

There is a big van at the door of the house in Old Street: great packing-cases have been hoisted in; a few disconsolate chairs and tables are standing on the pavement; the one looking-glass of the establishment comes out sideways and stuffed with straw; the creepers hang for sole curtains to the windows; George's plants are growing already into tangle in the garden; John's study is no longer crammed with reports—the very flavor of his tobacco-smoke in it is gone, and the wind comes blowing freshly through the open window. Cassie and Zoe are away in the country on a visit; the boys are away; Rhoda and Mrs. Morgan are going back to join John in the city. The expense of the double household is more than the family purse can conveniently meet. The gifts the rector has to bestow are not those of gold or of silver.

They have been working hard all the morning, packing, directing, Rhoda showing great cleverness and aptitude, for she was always good at an emergency; and now, tired out, with dusty hands and soiled apron, she is resting on the one chair which remains in the drawing-room, while Mrs. Morgan, down stairs, is giving some last directions. Rhoda is glad to go—to leave the old, tiresome house; and yet, as she told Dolly, it is but the old grind over again, which is to recommence, and she hates it more and more. Vague schemes cross her mind—vague and indirect regrets. Is she sorry for George? Yes, Rhoda is as sorry as it is in her nature to be. She put on a black dress when she heard he was dead; but again and again the thought came to her how different things might have been. If she had only known all, thought Rhoda, naïvely, how differently she would have acted! As they sat in the empty room where they used to make music once, she thought it all over. How dull they had all been! She felt ill and aggrieved. There was Raban, who never came near her now. It was all a mistake from the beginning.....Then she began to think about her future. She had heard of a situation in Yorkshire—Mrs. Boswarick wanted a governess for her children. Should she offer herself? Was it near Ravensrick? she wondered. This was not the moment for such reflections. One of the men came for the chair on which she was sitting. Rhoda then went into the garden and looked about for the last time, walking once more round the old gravel-walk. George's strawberry plants had spread all over the bed; the verbena was green and sprouting; the vine wall was draped with falling sprays and tendrils. She pulled a great bunch down and came away, tearing the leaves one by one from the stem. Yes, she would write to Mrs. Boswarick, she thought.

Old Betty was standing at the garden

door. "T' missus was putten her bonnet an," she said; "t' cab was at door; and t' poastman wanted to knaw whar to send t' letters: he had brought one;" and Betty held out a thick envelope addressed to Miss Parnell.

It was a long letter, and written in a stiff, round hand on very thick paper. Rhoda understood not one word of it at first, then she looked again more closely.

As she stood there reading it, absorbed, with flushed cheeks, with a beating heart, Mrs. Morgan called her hastily. "Come, child," she said, "we shall have to give the cabman another sixpence for waiting!" But Rhoda read on, and Mrs. Morgan came up, vexed and impatient, and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Don't," said Rhoda, impatiently, reading still; and she moved away a step.

"Are you going to keep me all day, Rhoda?" said Mrs. Morgan, indignant and surprised.

"Aunt Morgan," said Rhoda, looking up at last, "something has happened." Her eyes were glittering, her lips were set tight, her cheeks were burning bright. "It is all mine, they say."

"What do you mean?" said the old lady. "Were the keys in the box, Betty?"

Rhoda laid her hand upon her aunt's arm.

"George Vanborough has left me all his money!" she said, in a low voice.

For a moment her aunt looked at her in amazement.

"But you mustn't take it, my dear!" said Mrs. Morgan, quite breathless.

"Poor George! it was his last wish," said Rhoda, gazing fixedly before her.

Mr. Tapeall was a very stupid old man, weaving his red tape into ungracious loops and meshes, acting with due deliberation. If an address was to be found in the red-book, he would send a clerk to certify it before dispatching a letter by post. When Dolly some time before had sent him George's will, he put it carefully away in his strong-box; now when she wrote him a note begging him to do at once what was necessary, he deliberated greatly, and determined to write letters to the whole family on the subject.

Mrs. Palmer replied by return of post. She was not a little indignant when the old lawyer had announced to her that he could not answer for the turn which circumstances might take, nor for the result of an appeal to the law. He was bound to observe that George's will was perfectly valid. It consisted of a simple gift, in formal language, of all his property, real and personal, to Rhoda. By the late "Wills Act" of 1837 this gift would pass all the property as it stood at his death; or, as Mr. Tapeall clear-

ly expressed it, "would speak as from his death as to the property comprised therein." Mr. Tapeall recommended that his clients should do nothing for the present. The onus of proof lay with the opposite side. Mr. Raban had promised to ascertain all particulars, as far as might be; on his return from the Crimea they would be in a better position to judge.

