Chapter IV

WIVES AND DAUGHTERS

In her "Preface" to Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell writes that when she wanted to start her literary career by writing a novel, her first thought was to take up a 'rural scene' on the borders of Yorkshire, a project which she later rejected. Consequently she wrote about the tribulations and problems of the wretched workers in the 'hungry forties' and the industrial strife that was at its height in Manchester, the town in which she resided.

The project about the treatment of rural life that was abandoned earlier was taken up by her in her novelettes Cranford, Cousin Phillis, My Lady Ludlow and short story entitled 'Moorland Cottage'. About sixteen years after the publication of her first novel Mary Barton, at full length she dealt with this theme in her last and incomplete novel Wives and Daughters. Two possible factors responsible for this reversion of attention to the country-side were her nostalgia for the life in the country town of Knutsford and the comparative calm that prevailed in the industrial towns after the 'hungry forties'.

1 Mrs. Gaskell, Preface to Mary Barton, p. lxxix.
Wives and Daughters was published serially in Smith's The Cornhill Magazine. The first instalment appeared in the August number of the year 1864. The conclusion to the novel, left incomplete by the sudden death of the author, was written by the editor of the Cornhill Frederick Greenwood which was based on what Mrs. Gaskell had told her family of her intentions regarding its final part and was published in the January issue of the magazine in 1866.¹

At first she wanted the novel to be entitled The Two Mothers but later she changed her mind and opted for Wives and Daughters, An Every-Day Story. This incomplete novel was later published posthumously in a book form in the year 1866 by Smith Elder & Co.

The novel concerns itself with the ups and downs in the life of mainly two families, those of Squire Hamley of Hamley Hall and the Gibsons. Other characters portrayed in the novel acquire significance only in relation to these two families. Squire Hamley is proud of his ancestry which he traces back to the Norman Conquest. He has his seat near Hollingford, a small country town which is the seat of Lord Cumnor. Being an old-fashioned agriculturist his financial condition is not very sound. Notwithstanding his present poor condition he holds the Lords of the Hollingford Tower, the Cumnors, the neighbouring aristocrats in great contempt because the latter belong to a new rich class of traders whose

¹ Ward, Introduction to Wives and Daughters, Knutsford Ed., Vol. 1, 1908, p.XI.
family was a non-entity a hundred years earlier. The Squire marries a lady from London, and they have two sons, Osborne and Roger. The elder, being the heir and their first-born is the apple of his parents' eyes. Impressed by his good performance at school, his parents, who have high hopes in him, send him to Cambridge, and expect him to become a Senior Wrangler and win a fellowship. They also wish him to marry him into some rich aristocratic family and thus rehabilitate their financial position through him. The younger son Roger, who resembles his father in looks is slow but steady, and being without inheritance he is expected to become a clergyman.

The Squire has close relations with the family of the Gibsons who live at a nearby town, Hollingford. The head of the family, Mr. Gibson had settled here some years back as a partner of Dr. Hall and married his grand-niece, Mary Pearson. After the death of Dr. Hall he inherits his practice and becomes the leading surgeon of the town. Soon after, however, his wife dies leaving behind a three year old daughter Molly whom he entrusts to the care of her nurse Betty.

By the time Molly grows into a moderately goodlooking girl of seventeen years, Mr. Gibson's household expands to include three servants, a cook, a maid-servant, Betty, the old nurse of Molly and two young apprentices for the professor of surgery. Mr. Gibson also engages a semi-governess, Miss
Eyre to give company to Molly when he is away on his professional rounds. Molly is, however, soon after sent to stay at Hamley Hall with the family of the Squire when her father intercepts the love-letter of one of his young apprentices, Coxe, who had fallen in love with her. Though sorry at being away from her father, Molly enjoys her stay with the Squire's family.

During Molly's absence, her father drifts into matrimony with Mrs. Kirkpatrick the ex-governess at the Towers, a woman of shallow and selfish nature. Though their marriage is partly manipulated by the Cumnors, Gibson thinks of this marriage because he feels his daughter needs a mother to protect her. Molly, however, feels very sad at the prospect of her father's remarriage and gets reconciled to it only when Roger consoles her with his affectionate advice. At the occasion of her father's marriage she meets Lady Harriet, the youngest daughter of Lord Cumnor and Mr. Preston, his land-agent. While she becomes intimate with the former, she takes an instant dislike for the latter.

Her step-mother's arrival at the house does not auger well for the family because all of their servants get estranged because of their new mistress's insolent behaviour towards them and leave their jobs.

Molly, however, does not stay at her house for long to see further developments there but is called at the Hall due to
the serious illness of Mrs. Hamley. She finds the family of
the Squire in a mood of great frustration because their elder
son Osborne has belied their hopes and failed to get the much
expected fellowship. She also learns of his secret marriage.
Though she feels very much concerned for the family she does
not involve herself in the affairs of the Squire and confines
herself only to nursing Mrs. Hamley. On returning to her
house from the Hall she meets Cynthia Kirkpatrick Mrs. Gibson's
daughter by first marriage, who has come to stay with them after
completing her studies. Though Molly discerns her lack of
principles and capacity for deep love she is fascinated by her
and develops very intimate relations with her.

Mrs. Hamley who has loved Molly as her own daughter dies
leaving her husband, sons and Molly in deep mourning. Roger,
the younger son of the Squire, becomes famous after publishing
an article on natural science. Lord Hollingford who has
interest in science himself takes notice of him and helps him.
It is the dull, mediocre second son of the Squire who passes
the Mathematical Tripos with flying colours and becomes the
Senior Wrangler at Cambridge winning the fellowship that his
parents had hoped his elder brother would win.

Mrs. Gibson with two daughters on her hand hopes to catch
Osborne, the heir to the Hamley estate as her son-in-law
and encourages him to visit them frequently. She is, however,
not civil to Roger who being the second son has to carve out
his own future. Molly who loves Roger secretly has to face frustration when she learns of the latter’s infatuation for the glamorous and lovely Cynthia. However, being a balanced and quiet girl, she maintains friendly relations with both of them even when they get engaged secretly on the eve of Roger’s departure for Africa. Molly’s old lover, Mr. Coxe who grows rich on inheriting his uncle’s property, visits Hollingford with a desire to propose to her, but ends in falling in love with the dazzling Cynthia and has to leave without obtaining the love of either.

Cynthia, whom Roger at the time of their engagement has given freedom to choose any other lover if she ever desires so, attracts many suitors including Henderson, a young man who is entailed to her uncle, Mr. Kirkpatrick, the Queen’s counsel. However, being engaged to Roger, she rejects his proposal for marriage. Meanwhile Molly discovers how Cynthia who, when she was sixteen, had borrowed some money from Mr. Preston, the disagreeable land-agent of Lord Cumnor, has been blackmailed by him into getting herself engaged to him secretly. Being sympathetic to both Cynthia and Roger, Molly helps to extricate the former from his clutches of Mr. Preston whom both of them hate. She, however, does so by meeting him in a clandestine manner, which gives rise to gossips about them in the town. Cynthia, who has never been stable in her affection towards anyone, realizes the incongruity of her and Roger’s nature and
breaks off the engagement to marry Mr. Henderson, her wealthy suitor.

