

From W. M. THACKERAY, *Vanity Fair*

CHAPTER II

In Which Miss Sharp and Miss Sedley Prepare to Open the Campaign

When Miss Sharp had performed the heroical act mentioned in the last chapter, and had seen the Dixonary, flying over the pavement of the little garden, fall at length at the feet of the astonished Miss Jemima, the young lady's countenance, which had before worn an almost livid look of hatred, assumed a smile that perhaps was scarcely more agreeable, and she sank back in the carriage in an easy frame of mind, saying—"So much for the Dixonary; and, thank God, I'm out of Chiswick."

Miss Sedley was almost as flurried at the act of defiance as Miss Jemima had been; for, consider, it was but one minute that she had left school, and the impressions of six years are not got over in that space of time. Nay, with some persons those awes and terrors of youth last for ever and ever. I know, for instance, an old gentleman of sixty-eight, who said to me one morning at breakfast, with a very agitated countenance, "I dreamed last night that I was flogged by Dr. Raine." Fancy had carried him back five-and-fifty years in the course of that evening. Dr. Raine and his rod were just as awful to him in his heart, then, at sixty-eight, as they had been at thirteen. If the Doctor, with a large birch, had appeared bodily to him, even at the age of threescore and eight, and had said in awful voice, "Boy, take down your pant—"? Well, well, Miss Sedley was exceedingly alarmed at this act of insubordination.

"How could you do so, Rebecca?" at last she said, after a pause.

"Why, do you think Miss Pinkerton will come out and order me back to the black-hole?" said Rebecca, laughing.

"No: but—"

"I hate the whole house," continued Miss Sharp in a fury. "I hope I may never set eyes on it again. I wish it were in the bottom of the Thames, I do; and if Miss Pinkerton were there, I wouldn't pick her out, that I wouldn't. O how I should like to see her floating in the water yonder, turban and all, with her train streaming after her, and her nose like the beak of a wherry."

"Hush!" cried Miss Sedley.

"Why, will the black footman tell tales?" cried Miss Rebecca, laughing. "He may go back and tell Miss Pinkerton that I hate her with all my soul; and I wish he would; and I wish I had a means of proving it, too. For two years I have only had insults and outrage from her. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen. I have never had a friend or a kind word, except from you. I have been made to tend the little girls in the lower schoolroom, and to talk French to the Misses, until I grew sick of my mother tongue. But that talking French to Miss Pinkerton was capital fun, wasn't it? She doesn't know a word of French, and was too proud to confess it. I believe it was that which made her part with me; and so thank Heaven for French. Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!"

"O Rebecca, Rebecca, for shame!" cried Miss Sedley; for this was the greatest blasphemy Rebecca had as yet uttered; and in those days, in England, to say, "Long live Bonaparte!" was as much as to say, "Long live Lucifer!" "How can you—how dare you have such wicked, revengeful thoughts?"

"Revenge may be wicked, but it's natural," answered Miss Rebecca. "I'm no angel." And, to say the truth, she certainly was not.

For it may be remarked in the course of this little conversation (which took place as the coach rolled along lazily by the river side) that though Miss Rebecca Sharp has twice had occasion to thank Heaven, it has been, in the first place, for ridding her of some person whom she hated, and secondly, for enabling her to bring her enemies to some sort of perplexity or confusion; neither of which are very amiable motives for religious gratitude, or such as would be put forward by persons of a kind and placable disposition. Miss Rebecca was not, then, in the least kind or placable. All the world used her ill, said this young misanthropist, and we may be pretty certain that persons whom all the world treats ill, deserve entirely the treatment they get. The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly upon you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly kind companion; and so let all young persons take their choice. This is certain, that if the world neglected Miss Sharp, she never was known to have done a good action in behalf of anybody; nor can it be expected that twenty-four young ladies should all be as amiable as the heroine of this work, Miss Sedley (whom we have selected for the very reason that she was the best-natured of all, otherwise what on earth was to have prevented us from putting up Miss Swartz, or Miss Crump, or Miss Hopkins, as heroine in her place!) it could not be expected that every one should be of the humble and gentle temper of Miss Amelia Sedley; should take every opportunity to vanquish Rebecca's hard-heartedness and ill-humour; and, by a thousand kind words and offices, overcome, for once at least, her hostility to her kind.

1. Read as far as line 19.

- a) Underline words and phrases that describe the two girls' reactions after Rebecca threw her dictionary out of the window.
- b) How would you describe the state of mind of the two girls? Choose from the adjectives below or supply your own.

satisfied

**nervous
relaxed**

**proud
defiant**

**frightened
worried**

2. Read up to the end.

- a) List the words and phrases that convey Rebecca's feelings for the school and find the reasons that caused such feelings.
- b) describe Amelia's reaction to Rebecca's behaviour and comments quoting from the text.
- c) Which of the following adjectives describe Rebecca's and Amelia's personalities best?

revengeful

gentle

simple

authoritarian

passive

passionate

calm

submissive

impulsive

conformist

3. Consider narrative technique

- a) Is the narrator a voice outside the story or is he a character in the story?
- b) In lines 11-18 the narrator relates an episode which has nothing to do with the novel.
 1. What is it about?
 2. Do you think it is meant as a justification for Amelia's reaction or an unfavourable comment on it?
- c) Rebecca's act is defined as "heroical" in line 1. Do you think the adjective is used seriously or ironically?
- d) Is the reader free to judge the characters or does s/he share the narrator's judgements?

4. Find in the text examples where the narrator:

- Addresses the reader
- Digresses
- Makes general comments
- Offers more generalizations
- Refers to the writing of the novel

