

**A HOUSE
DIVIDED AGAINST
ITSELF**

IN THREE VOLUMES

COMPLETE

BY MRS OLIPHANT

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**A HOUSE DIVIDED
AGAINST ITSELF.**

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

THE day was warm, and there was no shade; out of the olive woods which they had left behind, and where all was soft coolness and freshness, they had emerged into a piece of road widened and perfected by recent improvements till it was as shelterless as a broad street. High walls on one side clothed with the green clinging trails of the mesembryanthemum, with palm-trees towering above, but throwing no shadow below; on the other a low house or two, and more garden walls, leading in a broad curve to the little old walled town, its campanile rising up over the clustered roofs, in which was their home. They had fifteen minutes or more of dazzling sunshine before them ere they could reach any point of shelter.

Ten minutes, or even five, would have been enough for Frances. She could have run along, had she been alone, as like a bird as any human creature could be, being so light and swift and young. But it was very different with her father. He walked but slowly at the best of times; and in the face of the sun at noon, what was to be expected of him? It was part of the strange contrariety of fate, which was against him in whatever he attempted, small or great, that it should be just here, in this broad, open, unavoidable path, that he encountered one of those parties which always made him wroth, and which usually he managed to keep clear of with such dexterity—an English family from one of the hotels.

Tourists from the hotels are always objectionable to residents in a place. Even when the residents are themselves strangers—perhaps, indeed, all the more from that fact—the chance visitors

who come to stare and gape at those scenes which the others have appropriated and taken possession of, are insufferable. Mr Waring had lived in the old town of Bordighera for a great number of years. He had seen the Marina and the line of hotels on the beach created, and he had watched the travellers arriving to take possession of them—the sick people, and the people who were not sick. He had denounced the invasion unceasingly, and with vehemence; he had never consented to it. The Italians about might be complacent, thinking of the enrichment of the neighbourhood, and of what was good for trade, as these prosaic people do; but the English colonist on the Punto could not put up with it. And to be met here, on his return from his walk, by an unblushing band about whom there could be no mistake, was very hard to bear. He had to walk along exposed to the fire of all their unabashed and curious glances, to walk slowly, to miss none, from that of the stout mother to that of the slim governess. In the rear of the party came the papa, a portly Saxon, of the class which, if comparisons could be thought of in so broad and general a sentiment, Mr Waring disliked worst of all—a big man, a rosy man, a fat man, in large easy morning clothes, with a big white umbrella over his head. This last member of the family came at some distance behind the rest. He did not like the sun, though he had been persuaded to leave England in search of it. He was very warm, moist, and in a state of general relaxation, his tidy necktie coming loose, his gloves only half on, his waistcoat partially unbuttoned. It was March, when no doubt a good genuine east wind was blowing at home. At that moment this traveller almost regretted the east wind.

The Warings were going up-hill towards their abode: the slope was gentle enough, yet it added to the slowness of Mr Waring's pace. All the English party had stared at him, as is the habit of

English parties; and indeed he and his daughter were not unworthy of a stare. But all these gazes came with a cumulation of curiosity to widen the stare of the last comer, who had, besides, twenty or thirty yards of vacancy in which the indignant resident was fully exposed to his view. Little Frances, who was English enough to stare too, though in a gentlewomanly way, saw a change gradually come, as he gazed, over the face of the stranger. His eyebrows rose up bushy and arched with surprise; his eyelids puckered with the intentness of his stare; his lips dropped apart. Then he came suddenly to a stand-still, and gasped forth the word "WARING!" in tones of surprise to which capital letters can give but faint expression.

Mr Waring, struck by this exclamation as by a bullet, paused too, as with something of that inclination to turn round which is said to be produced by a sudden hit. He put up his hand momentarily, as if to pull down his broad-brimmed hat over his brows. But in the end he did neither. He stood and faced the stranger with angry energy. "Well?" he said.

"Dear me! who could have thought of seeing you here? Let me call my wife. She will be delighted. Mary! Why, I thought you had gone to the East. I thought you had disappeared altogether. And so did everybody. And what a long time it is, to be sure! You look as if you had forgotten me."

"I have," said the other, with a supercilious gaze, perusing the large figure from top to toe.

