

**WHO SHALL  
BE GREATEST!**

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Who shall be greatest! by Mary Howitt

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**MARY HOWITT**

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BY MARY HOWITT,

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"SOWING AND REAPING," ETC. &C.

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1863.



# WHO SHALL BE GREATEST?

## CHAPTER I.

### TWO OF MISS WYNDHAM'S YOUNG LADIES.

Gloucester, Dec. 29th, 179—

MY ADORABLE ELVIRA—I am sure you will give me credit for all the delight I feel in leaving "Miss Wyndham's Establishment for Young Ladies." I dismiss all thoughts of school and its annoyances for ever! Madame and her French exercises, Monsieur Pirouette and his *chassé*, thank Heaven, I have heard the last of them! Oh, how I pity you, that have twelve months of endurance yet before you! Poor little soul! I can see you, in my mind's eye, frowning defiance to all the horrid creatures!

But, my dearest Elvira, do not be utterly miserable. Time flies fast. Only think! it is but six months, this very day, since we had the supreme happiness of meeting—of forming that friendship which will be enduring as the stars! Oh, my sweet friend, think not that in absence your Miranda can forget you. Your beloved image is ever present with me. I dream of you by night, and think of you by day; and, though I am released from the hateful rule of Wyndham

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House, I am but half myself, for my heart remains with you!

There is no one here that can understand me. You, and you only, my Elvira, penetrated the recesses of my heart, and did me justice! Oh the sweet moonlight walks on the flags, when our fond souls commingled, and poured out their eternal vows! Do you not remember them? No, my Elvira, you have not forgotten those sweet times! And one night, of all others to be remembered, has registered itself in my heart's core; you remember it too!—there was a nightingale in Mr. Smith's chestnut at the moment, the sweet Philomela—you have not forgotten it! Oh, pardon me for hinting of such treason—to forget is impossible!

For oh, how vast a memory has love!

There is to be an Infirmary Ball next month, and the Misses Curtis, my cousins, about whom I told you that odd story about the calamanco petticoat, are to come out of the country to go with us; my father insisted upon it, or I should never have proposed it, for they are a couple of complete frights, and dress so ill. I have not decided whether to go in pink or lemon-colour. I have a lemon-coloured chambray, which my godmother gave me—a very sweet thing, and it is divinely made; and I have a pink silk slip; but lemon-colour, you know, is a bad candle-light colour, and I have worn my pink slip, so I am quite undetermined; I want the benefit of your sweet taste. Pray write by the return of post, and give my love to Anne Ward. Poor thing! how good-natured she is! Do you know, I called at her uncle's before we left the



TOWN, for we were an hour too soon for the coach, and she took me into her bed-room. I do believe they are poor; they have only one little back parlour, quite small and mean, and only one servant—quite a scrub of a girl—although, I must say, she was much neater than one might have expected, and very civil and obliging to me. I am sure that chain of Anne Ward's is not gold, from something I saw: but I forget what I am doing; for this letter, of course, goes to her care; but then, I think she would scorn to do a dishonourable action: and, after all, I should not care if she saw every word I have written. I always speak my mind, you know; I am open as the day, and I love Anne Ward. I foresee that she and you, my sweet friend, will be consolation to each other. Anne Ward and I were very near being dear friends, if you had not come. Sister of my soul, we should have been so; but Anne Ward would never have been all that the amiable Elvira is, to her devoted and attached

MIRANDA.

P.S.—I have bought a locket to put your sweet hair in; I shall wear it next my heart. Where you are, I ever will be. Adieu!

Such was the letter which Sarah Gibson addressed to her friend, Rebecca Wells, the week after their sorrowful parting in the school-room of "Miss Wyndham's Establishment for Young Ladies," when, with weeping sensibility, they protested that they never should be happy till they met again.

Sarah Gibson, otherwise "Miranda," was the

daughter of a wealthy grocer in the city of Gloucester. Her mother, an excellent and sensible woman, died in her infancy. A distant relation, a most precise person as to dress and demeanour, the very pink of housewives, as far as methodical routine and the sharp management of servants went, supplied, after Mrs. Gibson's death, her place as female head of the family. Cousin Judith, for so she was called, was spoken of by all her acquaintance as an inimitable woman; so exact in her housekeeping; so rigid a disciplinarian of servants; so never-failing in her attendance on Wednesday morning prayers, and three services on the Sunday! She was, every body said, a good woman; and so she believed herself, thinking, as every body thought, that it was fortunate for Mr. Gibson to have such a relative at his service. In one thing, however, Cousin Judith failed—she had no skill in the management of the child; this was the part of her cousin's establishment in which she professed no interest. It is true, that the little girl was well fed, and well clothed—that came into the general house-keeping; but the forming her mind and manners was left to fate.

Little Sarah Gibson ran wild about the house; she sate upon the kitchen dresser, of a morning, to watch the cook; or, with her hair powdered with dust, helped the housemaid to make the beds; or, which was best of all, played behind the counter with shopmen and apprentices, and rode down into the lower warehouses in the empty crane rope, until ordered into the house by her father, who wondered, good, easy man, "what all the

women could be about, that they did not look after the child." Cousin Judith, on such occasions, never failed to cuff her ears and send her to the housemaid to have her hands and face washed, and a clean pinafore put on; remarking, that "it really was one person's work to look after her."

In process of time she went to a day-school; learned to read and write and cypher: (the church catechism she had been taught by cousin Judith,) to work a sampler, and to do plain sewing, which included button-hole-stitch, back-stitching, and change-stitch; and in twelve months made her father four shirts. In the course of the next three years she worked a hearth-rug, in which was a hen and chickens; two foot-stools—they were not called ottomans in those days; two pair of kettle-holders, and the parting of Tippoo Saib and his children, in embroidery of bright-coloured silks upon white satin; which was duly framed and glazed, and hung up in the parlour at home. Her works were manifold, and Cousin Judith declared that she bade fair to be a very accomplished and well-behaved young lady, quite a credit to them all.

By this time, of course, she had left off playing with the shopmen, or riding in the crane-rope. She began to eschew the shop, and made her entries and exits invariably by the street-door. She was now thirteen, and full of budding sensibilities and gentilities. She had read all the love stories in a long series of the Ladies' Magazine; which, with Ready-Reckoners, old Dictionaries, and Almanacs, well-worn Cookery Books, two Bibles and three Prayer Books, covered with green baize, filled the shelves of the book-case at home.