Mrs. Palmer wrote back furious. Mr. Tapeall had reasons of his own. He knew perfectly well that it was a robbery, that every one would agree in this. It was a plot, she would not say by whom concocted. She was so immoderate in her abuse that Mr. Tapeall was seriously offended. Mrs. Palmer must do him the justice to withdraw her most uncalculated assertions. Miss Vanborough herself had requested him to prove her brother's will and carry out his intentions as trustee to her property. He considered it his duty to acquaint Miss Parnell with the present state of affairs.

Mr. Tapeall happened to catch cold and to be confined to his room for some days. He had a younger partner, Mr. Parch, a man of a more energetic and fiery temperament; and when, in Mr. Tapeall's absence, a letter arrived signed Philippa Palmer, presenting her compliments, desiring them *at once* to destroy that will of her son's, to which, for their own purposes, no doubt, they were pretending to attach importance, Mr. Parch, irritated and indignant, sat down then and there, and wrote off to Mrs. Palmer and to Miss Rhoda Parnell by that same post.

The letter to Mrs. Palmer was short and to the purpose. She was at liberty to consult any other member of the profession in whom she placed more confidence. To Miss Parnell Mr. Parch related the contents of his late client's will.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### AN EXPLANATION.

LADY SARAH had left much more than any body expected. She had invested her savings in houses. Some had sold lately at very high prices. A builder had offered a large sum for Church House itself and the garden. It was as Mr. Tapeall said—the chief difficulty lay in the proof of George's death. Alas for human nature! after an enterprising visit from Rhoda to Gray's Inn (she had been there before with Mrs. Palmer), after a not very long interview, in which Rhoda opened her heart and her beautiful eyes, and in the usual formula expressed her helpless confidence in Mr. Tapeall's manly protection, the old lawyer was suddenly far more convinced than he had been before of the justice of Miss Parnell's claims. Her friend and benefactor had died on the 21st.

He was lady Sarah's heir; he had *wished* her to have this last token of his love; but she would give every thing up, she said, rather than go to law with those whom she must ever revere, as belonging to him.

Mr. Tapeall was very much touched by her generosity.

"Really, you young ladies are outvying each other," said he. "When you know a little more of the world and money's use—"

Rhoda started to go.

"I must not stay now, but then I shall trust to you *entirely*, Mr. Tapeall," she said. "You will always tell me what to do? Promise me that you will?"

"Perhaps, under the circumstances," said Mr. Tapeall, hesitating, "it might be better if you were to take some other opinion."

"No, no," said the girl, "there is no division between us. All I wish is to do what is *right*, and to carry out dear George's wishes."

It is not the place here to enter into details which Mr. Tapeall alone could properly explain. It was after an interview with him that Dolly wrote to Rhoda:

"Mr. Tapeall tells me of your generous offer, dear Rhoda, and that you are ready to give every thing up sooner than go to law. Do not think that I am not glad that you should have what would have been yours if you had married my brother. I must always wish what he wished, and I write this to tell you that you must not think of me: my best happiness now is doing what he would have liked."

To Dolly it seemed, in her present morbid and overwrought state, as if this was a sort of expiation for her hardness to Rhoda, whom George had loved, and indeed money seemed to her at that time but a very small thing, and the thought of Church House so sad that she could never wish to go back to it. And Robert's letters seemed to grow colder and colder, and every thing was sad together.

Frank came to see her one day before she left London; he had been and come back, and was going again with fresh supplies to the East; he brought her a handful of dried grass from the slope where George had fallen. Corporal Smith had shown him the place where he had found the poor young fellow lying. Frank had also seen Colonel Fane, who had made all inquiries at the time. The date of the boy's death seemed established without doubt.

When Frank said something of business, and of disputing the will, Dolly said,

"Please, please let it be. There seems to be only one pain left for me now, that of not doing as he wished." People blamed Raban very much afterward for having so easily agreed to give up Miss Vanborough's rights.