"Oh come, Waring! Why—Mannering; you can't have forgotten Mannering, a fellow that stuck by you all through. Dear, how it brings up everything, seeing you again! Why, it must be a

dozen years ago. And what have you been doing all this time? Wandering over the face of the earth, I suppose, in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, since nobody has ever fallen in with you before.”

“I am something of an invalid,” said Waring. “I fear I cannot stand in the sun to answer so many questions. And my movements are of no importance to any one but myself.”

“Don’t be so misanthropical,” said the stranger in his large round voice. “You always had a turn that way. And I don’t wonder if you are soured—any fellow would be soured. Won’t you say a word to Mary? She’s looking back, wondering with all her might what new acquaintance I’ve found out here, never thinking it’s an old friend. Hillo, Mary! What’s the matter? Don’t you want to see her? Why, man alive, don’t be so bitter! She and I have always stuck up for you; through thick and thin, we’ve stuck up for you. Eh! can’t stand any longer? Well, it is hot, isn’t it? There’s no variety in this confounded climate. Come to the hotel, then—the Victoria, down there.”

Waring had passed his interrogator, and was already at some distance, while the other, breathless, called after him. He ended, affronted, by another discharge of musketry, which hit the fugitive in the rear. “I suppose,” the indiscreet inquirer demanded, breathlessly, “that’s the little girl?”

Frances had followed with great but silent curiosity this strange conversation. She had not interposed in any way, but she had stood close by her father’s side, drinking in every word with keen ears and eyes. She had heard and seen many strange things, but never an encounter like this; and her eagerness to know what it meant

was great; but she dared not linger a moment after her father's rapid movement of the hand, and the longer stride than usual, which was all the increase of speed he was capable of. As she had stood still by his side without a question, she now went on, very much as if she had been a delicate little piece of machinery of which he had touched the spring. That was not at all the character of Frances Waring; but to judge by her movements while at her father's side, an outside observer might have thought so. She had never offered any resistance to any impulse from him in her whole life; indeed it would have seemed to her an impossibility to do so. But these impulses concerned the outside of her life only. She went along by his side with the movement of a swift creature restrained to the pace of a very slow one, but making neither protest nor remark. And neither did she ask any explanation, though she cast many a stolen glance at him as they pursued their way. And for his part, he said nothing. The heat of the sun, the annoyance of being thus interrupted, were enough to account for that.

This broad bit of sunny road which lay between them and the shelter of their home had been made by one of those too progressive municipalities, thirsting for English visitors and tourists in general, who fill with hatred and horror the old residents in Italy; and after it followed a succession of stony stairs more congenial to the locality, by which, under old archways and through narrow alleys, you got at last to the wider centre of the town, a broad stony piazza, under the shadow of the Bell Tower, the characteristic campanile which was the landmark of the place. Except on one side of the piazza, all here was in grateful shade. Waring's stern face softened a little when he came into these cool and almost deserted streets: here and there was a woman at a doorway, an old man in the deep shadow of an open shop or booth

unguarded by any window, two or three girls filling their pitchers at the well, but no intrusive tourists or passengers of any kind to break the noonday stillness. The pair went slowly through the little town, and emerged by another old gateway, on the farther side, where the blue Mediterranean, with all its wonderful shades of colour, and line after line of headland cutting down into those ethereal tints, stretched out before them, ending in the haze of the Ligurian mountains. The scene was enough to take away the breath of one unaccustomed to that blaze of wonderful light, and all the delightful accidents of those purple hills. But this pair were too familiarly acquainted with every line to make any pause. They turned round the sunny height from the gateway, and entered by a deep small door sunk in the wall, which stood high like a great rampart rising from the Punto. This was the outer wall of the palace of the lord of the town, still called *the* Palazzo at Bordighera. Every large house is a palace in Italy; but the pretensions of this were well founded. The little door by which they entered had been an opening of modern and peaceful times, the state entrance being through a great doorway and court on the inner side. The deep outer wall was pierced by windows, only at the height of the second storey on the sea side, so that the great marble stair up which Waring toiled slowly was very long and fatiguing, as if it led to a mountaintop. He reached his rooms breathless, and going in through antechamber and corridor, threw himself into the depths of a large but upright chair. There were no signs of luxury about. It was not one of those hermitages of culture and ease which English recluses make for themselves in the most unlikely places. It was more like a real hermitage; or, to speak more simply, it was like, what it really was, an apartment in an old Italian house, in a rustic castle, furnished and provided as such a place, in the possession of its natural inhabitants, would be.

