this time on are written from the very valley of the shadow of death.

Grief sometimes makes men strong. Mary's stimulated her into a determination to break her connection with Imlay, and to live for her child alone. She would remain in Paris and superintend Fanny's education. She had already been able to labour for herself, and there was no reason why she should not do it again. Until she settled upon the means of support to be adopted, she would borrow money from her friends. Anything was better than to live at Imlay's expense. As for him, such a course would probably be a relief, and certainly it would do him no harm. "As I never concealed the nature of my connection with you," she wrote to him, "your reputation will not suffer." But her plans, for some reason, did not meet with his approval. He was tired of her, and yet he seems to have been ashamed to confess his inconstancy. At one moment he wrote that he was coming to Paris; at the next he bade her meet him in London. But no mention was made of the farm in America. The excitement of commerce proved more alluring than the peace of country life. His shilly-shallying unnerved Mary; positive desertion would have been easier to bear.

The child was now the strongest bond of union between them. For her sake she felt the necessity of continuing to live with Imlay as long as possible, though his love was dead. Therefore, when he wrote definitely that he would like her to come to him, since he could not leave his business to go to her, she relinquished her intentions of remaining alone in France with Fanny, and set out at once for London. She could hardly have passed through Havre without feeling the bitter contrast between her happiness of the year before, and her present hopelessness. "I sit, lost in thought," she

wrote to Imlay, "looking at the sea, and tears rush into my eyes when I find that I am cherishing any fond expectations. I have indeed been so unhappy this winter, I find it as difficult to acquire fresh hopes as to regain tranquillity. Enough of this; be still, foolish heart! But for the little girl, I could almost wish that it should cease to beat, to be no more alive to the anguish of disappointment."

She reached London in April 1795. Her gloomiest forebodings were confirmed. Imlay had provided a furnished house for her, and had considered her comforts. But his manner was changed. He was cold and constrained, and she felt the difference immediately. He was little with her, and business was, as of old, the excuse. According to Godwin, he had formed another connection with a young strolling actress. Life was thus even less bright in London than it had been in Paris. For her there were, indeed, worse things waiting at the gate of life than death; and she resolved by suicide to escape from them. This part of her story is very obscure. But it is certain that her suicidal intentions were so nearly carried into effect that she had written several letters containing her, as she thought, last wishes, and which were to be opened after all was over. There is no exact account of the manner in which she proposed to kill herself, nor of the means by which she was prevented. "I only know," Godwin says, "that Mr. Imlay became acquainted with her purpose at a moment when he was uncertain whether or no it was already executed, and that his feelings were roused by the intelligence. It was, perhaps, owing to his activity and representations that her life was at this time saved. She determined to continue to exist."

This event sobered both Imlay and Mary. They saw the danger they were in, and the consequent necessity of forming a definite conclusion as to the nature of their future relations. They must either live together in perfect confidence, or else they must separate. "My friend, my dear friend," she wrote him, "examine yourself well,—I am out of the question; for, alas! I am nothing,—and discover what you wish to do, what will render you most comfortable; or, to be more explicit, whether you desire to live with me, or part for ever! When you can ascertain it, tell me frankly, I conjure you! for, believe me, I have very involuntarily interrupted your peace." The determination could not be made in a hurry. In the meantime Mary knew it would be unwise to remain idle, meditating upon her wrongs. Forgetfulness of self in active work appeared the only possible means of living through the period of uncertainty. Imlay had business in Norway and Sweden which demanded the personal superintendence either of himself or of a trustworthy agent. He gave it in charge to Mary, and at the end of May she started upon this mission. That Imlay still looked upon her as his wife, and that his confidence in her was unlimited, is shown by the following document in which he authorizes her to act for him :—

May 19, 1795.

Know all men by these presents that I, Gilbert Imlay, citizen of the United States of America, at present residing in London, do nominate, constitute, and appoint Mary Imlay, my best friend and wife, to take the sole management and direction of all my affairs, and business which I had placed in the hands of Mr. Elias Bachman, negotiant, Gottenburg, or in those of Messrs. Myburg & Co., Copenhagen, desiring that she will manage and direct such concerns in such manner as she may deem most wise and prudent. For which this letter shall be a sufficient power, enabling her to receive all the

money or sums of money that may be recovered from Peter Ellison or his connections, whatever may be the issue of the trial now carrying on, instigated by Mr. Elias Bachman, as my agent, for the violation of the trust which I had reposed in his integrity.

Considering the aggravated distresses, the accumulated losses and damages sustained in consequence of the said Ellison's disobedience of my injunctions, I desire the said Mary Imlay will clearly ascertain the amount of such damages, taking first the advice of persons qualified to judge of the probability of obtaining satisfaction, or the means the said Ellison or his connections, who may be proved to be implicated in his guilt, may have, or power of being able to make restitution, and then commence a new prosecution for the same accordingly. . . .

Respecting the cargo of goods in the hands of Messrs. Myburg & Co., Mrs. Imlay has only to consult the most experienced persons engaged in the disposition of such articles, and then, placing them at their disposal, act as she may deem right and proper. . . .

Thus confiding in the talent, zeal, and earnestness of my dearly beloved friend and companion, I submit the management of these affairs entirely and implicitly to her discretion.

Remaining most sincerely and affectionately hers truly,

G. Imlay.

Witness, J. Samuel.

Unfortunately for Mary, she was detained at Hull, from which town she was to set sail, for about a month. She was thus unable immediately to still the memory of her sorrows. It is touching to see how, now that she could no longer doubt that Imlay was made of common clay, she began to find excuses for him. She represented to herself that it was her misfortune to have met him too late. Had she known him before dissipation had enslaved him, there would have been none of this trouble. She was, furthermore, convinced that his natural refinement was not entirely destroyed, and that if he would but make the effort he could overcome his grosser appetites.

After almost a month of inactivity, the one bright spot in it being a visit to Beverly, the home of her

childhood, she sailed for Sweden, with Fanny and a maid as her only companions. Her *Letters from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, with the more personal passages omitted, were published in a volume by themselves shortly after her return to England. Notice of them will find a more appropriate place in another chapter. All that is necessary here is the very portion which was then suppressed, but which Godwin later included with the *Letters to Imlay*. The northern trip had at least this good result. It strengthened her physically. She was so weak when she first arrived in Sweden that the day she landed she fell fainting to the ground as she walked to her carriage. For a while everything fatigued her. The bustle of the people around her seemed "flat, dull, and unprofitable." The civilities by which she was overwhelmed, and the endeavours of the people she met to amuse her, were fatiguing. Nothing, for a while, could lighten her deadly weight of sorrow. But by degrees, as her letters show, she improved. Pure air, long walks, and rides on horseback, rowing and bathing, and days in the country had their beneficial effect, and she wrote to Imlay on July 4th, "The rosy fingers of health already streak my cheeks; and I have seen a physical life in my eyes, after I have been climbing the rocks, that resembled the fond, credulous hopes of youth."

But even a sound body cannot heal a broken heart. Mary could not throw off her troubles in a day. She after a time tried to distract her mind by entering into the amusements she had at first scorned, but it was often in vain. There was a change for the better, however, in her mental state; for though her grief was not completely cured, she at least voluntarily sought to recover her emotional equilibrium.

She had at least one pleasure that helped to soften her cares. This was her love for the child, which, always great, was increased by Imlay's cruelty. The tenderness which he by his indifference repulsed, she now lavished upon Fanny. She seemed to feel that she ought to make amends for the fact that her child was, to all intents and purposes, fatherless.

It so happened that at one time she was obliged to leave her child with her nurse for about a month. Business called her to Tönsberg in Norway, and the journey would have been bad for Fanny, who was cutting her teeth. "I felt more at leaving my child than I thought I should," she wrote to Imlay, "and whilst at night I imagined every instant that I heard the half-formed sounds of her voice, I asked myself how I could think of parting with her for ever, of leaving her thus helpless." Here indeed was a stronger argument against suicide than Christianity or its "aftershine." This absence stimulated her motherly solicitude and heightened her sense of responsibility. In her appeals to Imlay to settle upon his future course in her regard, she now began to dwell upon their child as the most important reason to keep them together.

He seems to have written to her regularly. At times she reproached him for not letting her hear from him, but at others she acknowledged the receipt of three and five letters in one morning. If these had been preserved, hers would not seem as importunate as they do now, for he gave her reason to suppose that he was anxious for a reunion, and wrote in a style which she told him she may have deserved, but which she had not expected from him. She also referred to his admission that her words tortured him; and there was talk of a

trip together to Switzerland. But at the same time his proofs of indifference forced her to declare that she and pleasure had shaken hands. "How often," she breaks out in her agony, "passing through the rocks, I have thought, 'But for this child, I would lay my head on one of them, and never open my eyes again!'" The only particular in which he remained firm was his unwillingness to give a final decision in what, to her, was the one all-important matter. His vacillating behaviour was heartless in the extreme. Her suspense became unbearable, and all her letters contained entreaties for him to relieve it.

Finally, after allowing her to suffer three months of acute agony, he summoned up resolution enough to write and tell her he would abide by her decision. Her business in the North had been satisfactorily settled, for which she was, alas! to receive but poor thanks; and the welfare of the child having now become the pivot of her actions, she returned to England. From Dover she sent him a letter informing him that she was prepared once more to make his home hers:—

> You say I must decide for myself. I have decided that it was most for the interest of my little girl, and for my own comfort, little as I expect, for us to live together; and I even thought that you would be glad some years hence, when the tumult of business was over, to repose in the society of an affectionate friend, and mark the progress of our interesting child, whilst endeavouring to be of use in the circle you at last resolved to rest in, for you cannot run about for ever. . .

The result of this letter was that Imlay and Mary tried to retie the broken thread of their domestic relations. The latter went up to London, and they settled together in lodgings. It would have been better for

her had she never seen him again. The fire of his love had burnt out. No power could rekindle it. His indifference was hard to bear; but so long as he assured her that he had formed no other attachment, she made no complaint. For Fanny's sake she endured the new bitterness, and found such poor comfort as she could in being with him. It was but too true that the constancy of her affection was the torment of her life. In spite of everything, she still loved him. Before long, however, she discovered through her servants that he was basely deceiving her. He was keeping up a separate establishment for a new mistress. Mary, following the impulse of the moment, went at once to this house, where she found him. The particulars of their interview are not known; but her wretchedness during the night which followed maddened her. His perfidy hurt her more deeply than his indifference. Her cup of sorrow was filled to overflowing, and for the second time she made up her mind to fly from a world which held nothing but misery for her. It may be concluded that for the time being she was really mad. It will be remembered that troubles of a kindred nature had driven Mrs. Bishop to insanity. All the Wollstonecrafts inherited a peculiarly excitable temperament. Mary, had she not lost all self-control, would have been deterred from suicide, as she had been from thoughts of it in Sweden, by her love for Fanny. But her grief was so great it drowned all memory and reason. The morning after this night of agony she wrote to Imlay:—

I write you now on my knees, imploring you to send my child and the maid with —— to Paris, to be consigned to the care of Madame ——, Rue ——, Section de ——. Should they be removed, —— can give their direction. . . .

I shall make no comments on your conduct or any appeal to the world. Let my wrongs sleep with me! Soon, very soon, I shall be at peace. When you receive this my burning head will be cold.