The Squire who feels lonely after the sudden death of his son Osborne learns of the latter's secret marriage with the French bonne, Aimie, when she comes to the Hall with her one year old son. In the beginning he cold shoulders the poor widow but takes to the child. He later agrees to her remaining in Hamley Hall because of the child who cannot be separated from her. Roger, who has felt unhappy at Cynthia's desertion, realizes Molly's constant and silent love for him when he comes to the town on a short visit. He therefore decides to marry her when he finally returns from Africa.

At this point the narrative broke off as Mrs. Jarndell suddenly died. However, from the draft she had left behind it becomes clear how she had intended to wind up the story. At the end of the novel she wanted Osborne's child to inherit the Hamley estate, and Roger and Molly settle in London where the former gets a professor's job at a science institute.

As is evident from this brief resume of *Wives and Daughters*, it is mainly about relationships among three families, that of a physician, a feudal Squire and a Lord belonging to the family of a new rich class of traders. It depicts the life style of the professional classes and the aristocratic families with their inherent antagonistic attitude towards the lower strata of the society.
There is the proud "hot tempered, soft hearted" Squire Hanley, who claims his descent back to the nobles before the Norman Conquest. "As regarded his position as head of the oldest family in three counties, his pride is invincible; personally, he is ill at ease in the society of his equals, deficient in manners and in education" (p.290). Arthur Pollard says that the Squire has been deliberately portrayed as a simple, uncomplicated character. He is a type of his race, the bluff, blunt yet warm-hearted country Squire, proud of his line, attached to his house and land, somewhat at a loss with anything beyond the horizon of his own estate. Though his family has a long lineage, he has been reduced to the state of mere yeomanry as his ancestors failed to use the improved methods of agriculture and he had to spend a large amount of money to protect his estate. He is proud of the fact that he belongs to an old family. He says: "I, a Hanley of Hanley, straight in descent from nobody knows where - the Heptarchy" (p.106). Belonging to such an old aristocratic family, he holds the family of Lord Cumnor who is the lord of the neighbouring town of Hollingford, in utter contempt since the latter is said to have descended from the family of traders in tobacco, as is pointed out by Lady Harriet: "We

2 Pollard, p. 244.
3 A hypothetical confederacy, in the seventh and eight centuries, of seven Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms.
4 *Wives and Daughters*, Penguin ed., Hardmondsworth, All citations of this novel have been taken from this edition.
only came into the county a century ago; and there is a tale that the first Cumnor began his fortune through selling tobacco in King James's reign" (p.663). The Squire contemptuously calls them: "mere muck of yesterday" and says "I should be glad to know where the Cumnor folk were in the time of Queen Anne?" (pp.106-7). This contempt is typical of the attitude of the old aristocracy towards the new aristocratic families which originally belonged to the trading class and had risen to peerage quite recently, as a consequence of their newly acquired wealth. The old aristocracy feels jealous of the new rich class because the latter is financially much better off while the former is not so opulent. The Squire: "know Lord Cumnor and his family had gone up in the world ('the whig rascals!') both in wealth and in station, as the Hamleys had gone down" (p. 377). Another reason for this antagonism is that while the new aristocracy mainly supports the Whig party, which stands for liberal reforms, the older one favours the Tory party which is wedded to the policy of status quo in political and economic spheres. Notwithstanding this attitude of hostility the Squire feels flattered by the attention he or his family receive from the new aristocracy because he considers this 'homage' as a symbol of the superiority of the old feudal aristocracy over the new rich class. He never goes to the Towers when invited. He says, "I think I slighted them. They asked me to dinner, after my Lord was
made Lieutenant, time after time, but I never would go near 'em. I call that my slighting them" (p. 348). The Squire tends to be suspicious of the motive behind such invitations. When Roger, his second son, is invited by Lord Hollingford to a dinner to meet a French scientist, The Squire suspects this invitation as: "a palpable Whig trick" (p. 344), and thinks that it is because of the nearness of the county elections that Lord Hollingford wishes to befriend the Squire's family. "The election is coming on, it is? But I can tell him we're not to be got so easily" (p. 343). He also remarks:

"These Whig fellows have never done their duty by me; not that I want it of them. The Duke of Debenham used to pay the respect due to 'em - the oldest landowners in the county - but since he died, and this shabby Whig lord has succeeded him, I've never dined at the lord - lieutenant's - no, not once" (p. 343).

The Squire's sense of propriety is coloured by his own feudal values. He thinks that it is highly improper for Lord Hollingford not to invite him but to invite his son, and even if a son of his was to be invited it should have been his heir and not the younger one. He remarks, "They ought to have asked Osborne. He's the representative of the Hamley's, if I'm not" (p. 344).

There is an element of ambiguity in the Squire's
attitude towards Lord Cumnor. Even though he thinks his family superior to that of Lord Cumnor, he does not appear to mind seriously an alliance with it through the marriage of his prestigious elder son, Osborne. He would have given his consent if Osborne wanted to marry Lord Hollingford's daughter, provided he had one. He tells Holly: "I was talking to madam the other day about Osborne's marrying a daughter of Lord Hollingford's -- that's to say, if he had a daughter -- he's only got boys, as it happens; but I'm not sure if I should consent to it" (p.106). The same vagueness is visible in his views when he learns of his younger son's engagement to Cynthia. Talking to Gibson he enquires about the family of Cynthia's father: "What family is she of? None of 'em in trade, I reckon,... I like honourable blood" (p.436), when Gibson replies: "I believe her father was grandson of a certain Sir Gerald Kirkpatrick. Her mother tells me it is an old baronetc... But I'm afraid that only one-eighth of Cynthia's blood is honourable. I know nothing further of her relations excepting the fact that her father was a curate" (p.436). The Squire remarks: "Professional. That's a step above trade at any rate" (p.436). A little later however he tells Holly who does not belong to an aristocratic family and with whom he has always discouraged any intimacy of his sons, "I wish it had been you, Holly, my lads had taken a fancy for... for all you were beneath what I ever thought to see them marry -- well it's
of no use -- it's too late, now" (p. 689).