The storm of indignation, consternation, is over. The shower of lawyers' letters is dribbling and dropping more slowly. Mrs. Palmer had done all in her power, sat up all night, retired for several days to bed, risen by daybreak, gone on her knees to Sir Thom-

as, apostrophized Julie, written letter after letter, and finally come up to town, leaving Dolly at Henley Court. Dolly was in disgrace, direst disgrace. It was all her fault, her strange and perverted obstinacy, that led her to prefer others to her own mother. The Admiral, too, how glad he would have been of a home in London. How explain her own child's conduct. Dear George had never for one instant intended to leave any thing but his own fortune to Rhoda. How could Dolly deny this? How could she? Poor Dolly never attempted to deny it. Sir Thomas had tried in vain to explain to his sister that Dolly had nothing whatever to do with the present state of the law. It was true that she steadily refused to put the whole thing into Chancery, as many people suggested; but Rhoda, too, refused to plead, and steadily kept to her resolution of proposing every thing first.

"Painful, indeed, very painful," said Mr. Stock, "but absolutely necessary under the circumstances; otherwise I should say" (with a glance at poor pale Dolly), "let it go, let it go, worm and moth, dross, dross, dross."

"Mr. Stock, you are talking nonsense," said Mrs. Palmer, quite testily.

Then Mrs. Palmer came to London with Sir Thomas, and all day long the faded fly—it has already appeared in these pages—traveled from Gray's Inn to Lincoln's Inn, to the Temple, and back to Mr. Tapeall's again. Mrs. Palmer left a card at the Lord Chancellor's private residence, then picked up her brother at his club, went off to the City to meet Rhoda face to face and to insist upon her giving up her ill-gotten wealth. She might have spared herself the journey. Rhoda had left the rectory. John Morgan received Mrs. Palmer and her companion with a very grave face. Cassie and Zoe left the room. Mrs. Morgan came down in an old cap looking quite crushed and subdued. The poor old lady began to cry.

John was greatly troubled. He said, "I don't know how to speak of this wretched business. What can you think of us, Mrs. Palmer?"

"You had better not ask me, Mr. Morgan," said Mrs. Palmer; "I have come to speak to your niece."

"I am sorry to say that Rhoda has left our house," John said. "She no longer cares for our opinion. She has sent for one of her own father's relations."

"Perhaps you can tell me where to find her?" said Mrs. Palmer, in her most sarcastic tone. She thought Rhoda was up stairs, and ashamed to come down.

"Oh, Mrs. Palmer, she is at Church House," burst in Mrs. Morgan. "We entreated her not to go. John forbade her. Mr. Tapeall gave her leave. If only Frank Raban were back!"

Mrs. Palmer gave a little shriek. "At

Church House already. It is disgraceful, utterly disgraceful, *that* is what I think. Dolly and all of you are behaving in the most scandalous—"

"Poor Dolly has done no harm," said Morgan, turning very red. "She has not unjustly and ungratefully grasped at a quibble, taken what does not belong to her, paid back all your kindness with ingratitude...."

Good-natured Sir Thomas was touched by the curate's earnestness. He held out his hand.

"You, of course, Morgan, have nothing to do with the circumstances," said he. "Something must be done, some arrangement must be made. Any thing is better than going to law."

"If Mrs. Palmer would only see her," said Mrs. Morgan, earnestly. "I know Rhoda would think it most kind."

"I refuse to see Miss Parnell," said Mrs. Palmer, with dignity. "As for Tapeall, Thomas, let us go to him."

"They certainly do not seem to have profited by Rhoda's increase of fortune, living on in that horrible dingy place," Sir Thomas said, as the fly rolled away toward Gray's Inn once more. On the road Mrs. Palmer suddenly changed her mind, and desired the coachman to drive to Kensington.

"Do you really propose to go there?" said Sir Thomas, rather doubtfully.

"You are like the Admiral, Thomas, for making difficulties," said Mrs. Palmer, excitedly, and calling to the coachman to go quicker.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the door of Church House. A strange servant opens to them; a strange stream of light comes from the hall where a bright chandelier had been suspended. The whole place seemed different already. A broad crimson carpet had been put down; some flowers had been brought in and set out on great china jars. Mrs. Palmer was rather taken aback as she asked, with her head far out of the carriage window, whether Miss Parnell was at home.

The drawing-room door opens a little bit, Rhoda listens, hesitates whether or not to go out; but Mrs. Palmer is coming in, and Rhoda retreats, only to give herself room to advance once more as the two visitors are ushered in. The girl comes flying from the other end of the room, bursts out crying, and clings kneeling to Philippa's dress.

"At last!" she says. "Oh, Mrs. Palmer, I did not dare to hope, but oh, how good of you to come!"