I would encounter a thousand deaths rather than a night like the last. Your treatment has thrown my mind into a state of chaos; yet I am serene. I go to find comfort; and my only fear is that my poor body will be insulted by an endeavour to recall my hated existence. But I shall plunge into the Thames where there is the least chance of my being snatched from the death I seek.

God bless you! May you never know by experience what you have made me endure. Should your sensibility ever awake, remorse will find its way to your heart; and, in the midst of business and sensual pleasures, I shall appear before you, the victim of your deviation from rectitude.

Then she left her house to seek refuge in the waters of the river. She went first to Battersea Bridge; but it was too public for her purpose. She could not risk a second frustration of her designs. There was no place in London where she could be unobserved. With the calmness of despair she hired a boat and rowed to Putney. It was a cold, foggy November day, and by the time she arrived at her destination the night had come, and the rain fell in torrents. An idea occurred to her: if she wet her clothes thoroughly before jumping into the river, their weight would make her sink rapidly. She walked up and down, up and down the bridge in the driving rain. The fog enveloped the night in a gloom as impenetrable as that of her heart. No one passed to interrupt her preparations. At the end of half an hour, satisfied that her end was accomplished, she leaped from the bridge into the water below. Despite her soaked clothing, she did not sink at once. In her desperation she pressed her skirts around her; then she became unconscious. She was found, however, before it was too late. Vigorous efforts were made to restore life, and she was brought

back to consciousness. She had met with the insult she most dreaded, and her disappointment was keen. Her failure only increased her determination to destroy herself.

Imlay, whose departure to his other house Mary construed into abandonment of her, made, in spite of this letter, many inquiries as to her health and tranquillity, repeated offers of pecuniary assistance, and, at the request of mutual acquaintances, even went to see her. But a *show* of interest was not what she wanted, and her thanks for it was the assurance that before long she would be where he would be saved the trouble of either thinking or talking of her. Fortunately Mr. Johnson and her other friends interfered actively in her behalf, and by their arguments and representations prevailed upon her to relinquish the idea of suicide. Through their kindness, the fever which consumed her was somewhat abated. Her temporary madness over, she again remembered her responsibility as a mother, and realized that true courage consists in facing a foe, and not in flying from it. Of the change in her intentions for the future she informed Imlay.

Godwin makes the incredible statement that Imlay refusing to break off his new connection, though he declared it to be of a temporary nature, Mary proposed that she should live in the same house with his mistress. In this way he would not be separated from his child, and she would quietly wait the end of his intrigue. Imlay, according to Godwin, consented to her suggestion, but afterwards thought better of it and refused. There is not a word in her letters to confirm this extraordinary story. It is simply impossible that at one moment she should have been driven to suicide by

the knowledge that he had a mistress, and that at the next she should take a step which was equivalent to countenancing his conduct. It is more rational to conclude that Godwin was misinformed, than to believe this.

Towards the end of November Imlay went to Paris with the woman for whom he had sacrificed wife and child. Mary felt that the end had now really come, as is seen in the few letters which still remain. Once the first bitterness of her disappointment had been mastered, the old tenderness revived, and she renewed her excuses for him. "My affection for you is rooted in my heart," she wrote fondly and sadly. "I know you are not what you now seem, nor will you always act and feel as you now do, though I may never be comforted by the change." Writing to him, however, was more than she could bear. Each letter reopened the wound he had inflicted, and inspired her with a wild desire to see him. She therefore wisely concluded that all correspondence between them must cease. In December, 1795, while he was still in Paris, she bade him her last farewell, though in so doing she was, as she says, piercing her own heart. She refused to hold further communication with him, or to receive his money; but she told him she would not interfere in anything he might wish to do for Fanny. Here it may be said that, though Imlay declared that a certain sum should be settled upon the latter, not a shilling of it was ever paid.

Mary saw him once or twice afterwards. When he came to London again, Godwin says that "she could not restrain herself from making another effort, and desiring to see him once more. During his absence,

affection had led her to make numberless excuses for his conduct, and she probably wished to believe that his present connection was, as he represented it, purely of a casual nature. To this application she observes that he returned no other answer, except declaring, with unjustifiable passion, that he would not see her.

They did meet, however, but their meeting was accidental. Imlay was one day paying a visit to Mr. Christie, who had returned to London, and with whom he had business relations. He was sitting in the parlour when Mary called. Mrs. Christie, hearing her voice, and probably fearing an embarrassing scene, hurried out to warn her of his presence, and to advise her not to come into the room. But Mary, not heeding her, entered fearlessly and, with Fanny by the hand, went up and spoke to Imlay. They retired, it seems, to another room, and he then promised to see her again, and indeed to dine with her at her lodgings on the following day. He kept his promise, and there was a second interview; but it did not lead to a reconciliation. The very next day she went into Berkshire, where she spent the month of March with her friend, Mrs. Cotton. She never again made the slightest attempt to see him or to hear from him. There was a limit even to her affection and forbearance. One day, after her return to town, she was walking along the New Road when Imlay passed her on horseback. He jumped off his horse and walked with her for some little distance. This was the last time they met. From that moment he passed completely out of her life.

CHAPTER X.

LITERARY WORK.

1793-1796.

The first volume of *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution, and the Effect it has produced in Europe,* which Mary wrote during the months she lived in France, was published by Johnson in 1794. It was favourably received and criticised, especially by that portion of the public who had sympathised with the Revolutionists in the controversy with Burke. One admirer, in 1803, declared it was not second even to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* It went very quickly through two editions, surest proof of its success.

Mary had apparently spent in idleness the years which had elapsed since the *Rights of Women* had taken England by storm, but, in reality, she must have made good use of them. This new book marks an enormous advance in her mental development. It is but little disfigured by the faults of style, and is never weakened by the lack of method, which detract from the strength and power of the work by which she is best known. In the *French Revolution* her

arguments are well weighed and balanced, and flowers of rhetoric, with a few exceptions, are sacrificed for a simple and concise statement of facts. Unfortunately the first volume was never followed by a second. Had Mary finished the book, as she certainly intended to do when she began it, it probably would still be ranked with the standard works on the Revolution.

Among the most remarkable passages in the book are those relating to Marie Antoinette. As was the case when she wrote her answer to Burke, the misery of millions unjustly subjected moved Mary more than the woes of one woman justly deprived of an ill-used liberty. Her love and sympathy for the people made her perhaps a little too harsh in her judgment of the queen. "Some hard words, some very strong epithets, are indeed used of Marie Antoinette," Mr. Kegan Paul says in his short but appreciative criticism of this book, "showing that she, who could in those matters know nothing personally, could not but depend on Paris gossip; but this is interesting, as showing what the view taken of the queen was before passion rose to its highest, before the fury of the people, with all the ferocity of word and deed attendant on great popular movements, had broken out." The following lines, reflecting the feelings and opinions of the day, must be read with as much, if not more interest than those of later and better-informed historians:—

> The unfortunate Queen of France, beside the advantages of birth and station, possessed a very fine person; and her lovely face, sparkling with vivacity, hid the want of intelligence. Her complexion was dazzlingly clear; and when she was pleased, her manners were bewitching; for she happily mingled the most insinuating voluptuous softness and affability with an air of grandeur bordering on pride, that rendered the contrast more striking. Independence also of

whatever kind, always gives a degree of dignity to the mien; so that monarchs and nobles with most ignoble souls, from believing themselves superior to others, have actually acquired a look of superiority.

But her opening faculties were poisoned in the bud; for before she came to Paris she had already been prepared, by a corrupt, supple abbé, for the part she was to play; and, young as she was, became so firmly attached to the aggrandizement of her house, that, though plunged deep in pleasure, she never omitted sending immense sums to her brother on every occasion. The person of the king, in itself very disgusting, was rendered more so by gluttony, and a total disregard of delicacy, and even decency, in his apartments; and when jealous of the queen, for whom he had a kind of devouring passion, he treated her with great brutality, till she acquired sufficient finesse to subjugate him. Is it then surprising that a very desirable woman, with a sanguine constitution, should shrink, abhorrent, from his embraces; or that an empty mind should be employed only to vary the pleasures which emasculated her Circean court?

Mary's inflexible hatred of the cruelty of the court and the nobility, which had led to the present horrors, though great, did not prevent her from seeing the tyranny and brutality in which the people indulged so soon as they obtained the mastery. Her treatment of the facts of the Revolution is characterized by honesty. She is above all else an impartial historian and philosopher. She distinguishes, it is true, between the well-meaning multitude—those who took the Bastille, for example — and the rabble composed of the dregs of society,—those who headed the march to Versailles. She declares, "There has been seen amongst the French a spurious race of men, a set of cannibals, who have gloried in their crimes; and, tearing out the hearts that did not feel for them, have proved that they themselves had iron bowels." But while she makes this distinction, she does not hesitate to admit that the retaliation of the French people, suddenly all become

sovereigns, was as terrible as that of slaves unexpectedly loosed from their fetters. It is but fair, after quoting her denunciations of Marie Antoinette, to tell that the new rule was far from receiving her unqualified approbation.

The same impartiality is preserved in the relation of even the most exciting and easily misconceived incidents of the Revolution. The courageous and resolute resistance of the Third Estate to the clergy and nobility is described with dignified praise which never descends into fulsome flattery. The ignorance, vanity, jealousy, disingenuousness, self-sufficieney, and interested motives of members of the National Assembly are unhesitatingly exposed in recording such of their actions as, examined superficially, might seem the outcome of a love of freedom. In giving the details of the taking of the Bastille, and the women's march on Versailles, Mary becomes really eloquent.

Notwithstanding its excellence and the reputation it once had, this work is now almost unknown. But few have ever heard of it, still fewer read it ; a fact due, of course, to its incompleteness. The first and only volume ends with the departure of Louis from Versailles to Paris, when the Revolution was as yet in its earliest stages. This must ever be a matter of regret. That succeeding volumes, had she written them, would have been even better is very probable. There was marked development in her intellectual powers after she published the *Rights of Women*. The increased merit of her later works somewhat confirms Southey's declaration, made three years after her death, that "Mary Wollstonecraft was but beginning to reason when she died."

The last book she finished and published during her life-time was her *Letters written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.* Her journey, as has been explained in the last chapter, was undertaken to attend to certain business affairs for Imlay. Landing in Sweden, she went thence to Norway, then again to Sweden and then to Denmark, and finally to Hamburg, in which latter place she remained a comparatively short period. Not being free to go and come as she chose, she was sometimes detained in small places for two or three weeks, while she could stay but a day or two in large cities. But she had letters of introduction to many of the principal inhabitants of the towns and villages to which business called her, and was thus able to see something of the life of the better classes. The then rough mode of travelling also brought her into close contact with the peasantry. As the ground over which she travelled was then but little visited by English people, she knew that her letters would have at least the charm of novelty.

They were published by her friend Johnson in 1796. Hitherto, her work had been purely of a philosophical, historical, or educational nature. The familiar epistolary style in which she had begun to record her observations of the French people had been quickly changed for the more formal tone of the *French Revolution.* These travels, consequently, marked an entirely new departure in her literary career. Their success was at once assured. Even the fastidious Godwin, who had condemned her other books, could find no fault with this one. Contemporary critics agreed in sharing his good opinion.