Lord Cumnor, whose family is at the top of the social life in the town is, however, not a typical member of the peerage. Though as "grey-haired, red-faced, somewhat clumsy man" (p.39), he is simple and jovial by nature, as opposed to the quick-tempered Squire Hamley. He is a Whig because: "His family had obtained property and title from the Whigs at the time of the Hanoverian succession" (p.383). He is a forbearing and considerate landlord and often visits his estate and takes interest in the life of his tenants. He talks to everyone he meets though his conversation is rather one sided for he "seldom passed any one of his acquaintance without asking a question of some sort -- not always attending to the answer" (p.39). His son and heir, Lord Hollingford is a man of scientific leanings. Though a kind-hearted man, he is often mistaken for a snob because of his sober nature. Both he and his father are very hospitable and often invite "all sorts of people" (p.68) to the Towers as the Countess calls the men of learning. Lady Harriet, Lord Cumnor's youngest daughter, remarks: "Papa is so open hearted, he asks every friend he meets with to come and pay us a visit" (p.402). Lord Cumnor's wife, the Countess, being a typical Victorian aristocratic lady, does not approve them in any of their actions. Talking to Mrs. Gibson, who has formerly been a governess of her children, she remarks: "You know me well enough to be aware
that I am not the person... to go about soliciting guests. But in this instance, I bend my head; high rank should always be the first to honour those who have distinguished themselves by art or science" (p.663). Giving the reason for the haughtiness of the Countess the author sarcastically comments that she "made up by her unapproachable dignity" (p.37), for the kind and jovial nature of her husband. Lady Harriet, Lord Cumnor's youngest daughter, takes after her father in her sociable nature. She takes a keen interest in the lives of the residents of Hollingford. Once when her mother asks her: "I can't think what always makes you take such an interest in all these petty Hollingford affairs" (p. 579), she retorts: "Mamma, it's only tit for tat. They take the most lively interest in all our sayings and doings... 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" (p. 579). Though she evinces such an interest in the everyday affairs of the residents of Hollingford and is very friendly with them she does not like her father's land-agent, Mr. Preston. She says: "I cannot bear that sort of person, giving himself airs of gallantry towards one to whom his simple respect is all his duty. I can talk to one of my father's labourers with pleasure, while with a man like that underbred Fop I am all over thorns and nettles" (p. 196).
The Squire's wife is different in nature from the proud Countess, she is gentle and lovable. Though Squire Hamley loves his wife very much he cannot help remembering that she does not come from aristocratic background. He remarks that she "couldn't tell her great-grandfather from Adam" (p. 106). The Squire and his wife resemble Mr. and Mrs. Burton portrayed by Mrs. Gaskell in her short novel entitled 'Moorland Cottage', which was published in 1859. Mr. Burton, who is a yeoman has married: "a sweet, gentle lady", who is "delicate and weakly", like Mrs. Hamley and exercises a controlling influence over her husband, though: "if she ruled him never showed it." Like Mrs. Burton Mrs. Hamley yields a great influence over her husband:

Quiet and passive as Mrs. Hamley had always been in appearance, she was the ruling spirit of the house as long as she lived. The directions to the servants, down to the most minute particulars, came from her sitting-room, or from the sofa on which she lay. Her children always knew where to find her; and to find her, was to find love and sympathy. Her husband, who was often restless and angry from one cause or another, always came to her to be smoothed down and put right. He was conscious of her pleasant influence over him (pp. 285-86).

When Mrs. Hamley falls seriously ill Squire Hamley is

1 Moorland Cottage, Complete Works, p.282.
2 Ibid., p. 278.
3 Ibid., p. 323.
anxious for her and inquires continually from Molly her opinion of his wife's state of health; but when "Molly told the truth -- that every day seemed to make her weaker and weaker -- he was almost savage with the girl. He could not bear it; and he would not" (p.231). He tries to convince himself that there is nothing seriously wrong with his wife: "It's only the delicacy she's had for years;... for my opinion it's only moping and nervousness" (p. 231). He gets angry with Dr. Gibson when he is told that his wife is very ill and a consultation with the county doctor Mr. Nicholls is needed. However, when her condition worsens he sends a note to Gibson saying "write for Nicholls, and all the physicians you want... I put myself in your hands" (p. 232). When Mrs. Hamley's end draws near, he remains tied to her bedside: "The Squire scarcely left his wife's room; he sat by her, watching her, and now and then moaning to himself" (p.237). He feels absolutely broken down after her death and thinks "the keystone of the family arch was gone, and the stones of which it was composed began to fall apart". (p.286). He is very miserable because his wife "was no longer there to whom he used to carry his sore heart" (p.286).

The two sons of Squire Hamley are as different from each other as in looks. The Squire's attitude towards his sons is revealed in his conversation with Molly when she visits the Hamley Hall: "there's Osborne, who takes after his mother..."
Now, Roger is like me, a Hamley of Hamley" (p.106). Osborne Hamley, the elder son is a man of delicate health and has a poetic disposition: "His appearance had all the grace and refinement of his mother's. He was sweet-tempered and tempered and affectionate, almost as demonstrative as a girl" (p.73). Commenting on Osborne, Arthur Pollard remarks: "He has been presented in un-masculine, if not actually effeminate, terms as beautiful, languid and immaculate."¹ At school he has been very outstanding and won many prizes. He is "the pride and delight of both father and mother" (p. 75). At home his words and tastes are law. To his fond parents he appears to be a promising boy who they hope will do very well at the University, win the Senior Wrangler, a fellowship and make a grand marriage. The Squire tells Molly: "Osborne's a bit of a genius. His mother looks for great things from Osborne. I'm rather proud of him myself. He'll get a Trinity fellowship... 'I've got a son who will make a noise at Cambridge, or I'm very much mistaken'" (p.106).

The Squire's keen desire to see his elder son shine at the University is partially motivated by his own deficiency of not having been educated in one. The Squire has been handicapped because of the prejudiced attitude his father had developed towards the Universities because of his own failure at Oxford.

¹ Pollard, p.244.
He had "sworn a great oath... that none of his children to come should ever know either University by becoming a member of it" (p. 73). He, therefore, did not send his son Roger Hamley Senior, to any school or university and as a result the Squire feels awkward in educated company and avoids it as much as he can. He feels this deficiency in himself very greatly and does not wish his sons to be handicapped in a similar manner. So he sent them to Rugby and then on to Cambridge as: "the idea of Oxford was hereditarily distasteful in the Hamley family" (p. 74).

The Squire feels very miserable when his promising son Osborne fails to make a mark for himself at the University of Cambridge by his poor performance at the Mathematical Tripos and "after failing like this he is not very likely to get a fellowship" (p. 118). Even the wife of the Squire is very unhappy with her favourite son who has belied her high expectations by not qualifying himself for the coveted fellowship. Her disappointment is evident when she tells Molly about Osborne's failure: "I've made such an idol of my beautiful Osborne; and he turns out to have feet of clay not strong enough to stand firm on ground. And that's the best view of his conduct too" (p. 230). Mrs. Gaskell here expresses a very common feature of the degenerated feudal families of the Victorian age. Most of the elder sons in these families, on
when their parents pinned high hopes often proved to be worthless. Instead of devoting themselves to their studies they lead a pretentious and vain life at the University to impress upon others of their superior ancient lineage. Earlier also Mrs. Gaskell had satirized the weaknesses of the young men who were the elder sons in her short stories -- 'Moorland Cottage' and 'The Crooked Branch', in which Edward and Benjamin take to bad habits while studying at the University and thus disappoint their parents sorely. Osborne also squanders money over frivolities and incurs heavy debts, which he finds difficult to pay back on his failure to get the fellowship. When the money lenders pester the old Squire for the payment and make inquiries: "as to the entail of the estate" (p.329), he feels terribly upset and is a fit of anger he writes to his son: "not to show his face at home till he had paid off the debts he had incurred" (p. 328).

