

A prize of five guineas offered by a London weekly journal to the author of the best parody on Shakespeare's "Seven Ages of Man" has been won by a gentleman of Ottawa. The following is the production:

THE SEVEN AGES OF SHAM (VEMININE).
All the world's a sham,
And all the women in it merely shammers;
Their shams commence with earliest infancy,
And each one in her time plays many parts,
Her shams being seven stages. At first the Infant,
Smiling serene in lace-draped bassinet,
Deludes mamma with promises of beauty,
Which turn out all a sham. Then, the Schoolgirl,
With boyish tricks, and ignorance o'erlaid
By thin veneering of accomplishments. Then
the Debutante,
With most precocious knowledge of the world,
And cunning wiles to capture wealthy spouse.
Then the Beauty, talk of all the town;
Her photograph in every shop displayed,
Each fool of fashion dangling in her train—
Her husband quite ignored. Then the Charperone,
Leading her charge to every ball and rout,
With patience worthy of a better cause,
All "nods and wretched smiles" for older sons,
With frowns for detrimentials. The sixth sham
shows
The lean and scandal-loving Spinster,
Her pamper'd poodle wading by her side;
With shrugs and inaudible faintly veiled,
Blasting a reputation at each breath;
And so she plays her part. Last stain of all,
Which ends the sad, dissembling history,
Is an old age devoid of reverence—
Sham teeth, sham hair, sham bloom, sham every-
thing.

THE MAGIC SPECTACLES.

A Christmas Story.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

(Conclusion.)
CHAPTER II.
MEMOIRS OF MYSELF.

Who were the two ladies?
They were both young and unmarried. As
a matter of delicacy, I ask permission to men-
tion them by their Christian names only.
Zilla, aged seventeen. Cecilia, aged two and
twenty.

And what was my position between them?
I was of the same age as Cecilia. She was
my mother's companion and reader; hand-
some, well born and poor. I had made her a
proposal, and had been accepted. There was
no money difficulties in the way of our mar-
riage, in spite of my sweetheart's empty
purse. I was only child, and I had inherited,
excepting my mother's jointure, the whole of
the large property that my father left at his
death. In social rank Cecilia was more
than my equal; we were therefore not ill-
matched from the worldly point of view.
Nevertheless, there was an obstacle to our
union, and a person interested in making the
most of it. The obstacle was Zilla. The
person interested was my mother. Zilla
was her niece—her elder brother's daughter.
The girl's parents had died in India, and she
had been sent to school in England, under
the care of her uncle and guardian. I had
never seen her, and had hardly even heard
of her until there was a question of her
spending the Christmas holidays (in the year
when Septimus Notman died) at our house.

"Her uncle has no objection," my mother
said, "and I shall be more than glad to see
her. A most interesting creature, as I hear.
So lovely and so good that they call her The
Angel at school. I say nothing about her
nice little fortune or the high military rank
that her poor father possessed. You don't
care for these things. But, oh, Alfred, it
would make me so happy if you fell in love
with Zilla and married her!"

Three days before, I had made my proposal
to Cecilia, and had been accepted—subject
to my mother's approval. I thought this a good
opportunity of stating my case plainly; and I
spoke out. Never before had I seen my
mother so enraged and so disappointed—
argued with Cecilia; disappointed in me.
A woman without a farthing of dowry; a
woman who was as old as I was; a woman
who had taken advantage of her position
to mislead and delude me!—and
on, and so on. Cecilia would certainly
have been sent away if I had not declared
that I should feel it my duty, in that event,
to marry her immediately. My mother
saw my temper, and refrained from
giving Cecilia any cause of offence. Cecilia,
being, it was also understood that Zilla
was bitterly disappointed at having her
visit to us put off. "She was so
anxious to see you, poor child," my mother
said to me; "but I really don't see how
she can be under present circumstances. She is so
dear, so innocent, so infinitely superior in
personal attractions to Cecilia, that I don't
know what might happen if you saw her
now. You are the soul of honor, Alfred;
at you and Zilla had better remain stran-
gers to each other—you might repent your
engagement." After this, it is needless
to say that I was dying to see Zilla; while,
at her side, showed what is called a proper
pride; she declined to become my wife until
my mother approved of her. She considered
herself to be a martyr; and I considered
myself to be an abominably ill-treated man.
Between us, I am afraid, we made my good
mother's life unendurable—she was obliged
to be the first who gave way. It was under-
stood that we were to be married in the
same time, I never for an instant swerved
in my fidelity to Cecilia.