It is true that occasionally affected and involved

phrases occur in Mary's letters from the North, and that the tone of many passages is a trifle too sombre. But the former defects are much less glaring and fewer in number than those of her earlier writings; while, when it is remembered that during her journey her heart was heavy-laden with disappointment and despair, her melancholy reflections must be forgiven her. With the exception of these really trifling shortcomings, she may be said to have ably fulfilled the required conditions.

She found Swedes and Norwegians unaffected and hospitable, but sensual and indolent. Both good and evil she attributes to the influence of climate and to the comparatively low stage of culture attained in these northern countries. The long winter nights, she explains in her letters, have made the people sluggish. Their want of interest in politics, literature, and scientific pursuits, have concentrated their attention upon the pleasures of the senses. They are hospitable because of the excitement and social amusements hospitality ensures. They care for the flesh-pots of Egypt because they have not yet heard of the joys of the Promised Land. The women of the upper classes are so indolent that they exercise neither mind nor body; consequently the former has but a narrow range, the latter soon loses all beauty. The men seek no relaxation from their business occupations save in Brobdignagian dinners and suppers. If they are godly, they are never cleanly, cleanliness requiring an effort of which they are incapable. Indolence and indifference to culture throughout Sweden and Norway are the chief characteristics of the natives.

To Mary the coarseness of the people seemed the

more unbearable because of the wonderful beauty of their country as she saw it in midsummer. She could not understand their continued indifference to its loveliness. Her own keen enjoyment of it shows itself in all her letters. She constantly pauses in relating her experiences to dwell upon the grandeur of cliffs and sea, upon the impressive wildness of certain districts, full of great pine-covered mountains and endless fir woods, contrasting with others more gentle and fertile, which are covered with broad fields of corn and rye. She loves to describe the long still summer nights and the grey dawn when the birds begin to sing, the sweet scents of the forest, and the soft freshness of the western breeze. The smallest details of the living picture did not escape her notice. She records the musical tinkling of distant cow-bells and the mournful cry of the bittern. She even tells how she sometimes, when she is out in her boat, lays down her oars that she may examine the purple masses of jelly-fish floating in the water.

The *Letters* were published in the same year, 1796, in Wilmington, Delaware. A few years later, extracts from them, translated into Portuguese, together with a brief sketch of their author, were published in Lisbon, while a German edition appeared in Hamburg and Altona. The book is not now so well known as it deserves to be. Mary's descriptions of the physical characteristics of Norway and Sweden are equal to any written by more recent English travellers to Scandinavia; and her account of the people is valuable as an unprejudiced record of the manners and customs existing among them towards the end of the eighteenth century. But though so little known, it is still true

that, as her self-appointed defender said in 1803, "Letters so replete with correctness of remark, delicacy of feeling, and pathos of expression, will cease to exist only with the language in which they were written."

Shortly after her death, Godwin published in four volumes all Mary's unprinted writings, unfinished as well as finished. This collection, which is called simply *Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, may more appropriately be noticed here in connection with the more complete productions of her last years.

Of the *Letters to Imlay*, which fill the third and a part of the fourth volume, nothing more need be said. The next in importance of these writings is *Maria, or, The Wrongs of Woman*, a novel. It is but a fragment. Mary intended to revise the first chapters carefully, and of the last she had written nothing but the headings and a few detached hints and passages. Godwin, in his Preface, says "So much of it as is here given to the public, she was far from considering as finished; and in a letter to a friend directly written on this subject, she says, 'I am perfectly aware that some of the incidents ought to be transposed and heightened by more luminous shading; and I wished in some degree to avail myself of criticism before I began to adjust my events into a story, the outline of which I had sketched in my mind.'" It therefore must be more gently criticised than such of her books as were published during her life-time, and considered by her ready to be given to the public. But, as the last work upon which she was engaged, and as one which engrossed her thoughts for months, and to which she devoted, for her, an unusual amount of labour, it must be read with interest.

The incidents of the story are, in a large measure,

drawn from real life. Her own experience, that of her sister, and events which had come within her actual knowledge, are the materials which she used. These served her purpose as well as, if not better than, any she could have invented. The only work of her imagination was the manner in which she grouped them to form her plot. The story is, briefly, as follows: The heroine, whose home-life seems to be a description of the interior of the Wollstonecraft household, marries to secure her freedom, rather than from affection for her lover, as was probably the case with "poor Bess." Her husband, who even in the days of courtship had been a dissolute rascal, but hypocrite enough to conceal the fact, throws off his mask after marriage. He speculates rashly, drinks, and indulges in every low vice. All this she bears until he, calculating upon her endurance, seeks to sell her to a friend, that her dishonour may be his gain financially. Then he learns that he has gone too far. She flies from his house, to which she refuses, on any consideration, to return. All attempts to bring her back having failed, he, by a successful stratagem, seizes her as she is on her way to Dover with her child, and, taking possession of the latter, has his wife confined in an insane asylum. Here, after days of horror, Maria succeeds in softening the heart of her keeper, Jemima by name, and through her makes the acquaintance of Henry Darnford, a young man who, like her, has been made a prisoner under the false charge of lunacy. Jemima's friendship is so completely won that she allows these companions in misery to see much of each other. She even tells them her story, which, as a picture of degradation, equals that of some of Defoe's heroines. Darnford

then tells his, and the reader at once recognizes in him another Imlay. Finally, by a lucky accident, the two prisoners make their escape, and Jemima accompanies them. The latter part of the story consists of sketches and the barest outlines; but these indicate the succession of its events and its conclusion. Maria and Darnford live together as husband and wife in London. The former believes that she is right in so doing, and cares nothing for the condemnation of society. She endures neglect and contumely because she is supported by confidence in the rectitude of her conduct. Her husband now has her lover tried for adultery and seduction, and in his absence Maria undertakes his defence. Her separation from her husband is the consequence, but her fortune is thrown into chancery. She refuses to leave Darnford, but he, after a few years, during which she has borne him two children, proves unfaithful. In her despair she attempts to commit suicide, but fails. When consciousness and reason return, she resolves to live for her child.

Maria is a story with a purpose. Its aim is the reformation of the evils which result from the established relations of the sexes. Certain rights are to be vindicated by a full exposition of the wrongs which their absence causes. Mary wished, as her Preface set forth, to exhibit the misery and oppression peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society. *Maria*, in fact, was to be a forcible proof of the necessity of those social changes which she had urged in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. In the career of the heroine the wrongs women suffer from matrimonial despotism and cruelty are demonstrated; while that of Jemima shows how

impossible it is for poor or degraded women to find employment.

The incidents selected by Mary to prove her case are, it must be admitted, disagreeable, and the minor details too frequently revolting. The stories of Maria, Darnford, and Jemima are records of shame and crime, little less unpleasant than the realism of a Zola. It is an astonishing production, even for an age when Fielding and Smollett were not considered coarse. But, as was the case in the *Rights of Women*, this plainness of speech was due not to a delight in impurity and uncleanliness for their own sakes, but to Mary's certainty that by the proper use of subjects vile in themselves, she could best establish principles of purity. Whatever may be thought of her moral creed and of her manner of promulgating it, no reader of her books can deny her the respect which her courage and sincerity evoke. *Maria* seemed to many of its readers an unanswerable proof of the charge of immorality brought against its authoress. Mrs. West, in her *Letters to a Young Man*, pointed to it as evidence of Mary's unfitness for the world beyond the grave. The *Biographical Dictionary* undoubtedly referred to it when it declared that much of the four volumes of Mary's posthumous writings had better been suppressed, as ill calculated to excite sympathy for one who seems to have rioted in sentiments alike repugnant to religion, sense, and decency. Modern readers have been kinder. The following is Miss Mathilde Blind's criticism, which, though somewhat enthusiastic, shows a keen appreciation of the redeeming merits of the book :—

For originality of invention, tragic incident, and a certain fiery eloquence of style, this is certainly the most remarkable and mature

of her works, although one may object that for a novel the moral purpose is far too obvious, the manner too generalised, and many of the situations revolting to the taste of a modern reader. But, with all its faults, it is a production that, in the implacable truth with which it lays open the festering sores of society, in the unshrinking courage with which it drags into the light of day the wrongs the feeble have to suffer at the hands of the strong, in the fiery enthusiasm with which it lifts up its voice for the voiceless outcasts, may be said to resemble *Les Misérables*, by Victor Hugo.

The other contents of these four volumes are: a series of lessons in spelling and reading, which, because prepared especially for her child, Fanny Imlay, are an interesting relic; the "Letter on the French Nation," mentioned in a previous chapter; a fragment and list of proposed "Letters on the Management of Infants"; several letters to Mr. Johnson, the most important of which have already been referred to; the "Cave of Fancy," an Oriental tale, as Godwin calls it,—the story of an old philosopher who lives in a desolate sea-coast district and there seeks to educate a child, saved from a shipwreck, by means of the spirits under his command (the few chapters Godwin thought proper to print were written in 1787, and then put aside, never to be finished); an "Essay on Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature," a short discussion of the difference between the poetry of the ancients, who recorded their own impressions from nature, and that of the moderns, who are too apt to express sentiments borrowed from books; and finally, to conclude the list of contents, the book contains some "Hints" which were to have been incorporated in the second part of the *Rights of Women* which Mary intended to write. These fragments and works are intrinsically of small value.

CHAPTER XI.

RETROSPECTIVE.

1794–1796.

Mary's torture of suspense was now over. The reaction from it would probably have been serious, if she had not had the distraction of work. Activity was, as it had often been before, the tonic which restored her to comparative health. She had no money, and Fanny, despite Imlay's promises, was entirely dependent upon her. Her exertions to maintain herself and her child obliged her to stifle at least the expression of misery.

Outwardly she became much calmer. She resumed her old tasks; Mr. Johnson now, as ever, practically befriending her by providing her with work. She had nothing so much at heart as her child's interests, and these seemed to demand her abjuration of solitude and her return to social life. Her existence externally was, save for the presence of Fanny, exactly the same as it had been before her departure for France. Another minor change was that she was now known as Mrs. Imlay. Imlay had asked her to retain his name; and to

prevent the awkwardness and misunderstandings that otherwise would have arisen, she consented to do so.

During this period she had held but little communication with her family. The coolness between her sisters and herself had, from no fault of hers, developed into positive anger. Their ill-will, which had begun some years previous, had been stimulated by her comparative silence during her residence abroad. She had really written to them often, but it was impossible at that time for letters not to miscarry. Those which she sent by private opportunities reached them, and they contain proofs of her unremitting and affectionate solicitude for them. Always accustomed to help them out of difficulties, she worried over what she heard of their circumstances, and while her hands were, so to speak, tied, she made plans to contribute to their future comforts.

That she had discussed the question of her sister's prospects with Imlay seems probable from the fact that while he was in London alone, in November, 1794, he wrote very affectionately to Eliza, saying,—

. . . We shall both of us continue to cherish feelings of tenderness for you, and a recollection of your unpleasant situation, and we shall also endeavour to alleviate its distress by all the means in our power. The present state of our fortune is rather [word omitted]. However, you must know your sister too well, and I am sure you judge of that knowledge too favourably, to suppose that whenever she has it in her power she will not apply some specific aid to promote your happiness. I shall always be most happy to receive your letters; but as I shall most likely leave England the beginning of next week, I will thank you to let me hear from you as soon as convenient, and tell me ingenuously in what way I can serve you in any manner or respect. . . ."

