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LANCASHIRE MEMORIES









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LANCASHIRE MEMORIES



LANCASHIRE

MEMORIES.

BY LOUISA POTTER.

*"Could those few pleasant days again appear,
Might one wish bring them, would I wish them here?
I would not trust my heart—the dear delight
Seems so to be desired, perhaps I might."*



London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1879.

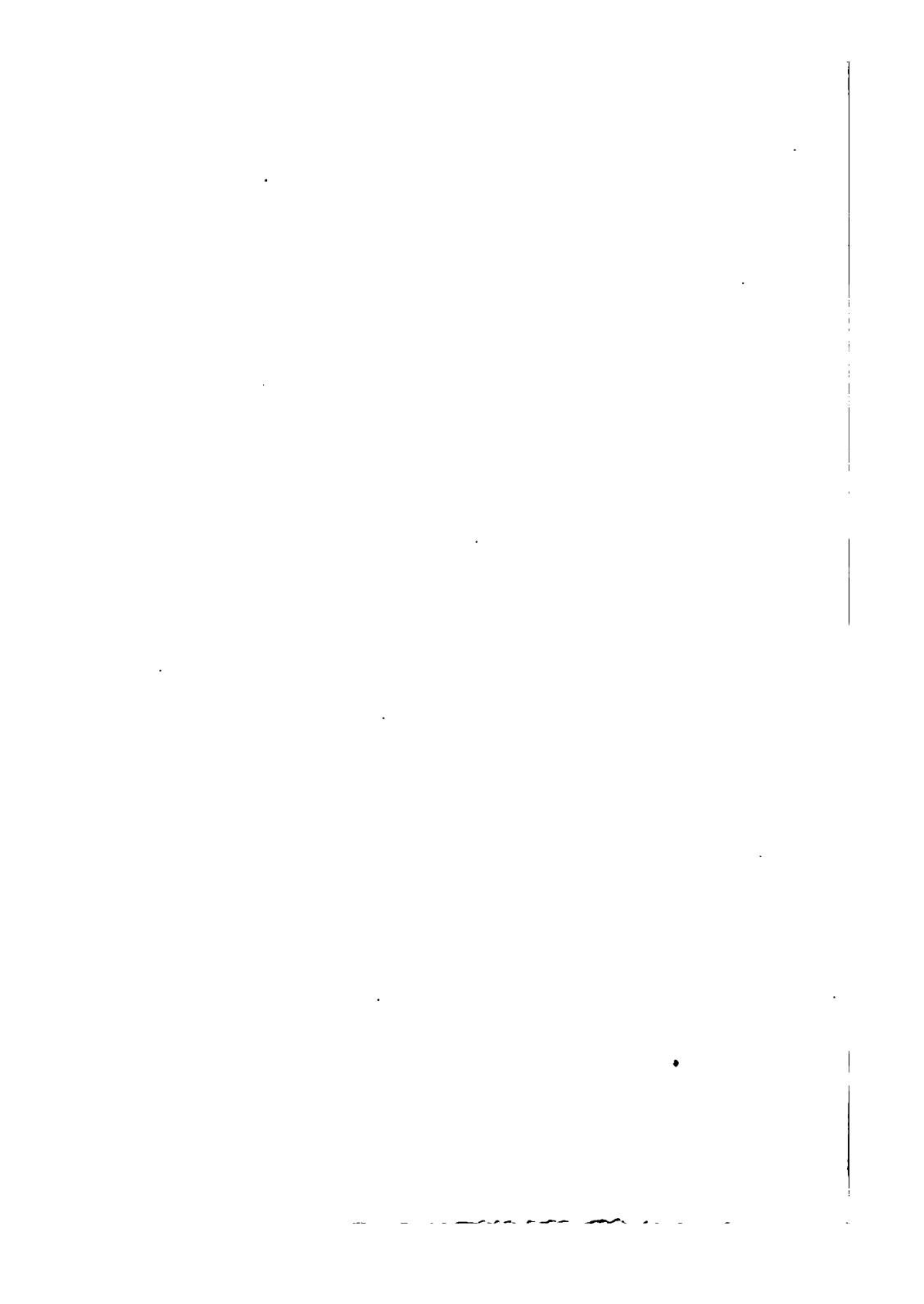
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270 . f . 682 .

LONDON:
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR,
BRAD STREET HILL.