Such was my position on the memorable
evening when Septimus Notman died, leaving me
possessor of the Magic Spectacles.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEST OF THE SPECTACLES.

The first person whom I encountered on
returning to the house was the butler. He
was in the hall, with a receipted account
in his hand which I had sent him to pay.
The amount was close on a hundred pounds,
I had paid it immediately. "Is there no
more?" I asked, looking at the receipt.
The parties expect cash, sir, and charge
ordinarily."
I looked so respectable when he made
answer, he had served us for so many
years, that I felt an irresistible temptation to
the Magic Spectacles on the butler, before
returning to look through them at the ladies
in my family. Our honest old servant would
not an excellent test.
"I am afraid my sight is falling me," I
said.

With this exceedingly simple explanation I
went to the spectacles and looked at the
hall whirled round with me; on my
part of honor I tremble and turn cold while
I look at it now. Septimus Notman had
been on the truth!
An instant the butler's heart became
visibly—a fat organ seen through
medium of the infernal glasses. The
light in him was plainly legible to me in
his words: "Does my master think I'm

going to give him the five per cent. off the
bill? Beasts meanness, interfering with the
butler's perquisites."
I took off my spectacles and put them in
my pocket.

"You are a thief," I said to the butler.
"You have got the discount money on this
bill—five pounds all but a shilling or two—in
your pocket. Send in your accounts; you
leave my service."
"To-morrow, sir, if you like!" answered
the butler, indignantly. "After serving your
family for five-and-twenty years, to be called
a thief for only taking my perquisites is an
insult, Mr. Alfred, that I have not deserved."
He put his handkerchief to his eyes and I left
me.

It was true that he had served us for a
quarter of a century; it was also true that
he had taken his perquisites and told a fib
about it. But he had his compensating
virtues. When I was a child he had given
me many a ride on his knee and many a
stolen drink of wine and water. His collar-
book had always been honestly kept; and
his wife herself admitted that he was a model
husband. At other times I should have re-
membered this, I should have felt that I had
been hearty, and have asked his pardon. At
this time I failed to feel the slightest com-
passion for him, and never faltered for a
moment in my resolution to send him away.
What change had passed over me?

The library door opened, and an old school-
fellow and college friend of mine looked out.
"I thought I heard your voice in the hall,"
he said; "I have been waiting an hour for
you."

"Anything very important," I asked,
leading the way back to the library.

"Nothing of the least importance to you,"
he replied, modestly.

I wanted no further explanation. More than
once already I had lent him money, and,
sooner or later, he had always repaid me.
"Another little loan?" I inquired, smiling
pleasantly.

"I am really ashamed to ask you again,
Alfred. But if you could lend me fifty
pounds—just look at that letter."

What mean impulse led me to repeat the
excuse about my falling sight, and to read
his heart on pretence of reading his letter?
He made some joke, suggested by the
quaint appearance of the Spectacles. I was
too closely occupied to appreciate his sense
of humor. What had he just said to me?
He had said, "I am ashamed to ask you
again." And what had he thought while he
was speaking? He had thought, "When one
has a milch cow at one's disposal, who but
a fool would fail to take advantage of it?"

I handed him back the letter (from a
lawyer, threatening "proceedings") and I
said, in my hardest tones, "It's not con-
venient to oblige you this time."

He stared at me like a man thunderstruck.
"Is this a joke, Alfred?" he asked.
"Do I look as if I was joking?"

He took up his hat. "There is but one
excuse for you," he said. "Your social posi-
tion is too much for your weak brain—your
money has got into your head. Good morn-
ing."