But all Mary's efforts to be kind could not soften their resentment. On the contrary, it was still further

increased by the step she took in their regard on her return to England in the same year. When in France she had gladly suggested Everina's joining her there; but in London, after her discovery of Imlay's change of feeling, she naturally shrank from receiving her or Eliza into her house. Her sorrow was too sacred to be exposed to their gaze. She was brave enough to tell them not to come to her, a course of action that few in her place would have had the courage to pursue. In giving them her reasons for this new determination, she of course told them but half the truth. To Everina she wrote :—

April 27, 1795.

When you hear, my dear Everina, that I have been in London near a fortnight without writing to you or Eliza, you will perhaps accuse me of insensibility; for I shall not lay any stress on my not being well in consequence of a violent cold I caught during the time I was nursing, but tell you that I put off writing because I was at a loss what I could do to render Eliza's situation more comfortable. I instantly gave Jones ten pounds to send, for a very obvious reason, in his own name to my father, and could send her a trifle of this kind immediately, were a temporary assistance necessary. I believe I told you that Mr. Imlay had not a fortune when I first knew him; since that he has entered into very extensive plans which promise a degree of success, though not equal to the first prospect. When a sufficient sum is actually realized, I know he will give me for you and Eliza five or six hundred pounds, or more if he can. In what way could this be of the most use to you? I am above concealing my sentiments, though I have boggled at uttering them. It would give me sincere pleasure to be situated near you both. I cannot yet say where I shall determine to spend the rest of my life; but I do not wish to have a third person in the house with me; my domestic happiness would perhaps be interrupted, without my being of much use to Eliza. This is not a hastily formed opinion, nor is it in consequence of my present attachment, yet I am obliged now to express it because it appears to me that you have formed some such expectation for Eliza. You may wound me by remarking on my determination, still I know on what principle I act, and therefore you

can only judge for yourself. I have not heard from Charles for a great while. By writing to me immediately you would relieve me from considerable anxiety. Mrs. Imlay, No. 26 Charlotte Street, Rathbone Place.

Yours sincerely,

MARY.

Two days later she wrote to this effect to Eliza. Both letters are almost word for word the same, so that it would be useless to give the second. It was too much for Eliza's inflammable temper. All her worst feelings were stirred by what she considered an insult. The kindness of years was in a moment effaced from her memory. Her indignation was probably fanned into fiercer fury by her disappointment. From a few words she wrote to Everina it seems as if both had been relying upon Mary for the realization of certain "goodly prospects." She returned Mary's letter without a word, but to Everina she wrote:—

I have enclosed this famous letter to the author of the *Rights of Women*, without any reflection. She shall never hear from *Poor Bess* again. Remember, I am fixed as my misery, and nothing can change my present plan. This letter has so strangely agitated me that I know not what I say; but this I feel and know, that if you value my existence you will comply with my requisition [that is, to find her a situation in Ireland where she, Everina, then was], for I am positive I will never torture our amiable friend in Charlotte Street. Is not this a good spring, my dear girl? At least poor Bess can say it is a fruitful one. Alas, poor Bess!

But, though deserted by those nearest to her, her friends rallied round her. She was joyfully re-welcomed to the literary society which she had before frequented. She was not treated as an outcast, because people resolutely refused to believe the truth about her connection with Imlay. She was far from encouraging them in this. Godwin says in her desire to be honest she went so far as to explain the true state of the case to a man

whom she knew to be the most inveterate tale-bearer in London, and who would be sure to repeat what she told him. But it was of no avail. Her personal attractions and cleverness predisposed friends in her favour. In order to retain her society and also to silence any scruples that might arise, they held her to be an injured wife, as indeed she really was, and not a deserted mistress. A few turned from her coldly; but those who eagerly re-opened their doors to her were in the majority.

CHAPTER XII.

WILLIAM GODWIN.

William Godwin was one of those with whom Mary renewed her acquaintance. The impression they now made on each other was very different from that which they had received in the days when she was still known as Mrs. Wollstonecraft. Since he was no less famous than she, and since it was his good fortune to make the last year of her life happy, and by his love to compensate her for her first wretched experience, a brief sketch of his life, his character, and his work is here necessary. It is only by knowing what manner of man he was, and what standard of conduct he deduced from his philosophy, that his relations to her can be fairly understood.

William Godwin, the seventh child of thirteen, was the son of a Dissenting minister, and was born March 3, 1756, at Wisbeach, Cambridgeshire. He came on both sides of respectable middle-class families. His father's father and brother had both been clergymen, the one a Methodist preacher, the other a Dissenter. His father was a man of but little learning, whose strongest feeling was disapprobation of the Church of

England, and whose "creed was so puritanical that he considered the fondling of a cat a profanation of the Lord's day." Mrs. Godwin in her earlier years was gay, too much so for the wife of a minister, some people thought, but after her husband's death she joined a Methodistical sect, and her piety in the end grew into fanaticism. A Miss Godwin, a cousin, who lived with the family, had perhaps the greatest influence over William Godwin when he was a mere child. She was not without literary culture, and through her he learnt something of books. But her religious principles were severely Calvinistic, and these she impressed upon him at the same time.

His first school-mistress was an old woman, who was concerned chiefly with his soul, and who gave him, before he had completed his eighth year, an intimate knowledge of the Bible. The inevitable consequence of this training was that religion became his first thought. Thanks to his cousin, however, and to his natural cleverness and ambition, he was saved from bigotry by his interest in wider subjects, though they were for many years secondary considerations. From an early age he had, as he says of himself, developed an insatiable curiosity and love of distinction. One of his later tutors was Mr. Samuel Newton, an Independent minister and a follower of Sandeman, "a celebrated north country apostle, who, after Calvin had damned ninety-nine out of a hundred of mankind, has contrived a scheme for damning ninety-nine in a hundred of the followers of Calvin." Godwin remained some years with him, and was so far influenced by his doctrines, that when, later, he sought admission into Homerton Academy, a Dissenting institution, he was refused,

because he seemed to the authorities to show signs of Sandemanianism. But he had no difficulty in entering Hoxton College; and here, in his twenty-third year, he finished his religious and secular education. During these years his leading inspiration had been a thirst after knowledge and truth.

This was in 1778. Upon leaving college he began his career as minister, but he was never very successful, and before long his religious views were much modified. His search for truth led him in a direction in which he had least expected to go. In 1781, when he was fulfilling the duties of his profession at Stowmarket, he began to read the French philosophers, and by them his faith in Christianity was seriously shaken. 1783 was the last year in which he appeared in the pulpit. He gave up the office and returned to London, where he supported himself by writing. In the course of a short time he dropped the title of Reverend and emancipated himself entirely from his old religious associations.

His first literary work was the *Life of Lord Chatham,* and this was followed by a defence of the Coalition of 1783. He then obtained regular employment on the *English Review,* published by Murray in Fleet Street, wrote several novels, and became a contributor to the *Political Herald.* He was entirely dependent upon his writings, which fact accounts for the variety displayed in them. His chief interest was, however, in politics. He was a Radical of the most pronounced type, and his articles soon attracted the attention of the Whigs. His services to that party were considered so valuable that when the above-mentioned paper perished, Fox, through Sheridan, proposed to Godwin that he should

edit it, the whole expense to be paid from a fund set aside for just such purposes. But Godwin declined. By accepting he would have sacrificed his independence and have become their mouthpiece, and he was not willing to sell himself. He seems at one time to have been ambitious to be a Member of Parliament, and records with evident satisfaction Sheridan's remark to him: "You ought to be in Parliament." But his integrity again proved a stumbling-block. He could not reconcile himself to the subterfuges which Whigs as well as Tories silently countenanced. Honesty was his dominant quality quite as much as it was Mary's. He was unfit to take an active part in politics; his sphere of work was speculative.

He was the foremost among the devoted adherents in England of Rousseau, Helvetius, and the other Frenchmen of their school. He was one of the "French Revolutionists," so called because of their sympathy with the French apostles of liberty and equality; and at their meetings he met such men as Price, Holcroft, Earl Stanhope, Horne Tooke, Geddes, all of whom considered themselves fortunate in having his co-operation. Thomas Paine was one of his intimate acquaintances; and the *Rights of Man* was submitted to him, to receive his somewhat qualified praise, before it was published. He was one of the leading spirits in developing the Radicalism of his time, and thus in preparing the way for that of the present day; and the influence of his writings over men of his and the next generation was enormous. Indeed, it can hardly now be measured, since much which he wrote, being unsigned and published in papers and periodicals, has been lost.

He was always on the alert in political matters,

ready to seize every opportunity to do good and to promote the cause of freedom. He was, in a word, one of that large army of pilgrims whose ambition is to "make whole flawed hearts, and bowed necks straight." In 1791 he wrote an anonymous letter to Fox, in which he explained at once the two leading doctrines of his philosophy: the necessity of change, and the equal importance of moderation in effecting it. His political creed was, paradoxical as this may seem, the outcome of his religious education. He had long since given up the actual faith in which he was born and trained; after going through successive stages of Sandemanianism, Deism, and Socinianism, he had, in 1787, become a "complete unbeliever"; but he never entirely outlived its influence. This was of a twofold nature. It taught him to question the sanctity of established institutions, and it crushed in him, even if it did not wholly eradicate, strong passion and emotional demonstration. No man in England was as thorough a Radical as he; after he ceased to be a religious, he became a political and social dissenter. In his zeal for the liberty of humanity, he contended for nothing less than the destruction of all human laws. French Republicans demanded the simplest possible form of Government. But Godwin, outstripping them, declared there should be none whatsoever. "It may seem strange," Mrs. Shelley writes, "that anyone should, in the sincerity of his heart, believe that no vice could exist with perfect freedom, but my father did; it was the very basis of his system, the very key-stone of the arch of justice, by which he desired to knit together the whole human family."

His ultra-radicalism led him to some new and start-

ling conclusions, and these he set before the public in his *Political Justice*, the first book he published under his own name. It appeared in 1793, and immediately created a great sensation. It must be ranked as one of the principal factors in the development of English thought. A short explanation of the doctrines embodied in it will throw important light on his subsequent relations to Mary, as well as on his own character. The foundation of the arguments he advances in this book is his belief in the efficacy of reason in the individual as a guide to conduct. He thought that, if each human being were free to act as he chose, he would be sure to act for the best; for, according to him, instincts do not exist. He makes no allowance for the influence of the past in forming the present, ignoring the laws of heredity. A man's nature is formed by the character of his surroundings. Virtue and vice are the result not of innate tendencies, but of external circumstances. When these are perfected, evil will necessarily disappear from the world. He had so successfully subordinated his own emotions, that in his philosophical system he calmly ignores passion as a mainspring of human activity. This is exemplified by the rule he lays down for the regulation of a man's conduct to his fellow-beings. He must always measure their respective worth, and not the strength of his affection for them, even if the individuals concerned be his near relations. Supposing, for example, he had to choose between saving the life of a Fénelon and that of a chambermaid, he must select the former because of his superior talents, even though the latter should be his mother or his wife. Affections are to be forgotten in the calculations of reason. Godwin's

faith in the supremacy of the intellect was not lessened because he was forced to admit that men often do not act reasonably. This is, he explains, because they are without knowledge of the absolute truth. Show them what is true or right, and all, even the most abandoned criminal, will give up what is false or wrong. He boldly advanced the substitution of an appeal to reason for punishment in the treatment of criminals, and this at a time when such a doctrine was considered treason. He declared that any article of property justly belongs to those who most want it, "or to whom the possession of it will be most beneficial." But his objection to the marriage law seemed the most glaringly immoral part of his philosophy. He assailed theoretically an institution for which Mary Wollstonecraft had practically shown her disapprobation. His reasoning in this regard is curious, and reveals the little importance he attached to passion. He disapproved of the marriage tie because he thought that two people who are bound together by it are not at liberty to follow the dictates of their own minds, and hence are not acting in accordance with pure reason. Free love, or a system of voluntary divorce, would be less immoral; because in either of these cases men and women would be self-ruled, and therefore could be relied upon to do what is right.