The Palazzo was subdivided into a number of habitations, of which the apartment of the Englishman was the most important. It was composed of a suite of rooms facing to the sea, and commanding the entire circuit of the sun; for the windows on one side were to the east, and at the other the apartment ended in a large loggia, commanding the west and all the glorious sunsets accomplished there. We Northerners, who have but a limited enjoyment of the sun, show often a strange indifference to him in the sites and situations of our houses; but in Italy it is well known that where the sun does not go the doctor goes, and much more regard is shown to the aspect of the house.

The Warings at the worst of that genial climate had little occasion for fire; they had but to follow the centre of light when he glided out of one room to fling himself more abundantly into another. The Punto is always full in the cheerful rays. It commands everything—air and sea, and the mountains and all their thousand effects of light and shade; and the Palazzo stands boldly out upon this the most prominent point in the landscape, with the houses of the little town withdrawing on a dozen different levels behind. In the warlike days when no point of vantage which a pirate could seize upon was left undefended or assailable, it is probable that there was no loggia from which to watch the western illuminations. But peace has been so long on the Riviera that the loggia too was antique, the parapet crumbling and grey. It opened from a large room, very lofty, and with much faded decoration on the upper walls and roof, which was the salone or drawing-room, beyond which was an ante-room, then a sort of library, a dining-room, a succession of bed-chambers; much space, little furniture, sunshine and air unlimited, and a view from every window which it was worth living to be able to look out upon night and day. This,

however, at the moment of which we write, was shut out all along the line, the green *persiani* being closed, and nothing open but the loggia, which was still cool and in the shade. The rooms lay in a soft green twilight, cool and fresh; the doors were open from one to another, affording a long vista of picturesque glimpses.

From where Waring had thrown himself down to rest, he looked straight through the apartment, over the faded formality of the ante-room with its large old chairs, which were never moved from their place, across his own library, in which there was a glimmer of vellum binding and old gilding, to the table with its white tablecloth, laid out for breakfast in the eating-room. The quiet soothed him after a while, and perhaps the evident preparations for his meal, the large and rotund flask of Chianti which Domenico was placing on the table, the vision of another figure behind Domenico with a delicate dish of mayonnaise in her hands. He could distinguish that it was a mayonnaise, and his angry spirit calmed down. Noon began to chime from the campanile, and Frances came in without her hat and with the eagerness subdued in her eyes. "Breakfast is ready, papa," she said. She had that look of knowing nothing and guessing nothing beyond what lies on the surface, which so many women have.

She was scarcely to be called a woman, not only because of being so young, but of being so small, so slim, so light, with such a tiny figure, that a stronger breeze than usual would, one could not help thinking, blow her away. Her father was very tall, which made her tiny size the more remarkable. She was not beautiful—few people are to the positive degree; but she had the prettiness of youth, of round soft contour, and peach-like skin, and clear eyes. Her hair was light brown, her eyes dark brown, neither very remarkable; her features small and clearly cut, as was her figure,

no slovenliness or want of finish about any line. All this pleasing exterior was very simple and easily comprehended, and had but little to do with her, the real Frances, who was not so easy to understand. She had two faces, although there was in her no guile. She had the countenance she now wore, as it were for daily use—a countenance without expression, like a sunny cheerful morning in which there is neither care nor fear—the countenance of a girl calling papa to breakfast, very punctual, determined that nobody should reproach her as being half of a minute late, or having a hair or a ribbon a hair's-breadth out of place. That such a girl should have ever suspected anything, feared anything—except perhaps gently that the mayonnaise was not to papa's taste—was beyond the range of possibilities; or that she should be acquainted with anything in life beyond the simple routine of regular hours and habits, the sweet and gentle bond of the ordinary, which is the best rule of young lives.