I had been indebted to him for all sorts
of kind services at school and college. He
was an honorable man and a faithful friend.
If the galling sense of his own narrow means
made him unjustly contemptuous towards
rich people, it was a fault (in my case, an
exasperating fault), no doubt. But who is
perfect? And what are fifty pounds to me?
This is what I should once have felt, before
he could have found time enough to get to the
door. As things were, I let him go, and
thought myself well rid of a mean hanger-on
who only valued me for my money.

Being now free to visit the ladies, I rang
the bell and asked if my mother was at home.
She was in her boudoir. And where was
Miss Cecilia? In the boudoir, too.

On entering the room I found visitors in
the way, and put off the trial of the Spec-
tacles until they had taken their leave. Just
as they were going a thundering knock at the
door announced more visitors. This time,
fortunately, we escaped with no worse conse-
quences than the delivery of cards. We
actually had two minutes to ourselves. I
seized the opportunity of reminding my
mother that I was constitutionally inaccessi-
ble to the claims of society, and that I
thought we might as well have our house to
ourselves for half an hour or so. "Send
word downstairs," I said, "that you are not
at home."

My mother—magnificent in her old lace,
her admirably-dressed grey hair, and her
finely-falling robe of purple silk—looked
across the fireplace at Cecilia—tall, and
lax, and beautiful, with lovely brown eyes,
luxuriant black hair, a warmly-pale com-
plexion, and an amber-colored dress—and
said to me, "You forget Cecilia. She likes
society."

Cecilia looked at my mother with an air
of languid surprise. "What an extraordinary
mistake!" she answered. "I hate society."

My mother smiled—rang the bell—and
gave the order—Not at home. I produced
my Spectacles. There was an outcry at the
hideous ugliness of them. I laid the blame
on "my oculist," and waited for what was
to follow between the two ladies. My mother
spoke first. Consequently I looked at my
mother.

[I present her words first, and her thoughts
next, in parenthesis.]

"So you hate society, my dear? Surely
you have changed your opinion lately?"
("She doesn't mind how she lies, as long as
she can carry favour with Alfred. False crea-
ture.")

[I report Cecilia's answer on the same
plan.]

"Pardon me; I haven't in the least changed
my opinion—I was only afraid to express it.
I hope I have not given offence by expressing
it now." ("She can't exist without gossip,
and then she tries to lay it on me. Worldly
old wretch!")

What I began to think of my mother, I am
ashamed to record. What I thought of
Cecilia may be stated in two words. I was
more eager than ever to see "The Angel of
the school," the good and lovely Zilla.

My mother stopped the further progress
of my investigations. "Take off those
hideous Spectacles, Alfred, or leave us to our
visitors. I don't say your sight may not be
falling; I only say, change your oculist."

I took off the Spectacles, all the more
willingly that I began to be really afraid
of them. The talk between the ladies went
on.

"Yours is a strange confession, my dear,"
my mother said to Cecilia. "May I ask what
motive so young a lady can have for hating
society?"

"Only the motive of wanting to improve
myself," Cecilia answered. "If I knew a
little more of modern languages, and if I
could be something better than a feeble

amateur when I paint in water colors, you
might think me worthier to be Alfred's wife.
But society is always in the way when I open
my book or take up my brushes. In London
I have no time to myself, and I really can't
disguise it, the frivolous life I lead is not to
my taste."

I thought this (my Spectacles being in my
pocket, remember) very well and very prettily
said. My mother looked at me. "I quite
agree with Cecilia," I said, answering the
look. "We cannot count on having five
minutes to ourselves in London from morning
to night." Another knock at the street door
contributed its noisy support to my views as
I spoke. "We aren't even look out of the
window," I remarked, "for fear society may
look up at the same moment and see that we
are at home."

My mother smiled. "You are certainly
two remarkable young people," she said, with
an air of satirical indulgence—and paused for
a moment, as if an idea had occurred to
her which was more than usually worthy of
consideration. If her eye had not been on
me at the moment, I believe I should have
taken my Spectacles out of my pocket. "You
are both so thoroughly agreed in disliking
society and despising London," she resumed,
"that I feel it my duty, as a good mother, to
make your lives a little more in harmony
with your tastes, if I can. You complain,
Alfred, that you can never count on
having five minutes to yourself with
Cecilia. Cecilia complains that she is per-
petually interrupted in the laudable effort to
improve her mind. I offer you both the
whole day to yourselves, week after week, for
the next three months. We will spend the
winter at Long Fallass."