The Squire does not get reconciled to him even when Osborne returns home owing to the serious illness of his mother. Emphasizing this stubborn attitude of his father Roger tells Holly: "he didn't forgive us formerly... My father is a man of few affections, but what he has are very strong; he feels anything that touches him on these points deeply and permanently" (p. 240).

He is, however, deeply grief-stricken when Osborne dies:
"the Squire was sitting alone at the side of the bed, holding the dead man's hand, and looking straight before him at vacancy. He did not stir or move, even so much as an eyelid" (p. 606). In this miserable condition he tells Gibson: "It comes hard on me. He was my firstborn child... my eldest son. And of late years we weren't -- we weren't quite as good friends as could be wished, and I'm not sure that he knew how I loved him" (p. 611).

The Squire gets a still greater shock from his favourite son Osborne when he learns of his secret marriage with a French girl of no consequence during his stay at Cambridge. He cries out in grief: "I wish he'd ha' told me; he and I to live together with such a secret in one of us... Married so long! Oh, Osborne, Osborne, you should have told me!" (p.613). The Squire who had very high expectations about the wife of his heir "looked high, and over high, for the wife of his heir" (p. 347), is unable to believe it when Molly tells him that Osborne's wife is a French servant girl and remarks in a fit of irritation: "Do you think he'd go and marry a French baggage of a servant? It may be all a tale trumped up" (p.613).

Like other members of old English aristocracy the Squire was: "content to hate 'em and to lick 'em" (p.344). This aversion did not emanate only from the spirit of patriotism generated by long years of war between England and France, but
was also the result of the abolition of the feudal nobility in France after the French revolution.

As compared to his elder brother, Roger Hamley, the younger son of the Squire is clumsy and heavily built like his father: "his face was square, and the expression grave, and rather immobile" (p. 75). He is rather mediocre at school. His parents also have no hopes of his having a brilliant career at the university. They know that he has to make his way into the world on his own, "as he was so little likely to distinguish himself in intellectual pursuits; anything practical -- such as a civil engineer -- would be more the kind of life for him" (p. 75). This shows the concern and love of the aristocratic parents for the eldest male child who was the heir to the property, and the indifference towards the younger sons who did not inherit any property and were also not given any real attention as children. Ironically enough these neglected younger sons were able to shine more than their elder brothers who were the favourites of their parents. Roger also whom Whitfield calls: "a pleadder -- a kind of Charles Darwin, who never realizes his own worth,"1 outshines his brother at the University by distinguishing himself in the Mathematical Tripos and winning the coveted fellowship.

Though the rise of Roger in his career pleases the Squire

1 Whitfield, p.167.
he does not smelt as much in his admiration for him as he would have done had Osborne been in his place. His utterances in praise of Roger are rather mild and lukewarm: "He is a boy to be proud of, is old Roger. Steady Roger; we used to think him slow, but it seems to me that slow and sure wins the race" (p. 409). When Roger is selected to go to Africa on a trip, the Squire tells Gibson: "I shall miss the lad, I know that" (p. 409). The Squire is also not very much upset when he learns of Roger's engagement with Cynthia Kirkpatrick for he does not mind his entering into matrimony with a girl of ordinary stratum of society. With a sense of great relief he tells Gibson: "It's well he's not Osborne" (p. 436). After Osborne's death, the Squire is grief-striken and Gibson offers to inform Roger so that he may return and be a source of consolation to his father. He says: "Roger isn't Osborne" (p. 611). The author here mildly satirises the attitude of the old English aristocracy which always showered its affection on the worthless firstborn children and were blind to the real merits of the younger ones. The younger sons, however, having nothing to fall back upon by way of financial security in their own houses often worked hard and shone better in life than their elder brothers.

Roger, though dubbed as a mediocr at school, makes a special mark for himself at the University and turns a budding
young scientist. Many critics have emphasized the similarity between the academic careers of Roger and young Darwin. Though Edgar Wright does not discount the resemblance between the two, he is of the view that the latter could never have been the model as a young lover for the former. Mrs. Gaskell, however, seems to have drawn Roger's character after her son-in-law, Charles Crompton, Q.C. The description of Charles Crompton as left by her in one of her letters is very much similar to that of Roger:

He has almost perfect health, and perfect temper. I should have said not clever; but he was 4th wrangler at Cambridge and is a fellow of Trinity, and is getting on very fast in his profession; so I suppose he has those solid intellectual qualities which tell in action, though not in conversation. But his goodness is what gives me thankfulest feeling of confidence in him... He cares for science... His strong, good unsensitive character.¹

Roger is described as: "a tall powerfully-made young man, giving the impression of strength more than elegance. His face was rather square, ruddy-coloured, hair and eyes brown... He had a large mouth, with excessively mobile lips" (p.119). When he sees Cynthia Kirkpatrick he falls head over shoulders in love with her and when she accepts him and they get engaged

¹ Wright, p.221.
he offers to keep it a secret. His liberality, however, makes him say to Cynthia on the eve of his departure to Africa for two years, that she could break off the engagement if she gets involved elsewhere. He says: "I will not accept your pledge. I am bound, but you are free. I like to feel bound, it makes me happy and at peace, but with all the chances involved in the next two years, you must not shackle yourself by promises" (p.419).

Later, when Cynthia takes advantage of his words and wriggles out of the engagement with him he feels very bad, but soon reconciles himself to the situation. His decision to marry Molly proves the validity of Cynthia's forecast that Roger would marry Molly. Talking to Molly she had once pointed out:

"Molly, Roger will marry you! See if it isn't so!"

But Molly turns crimson with shame and indignation and says: "Your husband this morning! Mine tonight! What do you take him for?"

Cynthia replies with a smile: "A man! And therefore, if you won't let me call him changeable, I'll coin a word and call him consolable!" (pp. 602-3).

Though Roger communicates his decision to marry Molly to Gibson, he does not propose to her in a hurry but waits till his final return from Africa to do so.
Among the lower strata of the gentry in the countryside, *Wives and Daughters* treats mainly of the doctors, clergymen, lawyers, land-agents, governesses and members of the shabby gentry. The novel, however, focuses greater attention on the physician, Dr. Gibson and his family, than to other categories of the lower gentry. When the old and established doctor of Hollingford, Dr. Hall announces his decision to take in a partner as he is getting old, deaf and rheumatic, all Hollingford is "disturbed to its foundations" (p. 60).