"Good, indeed! No, do not thank me," said Mrs. Palmer, drawing herself up. "Have you the face, Rhoda, to meet me—to wish to see me after all the harm you have done to me and to my poor child? I wonder you dare stay in the same room with me!"

Rhoda did not remark that it was Mrs.

Palmer herself who had come to her. Her eyes filled with big tears.

"What have I done?" she said, appealing to Sir Thomas. "It is all theirs, and they know it. It will *always* be theirs. Oh, Mrs. Palmer, if you would only take it all, and let me be your—your little companion, as before!" cried the girl, with a sob, fixing those wonderful constraining eyes of hers upon Philippa. "Will you send me away—I, who owe every thing to you?" she said; and she clasped her hands and almost knelt. The baronet instinctively stepped forward to raise her.

"Do not kneel, Rhoda. This is all pretense," cried Mrs. Palmer. "Sir Thomas is easily deceived. If the Admiral were here, he would see through your—your ungrateful duplicity."

Rhoda only persisted. How her eyes spoke! how her hands and voice entreated!

"You would believe me," she said, "indeed you would, if you could see my heart. My only thought is to do as you wish, and to show you that I am not ungrateful."

"Then you will give it all back," said Mrs. Palmer, coming to the point instantly, and seizing Rhoda's hand tight in hers.

"Of course I will," said Rhoda, still looking into Mrs. Palmer's eager face. "I have done so already. It is all yours; it always will be yours, as before. Dear Mrs. Palmer, this is your house. Your room is ready. I have put some flowers there. It is, oh, so sad here all alone! The walls seem to call for you! If you send me away, I don't know what will happen to me!" And she began to cry. "My own have sent me away. There is no one left but you, and the memory of his love for me."

I don't know how or where Rhoda had studied human nature, nor how she had learned the art of suiting herself to others. Mrs. Palmer came in meaning to speak her mind plainly, to overwhelm the girl with reproach: before she had been in the room two minutes she had begun to soften. There was the entreating Rhoda, no longer shabby little Rhoda from the curate's house, but an elegant lady in a beautiful simple dress, falling in silken folds; her cloud of dark hair was fashionably frizzed; her manner had changed—it was appealing and yet dignified, as befitted an heiress. All this was not without its effect upon Philippa's experienced eye.

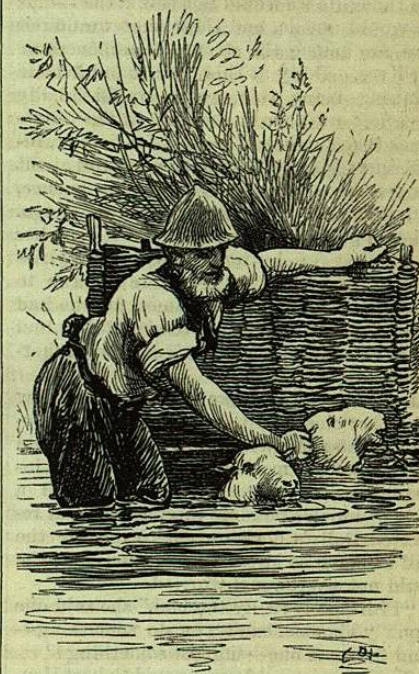
Rhoda had determined from the first to win Mrs. Palmer over, to show the world that hers was no stolen wealth, no false position. She felt as if it would make every thing comfortable, both to her own conscience, which was not overeasy, and to those from whom she was taking her wealth, if only a reconciliation could be brought about. What need was there for a quarrel—for going to law—if only all could be reconciled? She would do any thing they wished—serve

them in a hundred ways. Uncle John, who had spoken so unkindly, would see then who was right. Aunt Morgan, too, who had refused to come with her, would discover her mistake. There was a certain triumph in the thought of gaining over those who had most right to be estranged; so thought Rhoda, unconsciously speculating upon Dolly's generosity, upon Mrs. Palmer's suddenness of character.

"This is all *most* painful to me," Philippa cried, more and more flurried. "Rhoda, you can not expect—"

"I expect nothing—nothing; only I ask *every thing!*" said Rhoda, passionately, to Sir Thomas. "Oh, Mrs. Palmer, you can send me away from you, if you will, or you can let me be your daughter! I would give up every thing: I would follow you any where—any where—every where!"

Mrs. Palmer sank, still agitated, into the nearest arm-chair. It was a new one of Gillo's, with shining new cushions and casters. Rhoda came and knelt beside it, with her lustrous eyes still fixed upon Mrs. Palmer's face. Sir Thomas cleared his throat: he was quite affected by the little scene. Mrs. Palmer actually kissed Rhoda at parting.