Long Fallass was our country seat. There
was no hunting; the shooting was let; the
place was seven miles from Timber-
combe town and station; and our nearest
neighbor was a young Ritualistic clergyman,
popularly reported in the village to be starv-
ing himself to death. I declined my mother's
extraordinary proposal without a moment's
hesitation. Cecilia, with the readiest and
sweetest submission, accepted it.

This was our first open difference of
opinion. Even without the Spectacles I could
see that my mother hated it as a
good sign. She had consented to
our marriage in the spring without
in the least altering her opinion that the
angelic Zilla was the right wife for me.
"Settle it between yourselves, my dears," she
said, and left her chair to look for her work.
Cecilia rose immediately to save her the
trouble.

The instant their backs were turned on me
I put on the terrible glasses. Is there such a
thing in anatomy as a back view of the heart?
There is such a thing assuredly when you look
through the Magic Spectacles. My mother's
private sentiments presented themselves to
me as follows: "If they don't get thoroughly
sick of each other in a winter at Long Fallass
I give up all knowledge of human nature.
He shall marry Zilla yet." Cecilia's motives
asserted themselves with transparent sim-
plicity in these words, "His mother fully
expects me to say 'No.' Horrible as the
prospect is, I'll disappoint her by saying
'Yes.'"

"Horrible as the prospect is," was to my
mind a very revolting expression, considering
that I was personally included in the prospect.
My mother's mischievous test of our affection
for each other now presented itself to me
in the light of a sensible pro-
ceeding. In the solitude of Long
Fallass, I should surely discover whether
Cecilia was about to marry me for money or
for myself. I concealed my Spectacles, and
said nothing at the time. But later, when
my mother entered the drawing-room dressed
to go out for dinner, I waylaid her, and
after announcing that I had reconsidered the
matter, declared that I was quite willing to
go to Long Fallass. Cecilia came in dressed
for dinner also. She had never looked so
irresistibly lovely as when she was informed
of my change of opinion. "What a happy
time we shall have," she said, and smiled as
if she really meant it.

They went away to their party. I was in
the library when they returned. Hearing the
carriage stop at the door I went out into the
hall, and was suddenly checked on my way
to the ladies by the sound of a man's voice:
"Many thanks, I am close at home now." My
mother's voice followed: "I will let you
know if we go to the country, Sir John. You
will ride over and see us?" "With
the greatest pleasure. Good-night, Miss
Cecilia." There was no mistaking the tone
in which these last four words were spoken.
Sir John's accent expressed indescribable
tenderness. I retired again to the library.

My mother came in, followed by her
charming companion.

"Here is a new complication," she said.
"Cecilia doesn't want to go to Long Fallass."
I asked why. Cecilia answered, without
looking at me, "Oh, I have changed my
mind." She turned aside to relieve my
mother of her fur cloak. I instantly con-
sulted my Spectacles, and obtained my
information in these mysterious terms: "Sir
John goes to Timbercombe."

Very short, and yet suggestive of more
than one interpretation. A little enquiry
made the facts more clear. Sir John had
been one of the guests at the dinner, and he
and Cecilia had shaken hands like old friends.
At my mother's request, he had been
presented to her. He had produced
an excellent impression that she had
taken him in her carriage part of his way
home. She had also discovered that he was
about to visit a relative living at Timber-
combe (already mentioned, I think, as our
nearest town). Another momentary oppor-
tunity with the Spectacles completed my
discoveries. Sir John had proposed marriage
(unsuccessfully) to Cecilia, and being still
persistently in love with her, only wanted a
favorable opportunity to propose again. The
excellent impression which he had produced
on my mother was perfectly intelligible now.

