

## **Points to Ponder , Wives and Daughters, March 2023**

This section focuses on Cynthia, Molly and Mr Preston with, in the later stages, an introduction to the idea that Osborne Hanley may soon die.

**Gaskell makes much of this Mr Preston/Cynthia/Molly incident. What does it add to the story?**

**What is EG saying about London Society here?**

*Why, Cynthia!" she said, "you might have been there [at lord Hollingford's talk about Roger's expedition] ; ladies were there. It says 'many ladies were present.' Oh, couldn't you have managed to go? If your uncle's set cared about these things, wouldn't some of them have taken you?*

*Perhaps, if I had asked them. But I think they would have been rather astonished at my sudden turn for science.*

**Why does ECG include the chapter on Gossips (Chapter 46) what is the role of the gossips? What is ECG revealing about society?**

**Think about p. 488-‘ocular proof’, how far is this letter incident reminiscent of *Othello*. What point is ECG making about our perception of events?**

*"I suppose you mean Mr. Preston and Miss Gibson?"*

*"Why, who told you?" said Mrs. Goodenough, turning round upon her in surprise. "You can't say as I did. There's many a Molly in Hollingford, besides her,—though none, perhaps, in such a genteel station in life. I never named her, I'm sure."*

*"No. But I know. I could tell my tale too," continued Mrs. Dawes.*

*"No! could you, really?" said Mrs. Goodenough, very curious and a little jealous.*

*"Yes. My uncle Sheepshanks came upon them in the Park Avenue,—he startled 'em a good deal, he said; and when he taxed Mr. Preston with being with his sweetheart, he didn't deny it."*

*"Well! Now so much has come out, I'll tell you what I know. Only, ladies, I wouldn't wish to do the girl an unkind turn,—so you must keep what I've got to tell you a secret." Of course they promised; that was easy.*

*"My Hannah, as married Tom Oakes, and lives in Pearson's Lane, was a-gathering of damsons only a week ago, and Molly Gibson was a-walking fast down the lane,—quite in a hurry like to meet some one,—and Hannah's little Anna-Maria fell down, and Molly (who's a kind-hearted lass enough) picked her up; so if Hannah had had her doubts before, she had none then."*

*"But there was no one with her, was there?" asked one of the ladies, anxiously, as Mrs. Goodenough stopped to finish her piece of cake, just at this crisis.*

*"No: I said she looked as if she was going to meet someone,—and by-and-by comes Mr. Preston running out of the wood just beyond Hannah's, and says he, 'A cup of water, please, good woman, for a lady has fainted, or is 'sterical or something.' Now though he didn't know Hannah, Hannah knew him. 'More folks know Tom Fool, than Tom Fool knows,' asking Mr. Preston's pardon; for he's no fool whatever he be. And I could tell you more,—and what I've seed with my own eyes. I seed her give him a*

letter in Grinstead's shop, only yesterday, and he looked as black as thunder at her, for he seed me if she didn't."

### **Extract 2?**

*"Time enough then to be thinking of London. I wish her an honest country husband with enough to live upon, and a little to lay by, and a good character to boot. Mind that, Molly," said she, firing round upon the startled Molly; "I wish Cynthia a husband with a good character; but she's got a mother to look after her; you've none, and when your mother was alive she was a dear friend of mine: so I'm not going to let you throw yourself away upon any one whose life isn't clear and above-board, you may depend upon it!"*

*This last speech fell like a bomb into the quiet little drawing-room, it was delivered with such vehemence. Miss Browning, in her secret heart, meant it as a warning against the intimacy she believed that Molly had formed with Mr. Preston; but as it happened that Molly had never dreamed of any such intimacy, the girl could not imagine why such severity of speech should be addressed to her.*

**Text A. This is a very polite but direct criticism of Preston's behaviour. In what ways is he a gentleman and in what ways is he not one?**

A) *"I am quite puzzled by you both," said Molly. "The only thing I do know is, that we ought not to be standing here at this time of evening, and that Cynthia and I shall go home directly. If you want to talk to Miss Kirkpatrick, Mr. Preston, why don't you come to my father's house, and ask to see her openly, and like a gentleman?" Ch 42 p. 453*

**Text B- What does this say about the reliability of Mrs Gibson's judgement?**

B) *"Indeed! I am truly glad to hear it. I always was fond of Osborne; and, do you know, I never really took to Roger? I respected him and all that, of course; but to compare him with Mr. Henderson! Mr. Henderson is so handsome and well-bred, and gets all his gloves from Houbigant!" Ch 45 p. 482*