The horror at Dr. Hall's taking in a partner and the prejudice against the newcomer are treated in a comic manner by the author. The old residents of Hollingford feel: "blind and deaf, and rheumatic as he might be, he was still Mr. Hall the doctor who could heal all their ailments -- unless they died meanwhile -- and he had no right to speak of growing old, and taking a partner" (p. 60). But later when Gibson is introduced to them "slyly" (p. 61), they take a liking for him and are anxious to know about his antecedents and thus many speculations are made as to "his birth, parentage, and education -- the favourite conjecture of Hollingford society was, that he was the illegitimate son of a Scotch duke, by a Frenchwoman" (p. 61). When they fail to know anything about his earlier life they comment on his physical appearance: "he was tall, grave, rather handsome than otherwise: thin enough to be called 'a very genteel figure', ... speaking with
a slight Scotch accent and, as one good lady observed, 'so very trite in his conversation', by which she meant sarcastic" (p. 61). Dr. Gibson has been modelled after Dr. Holland, Mrs. Gaskell's uncle with whom she used to go on his professional visits as Molly does with her father. Notwithstanding the initial prejudice, Gibson soon became very popular:

nearly every one sent for Mr. Gibson. Even at great houses -- even at the Towers, that greatest of all, where Mr. Hall had introduced his new partner with fear and trembling, with untold anxiety as to his behaviour, and the impression he might make on my lord the Earl, and my lady the Countess. Mr. Gibson was received at the end of a twelve month with as much welcome respect for his professional skill as Mr. Hall himself had ever been... Mr. Gibson had even been invited once to dinner at the Towers, to dine with the great Sir Astley, the head of the profession (p. 62).

His position becomes still more secure when he turns a regular consultant at the Towers: "the good doctor's business grew upon him. He thought that this increase was owing to his greater skill and experience, and he would probably have been mortified if he could have known how many of his patients were solely biased in sending for him, by the fact that he was employed at the Towers" (p. 364).
He marries the grand-niece of Mr. Hall from whom he has a daughter named Molly. After his wife's death he remains a widower for a long time, but when his daughter grows older he begins to feel that lest she be misled because of her innocence, he must have a responsible person in the house to look after her. Lord Hollingford, who is himself a widower also advises him to go in for a second wife because "she would be able to give your daughter that kind of tender supervision which, I fancy, all girls of that age require" (p. 135). Gibson reflects over his advice seriously;

but it was a case of 'first catch your hare'. Where was the 'sensible and agreeable woman of thirty or so'? Not Miss Browning, nor Miss Phoebe, nor Miss Goodenough. Among his country patients there were two classes pretty distinctly marked: farmers, whose children were unrefined and uneducated; squires, whose daughters would, indeed, think the world was coming to a pretty pass, if they were to marry a country surgeon (p. 135).

His situation makes him think about the second marriage for himself:

He was partly aware of whither he was going; and partly it was like the soft floating movement of a dream. He was more passive than active of the affair; though, if his reason had not fully approved of the step he was tending to -- if he
had not believed that a second marriage was the very best way of cutting the Gordian knot of domestic difficulties, he could have made an effort without any great trouble, and extricated himself without pain from the mesh of circumstances (p. 122).

As the class prejudices of the Victorian society leave little choice to Gibson for having a second wife he decides to marry Mrs. Kirkpatrick, the widowed governess of the Towers. While proposing to her he says: "I should like you to love my poor little Molly -- to love her as your own... Could you love her as your daughter? Will you try? Will you give me the right of introducing you to her as her future mother, as my wife?" (p. 140). But the author with her usual insinuations make the reader realize beforehand that this marriage is not to be what it is expected to be as she makes Gibson reflect over the proposal immediately after it is made: "There: he had done it -- whether it was wise or foolish -- he had done it! but he was aware that the question as to its wisdom came into his mind the instant that the words were said past recall" (p. 140).

The second marriage of Gibson does not prove to be a success because of the incompatibility of their nature. Gibson henceforth turns ironical and keeps aloof. As Arthur Pollard points out, after his marriage Gibson seems to have played his
part and therefore recedes into the background.\(^1\) Stanton A. Whitfield says: "We might well wonder how such a keen spirited man as Mr. Gibson, the country doctor, come to marry Mrs. Kirkpatrick. A man with his perception must have known from a casual acquaintanceship that she was not remarkable for unflinching morality, but then her movements were soft and sinuous."\(^2\)

Both Mr. and Mrs. Gibson, however, continue to pull on with each other without any serious animosity between them because at a very early stage Gibson realizes how mistaken he has been in his choice and finds out the shallowness of her nature. However, "he had grown accustomed to his wife by this time, and regarded silence on his own part preservative against long inconsequential arguments" (p. 260). The fact that his expectations are not realised lend a certain acridity and sarcasm in his utterances addressed to the second Mrs. Gibson. His sense of humour is his saving grace as he is encumbered with such a wife for life and there is no escape for him. "Her words were always like ready-made clothes, and never fitted individual thoughts" (p. 349). Though her husband turns sarcastic, "she had no great facility for understanding sarcasm... Yet she saw she was often in some kind of disfavour with her husband, and it made her uneasy... she liked to be

\(^1\) Pollard, p. 230.
\(^2\) Whitfield, p. 184.
liked; she wanted to regain the esteem which she did not perceive she had lost for ever" (p. 457). The couple reminds one of another maladjusted couple of this nature -- Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), by Jane Austen. Muriel Masefield is of the opinion that like Mr. Bennet, Gibson also takes refuge in satire when his wife shows her shallow airs and graces but as he is aware of the fact that his wife is "harmless, and wonderfully just to Molly for a stepmother" (p. 365), he does not want "to become more aware of her faults and foibles by defining them" (p. 365).

Being a widow, Mrs. Kirkpatrick has had to face the financial problem of supporting herself as well as her daughter from her first marriage, and has therefore to look for some security and the satisfaction of her social aspirations. Through the character of Mrs. Kirkpatrick the author highlights the condition of the English widows in the Victorian society. The second marriage was treated by these widows as a blessing, for it not only gave them a sense of financial stability but also helped them rehabilitate their position in the society.

Mrs. Gibson is basically a woman of very superficial character. She is beautiful to look at: "she was very pretty and graceful ... her beautiful hair was of that rich auburn that hardly ever turns grey... she looked much younger than her age, which was not far short of forty. She had a pleasant
voice" (pp. 129-30). However, she lacks brains and is given
to frivolous vanities. She takes pride in having had a curate
as her first husband, with remote family connections with the
landed aristocracy. She even brags: "he was only a curate, poor
fellow; but he was of a very good family, and if three of his
relations had died without children I should have been a
baronet's wife. But providence did not see fit to permit it"
(p. 51).

She had been a governess before marriage. Therefore later
when she becomes a widow she returns to her old profession and
sometimes later tries to run a school with the help of the
Cumhors with whom she had been a governess in her maiden times
and becomes what Edgar Wright calls: "a partial parasite of
the Cumhors, now a widow and desperate to escape from the
pinching existence of school-teaching." She takes pleasure in
thinking herself to be associated with an aristocratic family
and jealously guards her association with the family and is
resentful of any other lady who aspires to it.