In feeling reluctant to give her rejected
lover that other opportunity, was Cecilia
afraid of Sir John, or afraid of herself? My
Spectacles informed me that she deliberately
declined to face that question, even in her
thoughts.

Under these circumstances, the test of a
dreary winter residence at Long Fallass became,
to my mind, more valuable than
ever. Single-handed, Cecilia might successfully
keep up appearances and deceive other peo-
ple, though she might not deceive me. But,
in combination with Sir John, there was a
chance that she might openly betray the true
state of her feelings. If I was really the
favored man, she would, of course, be dearer
to me than ever. If not (with more produc-
ible proof than the Magic Spectacles to justify
me), I need not hesitate to break off the
engagement.

"Second thoughts are not always best,"
dear Cecilia," said I. "Do me a favor. Let

us try Long Fallass, and if we find the place
quite unendurable, let us return to London."
Cecilia looked at me and hesitated—
looked at my mother and submitted to
Long Fallass in the sweetest man-
ner. The more they were secretly at
variance, the better the two ladies appeared
to understand each other.

We did not start for the country until three
days afterward. The packing-up was a seri-
ous matter, to being with, and my mother
prolonged the delay by paying a visit to her
niece at the school in the country. She kept
the visit a secret from Cecilia, of course. But
even when we were alone, and when I asked
about Zilla, I was only favored with a very
brief reply. She merely lifted her eyes to
heaven and said, "Perfectly charming!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEST OF LONG FALASS.

We had had a week of it. If we had told
each other the truth we should have said,
"Let us go back to London."
Thus far there had been no signs of Sir
John. The Spectacles informed me that he
had arrived at Timbercombe, and that
Cecilia had written to him. But, strangely
enough, they failed to disclose what she had
said. Had she forgotten it already, or was
there some defect, hitherto unsuspected, in
my supernatural glasses?

Christmas Day was near at hand. The
weather was, so far, almost invariably misty
and wet. Cecilia began to yawn over her
favorite intellectual resources. My mother
waited with superhuman patience for events.
As for myself, having literally nothing else to
amuse me, I took to gratifying an improper
curiosity in the outlying regions of the family
circle. In plain English, I discovered a nice
little needlewoman, who was employed at
Long Fallass. Her name was Miss Peasey.
Quite a young girl, Miss Peasey had the self-
possession of a mature woman. She had a
trim little figure, soft blue eyes, and glossy,
golden hair. Miss Peasey follied me at every
point. For the first week I never even got
the chance of looking at her through the
Magic Spectacles.

On the first day of the new week the weath-
er cleared up wonderfully; spring seemed
to have come to us in the middle of winter.

Cecilia and I went out riding. On our
return, having nothing better to do, I accom-
panied the horses back to the stables, and
naturally offended the groom, who thought
I was "watching him." Returning toward
the house, I passed the window of the
ground-floor room, at the back of the build-
ing, devoted to the needlewoman. A railed
yard kept me at a respectful distance, but at
the same time gave me a view of the interior
of the room. Miss Peasey was not alone;
my mother was with her. They were evi-
dently talking, but not a word reached my
ears. It mattered nothing. While I could
see them through my Spectacles, their
thoughts were visible to me before they
found their way into words.

My mother was speaking—"Well, my
dear, have you formed your opinion of him
yet?"

Miss Peasey replied, "Not quite yet."
"You are wonderfully cautious in arriving
at a conclusion. How much longer is this
clever contrivance of yours to last?"

"Give me two days more, dear madam; I
can't decide until Sir John helps me."

"Is Sir John really coming here?"

"I think so."
"And have you managed it?"

"If you will kindly excuse me, I would
rather not answer just yet."

The housekeeper entered the room, and
called my mother away on some domestic
business. As she walked to the door, I had
time to read her thought before she went out—
"Very extraordinary to find such resources
of clever invention in such a young girl!"

Miss Peasey, left in maiden meditation
with her work on her lap, smiled to herself.
I turned the glasses on her, and made a dis-
covery that petrified me. To put it plainly,
the charming needlewoman was deceiving us
all (with the one exception of my mother)
under an assumed name and vocation in life.
Miss Peasey was no other than my cousin
Zilla, aged seventeen.