**In the exchange below is Cynthia's justification. How does EG show her own views on Cynthia's actions? Are there ways in which we might view Cynthia and Preston as similar in character?**

*"Since you will have it out,—since I must speak here, I own that what you say is literally true; that when I was a neglected girl of sixteen, you—whom I believed to be a friend, lent me money at my need, and made me give you a promise of marriage."*

*"Made you!" said he, laying an emphasis on the first word.*

*Cynthia turned scarlet. "'Made' is not the right word, I confess. I liked you then—you were almost my only friend—and, if it had been a question of immediate marriage, I daresay I should never have objected. But I know you better now; and you have persecuted me so of late, that I tell you once for all (as I have told you before, till I am sick of the very words), that nothing shall ever make me marry you. Nothing! I see there's no chance of escaping exposure and, I daresay, losing my character, and I know losing all the few friends I have."*

*"Never me," said Molly, touched by the wailing tone of despair that Cynthia was falling into.*

*"It is hard," said Mr. Preston. "You may believe all the bad things you like about me, Cynthia, but I don't think you can doubt my real, passionate, disinterested love for you."*

*"I do doubt it," said Cynthia, breaking out with fresh energy. "Ah! when I think of the self-denying affection I have seen—I have known—affection that thought of others before itself—"*

*Mr. Preston broke in at the pause she made. She was afraid of revealing too much to him.*

*"You do not call it love which has been willing to wait for years—to be silent while silence was desired—to suffer jealousy and to bear neglect, relying on the solemn promise of a girl of sixteen—for solemn say flimsy, when that girl grows older. Cynthia, I have loved you, and I do love you, and I won't give you up. If you will but keep your word, and marry me, I'll swear I'll make you love me in return."*

**Ch 42, end, pp. 453-4**

**In the Chapter 'Molly to the Rescue' we see yet another Gaskell heroine led into deceit. Why does Gaskell show Molly and Margaret Hale involving themselves in this unladylike behaviour. What is she trying to show/ say about women/heroiness?**

**Molly may be passive, but her 'simple earnestness' gives out strong messages to other characters, Mr Preston for example. (Ch 46, p 487) How far do you feel Molly's passive behaviour is necessary to the novel and Gaskell's ideology?**

**The extract below reveals a good deal about Lady Harriet and the Hollingford Society without Gaskell making any authorial comments on the narrative. Why does ECG choose Lady h to sort out the Molly/Cynthia/ Mr. P. mess and what information do we, as readers, glean from this passage?**

*"I think it is much more likely that Clare's own daughter—that pretty pawky Miss Kirkpatrick—is the real heroine of this story," said Lady Harriet. "She always looks like a heroine of genteel comedy; and those young ladies were capable of a good deal of innocent intriguing, if I remember rightly. Now little Molly Gibson has a certain gaucherie about her which would disqualify her at once from any clandestine proceedings. Besides, 'clandestine!' why, the child is truth itself. Papa, are you sure Mr. Sheepshanks said it was Miss Gibson that was exciting Hollingford scandal? Wasn't it Miss Kirkpatrick? The notion of her and Mr. Preston making a match of it doesn't sound so incongruous; but if it's my little friend Molly, I'll go to church and forbid the banns."*

*"Really, Harriet, I can't think what always makes you take such an interest in all these petty Hollingford affairs."*

*"Mamma, it's only tit for tat. They take the most lively interest in all our sayings and doings. If I were going to be married, they would want to know every possible particular,—when we first met, what we first said to each other, what I wore, and whether he offered by letter or in person. I'm sure those good Miss Brownings were wonderfully well-informed as to Mary's methods of managing her nursery, and educating her girls; so it's only a proper return of the compliment to want to know on our side how they are going on. I'm quite of papa's faction. I like to hear all the local gossip." Ch 49, p. 516.*

**Does ECG's multifaceted character depiction make her work more difficult to discuss or form an opinion on?**

## Quotations

### Chapter 40

Mamma does not know it; it is not in her to know what I might have been if I had only fallen into wise, good hands.

"Oh! a little bird told us," said Miss Browning. Molly knew that little bird from her childhood, and had always hated it, and longed to wring its neck.

"But you are good, Cynthia," put in Molly.