Besides, according to his ideal of justice in the matter of property, a man or a woman belongs to whomsoever most needs him or her, irrespective of any relations already formed. It follows naturally that the children born in a community where these ideas are adopted are to be educated by the State, and must not be subjected to rules or discipline, but taught from

the beginning to regulate their conduct by the light of reason.

It is not surprising that this book made a stir in the political world. None of the Revolutionists had delivered themselves of such ultra-revolutionary sentiments. Men had been accused of high treason for much more moderate views. Perhaps it was their very extravagance that saved him, though he accounted for it in another way. "I have frequently," Mrs. Shelley explains, "heard my father say that *Political Justice* escaped prosecution from the reason that it appeared in a form too expensive for general acquisition. Pitt observed, when the question was debated in the Privy Council, that 'a three-guinea book could never do much harm among those who had not three shillings to spare.'" Godwin purposely published his work in this expensive form because he knew that by so doing he would keep it from the multitude, whose passions he would have been the last to arouse or to stimulate. He only wished it to be studied by men too enlightened to encourage abrupt innovation. *Festina lente* was his motto. The success of the book, however, went beyond his expectations and perhaps his intentions. Three editions were issued in as many years. Among the class of readers to whom he immediately appealed, the verdict passed upon it varied. Dr. Priestley thought it very original, and that it would probably prove useful, though its fundamental principles were too pure to be practical. Horne Tooke pronounced it a bad book, calculated to do harm. The Rev. Samuel Newton's vigorous disapproval of it caused a final breach between Godwin and his old tutor. As a rule, the reformers accepted it as the work

of inspiration, and the Tories condemned it as the outcome of atheism and political rebellion.

His novel, *Caleb Williams,* established his literary reputation. Its success almost realized Mrs. Inchbald's prediction that "fine ladies, milliners, mantua-makers, and boarding-school girls will love to tremble over it, and that men of taste and judgment will admire the superior talents, the *incessant* energy of mind you have evinced." He was at this time one of the most conspicuous and most talked-about men in London. He counted among his friends and acquaintances all the distinguished men and women of the day; among whom he was in great demand, notwithstanding the fact that he talked neither much nor well, and that not even the most brilliant conversation could prevent his taking short naps when in company.

He was as cold in his conduct as in his philosophy. He was always methodical in his work. Great as his interest in his subject might be, his ardour was held within bounds. There were no long vigils spent wrestling with thought, or days and weeks passed alone and locked in his study that nothing might interfere with the flow of ideas, unless, as happened occasionally, he was working against time. He wrote from nine till one, and then, when he found his brain confused by this amount of labour, he readily reduced the number of his working hours. Literary composition was undertaken by him with the same placidity with which another man might devote himself to book-keeping.

He was equally uncompromising in his friendships. His feelings towards his friends were always ruled by his sense of justice. He was the first to come forward with substantial help in their hour of need, but he was

also the first to tell them the truth, even though it might be unpleasant, when he thought it his duty to do so. His unselfishness is shown in his conduct during the famous state trials, in which Holcroft, his most intimate friend, Horne Tooke, and several other highly-prized acquaintances, were accused of high treason. His boldly avowed revolutionary principles made him a marked man, but he did all that was in his power to defend them. He expressed in the columns of the *Morning Chronicle* his unqualified opinion of the atrocity of the proceedings against them; and throughout the trials he stood by the side of the prisoners, though by so doing he ran the risk of being arrested with them. But if his friends asked his assistance when it did not seem to him that they deserved it, he was as fearless in withholding it. A Jew money-lender, John King by name, at whose house he dined frequently, was arrested on some charge connected with his business. He appealed to Godwin to appear in court and give evidence in his favour; whereupon the latter wrote to him, not only declining, but forcibly explaining that he declined because he could not conscientiously attest to his, the Jew's, moral character. There was no ill-will on his part, and he continued to dine amicably with King. Engrossed as he was with his own work, he could still find time to read a manuscript for Mrs. Inchbald, or a play for Holcroft; but when he did so, he was very plain-spoken in pointing out their faults. He incurred the former's displeasure by correcting some grammatical errors in a story she had submitted to him, and he deeply wounded the latter by his unmerciful abuse of the *Lawyer*. Yet his affection for Holcroft was un-

wavering. The conflicting results to which his honesty sometimes led are strikingly set forth in his relations to Thomas Cooper, a distant cousin, who at one time lived with him as pupil. He studied attentively the boy's character, and did his utmost to treat him gently and kindly; but, on the other hand, he expressed in his presence his opinion of him in language harsh enough to justify his pupil's indignation. It is more than probable that this same frankness was one of the causes of his many quarrels—*démêlés*, he calls them in his diary —with his most devoted friends. His sincerity, however, invariably triumphed, and these were always mere passing storms.

He was passionless even in relations which usually arouse warmth in the most phlegmatic natures. He was a good son and brother, yet so undemonstrative that his manner passed at times for indifference. Though in beliefs and sentiments he had drifted far apart from his mother, he never let this fact interfere with his filial respect and duty; and her long and many letters to him are proofs of his unfailing kindness for her. He was always willing to look out for the welfare of his brothers, two of whom were somewhat disreputable characters, and of his sister Hannah who lived in London. With the latter he was on particularly friendly terms, and saw much of her, yet Mrs. Sothren —the cousin who had been such a help to him in his early years—reproves him for writing of her as "Miss Godwin" instead of "sister," and fears lest this may be a sign that his brotherly affection, once great, had abated.

He seems at one time to have thought that he could provide himself with a wife in the same manner in

which he managed his other affairs. He imagined that in contracting such a relationship, love was no more indispensable than a heroine was to the interest of a novel. He proposed that his sister Hannah should choose a wife for him: and she, in all seriousness, set about complying with his request. In a spirit as business-like as his, she decided upon a friend, calculated she was sure to meet his requirements, and then sent him a list of her merits, much as one might write a recommendation of a governess or a cook.

Not even her glowing report could kindle the philosophical William into warmth. He waited many months before he called upon the paragon, and when he finally saw her he failed to be enraptured according to Hannah's expectations. "Poor Miss Gay," as the Godwins subsequently called her, never received a second visit.

There must have been, beneath all his coldness, a substratum of warm and strong feeling. He possessed, to a rare degree, the power of making friends and of giving sympathy to his fellow-beings. The man who can command the affection of others, and enter into their emotions, must know how to feel himself. It was for more than his intellect that he was loved by men like Holcroft and Josiah Wedgwood, like Coleridge and Lamb, and that he was sought after by beautiful and clever women. His talents alone would not have won the hearts of young men, and yet he invariably made friends with those who came under his influence. Willis Webb and Thomas Cooper, who, in his earlier London life, lived with him as pupils, not only respected, but loved him, and gave him their confidence. In a later generation, youthful enthusiasts, of whom

Bulwer and Shelley are the most notable, looked upon Godwin as the chief apostle in the cause of humanity, and, beginning by admiring him as a philosopher, finished by loving him as a man. Those who know him only through his works or by reading his biography, cannot altogether understand how it was that he thus attracted and held the affections of so many men and women. But the truth is that, while Godwin was naturally a man of an uncommonly cold temperament, much of his emotional insensibility was artificially produced by his puritanical training. He was perfectly honest when in his philosophy of life he banished the passions from his calculations. He was so thoroughly schooled in stifling emotion and its expression, that he thought himself incapable of passional excitement, and, reasoning from his own experience, failed to appreciate its importance in shaping the course of human affairs. But it may be that people brought into personal contact with him felt that beneath his passive exterior there was at least the possibility of passion. Mary Wollstonecraft was the first to develop this possibility into certainty, and to arouse Godwin to a consciousness of its existence. She revolutionized not only his life, but his social doctrines. Through her he discovered the flaw in his arguments, and then honestly confessed his mistake to the world.

When Godwin met Mary, after her desertion by Imlay, he was forty years of age, in the full prime and vigour of his intellect, and in the height of his fame. She was thirty-seven, only three years his junior, and deemed the cleverest woman in England. Her talents had matured, and grief had made her strong. She was strikingly handsome. She had, by

her struggles and sufferings, acquired what she calls in her *Rights of Women* a *physionomie*. Even Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Reveley, hard as life had gone with them, had never approached the depth of misery which she had fathomed. The eventful meeting took place in the month of January, 1796, shortly after Mary had returned from her travels in the North. Miss Hayes invited Godwin to come to her house one evening when Mary expected to be there. He accepted her invitation without hesitation, but evinced no great eagerness.

The meeting was more propitious than their first, some few years earlier, had been. Godwin had, with others, heard her sad story, and felt sorry for her, and perhaps admired her for her bold, practical application of his principles. This was better than the positive dislike with which she had once inspired him. But still his feeling for her was negative. He would probably never have made an effort to see her again. What Mary thought of him has not been recorded. But she must have been favourably impressed, for when she came back to London from her trip to Berkshire, she called upon him in his lodgings in Somer's Town. He, in the meantime, had read her *Letters from Norway*, and they had given him a higher respect for her talents. The inaccuracies and the roughness of style which had displeased him in her earlier works had disappeared. There was no fault to be found with the book, but much to be said in its praise. Once she had pleased him intellectually, he began to discover her other attractions, and to enjoy being with her. Her conversation, instead of wearying him, as it once had, interested him. He no longer thought her for-

ward and conceited, but succumbed to her personal charms.

Godwin now began to see her frequently. She had established herself in rooms in Cumming Street, Pentonville, where she was very near him. They met often at the houses of Miss Hayes, Mr. Johnson, and other mutual friends. Her interests and tastes were the same as his; and this fact he recognized more fully as time went on. It is probably because his thoughts were so much with her, that the work he accomplished during this year was comparatively small. None of the other women he knew and admired had made him act spontaneously and forget to reason out his conduct as she did. He really had, at one time, thought of making Amelia Alderson his wife; but this, for some unrecorded reason, proving an impossibility, he calmly dismissed the suggestion from his mind and continued the friend he had been before. Had Mrs. Reveley been single he might have allowed himself to love her, as he did later, when he was a widower and she a widow. But so long as her husband was alive, and he knew he had no right to do so, he, with perfect equanimity, regulated his affection to suit the circumstances. But he never reasoned either for or against his love for Mary Wollstonecraft. It sprang from his heart, and it had grown into a strong passion before he had paused to deliberate as to its advisability.