Frances Waring had sometimes another face. That profile of hers was not so clearly cut for nothing; nor were her eyes so lucid only to perceive the outside of existence. In her room, during the few minutes she spent there, she had looked at herself in her old-fashioned dim glass, and seen a different creature. But what that was, or how it was, must show itself farther on. She led the way into the dining-room, the trimmest composed little figure, all England embodied—though she scarcely remembered England—in the self-restrained and modest toilet of a little girl accustomed to be cared for by women well instructed in the niceties of feminine costume; and yet she had never had any one to take counsel with except an Italian maid-of-all-work, who loved the brightest primitive colours, as became her race. Frances knew so few English people that she had not even the admiration of surprise at

her success. Those she did know took it for granted that she got her pretty sober suits, her simple unelaborate dresses, from some very excellent dressmaker at “home,” not knowing that she did not know what home was.

Her father followed her, as different a figure as imagination could suggest. He was very tall, very thin, with long legs and stooping shoulders, his hair in limp locks, his shirt-collar open, a velvet coat—looking as entirely adapted to the locality, the conventional right man in the right place, as she was not the conventional woman. A gloomy look, which was habitual to him, a fretful longitudinal pucker in his forehead, the hollow lines of ill health in his cheeks, disguised the fact that he was, or had been, a handsome man; just as his extreme spareness and thinness made it difficult to believe that he had also been a very powerful one. Nor was he at all old, save in the very young eyes of his daughter, to whom forty-five was venerable. He might have been an artist or a poet of a misanthropical turn of mind; though, when a man has chronic asthma, misanthropy is unnecessary to explain his look of pain, and fatigue, and disgust with the outside world. He walked languidly, his shoulders up to his ears, and followed Frances to the table, and sat down with that air of dissatisfaction which takes the comfort out of everything. Frances either was inaccessible to this kind of discomfort, or so accustomed to it that she did not feel it. She sat serenely opposite to him, and talked of indifferent things.

“Don’t take the mayonnaise, if you don’t like it, papa; there is something else coming that will perhaps be better. Mariuccia does not at all pride herself upon her mayonnaise.”

“Mariuccia knows very little about it; she has not even the sense to know what she can do best.” He took a little more of the

dish, partly out of contradiction, which was the result which Frances hoped.

“The lettuce is so crisp and young, that makes it a little better,” she said, with the air of a connoisseur.

“A little better is not the word; it is very good,” he said, fretfully; then added with a slight sigh, “Everything is better for being young.”

“Except people, I know. Why does young mean good with vegetables and everything else, and silly only when it is applied to people?—though it can’t be helped, I know.”

“That is one of your metaphysical questions,” he said, with a slight softening of his tone. “Perhaps because of human jealousy. We all like to discredit what we haven’t got, and most people you see are no longer young.”

“Oh, do you think so, papa? I think there are more young people than old people.”

“I suppose you are right, Fan; but they don’t count for so much, in the way of opinion at least. What has called forth these sage remarks?”

“Only the lettuce,” she said, with a laugh. Then, after a pause, “For instance, there were six or seven children in the party we met to-day, and only two parents.”

“There are seldom more than two parents, my dear.”

She had not looked up when she made this careless little speech, and yet there was a purpose in it, and a good deal of keen observation through her drooped eyelashes. She received his reply

with a little laugh. "I did not mean that, papa; but that six or seven are a great deal more than two, which of course you will laugh at me for saying. I suppose they were all English?"

"I suppose so. The father—if he was the father—certainly was English."

"And you knew him, papa?"

"He knew me, which is a different thing."

Then there was a little pause. The conversation between the father and daughter was apt to run in broken periods. He very seldom originated anything. When she found a subject upon which she could interest him, he would reply, to a certain limit, and then the talk would drop. He was himself a very silent man, requiring no outlet of conversation; and when he refused to be interested, it was a task too hard for Frances to lead him into speech. She on her side was full of a thousand unsatisfied curiosities, which for the most part were buried in her own bosom. In the meantime Domenico made the circle of the table with the new dish, and his step and a question or two from his master were all the remarks that accompanied the meal. Mr Waring was something of a *gourmet*, but at the same time he was very temperate—a conjunction which is favourable to fine eating. His table was delicately furnished with dishes almost infinitesimal in quantity, but superlative in quality; and he ate his dainty light repast with gravity and slowly, as a man performs what he feels to be one of the most important functions of his life.

"Tell Mariuccia that a few drops from a fresh lemon would have improved this *ragoût*—but a very fresh lemon."

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