## CHAPTER XLIX.

## SHEEP-SHEARING.

LADY HENLEY had always piqued herself upon a certain superiority to emotion of every kind—youth, love, sorrow, had seem-

ed to her ridiculous things for many years. This winter, however, had changed the little wooden woman and brought her grief and anxiety, and revealed secrets to her that she had never guessed before. Often the very commonest facts of life are not facts, only sounds, until they have been lived. One can't listen to happiness, or love, or sorrow—one must have been some things in order to understand others. Lady Henley married somewhat late in life—soberly, without romance. Until then her horse, her dog, her partner at the last ball, had been objects of about equal interest. She had always scouted all expressions of feeling. She had but little experience; and coldness of heart comes more often from ignorance than from want of kindness or will to sympathize.

Sometimes the fire of adversity warms a cold heart, and then the story is not all sorrowful. The saddest story is that of some ice-bound souls, whom the very fires of adversity can not reach. Poor Dolly sometimes felt the chill when Philippa, unconscious of the stab, would say something, do some little thing, that brought a flush of pain into poor Dolly's cheek.

The girl would not own it to herself, but there is a whole life reluctant as well as a life consenting. The involuntary words, the thoughts we would not think, the things we would not do, and those that we do not love, are among the strongest influences of our lives. Dolly at this time found herself thinking many things she would gladly have left unthought, hoping things sometimes that she hated herself for hoping, indifferent to others that all those round about her seemed to imagine of most consequence, and that she tried in vain to care for too. When Philippa began to recover from her first burst of hysteric grief, her spirits seemed to revive. They were enough to overwhelm poor Dolly at times, for she had inherited her mother's impressionability, and at the same time her father's somewhat morbid fidelity.

Lady Henley's dislike to her sister-in-law made her clear-sighted as to what was going on, and she tried in many ways to shield Dolly from her mother's displeasure and incessant worry of recrimination. With a view to Jonah's possible interest, she had regretted Dolly's decision not to dispute the will as much as Mrs. Palmer herself, but she could not see the girl worried.

"Philippa is really too bad," she said one day. "Thomas, can't you do something—send for some one—suggest something?"

Sir Thomas meekly suggested Robert Henley.

"The very last person I should wish to see!" cried Lady Henley, sharply. "Bell, did you ever know your father understand any thing one said to him?"