As for Mary, Godwin's friendship, coming just when it did, was an inestimable service. Never in all her life had she needed sympathy as she did then. She was virtually alone. Her friends were kind, but their kindness could not quite take the place of the indivi-

dual love she craved. Imlay had given it to her for a while, and her short-lived happiness with him made her present loneliness seem more unendurable. Her separation from him really dated back to the time when she left Havre. Her affection for him had been destroyed sooner than she thought, because she had struggled bravely to retain it for the sake of her child. The gaiety and many distractions of London life could not drown her heart's wretchedness. It was through Godwin that she became reconciled to England, to life, and to herself. He revived her enthusiasm and renewed her interest in work and in mankind; but above all he gave her that special devotion without which she but half lived. In the restlessness that followed her loss of Imlay's love, she had resolved to make the tour of Italy or Switzerland. Therefore, when she had returned to London, expecting it to be but a temporary resting-place, she had taken furnished lodgings. "Now, however," as Godwin says in his *Memoirs*, "she felt herself reconciled to a longer abode in England, probably without exactly knowing why this change had taken place in her mind." She moved to other rooms in the extremity of Somer's Town, and filled them with the furniture she had used in Store Street in the first days of her prosperity, and which had since been packed away. The unpacking of this furniture was with her what the removal of widows' weeds is with other women. Her first love had perished; but from it rose another, stronger and better; just as the ripening of autumn's fruits follows the withering of spring's blossoms. She mastered the harvest-secret, learning the value of that death which yields higher fruition.

In July, Godwin left London and spent the month in Norfolk. Absence from Mary made him realize more than he had hitherto done that she had become indispensable to his happiness. She was constantly in his thoughts. The more he meditated upon her, the more he appreciated her. There was less pleasure in his excursion than in the meeting with her which followed it. They were both glad to be together again; nor did they hesitate to make their gladness evident. At the end of three weeks they had confessed to each other that they could no longer live apart. Henceforward their lines must be cast in the same places. Godwin's story of their courtship is eloquent in its simplicity. It is almost impossible to believe that it was written by the author of *Political Justice.* He explains:—

> The partiality we conceived for each other was in that mode which I have always regarded as the purest and most refined style of love. It grew with equal advances in the mind of each. It would have been impossible for the most minute observer to have said who was before, and who was after. One sex did not take the priority which long-established custom has awarded it, nor the other overstep that delicacy which is so severely imposed. I am not conscious that either party can assume to have been the agent or the patient, the toil-spreader or the prey, in the affair. When, in the course of things, the disclosure came, there was nothing, in a manner, for either party to disclose to the other. . . . It was friendship melting into love.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIFE WITH GODWIN: MARRIAGE.

1796–1797.

Godwin and Mary did not at once marry. The former, in his *Political Justice,* had frankly confessed to the world that he thought the existing institution of marriage an evil. Mary had by her conduct avowed her agreement with him. But their views in this connection having already been fully stated need not be repeated. In omitting to seek legal sanction to their union both were acting in perfect accord with their standard of morality. Judged according to their motives, neither can be accused of wrong-doing. Pure in their own eyes, they deserve to be so in the world's esteem. Their mistake consisted in their disregard of the fact that, to preserve social order in the community, sacrifices are required from the individual. They forgot—as Godwin, who was opposed to sudden change, should not have forgotten—that laws made for men in general cannot be arbitrarily altered to suit each man in particular.

Godwin, strange to say, was ruled in this matter not only by principle, but by sentiment. For the first time

his emotions were stirred, and he really loved. He was more awed by his passion than a more susceptible man would have been. It seemed to him too sacred to flaunt before the public. "Nothing can be so ridiculous upon the face of it," he says in the story of their love, "or so contrary to the genuine march of sentiment, as to require the overflowing of the soul to wait upon a ceremony, and that which, wherever delicacy and imagination exist, is of all things most sacredly private, to blow a trumpet before it, and to record the moment when it has arrived at its climax." Mary was anxious to conceal, at least for a time, their new relationship. She was not ashamed of it, for never, even when her actions seem most daring, did she swerve from her ideas of right and wrong. But though, as a rule, people had blinded themselves to the truth, some bitter things had been said about her life with Imlay, and some friends had found it their duty to be unkind. All that was unpleasant she had of course heard. One is always sure to hear the evil spoken of one. A second offence against social decrees would assuredly call forth redoubled discussion and increased vituperation. The misery caused by her late experience was still vivid in her memory. She was no less sensitive than she had been then, and she shrank from a second scandal.

The great change in their relations made little difference in their way of living. Their determination to keep it a secret would have been sufficient to prevent any domestic innovations in the establishment of either. But, in addition to this, Godwin had certain theories upon the subject. Because his love was the outcome of strong feeling, and not of calm discussion, his

reliance upon reason, as the regulator of his actions, did not cease. The habits of a life-time could not be so easily broken. If he had not governed love in its growth, he at least ruled its expression. It was necessary to decide upon a course of conduct for the two lives now made one. Since he and Mary were to be really, if not legally, man and wife, the time had come to test the truth of these ideas. The plan he proposed was that they should be as independent of each other as they had hitherto been, that the time spent together should not in any way be restricted or regulated by stated hours, and that, in their amusements and social intercourse, each should continue wholly free.

Mary readily acquiesced, though such a suggestion would probably never have originated with her. Her heart was too large and warm for doubts, where love was concerned. She was the very opposite of Godwin in this respect. She had the poetic rather than the philosophic temperament, and when she loved it was with an intensity that made analysis of her feelings and their possible results out of the question. It is true that in her *Rights of Women* she had shown that passion must inevitably lose its first ardour, and that love between man and wife must in the course of time become either friendship or indifference. But while she had reasoned dispassionately in an abstract treatise, she had not been equally temperate in the direction of her own affairs. Her love for Imlay had not passed into the second stage, but his had deteriorated into indifference very quickly. Godwin was, as she well knew, in every way unlike Imlay. That she felt perfect confidence in him is seen by her willingness to live with him. But still, sure as she was of his innate upright-

ness, when he suggested to her means by which to insure the continuance of his love, she was only too glad to adopt them. She had learned, if not to be prudent herself, at least to comply with the prudence of others.

It would not be well for many people to follow their plan of life, but with them it succeeded admirably. Godwin remained in his lodgings, Mary in hers. He continued his old routine of work, made his usual round of visits, and went by himself, as of yore, to the theatre, and to the dinners and suppers of his friends. Mary pursued uninterruptedly her studies and writings, conducted her domestic concerns in the same way, and sought her amusements singly, sometimes meeting Godwin quite unexpectedly at the play or in private houses. His visits to her were as irregular in point of time as they had previously been, and when one wanted to make sure of the other for a certain hour or at a certain place, a regular engagement had to be made.

Not only did they not inform each other of their movements, but they even considered it unnecessary to speak when they met by chance. The peculiar terms on which they lived had at least one advantage. They were the means of giving to later generations a clear insight into their domestic relations. For, as the two occupied separate lodgings and were apart during the greater part of the day, they often wrote to each other concerning matters which people so united usually settle by word of mouth. Godwin's diary was a record of bare facts. Mary never kept one. There was no one else to describe their every-day life. This is exactly what is accomplished by the notes, which thus, while they are without absolute merit, are of relative importance. They are really little informal conversa-

tions on paper. To read them is like listening to some one talking. They show how ready Mary was to enlist Godwin's sympathy on all occasions, small as well as great, and how equally ready he was to be interested. It is strange to hear these two apostles of reform talking much in the same strain as ordinary mortals, making engagements to dine on beef, groaning over petty ailments and miseries, and greeting each other in true *bon compagnon* style. Mary's notes, like her letters to Imlay, are essentially feminine. Short as they are, they are full of womanly tenderness and weakness. Sometimes she wrote to invite Godwin to dinner, or to notify to him that she intended calling at his apartments, at the same time sending a bulletin of her health and of her plans for the day.

There was now a decided improvement in the lives of both Mary and Godwin. The latter, under the new influence, was humanized. Domestic ties, which he had never known before, softened him. He hereafter appears not only as the passionless philosopher, but as the loving husband and the affectionate father, little Fanny Imlay being treated by him as if she had been his own child. His love transformed him from a mere student of men to a man like all others. He who had always been, so far as his emotional nature was concerned, apart from the rest of his kind, was, in the end, one with them. From being a sceptic on the subject, he was converted into a firm believer in human passion. With the zeal usually attributed to converts, he became as warm in his praise of the emotions as he had before been indifferent in his estimation of them.

Mary was as much metamorphosed by her new circumstances as Godwin. Her heart at rest, she grew

gay and happy. She was at all times, even when harassed with cares, thoughtful of other people. When her own troubles had ceased, her increased kindliness was shown in many little ways, which unfortunately cannot be appreciated by posterity, but which made her, to her contemporaries, a more than ever delightful companion and sympathetic friend.

On March 29th, 1797, after they had lived together happily and serenely for seven months, Mary and Godwin were married. The marriage ceremony was performed at old Saint Pancras Church, in London, and Mr. Marshal, their mutual friend, and the clerk were the only witnesses. So unimportant did it seem to Godwin, to whom reason was more binding than any conventional form, that he never mentioned it in his diary, though in the latter he kept a strict account of his daily actions.

They were induced to take this step, not by any dissatisfaction with the nature of the connection they had already formed, but by the fact that Mary was soon to become a mother for the second time. Godwin explains that "she was unwilling, and perhaps with reason, to incur that exclusion from the society of many valuable and excellent individuals, which custom awards in cases of this sort. I should have felt an extreme repugnance to the having caused her such an inconvenience." But probably another equally strong motive was, that both had at heart the welfare of their unborn child.

At first they told no one of their marriage. Mrs. Shelley gives two reasons for their silence. Godwin was very sensitive to criticism, perhaps even more so than Mary. This was true not only in connection

with his literary work, but with all his relations in life. He knew that severe comments would be called forth by an act in direct contradiction to doctrines he had emphatically preached. His adherents would condemn him as an apostate. His enemies would accept his practical retraction of one of his theories as a proof of the unsoundness of the rest. It required no little courage to submit to such an ordeal. But the other motive for secrecy was more urgent. Mary, after Imlay left her, was penniless. She resumed at once her old tasks. But her expenses were greater than they had been, and her free time less, since she had to provide for and take care of Fanny. Besides, Imlay's departure had caused certain money complications. Mr. Johnson and other kind friends, however, were now, as always, ready to help her out of pressing difficulties, and to assume the debts which she could not meet. Godwin, who had made it a rule of life not to earn more money than was absolutely necessary for his very small wants, and who had never looked forward to maintaining a family, could not at once contribute towards Mary's support, or relieve her financial embarrassments. The announcement of their marriage would be the signal for her friends to cease giving her their aid, and she could not, as yet, settle her affairs alone. This was the difficulty which forced them into temporary silence.

However, to secure the end for which they had married, long concealment was impossible. Godwin applied to Mr. Thomas Wedgwood of Etruria for a loan of £50, without giving him any explanation for his request, though he was sure, on account of his well-known economy and simple habits, it would appear

extraordinary. This sum enabled Mary to tide over her present emergency, and the marriage was made public on the 6th of April, a few days after the ceremony had been performed. One of the first to whom Godwin told the news was Miss Hayes. This was but fair, since it was under her auspices that they renewed their acquaintance to such good purpose.

About ten days later he wrote to Mr. Wedgwood, and his letter confirms Mrs. Shelley's statement. His effort to prove that his conduct was not inconsistent with his creed shows how keenly he felt the criticisms it would evoke; and his demand for more money reveals the slender state of the finances of husband and wife.