I followed the train of thought which my
mother's questions had set going in the mind
of this young person. To justify my own
conduct, I must report the result as briefly
as I can. Have you heard of "fasting"
girls? Have you heard of "mesmeric" girls?
Have you heard of girls (in the newspapers)
who have invented the most infamous charges
against innocent men? Then don't accuse
my Spectacles of seeing impossible sights!

My report of Miss Zilla's thoughts, as
they succeeded each other, begins as follows:
First thought: "My small fortune is all
very well; but I want to be mistress of a
great establishment, and to get away from
school. Alfred, dear fellow, is reported to
have fifteen thousand a year. Is his mother's
companion to be allowed to catch this rich
fish, without the least opposition? Not if I
know it!"

Second thought: "How very simple old
people are! His mother visits me, invites
me to Long Fallass, and expects me to cut out
Cecilia. Men are such fools (the writing-
master has fallen in love with me) that she
would only have to burst out crying, and
keep him to herself. I have proposed a
better way than fair fighting for Alfred, sug-
gested by a play I read the other day. The
old mother consents, with conditions. 'I
am sure you will do nothing, my dear,
unbecomingly to a young lady.' Win him, as
Miss Hardcastle won Mr. Marlow in 'She
Stoops to Conquer,' if you like; but do
nothing to forfeit your self-respect. What
astonishing simplicity! Where did she go
to school when she was young?"

Third thought: "How amazingly lanky
that Cecilia's maid is lazy, and that the
needlewoman dines in the servants' hall!
The maid had the prospect of getting up
before six in the morning, to be ready to go
in the chaise-cart with the servants who does
the household errands at Timbercombe—
and for what? To take a note from her
mistress to Sir John and wait for an answer.
The good little needlewoman hears this,
smiles and says: 'I don't mind how early I
get up; I'll take it for you, and bring back
the answer.'"

Fourth thought: "What a blessing it is
to have blue eyes and golden hair! Sir John
was quite struck with me. I thought at the
time he would do instead of Alfred. For-
tunately I have since asked the simple old
mother about him. He is a poor baronet.
Not to be thought of for an instant! 'My
Lady'—without a corresponding establish-

ment! Too dreadful! But I didn't throw
away my fascinations. I saw him wince
when he read the letter. 'No bad news, I
hope, sir,' I ventured to say. He shook
his head solemnly. 'Your mistress' (he took
me, of course, for Cecilia's maid), 'for-
bids me to call at Long Fallass.' I thought to
myself what a hypocrite Cecilia must be, and
I said modestly to Sir John, 'Do you think it
wise, sir, always to take a young lady at her
word?' What a wonderful effect a well-put
question sometimes has, especially when it is
followed by sound advice. I took back a
conventional answer from Sir John, to keep
up appearances. Our private arrangement is
that he is to ride over to Long Fallass to-
morrow, and wait in the shrubbery at half-
past two. If it rains or snows he is to try the
next fine day. In either case the poor
needlewoman will ask for a half holiday, and
will induce Miss Cecilia to take a little walk in
the right direction. Sir John gave me two
sovereigns and a kiss at parting. I accepted
both tributes with the most becoming
humility. He shall have his money's worth,
though he is a poor baronet; he shall meet
his young lady in the shrubbery. And I may
catch the rich fish, after all!"

Fifth thought: "Better this horrid work!
It is all very well to be clever with one's
needle," but how it disfigures one's fore-
finger! No matter, I must play my part
while it lasts, or I shall be reported lazy by
the most detestable woman I ever met with—
the housekeeper at Long Fallass."

She threaded her needle and I put my
Spectacles in my pocket.

I don't think I suspected it at the time, but
I am now well aware that Septimus Notman's
gift was exerting its influence over me. I
was wickedly cool under circumstances which
would have roused my righteous indignation
in the days before my Spectacles. Sir John
and the Angel; my mother and her family
interests; Cecilia and her unacknowledged
lover—what a network of conspiracy and
deception was wound about me! and what a
perfectly fiendish pleasure I felt in planning
to match them on their own ground! The
method of attaining this object presented
itself to me in the simplest form. I had only
to take my mother for a walk in the near
neighborhood of the shrubbery—and the
exposure would be complete! That night I
studied the barometer with unutterable
anxiety. The prospect of the weather was
all that I could wish.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRUTH IN THE SHRUBBERY.