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RIVERTON.

*“How often have I paused on every charm—
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighbouring hill.”*

GOLDSMITH



HEARD a friend say the other day that Lancashire was a county without country, that each large town sent forth such long straggling suburbs of houses and streets, that they met the corresponding offshoots of the next town, and so left no room for fields and trees. She knew little of Lancashire who said so; it is a

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libel on the dear old county. There were, and are yet, nooks and corners, for those who may be at the trouble to seek them, as rural and primitive as may be found in the remotest agricultural districts, where trade is either a mystery to be wondered at, or a vulgarity to be sneered at.

My memory clings lovingly to one sweet village, where I was in the habit of passing pleasant holiday times with some of my young companions. I may have since seen higher mountains or lovelier valleys, finer trees or more magnificent waterfalls, but Riverton is the Arcadia of my young life.

Before railroads realised the fairy tale of Fortunatus's wishing-cap, where you sat on a carpet and wished to be anywhere, and there you were, it was matter of consideration how to reach out-of-the-way places, except by leaving the stage-coach at the nearest point of the high road, or else taking a chaise for the whole distance. We were sometimes

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indulged with the chaise for the eight miles from the large town to Riverton; but we oftener walked, and sent the trunks by old Charles Moody the carrier, who plied three days a week with butter, fruit and vegetables, on his outward-bound journey, and returned laden with groceries, crockery-ware and linen-drapery for the whole district back again.

We rather liked the walking; for time was no object, and we could afford to be the whole day about it. We kept steadily along the high road for six miles, and then turned into Riverton Lane. Then for the first time we felt we were in the country; we had left high roads and manufactories behind us, and were in no particular hurry to see them again.

The middle of the lane was sandy and unpaved, bordered by a broad margin of soft grass and a straggling unpruned edge, where the bramble and the dog-rose threw their long garlands abroad, and the honeysuckle twined

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its supple stem round the thorn, and scattered its pink and yellow waxen blossoms in wild profusion, mingled and brightened with the glowing green and golden foliage of the young oak. Here and there a shining holly reared its head a little higher than its neighbours, or an old tree, with its trunk overgrown with ivy, stood single at intervals, like extreme old age, surviving its contemporaries, rising above the thorns and blossoms of life, as it approached nearer and nearer to death.

The village of Riverton stood at the end of the lane ; but the houses were all detached and placed at such distances, it was not easy to tell where the village proper began and ended. The first was a white cottage, occupied on Saturdays and Sundays by a bachelor lawyer from the large town ; a tiny dwelling in front of a clump of trees, precisely like the houses children draw on slates, with a door in the middle, a window on each side, three windows above, a railing, a gate, and a pump

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with a long curled handle, all in a row. The rooms were lower than the usual lowness of cottage rooms, lest, by their increased height, the chimneys of the house might possibly in winter-time, when the leaves were off, be seen from the windows of the "Hall." It was a wonderful little cottage in its capability of holding nephews and nieces; up stairs in the holidays they were packed as close as potted shrimps; and sometimes the bachelor himself, being considerably taller than the average height of humanity, would call out, "Are you all in your rooms?" in order that he might open his bed-room door and sleep comfortably with his feet out on the landing.

The dwelling of most pretension in the village was the "Hall," the seat of the Squire, an old house with a modern brick front, a pediment and a flight of steps; standing, respectable and dignified, embosomed in its own woods, and such a rookery behind it as new gentry vainly sigh after.

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The rook is an essentially aristocratic bird ; the country people say it will only settle in the neighbourhood of a good old family. However this may be, a neighbouring proprietor—a very great man indeed—Lofty Highway, Esq., of Highmount, but who never had any ancestors, at least none it was worth while mentioning, wished to increase the dignity of his domain by adding a rookery ; so in the early spring, before the young ones were fledged, nests and young were fetched in baskets from Riverton, and placed quite naturally in the trees of Highmount : but there is no deceiving sensible rooks : they never could be induced to build, and so far corroborated the popular opinion.

There was not much of out-door decoration about the Hall, no flower-beds, no smooth lawn, no evidence of a lady's taste or care, for the Squire was unmarried ; the hay-field came up to the gravel walk in front, and the garden was a small square inclosed space

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with paved walks, that produced gooseberries, currants, vegetables, and a few old-fashioned flowers, of which bachelors' buttons and sweet scabious predominated.