When Gibson proposes to her she takes this marriage as
"a means of escape" (p. 176), from the life of poverty, and,
"it was such a wonderful relief to feel that she need not
struggle any more for a livelihood" (p. 140).

Though after her marriage she thinks that her status
as the wife of the local doctor entitles her to refer to the
family at the Towers as 'the Cumnors' at their back, yet she
wishes to remain in subservient contact with it and to mono-
polize her connection with that family. She even feels jealous
of her step daughter Molly when she finds Lady Harriet friendly
with her. Provoked by Molly's frequent references to Lady
Harriet she says irritably: "you insist upon knowing Lady
Harriet better than I do — I, who have known her for eighteen
years at least" (p. 223). Mrs. Gibson does not like to inform
Molly about Lady Harriet's inquiries about her.

Mrs. Gibson is equally mean in her attitude towards Roger
Hamley, the second son of the Squire for he is not to inherit
the property of his father. She is not amiable towards him
because she does not want her daughters to fall in love with
a man who has to earn his own living. On one occasion she even
crosses all limits of decency when she tells Roger rudely:
"Really, Mr. Hamley, we must learn to shut our doors on you if
you come so often, and at such early hours" (p. 358). As
opposed to this she is very favourably inclined towards Osborne,
the heir of the Squire, and is pleased to welcome him at all
hours with a view of catching him as her son-in-law. Cynthia,
being an intelligent girl sees through her mother's game and
comments sarcastically though the hidden sting is lost on her
mother: "In short, mamma, one man may steal a horse, but
another must not look over the hedge" (p. 361).
Later, however, when she learns of Osborne's fatal illness by eavesdropping in on her husband's conversation with Dr. Nicholls, and expects Roger to become the heir of the Squire, her attitude towards him changes suddenly. Henceforward she even cleverly manoeuvres Roger's visit to her house. When she learns of Cynthia's engagement with Roger she gives credit to herself for bringing them together.

This shows the attitude of the mothers with daughters of marriageable age as to how they tried to trap the heirs and cold-shouldered the younger brothers. It also reminds the reader of the ironic opening of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife".¹

Mrs. Gibson looks down upon the middle class residents of Hollingford as she thinks herself to be superior to them. Her prime object, "was to squeeze herself into 'county society'" (p. 488), she avoids visiting the people of Hollingford when they invite her and gets angry with them when they call at her house at untimely hours. She, however, relaxes these rules when Lady Cumnor pays her visits to her. The author sarcastically remarks: "Mrs. Gibson would have been indignant at any commoner who had ventured to call at such an untimely

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hour, but in the case of passage the rules of domestic morality were relaxed" (p. 661).

When after the death of her first husband she has to return to her governessing, she even sends off her young daughter to a boarding school to avoid being encumbered with her during her stay with the Cumners. She ensures that Cynthia does not turn up on her wedding day because she feels: "how disagreeable it would be to her to have her young daughter flashing out her beauty by the side of her faded bride, her mother" (p.156).

Though she is considerate towards her stepdaughter Molly, her good behaviour towards her is not spontaneous but a calculated one with a view to impressing others. When Molly asks her to leave her room as it is and not change the furniture as she was doing in Cynthia's room, as nobody would know of it, she remarks:

"In such a tittle-tattle place as Hellingford: Molly, you are either very stupid or very obstinate, or else you don't care what hard things may be said about me and all for a selfish fancy of your own! No! I owe myself the justice of acting in this matter as I please. Every one shall know I'm not a common stepmother. every penny I spend on Cynthia I shall spend on you" (pp. 219-220).

She is so foolish as not to understand that all her clever contrivances are easily seen through by every one. As \\

...
remarks: "She has been seen through all along by her rather
too clear-sighted daughter, and by her stepdaughter she was
seen through long before the child could so much as dream of
their future relations to one another." ¹

Whitfield considers her a fully realized Mrs. Browne whom
Mrs. Gaskell has earlier caricatured in her story, "Moorland
Cottage," like Mrs. Browne, Mrs. Gibson is also: "wily,
decisive, and affected, flatterer and toady." According to
him she is Mrs. Norris of *Mansfield Park* (1814) by Jane Austen
joined on to Mrs. Bennet with her, mean understanding, little
information, and uncertain temper and, when discontented, she
fancies herself nervous. ²

Edgar Wright expresses similar opinion when he points out
that Jane Austen seems to be a definite influence on Mrs. Gaskell
while portraying Mrs. Gibson. He quotes Annette B. Hopkins who
has shrewdly commented that: "In the creation of Mrs. Gibson,
in *Wives and Daughters,* she has learned what Jane Austen well
understood: the art of making stupidity interesting." ³

Rosemond Lehmann calls Mrs. Gibson a masterpiece of port-
traiture and adds that she is, "one of the most devastating portrai-
tes of a stupid, vulgar, destructive woman ever drawn this side
of wickedness." ⁴

¹ Ward, p. xxiv.
² Whitfield, pp. 181-82.
³ Quoted in Wright, p. 216.
⁴ Quoted in Pollard, p. 233.
Through Cynthia, the daughter of Mrs. Gibson by her first husband, Mrs. Gaskell presents the problem of the children who because of the neglect of their parents and absence of affection in their impressionistic age often turn wayward and unstable. Cynthia is an intelligent and, "beautiful, tall, swaying figure... her smile was perfect... her eyes were beautifully shaped... in colouring she was not unlike her mother... and her long-shaped, serious eyes were fringed with dark lashes" (p. 239), but she is not, "remarkable for unflinching morality" (p. 235). Arthur Pollard calls her a complex character and adds that her complexity is due to the fact that she is her mother's daughter. As a child she had been neglected by her mother and her father being dead she did not get the love and affection of either of them. She herself remarks: "I think, if I had been differently brought up, I shouldn't have had the sort of angry heart I have now" (p. 603). She always remembers her father who had died when she was very young. Talking to Molly she says: "He died when I was quite a little thing, and no one believes that I remember him" (p. 237). She feels that had her father been alive he would have cared for her and moulded her life more fruitfully. She bears a deep rooted grudge against her mother, who she feels has always neglected her and denied the much needed maternal affection. She remarks: "It's very shocking, I daresay! but it is so. I don't think love for one's mother quite comes by nature, and

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1 Pollard, p. 239
remember how much I have been separated from mine... she didn't care for parting with me. I was a trouble, I daresay, So I was sent to school at four years old" (p. 257), and further you adds: "I'm not good, and I told/so. Somehow, I cannot forgive her for her neglect of me as a child, when I would have clung to her" (p. 261).

Having been without love for a long time she is immediately drawn towards Molly and Mr. Gibson who shower their unreserved affection on her. She tells Molly movingly: "no one ever loved me like you, and I think, your father... I wonder, if I had been brought up like you, whether I should have been as good" (p. 372). She even feels that had she known Molly earlier she would have been a different person. She says: "I wish I had known you years ago; I should have been different to what I am" (p. 473).