"No, I'm not. You're just as much mistaken as he[Roger] is; and some day I shall go down in your opinions with a run, just like the hall clock the other day when the spring broke."

### Chapter 41

When I look back to those happy days, it seems to me as if I had never valued them as I ought. To be sure—youth, love,—what did we care for poverty!

If Mr. Kirkpatrick had but taken care of that cough of his; but he was so obstinate! Men always are, I think.

### Chapter 42

Mrs. Gibson subsided into her arm-chair, holding a sheet of *The Times* before her, behind which she took a quiet and lady-like doze.

Molly gazed into the soft outer darkness, striving to discern the outlines of objects—the cottage—the great beech-tree—the wire arches, up which summer roses had clambered; each came out faint and dim against the dusky velvet of the atmosphere.

### Chapter 43

"How easy it is to judge rightly after one sees what evil comes from judging wrongly!"

Mrs. Donaldson gave me my ticket, but she rather looked grave at my idea of going to the Ball in my white muslin, which I had already worn two evenings at their house. Oh dear! how pleasant it must be to be rich!

I began to feel how awkward it was to be in his debt. I couldn't give myself airs to him as I did to others. Oh! it was so awkward and uncomfortable!

He made me feel as if I was in his power; and by too often reminding me of my engagement to him, he made me critical of his words and ways.

Once or twice I've thought I would marry Mr. Preston out of pure revenge, and have him for ever in my power—only I think I should have the worst of it;

Molly was compelled to perceive that there must have been a great deal of underhand work going on beneath Cynthia's apparent openness of behaviour; and still more unwillingly she began to be afraid that she might be led into the practice.

#### Chapter 44

It would be charming," said Mrs. Gibson, rapidly revolving the changes necessary ...,—calculating the consequent inconveniences, and weighing them against the probable advantages, even while she spoke.

"But you are good, Cynthia," put in Molly.

"No, I'm not. You're just as much mistaken as he[Roger] is; and some day I shall go down in your opinions with a run, just like the hall clock the other day when the spring broke."

Mrs Gibson: I never really took to Roger? I respected him and all that, of course; but to compare him with Mr. Henderson! Mr. Henderson is so handsome and well-bred, and gets all his gloves from Houbigant!"

Mr Preston to Molly: "Young ladies are very fond of the words 'hate' and 'detest.' I've known many who have applied them to men whom they were all the time hoping to marry."

#### Chapter 45

Mrs Gibson: '... you may really judge of the state of the weather by my spirits, I have always been such a sensitive creature! It is well for Cynthia that she does not inherit it.

The Hollingford Book Society: Everybody who pretended to gentility in the place belonged to it. It was a test of gentility, indeed, rather than of education or a love of literature. No shopkeeper would have thought of offering himself as a member

#### Chapter 46

Scandal sleeps in the summer, comparatively speaking. Its nature is the reverse of that of the dormouse.

But when evenings grew short, and people gathered round the fires, and put their feet in a circle—not on the fenders, that was not allowed—then was the time for confidential conversation!

Miss Browning: Without offence to the present company, I am inclined to look upon matrimony as a weakness to which some very worthy people are prone; but if they must be married, let them make the best of it, and go through the affair with dignity and propriety

Villagers on Dr. Gibson: when first he came here,—glad of a mutton-chop in his surgery, for I doubt if he'd a fire anywhere else; we called him Bob Gibson then, but none on us dare Bob him now; I'd as soon think o' calling him sweep!"

#### Chapter 47

Servants heard part of what was said in their mistresses' drawing-rooms, and exaggerated the sayings amongst themselves with the coarse strengthening of expression common with uneducated people.

Mrs Goodenough to friends: women should mind what they're about, and never be talked of; and if a woman's talked of, the less her friends have to do with her till the talk has died away, the better.

#### Chapter 48

Dr. Gibson: You don't know, Molly, how slight a thing may blacken a girl's reputation for life. I'd hard work to stand all she said, even though I didn't believe a word of it at the time.

Mrs Gibson: one would calculate one's behaviour at the present time so much better if one only knew what events were to come.

#### Chapter 49

It was always Lady Cumnor's habit to snub those she loved best. Her husband was perpetually snubbed by her.

#### Chapter 50

Mrs Gibson to Cynthia: You've entangled yourself with him, and you've done something of the sort with Mr. Preston, and got yourself into such an imbroglio" (Mrs. Gibson could not have said "mess" for the world, although the word was present to her mind),