On the next day, the friendly sun shone,
the balmy air invited everybody to go out.
I made no further use of the Spectacles
that morning; my purpose was to
keep them in my pocket until the
interview in the shrubbery was over.
Shall I own the motive? It was simply fear
—fear of making further discoveries and of
losing the mastery self control on which the
whole success of my project depended.

We lunched at one o'clock. Had Zilla and
Cecilia come to a private understanding on
the subject of the interview in the shrubbery?
By way of ascertaining this, I asked Cecilia
if she would like to go out riding in the
afternoon. She declined the proposal—she
wanted to finish a sketch. I was sufficiently
answered.

"Cecilia complains that your manner has
grown cold toward her lately," my mother
said, when we were left together.

My mind was dwelling on Cecilia's letter to
Sir John. Would any man have so easily
adopted Zilla's suggestion not to take Cecilia
at her word, unless there had been something
to encourage him? I could only trust
myself to answer my mother very briefly.
"Cecilia is changed toward me"—was all
my reply.

My mother was evidently gratified by this
prospect of a misunderstanding between us.

"Ah!" she said, "if Cecilia only had Zilla's
sweet temper!"

This was a little too much to endure—but
I did endure it. "Will you come out with
me, mamma, for a walk in the grounds?" I
asked.

My mother accepted the invitation so
gladly that I really think I should have felt
ashamed of myself—if I had not had the
contaminating Spectacles in my pocket. We
had just settled to start soon after two
o'clock when there was a timid knock at the
door. The angelic needlewoman appeared,
to ask for her half-holiday. My mother
actually blushed. Old habits will cling to
the members of the past generation. "What
is it?" she said, in low uncertain tones.

"Might I go to the village, ma'am, to buy
some little things?" "Certainly." The
door closed again. "Now for the shrub-
bery!" I thought. "Make haste, mamma,
I said, 'the best of the day is going. And
mind one thing—put on your thickest boots.'"

On one side of the shrubbery were the gar-
dens. The other side was bounded by a
wooden fence. A footpath running part of
the way beside the fence, crossed the grass
beyond, and made a short cut between the
nearest park gate and the servants' offices.
This was the safe place that I had chosen.
We could hear perfectly—though the closely-
planted evergreens might prevent the exercise
of sight. I had recommended "thick boots,"
because there was no help for it but to muffle
the sound of our footsteps by walking on the
wet grass. At its further end, the shrubbery
joined the carriage road up to the house.

My mother's surprise at the place I had
chosen for our walk would have been ex-
pressed in words, as well as by looks, if I had
not stopped her by a whispered warning.
"Keep perfectly quiet," I said, "and listen.
I have a motive for bringing you here."

The words had hardly passed my lips be-
fore we heard the voices of Cecilia and the
needlewoman in the shrubbery.

"Wait a minute," said Cecilia; "you must
be a little more explicit, before I consent to
go any farther. How came you to take my
letter to Sir John, instead of my maid?"

"Only to oblige her, Miss. She was not
very well, and she didn't fancy going all the
way to Timbercombe. I can buy no good
needles in the village, and I was glad of the
opportunity of getting to the town."

There was a pause. Cecilia was reflecting,
as I supposed. My mother turned pale.

Cecilia resumed. "There is nothing in Sir
John's answer to my letter," she said, "that
leads me to suppose he can be guilty of an act
of rudeness. I have always believed him to
be a gentleman. No gentleman would force
his way into my presence, when I wrote ex-
pressly to ask him to spare me. Pray how
did you know that he was determined only to
take his dismissal from my own lips?"

"Gentlemen's feelings sometimes get the
better of them, Miss. Sir John was very
much distressed—"

Cecilia interrupted her. "There was noth-
ing in my letter to distress him," she said.