

a more profitable employment to keep the one than the other."

"I suppose you think," said Mr. Blackstone, "that the lady who keeps a diary is in the same danger as the old woman who prided herself in keeping a strict account of her personal expenses. And it always was correct, for when she could not get it to balance at the end of the week, she brought it right by putting down the deficit as *charity*."

"That's just what I mean," I said.

"But," resumed Mr. S., "I did not mean a diary of your feelings, but of the events of the day and hour."

"Which are never in themselves worth putting down," I said. "All that is worth remembering will find for itself some convenient cranny to go to sleep in till it is wanted, without being made a poor mummy of in a diary."

"If you have such a memory, I grant that is better—even for my purpose—much better," said Mr. S.

"For your purpose!" I repeated in surprise. "I beg your pardon, but what designs can you have upon my memory?"

"Well, I suppose I had better be as straightforward as I know you would like me to be, Mrs. Percivale. I want you to make up the sum your father owes me. He owed me three books; he has paid me two. I want the third from you."

I laughed, for the very notion of writing a book seemed preposterous.

"I want you, under feigned names of course," he went on, "as are all the names in your father's two books, to give me the further history of the family, and in particular your own experiences in London. I am confident the history of your married life must contain a number of incidents which, without the least danger of indiscretion, might be communicated to the public to the great advantage of all who read them."

"You forget," I said, hardly believing him to be in earnest, "that I should be exposing my story to you and Mr. Blackstone at least. If I were to make the absurd attempt—I mean absurd as regards my ability—I should be always thinking of you two as my public, and whether it would be right for me to say this and say that; which you may see at once would render it impossible for me to write at all."

"I think I can suggest a way out of that difficulty, Wynnies," said my father. "You must write freely all you feel inclined to write, and then let your husband see it. You may be content to let all pass that he passes."

"You don't say you really mean it, papa! The thing is perfectly impossible. I never wrote a book in my life, and—"

"No more did I, my dear, before I began my first."

"But you grew up to it by degrees, papa."

"I have no doubt that will make it the easier for you when you try. I am so far, at least, a Darwinian as to believe that."

"But, really, Mr. S. ought to have more sense—I beg your pardon, Mr. S., but it is perfectly absurd to suppose me capable of finishing anything my father has begun. I assure I don't feel flattered by your proposal. I have got a man of more consequence for a father than that would imply."

All this time my tall husband sat silent at the foot of the table, as if he had nothing to do with the affair, instead of coming to my assistance, when, as I thought, I really needed it, especially seeing my own father was of the combination against me. For what can be more miserable than to be taken for wiser or better or cleverer than, you know perfectly well, you are? I looked down the table, straight and sharp at him, thinking to rouse him by the most powerful of silent appeals; and when he opened his mouth very solemnly, staring at me in return down all the length of the table, I thought I had succeeded. I was not a little surprised when I heard him say—

"I think, Wynnies, as your father and Mr. S. appear to wish it, you might at least try."

This almost overcame me, and I was very near—never mind what. I bit my lips and tried to smile, but felt as if all my friends had forsaken me, and were about to turn me out to beg my bread. How on earth could I write a book without making a fool of myself?

"You know, Mrs. Percivale," said Mr. S., "you needn't be afraid about the composition, and the spelling, and all that. We can easily set those to rights at the office."

He couldn't have done anything better to send the lump out of my throat, for this made me angry.

"I am not in the least anxious about the spelling," I answered; "and for the rest, pray what is to become of me, if what you print should happen to be praised by somebody who likes my husband or my father, and therefore wants to say a good word for me? That's what a good deal of reviewing comes to, I understand. Am I to receive in silence what doesn't belong to me, or am I to send a letter to the papers to say that the whole thing was patched and polished at the printing office, and that I have no right to more than perhaps a fourth part of the commendation? How would that do?"

"But you forget it is not to have your name to it," he said; "and so it won't matter a bit. There will be nothing dishonest about it."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)