Lady Henley's concern was relieved with-

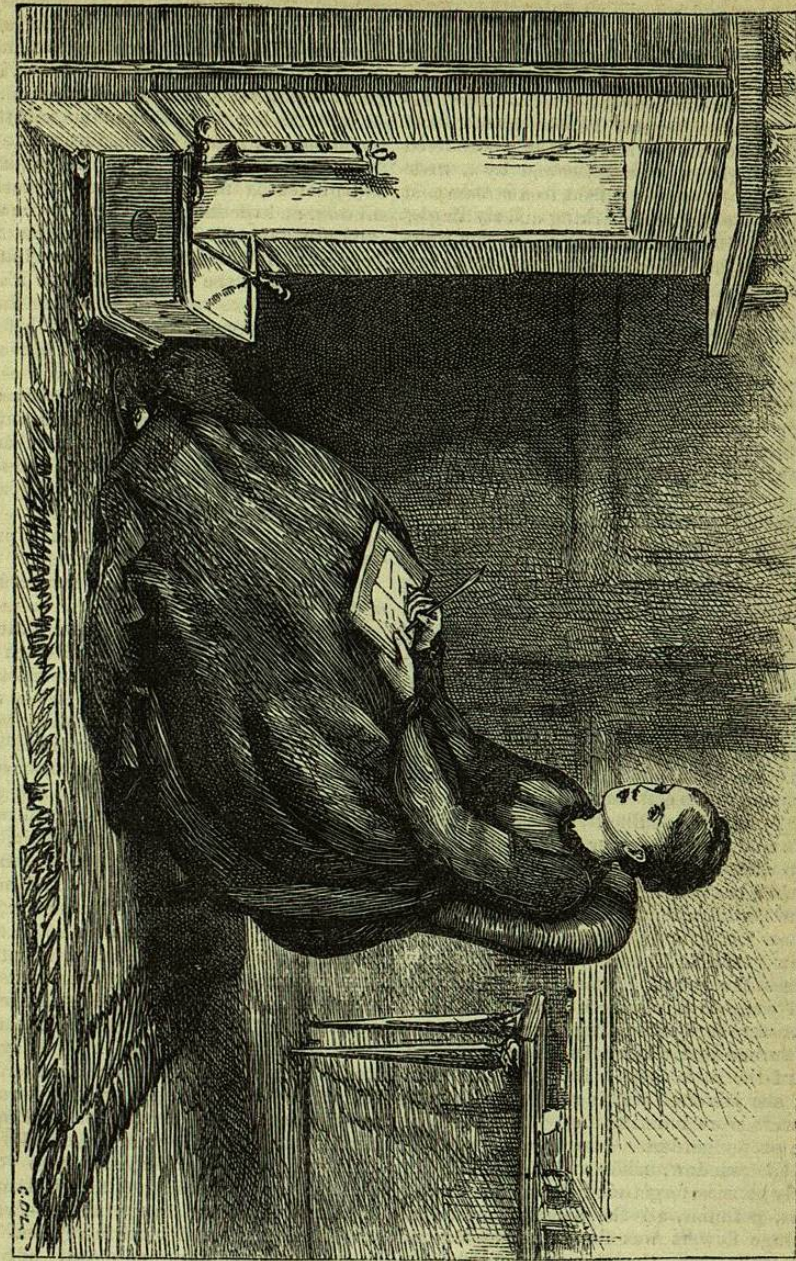
out Sir Thomas's assistance. Before the end of the winter Mrs. Palmer had left Henley Court and firmly established herself at Paris. Dolly remained behind. It was Philippa's arrangement, and Dolly had been glad to agree to her cousins' eager proposal that she should stay on at Henley for a time. Nobody quite knew how it had happened, except, indeed, that Philippa had intended it all along; and she now wrote in raptures with the climate, so different from what they had been enduring in Yorkshire. But Joanna did not care for climate—her Palmer constitution was not susceptible to the influence of atmosphere.

All through that sad winter Dolly staid on in Yorkshire. Their kindness was unwearied. Then, when the snow began to melt at last, the heavy clouds of winter to lighten, when the spring began to dawn, and the summer sun and the sweet tones of natural things to thrill and stir the world to life, Dolly, too, began to breathe again; she could not enjoy all this beauty, but it comforted her, nevertheless.

The silence of the country was very tranquillizing and quieting. She had come like a tired child, sad and overwearied. Mother Nature was hushing her off to sleep at last. She spent long mornings in the meadows down by the river; sometimes her cousins took her for walks across the moors, but to Dolly her cousins seemed more like birds than human beings, and she had not strength for their ten-mile flights.

"You know what our life is," she wrote to her cousin, "and I need not describe it. I try to help my uncle a little of a morning. I go out driving with my aunt, or into the village of an afternoon with Norah; the wind comes cutting through the trees by the lodge-gate—all the roads are heavy with snow. Every thing seems very cold and sad—every thing except their kindness, which I shall never forget. Yesterday Aunt Joanna kissed me, and looked at me so kindly that I found myself crying suddenly. Dear Robert, she showed me the letter you wrote her. I can not help saying one word about that one word in it in which you speak of your doubting that I wish for your return. Why do you say such things or think such unjust thoughts of me? Your return is the one bright spot in my life just now. Did I not tell you so when you went away? If I have ever failed, ever loved you less than you wished, scold me, dear Robert, as I am scolding you now, and I will love you the more for it. You and I can understand, but it is hard to explain, even to my aunt, how things stand between us. I trust you utterly, and I am quite content to leave my fate to you."

She sat writing by the fire, on her knee, as she warmed herself by the embers. She paused once or twice and looked into the flame with her sweet, dreamy eyes. Where



"DOES HE CALL HER HIS RACHEL?"

do people travel to as they sit quietly dreaming and warming their toes at the fire? What long, aimless journeys into other countries, into other hearts! What strange starts and returns! Dolly finds herself by the little well in Kensington Gardens, and some one is there, who says things in a strange voice that thrills as Robert's never did. Does he call her his Rachel? Is love a chord? It had seemed to her one single

note until Frank Raban had spoken. Is this Robert who is saying that she is the one only woman in all the world for him? Dolly blushes a burning blush of shame all alone as she sits in the twilight when she discovers of what she had been thinking.

"What are you burning, Dolly?" said her aunt, coming in.

It was her letter that Dolly had thrown into the fire. It had seemed to her false,