Strange to say, the announcement of their marriage did not produce quite so satisfactory an effect as they had anticipated. Mary, notwithstanding her frank protest, was still looked upon as Imlay's wife. Her intimate connection with Godwin had been very generally understood, but not absolutely known, and hence it had not ostracised her socially. If conjectures and comments were made, they were whispered, and not uttered aloud. But the marriage had to be recognized, and the fact that Mary was free to marry Godwin, though Imlay was alive, was an incontrovertible proof that her relation to the latter had been illegal. People who had been deaf to her statements could not ignore this formal demonstration of their truth. Hitherto, their friendliness to her could not be construed into approval of her unconventionality. But now, by continuing to visit her and receive her at their houses, they would be countenancing an offence against morality which the world ranks with the unpardonable sins.

They might temporize with their own consciences, but not with public opinion. They were therefore in a dilemma, from which there was no middle course of extrication. Thus forced to decisive measures, a number of her friends felt obliged to forego all acquaintance with her. Two whom she then lost, and whom she most deeply regretted, were Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Inchbald. In speaking of their secession, Godwin says: "Mrs. Siddons, I am sure, regretted the necessity which she conceived to be imposed on her by the peculiarity of her situation, to conform to the rules I have described."

The majority of her acquaintances, knowing that her intentions were pure, though her actions were opposed to accepted ideals of purity, were brave enough to regulate their behaviour to her by their convictions. Beautiful Mrs. Reveley was as much moved as Mrs. Inchbald when she heard the news of Godwin's marriage, but her friendship was formed in a finer mould. Mrs. Shelley says that "she feared to lose a kind and constant friend; but, becoming intimate with Mary Wollstonecraft, she soon learnt to appreciate her virtues and to love her. She soon found, as she told me in after days, that instead of losing one she had secured two friends, unequalled, perhaps, in the world for genius, single-heartedness, and nobleness of disposition, and a cordial intercourse subsisted between them." It was from Mrs. Reveley that Mrs. Shelley obtained most of her information about her mother's married life. Men like Johnson, Basil Montague, Thomas Wedgwood, Horne Tooke, Thomas Holcroft, did not, of course, allow the marriage to interfere with their friendship. It is rather strange that Fuseli should have now been

willing enough to be civil. Marriage, in his opinion, had restored Mary to respectability. "You have not, perhaps, heard," he wrote to a friend, "that the assertrix of female rights has given her hand to the *balancier* of political justice." He not only called on Mrs. Godwin, but he dined with her; an experiment, however, which did not prove pleasurable, for Horne Tooke, Curran, and Grattan were of the party, and they discussed politics. Fuseli, who loved nothing better than to talk, had never a chance to say a word. "I wonder you invited me to meet such wretched company," he exclaimed to Mary in disgust.

Mary's family were not so cordial. Everina and Mrs. Bishop apparently never quite forgave her for the letter she wrote after her return to England with Imlay, and they disapproved of her marriage. They complained that her strange course of conduct made it doubly difficult for them, as her sisters, to find situations. When, shortly after the marriage, Godwin went to stay a day or two at Etruria, Everina, who was then governess in the Wedgwood household, would not at first come down to see him, and, as far as can be judged from his letters, treated him very coolly throughout his visit.

Godwin and Mary now made their joint home in the Polygon, Somer's Town. But the former had his separate lodgings in the Evesham Buildings, where he went every morning to work, and where he sometimes spent the night. They saw little, if any, more of each other than they had before, and were as independent in their goings-out and comings-in.

While Mary seconded Godwin in his domestic theories, there were times when less independence would

have pleased her better. She had been obliged to fight the battle of life alone, and, when the occasion required it, she was equal to meeting single-handed whatever difficulties might arise. But instinctively she preferred to lean upon others for protection and help. Godwin would never wittingly have been selfish or cruel in withholding his assistance. But, as each had agreed to go his and her own way, it no more occurred to him to interfere with what he thought her duties, than it would have pleased him had she interfered with his. She had consented to his proposition, and in accepting her consent he had not been wise enough to read between the lines. Much as he loved Mary, he never seems to have really understood her. She had now to take entire charge of matters which her friends had hitherto been eager to attend to for her. They could not well come forward, once it had become Godwin's right to do what to them had been a privilege. Mary felt their loss and his indifference, and frankly told him so.

These were mere passing clouds over the bright horizon of their lives, such as it is almost impossible for any two people living together in the same relationship to escape. Both were sensitive, and each had certain qualities peculiarly calculated to irritate the other. Mary was quick-tempered and nervous. Godwin was cool and methodical. With Mary, love was the first consideration; Godwin, who had lived alone for many years, was ruled by habit. Their natures were so dissimilar, that occasional interruptions to their peace were unavoidable. But these never developed into serious warfare. They loved each other too honestly to cherish ill-feeling.

"Ours was not an idle happiness, a paradise of selfish and transitory pleasures," Godwin asserts in referring to the months of their married life. Mary never let her work come to a standstill. Idleness was a failing unknown to her; nor had marriage, as has been seen, lessened the necessity of industry. Indeed, it was now especially important that she should exert her powers of working to the utmost, which is probably the reason that little remains to show as product of this period. Reviewing and translating were still more profitable, because more certain, than original writing; and her notes to Godwin prove by their allusions that Johnson continued to keep her supplied with employment of this kind. She had several larger schemes afoot, for the accomplishment of which nothing was wanting but time. But her chief literary enterprise during the last year of her life was her story of *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman.* Her interest in it as an almost personal narrative, and her desire to make it a really good novel, were so great that she wrote and re-wrote parts of it many times. She devoted more hours to it than would be supposed possible, judging from the rapidity with which her other books were produced.

CHAPTER XIV.

LAST MONTHS: DEATH.

1797.

During the month of June of this year, Godwin made a pleasure trip into Staffordshire with Basil Montague. The two friends went in a carriage, staying over night at the houses of different acquaintances, and were absent for a little more than a fortnight. Godwin, while away, made his usual concise entries in his diary, but to his wife he wrote long and detailed accounts of his travels. The guide-book style of his letters is somewhat redeemed by occasional outbursts of tenderness, pleasant to read as evidences that he could give Mary the demonstrations of affection which to her were so indispensable. By his playful messages to little Fanny, and his interest in his unborn child, it can be seen that, despite his bachelor habits, domestic life had become very dear to him. He warns Mary to be careful of herself, assuring her that he remembers at all times the condition of her health, and wishes he could hear from moment to moment how she feels.

But even his tenderness is regulated by his philo-

sophy. The lover becomes the philosopher quite unconsciously. He writes in another letter:—

> One of the pleasures I promised myself in my excursion was to increase my value in your estimation, and I am not disappointed. What we possess without intermission, we inevitably hold light; it is a refinement in voluptuousness to submit to voluntary privations. Separation is the image of death, but it is death stripped of all that is most tremendous, and his dart purged of its deadly venom. I always thought St. Paul's rule, that we should die daily, an exquisite Epicurean maxim. The practice of it would give to life a double relish.

Imlay, too, had found absence a stimulus to love, but there was this difference in what at first appears to be a similarity of opinion between himself and Godwin; while the former sought it that he might not tire of Mary, the latter hoped it would keep her from growing tired of him.

Mary's letters to her husband are full of the tender love which no woman knew how to express as well as she did. They are not as passionate and burning as those to Imlay, but they are sincerely and lovingly affectionate, and reveal an ever-increasing devotion and a calmer happiness than that she had derived from her first union.

Once during this trip the peaceful intercourse between husband and wife was interrupted. Godwin might philosophize to his heart's content about the advantages of separation, but Mary could not be so sure of them. Absence in Imlay's case had not in the end brought about very good results; and as the days went by, Godwin's letters, at least so it seemed to her, became more descriptive and statistical, and less tender and affectionate. Interest in Dr. Parr and the Wedgwoods and the country through which he was travel-

ling overshadowed for the time being matters of mere sentiment. With the memory of another correspondence from which love had gradually disappeared, still fresh, she felt this change bitterly, and reproached Godwin for it in very plain language.

This misunderstanding, however, was not of long duration. The "little rift" in their case never widened to make their life-music mute. Godwin returned to London, his love in no wise diminished, and all ill-feeling and doubts were completely effaced from Mary's mind. His shortcomings were, after all, not due to any change in his affections, nor to the slightest suspicion of satiety. By writing long letters with careful description of everything he saw and did, he was treating Mary as he would have desired to be treated himself. His "icy philosophy," which made him so undemonstrative, was not altogether to her liking, but it was incomparably better than the warmth of a man like Imlay, who was too indifferent as to the individuality of the object of his demonstrations. The uprightness of Godwin precluded all possibility of infidelity, and once Mary's first disappointment at some new sign of his coldness was over, her confidence in him was unabated. After this short interruption to their semi-domestic life, they both resumed their old habits. Their separate establishments were still kept up, their social amusements continued, though Mary, because of the condition of her health, could not now enter into them quite so freely, and the little notes again began to pass between them. These were as amicable as they had ever been.

But a short period of happiness now remained to them. Mary expected to be confined about the

end of August, and she awaited that event with no misgivings. She had been perfectly strong and well when Fanny was born. She considered women's illness on such occasions due much more to imaginative than to physical causes, and her health through the past few months had been, save for one or two trifling ailments, uncommonly good. There was really no reason for her to fear the consequences. Both she and Godwin looked forward with pleasure to the arrival of their first son, as they hoped the child would prove to be.

She was taken ill early on Wednesday morning, the 30th of August, and sent at once for Mrs. Blenkinsop, matron and midwife to the Westminster Lying-in Hospital. Godwin says that, "influenced by ideas of decorum, which certainly ought to have no place, at least in cases of danger, she determined to have a woman to attend her in the capacity of midwife." But it seems much more in keeping with her character that the engagement of Mrs. Blenkinsop was due, not so much to motives of decorum as to her desire to uphold women in a sphere of action for which she believed them eminently fitted. Godwin went, as usual, to his rooms in the Evesham Buildings. Mary specially desired that he should not remain in the house, and, to reassure him that all was well, she wrote him several notes during the course of the morning.

Finally, in the night of August 30th, 1797, at twenty minutes after eleven, the child—not the William talked of for months, but a daughter, afterwards to be Mrs. Shelley—was born. Godwin was now sitting in the parlour below, waiting the, as he never doubted, happy

end. But shortly after two o'clock he received the alarming news that the patient was in some danger. He went immediately and summoned Dr. Poignard, physician to the Westminster Hospital, who hastened to the assistance of Mrs. Blenkinsop, and by eight o'clock the next morning the peril was thought safely over. Mary having expressed a wish to see Dr. Fordyce, who was her friend as well as a prominent physician, Godwin sent for him, in spite of some objections to his so doing on the part of Dr. Poignard. Dr. Fordyce was very well satisfied with her condition, and later, in the afternoon, mentioned as a proof of the propriety of employing midwives on such occasions, for which practice he was a strong advocate, that Mrs. Godwin "had had a woman, and was doing extremely well." For a day or two Godwin was so anxious that he did not leave the house; but Mary's progress seemed thoroughly satisfactory, and on Sunday he went with a friend to pay some visits, going as far even as Kensington, and did not return until dinner-time. His home-coming was a sad one. Mary had been much worse, and in her increasing illness had worried because of his long absence. He did not leave her again, for from this time until her death on the following Sunday, the physicians could give him but the faintest shadow of a hope.