Cynthia is intelligent enough to realize the main flaws in her character and conduct and attributes them to her neglected upbringing. She tells Molly that she is aware of the fact that her mother, "isn't one to help a girl with much good advice or good" (p. 486). The absence of love makes Cynthia self-centered. She herself confesses: "I like to be liked; it's born in me to try to make everyone I come near fond of me... I don't suppose I shall ever be what people call in love" (p. 454). Talking to Osborne she candidly points out the
difference between her character and that of Molly's: "I hope you notice the difference in our occupations. Mr. Hamley, Molly, you see, devotes herself to the useful, and I to the ornamental" (p. 369). In a fit of remorse for being wayward she feelingly tells Molly: "You ought not to care so much for me; I'm not good enough for you to worry yourself about me. I've given myself up a long time ago as a heartless baggage" (p. 373). Mrs. Gaskell had tried to bring about a comparison between Molly's goodness and Cynthia's lack of principles by highlighting the fact that it is the way girls are brought up that makes them good or bad. She makes Cynthia repeat the fact many times that had she been brought up in a different manner or like Molly she would have definitely been a different girl altogether.

When Roger sees Cynthia he is taken aback by her looks: "To him she was the one alone, peerless" (p. 373). He instantaneously falls in love with her. Cynthia, is however, not capable of any deep affection like Molly: "Cynthia was not capable of returning such feelings; she had had too little true love in her life, and perhaps too much admiration to do so; but she appreciated this honest ardour, this loyal worship that was new to her experience" (p. 373). She, however, accepts his hand when he proposes to her though she does not feel any deep love for him. Even after her secret engagement with Roger
she keeps encouraging other suitors also. One of these is Mr. Cook, Mr. Gibson’s erstwhile apprentice. She does not hesitate to make friendly overtures to him when he visits the Gibsons to propose to Molly and is rejected by her. She enjoys the situation when she finds Mr. Cook deeply in love with her. Another of these suitors is Mr. Henderson, a young lawyer entailed to her uncle, Mr. Kirkpatrick. He too falls in love with her and even proposes to her. Being however, engaged to Roger she rejects his suit at the time.

In fact Cynthia is not a wanton girl by nature. If she encourages other men it is only because she derives satisfaction with people falling in love with her. She has been so much starved of love in her adolescence that it tickles her vanity when young men confess their love for her. If she later breaks off her engagement with Roger it is because she feels unworthy of him. The indiscreet engagement which she has had with Preston at the age of fifteen continues to prey upon her mind. She explains to Molly the circumstances which trapped her in this engagement when she was just a child. She is unable to break off her relations with Preston because she fears that the latter might blackmail her because of the love letters she has written to him earlier and which he is not prepared to return to her. Later she succeeds in recovering these letters with the help of Molly. Yet as her engagement with Preston gets exposed in Hollingford she feels guilty of the
betrayal of Roger, and therefore breaks off her engagement with him also.

Pollard in this connection significantly remarks:  
"Cynthia's self-knowledge leads her to see that Preston is 'as much too bad for (her) as (Roger) is too good'". Left with no other choice, Cynthia finally decides to marry Mr. Henderson, her wealthy suitor who is rather feepish in nature. Mr. Gibson is wrong when he thinks that Cynthia has made her choice for Henderson because of his wealth. He remarks: "I don't wonder she preferred him to Roger Hanley. Such scent! Such gloves! and then his hair and cravats" (p. 458).

Gibson's daughter, Molly, is an honest and selfless girl who is passionately devoted to her father. Like the heroine of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, Molly is not beautiful. Yet she is more than compensated for this handicap by her moral calibre, goodness of heart and transparent sincerity. Both Molly and Jane Eyre project the image of new woman who became popular with the decline of feudal society. In the feudal set-up the wife was supposed to be the personal property of the husband and one of the decoration pieces of his home. She was therefore required to be a paragon of beauty. The bourgeoisie who emerged as dominant class after industrialism attached more importance to the wives who were intelligent, prudent and helpful companions.

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1 Pollard, p. 241.
Molly had been content with her life with her widowed father and her governess, Miss Hyre, and has never even dreamt that her father would remarry. She is unable to believe the casual suggestion of Squire Hanley that her father might go in for a marriage. Angus Easson is right when he remarks that Molly "is agitated by the suggestion of Squire Hanley that her father might marry again, though this is scarcely more than a passing shadow... it is one of Gaskell's key-notes which prepare the reader." Later when the threat of her father's remarriage becomes a reality she feels disturbed and is unable to suppress her resentment when her father comes to inform her of the step he has taken. She anticipates him by saying: "You are going to be married again" (p. 145), and adds "So I was sent out of the house that all this might be quietly arranged in my absence?" (p. 146).

Though Molly gets reconciled to her situation, yet she is surprised that a man like her father could come to like Mrs. Kirkpatrick enough to marry her. "This was an unsolved problem that she unconsciously put aside as inexplicable" (p. 161). This dislike of Molly for her future stepmother reminds one of Mrs. Gaskell's own dislike of her own stepmother. It has been repeatedly pointed out by critics that Mrs. Kirkpatrick has been modelled after the second Mrs. Stevenson with whom Mrs.

1 Easson, p. 194.
Gaskell was never on good terms. It was an alliance with which her father was also not happy. It is likely that Molly's impressions about Mrs. Kirkpatrick are based on the novelist's own impressions of her stepmother.

Molly does not feel fully at home with her stepmother as is evident from the reply she gives to Mrs. Hamley's query: "You and Mrs. Gibson got on happily together?", she replies: "Not always, you know we didn't know much of each other before we were put to live together" (p. 227). Later, however, she begins to sympathise with her stepmother when her father discovers the frivolity of his new wife and turns sarcastic towards her. Molly feels sorry for her and sometimes takes "her stepmother’s part in secret; she felt as if she herself could never have borne her father's hard speeches so patiently; they would have cut her to the heart" (p. 457). She even wishes the return of the early days of her father's remarriage, "the vanished blindness in which her father had passed the first year of his marriage" (p. 457).

Good-natured as Molly is, she does not feel any rancour against her stepsister Cynthia when the latter comes to stay with the Gibsons. She even begins to love Cynthia like her own real sister. She is not jealous of her even when Cynthia gets engaged to Roger whom she (Molly) herself loves secretly. She does not also try to use Cynthia's long-standing engagement
to Preston to create a wedge between her and Roger. Instead she helps Cynthia in recovering her love letters from Preston and breaking off her relations with him. It is not surprising that her goodness is ultimately rewarded and she wins the love of Roger to whom she alone could have proved to be a worthy wife.

From the very beginning of her friendship with Roger she has been secretly in love with him and he does not know of it; though when she had met him for the first time she had found him rather awkward. Roger falls in love with the beautiful Cynthia. Molly is rewarded in the end when Roger realizes her worth and wants to marry her. Stanton A. Whitfield makes a relevant observation when he remarks that both Molly and Roger are essentially good but adds: "Perhaps Mrs. Gaskell was wrong in designing Roger for Molly's future husband. Their sterling qualities are so much alike that it is questionable if, in reality, they would have been happy together."

Molly's strength of character makes her feel quite at ease even in the company of those who are superior to her on the social rung of ladder. She meets Lady Harriet as an equal and becomes friendly with her. She is instrumental in making Lady Harriet shed her class snobbery and turn friendly with other women of the town. She feels no hesitation in snubbing Lady Harriet when the latter refers to the Miss Brownings as:

1 Whitfield, p. 187.
"Pleassey and Flapsey" (p. 196), adding: "I've always wanted to see the kind of cousin of such people" (p. 196). Molly criticises her attitude by saying, "Your ladyship keeps speaking of the sort of -- the class of people to which I belong as if it was a kind of strange animal you are talking about" (p. 196). Later when Lady Harriet expresses her desire to see Molly at the Brownings, the latter tells her bluntly: "I would rather not -- because I think that I ought not to have any one see me who laughs at the friends I am staying with, and calls them names" (p. 199). Lady Harriet appreciates Molly's outspokenness and hence onwards comes closer to Miss Brownings and other friends of Molly.

Molly is also very intimate with Squire Hanley and his wife. They love her like their own daughter who had died some years ago. She goes to stay in their house often and nurses Mrs. Hanley when she falls seriously ill. She is deeply grieved when Mrs. Hanley whom she loves like her own mother dies.

The notable qualities of Molly are particularly revealed on two occasions. First when she accidently learns of the secret marriage of Osborne and promises him: "never to speak about it to anyone" (p. 247). She guards this secret well and acquaints the Squire about it only after Osborne's death because she feels that Mrs. Osborne and her child should get their proper place in the Squire's family.
On the second occasion she even risks her own reputation to help Cynthia by clandestinely meeting Preston to recover her (Cynthia's) love letters. The exposure of her secret meeting with Preston makes her the butt of the town gossip. Her father learns of it and asks her: "Molly, what is this I hear? That you have been keeping up a clandestine intercourse with Mr. Preston -- meeting him in out-of-the-way places; exchanging letters with him in a stealthy way?" (p.567). She tells him frankly: "Yes, papa, I have; but I don't think I was wrong... I cannot tell you all. It is not my secret, or you should know it directly" (p. 568). Lady Harriet too is very much shocked when she comes to know of the rumour about Molly's supposed secret affair with Preston. She feels relieved when she learns from Preston himself that it was Cynthia he was interested in and not in Molly who had met him only on behalf of Cynthia. Lady Harriet then walks with Molly in the town to impress upon the people of Hellingford of the latter's goodness.

Whitfield is right when he observes that Molly is "one of the most lovable heroines of fiction... Unselfish, tender, and devoted... Her love, strong and selfless, makes her a tower of strength in comparison to her impulsive half-sister Cynthia." Arthur Pollard calls Molly "one of those good, but not simply good, young women of whom the Victorians were fond. There is no priggishness about her; she is too natural

1 Whitfield, p. 179.
Mrs. Gaskell has also depicted realistically the spinsters and the widows belonging to the shabby gentry. The two Miss Brownings and Mrs. Goodenough, who fall in this category, have their own code of gentility and love of gossip. The Miss Brownings have been modelled after the two elderly cousins of Mrs. Gaskell, the Miss Hollands, with whom the novelist had lived in her childhood. As they were elderly ladies even at the time Mrs. Gaskell was a young girl she observed all their eccentricities and later recalled them in her stories. These two cousins were also portrayed by her earlier in her novelette Cranford as the two Miss Jenkyns. It can be said that the Miss Jenkyns made their reappearance in the new guise of Miss Brownings. The Miss Brownings are shown to be friendly with Gibson when young and had entertained the idea of Gibson wanting to marry one of them. They are, however, disappointed when Gibson marries the senior doctor's grand-niece. The author comments on their situation ironically: "The two Miss Brownings showed no signs of going into a consumption on the occasion, although their looks and manners were carefully watched. On the contrary, they were rather boisterously merry at the wedding, and poor Mrs. Gibson it was that died of consumption, four or five years after her marriage" (p. 62).

1 Pollard, p. 231.
After the death of the first Mrs. Gibson, Miss Phoebe would fail have taken a quasi-motherly interest in his little girl, had she not been guarded by a watchful dragon in the shape of Betty, her nurse, who was jealous of any interference between her and her charge; and especially resentful on disagreeable towards all those ladies who, by suitable age, rank, or propinquity, she thought capable of "casting sheep's eyes at master" (p. 63). Later when Gibson is going to remarry he visits the Brownings and asks them to look after Molly while his house is being prepared for his marriage. Mrs. Gaskell adds rather sarcastically:

A little hope darted up in Miss Phoebe's breast. She had often said to her sister... 'that the only man who could ever bring her to think of matrimony was Mr. Gibson; but if he ever proposed, she should feel bound to accept him, for poor dear Mary's sake; never explaining what exact style of satisfaction she imagined she should give to her dead friend by marrying her late husband (p. 178-79).

It is unfortunate that Mrs. Gaskell's untimely death in 1865, left the novel *Adventures and Daughters* incomplete. Mr. Frederick Greenwood has tried to reconstruct for the readers the rough draft of what would have been the last chapter of this novel of the idyllic country life had Mrs. Gaskell...
remained alive. Writing about the meeting of Roger and Molly after his return from Africa and his proposing to her, Mr. Greenwood regretfully remarks: "How charmingly that scene would have been drawn, had Mrs. Gaskell lived to depict it, we can only imagine that it would have been charming — especially in what Molly did, and looked, and said — we know". (p. 706).

Another scene which needed Mrs. Gaskell’s keen emotional understanding in depicting it is when Cynthia's husband, Mr. Henderson, learns that the famous traveller, scientist Roger Hamley is known to the Gibsons and he is surprised to realize that Cynthia had never mentioned it, "How well that little incident too would have been described?" (p. 707).

Like the previous novels, *Ayes and Daughters* also reveals the ethos of the Victorian society in all its rich and varied aspects. Rosamond Lehmann has called it "incomparably her richest and most satisfying" novel.¹ It also marks an advance on the technical skill of Mrs. Gaskell as a novelist. On the one hand she makes an improvement on the dramatic technique of Jane Austen in depicting the personal relationships among characters and on the other, she paves the way for the novel of stream of consciousness technique by frequent use of rambling interior monologues of different characters.

¹ Quoted in Pollard, p. 246.
The discussion of *Ayes and Daughters* can be very aptly ended with the commendation of it in a review in *The Nation* by Henry James who can be termed her successor in the novel:

So delicately, so elaborately, so artistically, so truthfully, and heartily is the story wrought out, that the hours given to its perusal seem like hours actually spent, in the flesh as well as in the spirit, among the scenes and people described, in the atmosphere of their motives, feelings, traditions, associations.¹

¹ Pollard, p. 247.