The week that intervened was long and suffering for the sick woman, and heart-breaking for the watcher. Every possible effort was made to save her; and if medical skill and the devotion of friends could have availed, she must have lived. Dr. Fordyce and Dr. Clarke were in constant attendance. Mr.—afterwards Sir—Anthony Carlisle, who had of his own accord al-

ready called once or twice, was summoned professionally on Wednesday evening, September 6th, and remained by her side until all was over. Godwin never left her room except to snatch a few moments of sleep that he might be better able to attend to her slightest wants. His loving care during these miserable days could not have been surpassed. Mary, had she been the nurse, and he the patient, could not have been more tender and devoted. But his curious want of sentiment, and the eminently practical bent of his mind, manifested themselves even at this sad and solemn time. Once when Mary was given an anodyne to quiet her well-nigh unendurable pain, the relief that followed was so great that she exclaimed to her husband, "Oh, Godwin, I am in heaven!" But, as Mr. Kegan Paul says, "even at that moment Godwin declined to be entrapped into the admission that heaven existed." His immediate reply was, "You mean, my dear, that your physical sensations are somewhat easier."

Mrs. Fenwick and Miss Hayes, two good true friends, nursed her and took charge of the sick-room. Mr. Fenwick, Mr. Basil Montague, Mr. Marshal, and Mr. Dyson established themselves in the lower part of the house that they might be ready and on hand for any emergency. It is in the hour of trouble that friendship receives its strongest test. Mary's friends, when it came, were not found wanting.

"Nothing," Godwin says, "could exceed the equanimity, the patience, and affectionateness of the poor sufferer. I entreated her to recover; I dwelt with trembling fondness on every favourable circumstance; and, as far as it was possible in so dreadful a situation, she, by her smiles and kind speeches, rewarded my

affection." After the first night of her illness she told him that she would have died during its agony had she not been determined not to leave him. Throughout her sickness she was considerate of those around her. Her ruling passion was strong in death. When her attendants recommended her to sleep, she tried to obey, though her disease made this almost impossible. She was gentle even in her complaints. Expostulation and contradiction were peculiarly irritating to her in her then nervous condition; but one night, when a servant heedlessly expostulated with her, all she said was, "Pray, pray do not let her reason with me!" Religion was not once, to use Godwin's expression, a torment to her. Her religious views had modified since the days long past when she had sermonized so earnestly to George Blood. She had never, however, despite Godwin's atheism, lost her belief in God nor her reliance upon Him. But, at no time an adherent to mere form, she was not disturbed in her last moments by a desire to conform to church ceremonies. Religion was at this crisis, as it had always been, a source of comfort and not of worry. She had invariably preferred virtue to vice, and she was not now afraid of reaping the reward of her actions. The probability of her approaching death did not occur to her until the last two days, and then she was so enfeebled that she was not harassed by the thought as she had been at first. On Saturday, the 9th, Godwin, who had been warned by Mr. Carlisle that her hours were numbered, and who wished to ascertain if she had any directions to leave, consulted her about the future of the two children. The physician had particularly charged him not to startle her, for she was too weak to bear any excitement. He therefore spoke

as if he wished to arrange for the time of her illness and convalescence. But she understood his real motive. "I know what you are thinking of," she told him. But she added that she had nothing to communicate upon the subject. Her faith in him and in his wisdom was entire. "He is the kindest, best man in the world," were among the very last words she uttered before she lost consciousness. Her survival from day to day seemed almost miraculous to the physicians who attended her. Mr. Carlisle refused, until the very end, to lose all hope. "Perhaps one in a million of persons in her state might possibly recover," he said. But his hopes were in vain. At six o'clock on Sunday morning, the 10th, he was obliged to summon Godwin, who had retired for a few hours' sleep, to his wife's bedside. At twenty minutes before eight the same morning, Mary died.

A somewhat different version of Mary's last hours and of the immediate cause of her death is given in some manuscript *Notes and Observations on the Shelley Memorials,* written by Mr. H. W. Reveley, son of the Mrs. Reveley who was Godwin's great friend. His account is as follows:—

When Mrs. Godwin was confined of her daughter, the late Mary Shelley, she was very ill; and my mother, then Mrs. Reveley, was constantly visiting her until her death, eight days after her confinement. I was often there with my mother, and I saw Mrs. Godwin the day before her death, when she was considered much better and quite out of danger. Her death was occasioned by a dreadful fright, in this manner. At the time of her confinement a gentleman and lady lodged in the first floor, whether as visitors or otherwise I cannot say, but that they were intruders in some way I am certain. The husband was continually beating his wife, and at last there was a violent contest between them, owing to his endeavouring to throw his wife over the balcony into the street. Her screams, of course, at-

tracted a crowd in front of the house. Mrs. Godwin heard the lady's shrieks and the shouts of the crowd that a man was throwing his wife out of the window, and the next day Mrs. Godwin died. What became of that miscreant and his wife I never knew.

There may have been some foundation for this story. An ill-tempered husband may have had lodgings in the same house; but it is extremely doubtful that his ill-temper had so fatal an effect on Mary. Godwin would certainly have recorded the fact had it been true, for his *Memoir* gives the minutest details of his wife's illness. The very day on which Mr. Reveley says Mary was out of danger was that on which Godwin was asking her for final instructions about her children, so sure were the physicians that her end was near. Mr. Reveley was very young at the time. His observations were not written until he was quite an old man. It would not be unlikely, then, that his memory played him false in this particular.

Mary was thirty-eight years of age, in the full prime of her powers. Her best work probably remained to be done; for her talents, like her beauty, were late in maturing. Her style had already greatly improved since she first began to write. Constant communication with Godwin would no doubt have developed her intellect, and the calm created by her more happy circumstances would have lessened her pessimistic tendencies. Moreover, life, just as she lost it, promised to be brighter than it had ever been before. Godwin's after career shows that he would not have proved unworthy of her love. Domestic pleasures were as dear to her as intellectual pursuits. In her own house, surrounded by husband and children, she would have been not only a great but a happy woman. It is at least a satisfaction

to know that her last year was content and peaceful. Few have needed happiness more than she did, for to few has it been given to suffer the hardships that fell to her share.

The very same day, Godwin himself wrote to announce his wife's death to several of his friends. It was characteristic of the man to be systematic even in his grief, which was sincere. He recorded in his diary the details of each day during Mary's illness, and it was not until the last that he shrank from coldly stating events to him so truly tragic. The only dashes which occur in his diary follow the date of Sunday, Sept. 10, 1797. Mr. Kegan Paul says that writing to his friends "was probably an attempt to be stoical, but a real indulgence in the luxury of woe." To Holcroft, who, he knew, could appreciate his sorrow, he said, "I firmly believe that there does not exist her equal in the world. I know from experience we were formed to make each other happy. I have not the least expectation that I can now ever know happiness again." Mrs. Inchbald was another to whom he at once sent the melancholy news. "I always thought you used her ill, but I forgive you," he told her in his note. Now that Mary was dead he felt the insult that had been shown her even more keenly than at the time. His words roused all Mrs. Inchbald's ill-feeling, and, with a singular want of consideration, she sent with her condolences an elaborate explanation of her own conduct. Two or three more notes passed between them. Godwin's plain-speaking—he told his correspondent very clearly what he thought of her—is excusable. But her arguments in self-justification and her want of respect for the dead are unpardonable.

Mrs. Fenwick was entrusted with the duty of informing the Wollstonecrafts, through Everina, of Mary's death.

Sept. 12, 1797.

I am a stranger to you, Miss Wollstonecraft, and at present greatly enfeebled both in mind and body; but when Mr. Godwin desired that I would inform you of the death of his most beloved and most excellent wife, I was willing to undertake the task, because it is some consolation to render him the slightest service, and because my thoughts perpetually dwell upon her virtues and her loss. Mr. Godwin himself cannot, upon this occasion, write to you.

Mrs. Godwin died on Sunday, September 10, about eight in the morning. I was with her at the time of her delivery, and with very little intermission until the moment of her death. Every skilful effort that medical knowledge of the highest class could make was exerted to save her. It is not possible to describe the unremitting and devoted attentions of her husband. Nor is it easy to give you an adequate idea of the affectionate zeal of many of her friends, who were on the watch night and day to seize on an opportunity of contributing towards her recovery, and to lessen her sufferings.

No woman was ever more happy in marriage than Mrs. Godwin. Who ever endured more anguish than Mr. Godwin endures? Her description of him in the very last moments of her recollection was, "He is the kindest, best man in the world."

I know of no consolations for myself, but in remembering how happy she had lately been, and how much she was admired and almost idolised by some of the most eminent and best of human beings.

The children are both well, the infant in particular. It is the finest baby I ever saw. Wishing you peace and prosperity, I remain your humble servant,

Eliza Fenwick.

Mr. Godwin requests you will make Mrs. Bishop acquainted with the particulars of this afflicting event. He tells me that Mrs. Godwin entertained a sincere and earnest affection for Mrs. Bishop.

The funeral was arranged by Mr. Basil Montague and Mr. Marshal for Friday, the 15th. All Godwin's and Mary's intimate acquaintances were invited to be present. Among these was Mr. Tuthil, whose views were

identical with Godwin's. This invitation gave rise to another short correspondence, unfortunate at such a time. Mr. Tuthil considered it inconsistent with his principles, if not immoral, to take part in any religious ceremonies; and Godwin, while he respected his scruples, disapproved of his coldness, which made such a decision possible. But he was the only one who refused to show this mark of respect to Mary's memory. Godwin himself was too exhausted mentally and physically to appear at the funeral. When Friday morning came he shut himself up in Marshal's rooms and unburdened his heavy heart by writing to Mr. Carlisle. At the same hour Mary was buried at old Saint Pancras, the church where but a few short months before she had been married. A monument was afterwards erected over her willow-shadowed grave. It bore this inscription:—

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN,

AUTHOR OF

A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN,

BORN XVII. APRIL, MDCCLIX.

DIED X. SEPTEMBER, MDCCXCVII.

Many years later, when Godwin's body lay by her side, the quiet old churchyard was ruined by the building of the Metropolitan and Midland Railways. But there were those living who loved their memory too dearly to allow their graves to be so ruthlessly disturbed. The remains of both were removed by Sir Percy Shelley to Bournemouth, where his mother, Mary Godwin Shelley, was already laid. "There," Mr. Kegan Paul writes, "on a sunny bank sloping to the west, among the rose-wreathed crosses of many who

have died in more orthodox beliefs, lie those who at least might each of them have said,—

'Write me as one who loves his fellow-men.'"

Mary's death was followed by exhaustive discussion not only of her work but of her character. The result was, as Dr. Beloe affirms, "not very honourable to her fair fame as a woman, whatever it might be to her reputation as an author."

It was to silence all calumnies that Godwin wrote his Memoirs, and this was undoubtedly the wisest way to answer Mary's critics. As he says of Marguerite in *St. Leon*, "The story of her life is the best record of her virtues. Her defects, if defects she had, drew their pedigree from rectitude of sentiment and perception, from the most generous sensibility, from a heart pervaded and leavened with tenderness." That truth is mighty above all things is shown by this story to have been her creed. By it she regulated her feelings, her thoughts, and her deeds. Whether her principles and conduct be applauded or condemned, she must always be honoured for her integrity of motive, her fearlessness of action, and her faithful devotion to the cause of humanity.

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