The dairy stood in the wood behind the house, and the churning was carried on by means of the clear brook that rushed by, turning the wheel communicating with the churn. That was a pretty dairy,—so clean and cool, overshadowed with trees, and the sound of running water perpetually murmuring in the ear; but as pretty as anything was the dairy-woman and her children,—such chubby elves, with complexions all “cream and roses,” such round sweet eyes, such clustering curly hair, for which Betty regularly apologised. “Indeed, ladies,” she would say, “I do what I can; I brush and I comb, I comb and I brush, and do what I will I cannot get it straight.”

Across the paddock at the edge of the wood was a white weather-stained dwelling, with a

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garden not very well cultivated, that belonged to the two Miss Archers, maiden sisters, whose object in life had resolved into the one apprehension of taking cold. Such devices there were for keeping out the enemy, such airing of clothing, such stuffing of keyholes, and averting draughts, as if God's precious gift, pure air, was to be regarded suspiciously, as rheumatism in disguise! The linen for the night was put under the cushions of the parlour chairs and assiduously sat upon during the day, whilst that for the day was safely and warmly accommodated at night under their own pillows.

The story went that Miss Martha, who was something of an invalid, sat up in bed in her bonnet and mantle. Kind and good they were withal, and ever ready to lend a helping hand to their neighbours in sorrow or difficulty.

The tall red brick house on the village green was the abode of a widow lady, with four or five grown-up daughters, smart young

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ladies, who did not care much for the country, and took their daily walk along the high road, or at least along the lane leading to the high road. They lived there many years; but at length, as the mother significantly observed, "We stay and stay, and nobody comes," they departed for the town, where it seems somebody did come, for they married in course of time.

Across the green and down in a little dell was the school; not a charity-school—oh no!—but a free-school, founded by a pious lover of his kind for the benefit of this his native village. Some of the neighbouring farmers eked out their means of livelihood by boarding the boys who came from a distance to this grammar-school, for it had a certain reputation, and once a Bishop had been educated within its walls. The church, of grey stone, with its little cupola, stood on a small eminence, primitive and simple almost to bareness, and looked down with the least possible air

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of superiority on its opposite neighbour, the little old chapel. Yet there was a kind and Christian example here worthy the imitation of those zealous disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus who manifest their faith in Him by intolerance, hatred and contempt. At the annual charity sermon in the church for the benefit of the Sunday-schools, the chapel was closed, and the whole congregation trooped to church to contribute their mite towards their neighbours' advantage; and when the chapel, in turn, had its collection, the church closed its doors, and its people worshipped with their fellow-christians.

The village inn, with the Squire's family crest for the sign, stood at the foot of the church bank, kept by Tibbet Rowe, who played the violoncello on Sundays at the chapel, with a placid, resigned air, acquired under the fierce clashings and shrill tongue of his good wife Hannah. The inn is always near the church, with a view to the accommodation of mourners

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or friends who attend the funerals or weddings. After the ceremony, either joyous or sad, is concluded, they adjourn to the public-house, and too often conclude the day in merry-making and riot. I remember one exception, when a funeral party from a distance, unwilling to incur the expense of a dinner and entertainment at the "Black Boy," thriftily brought their provision baskets in the hearse with the departed, and when all was over had a jovial picnic in the churchyard.

Across the lane and over the stile, that consists of two short ladders meeting at an acute angle, was the footpath leading to Tommy Stone's pretty gabled cottage, where lodgings might be obtained in summer for those who were content with a parlour opening into the house part and the room over it. The well in the garden was one of the beauties of Riverton—so cool, so deep, so clear, bordered with moss and the low blue campanula, and the pretty white veronica, called in the coun-

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try "spill milk," and backed by a luxuriant growth of fox-gloves, and that most beautiful of all green leaves, the fern. Oh, it was a spot well worth visiting! On week days, Tommy was stonemason and thatcher; on Sundays he led the singing in the choir; now and then carved an inscription on a gravestone, and might be supposed to have occasionally indulged in the lighter labour of composing it, to judge of one memento in the churchyard :

" In time of need I sought to God,
By night no rest I took ;
I spake, but could not make an end,
My breath was stopped so sore."

One of old Tommy's daughters had been brought up with a relation in London, and at his death returned home; but finding the habits of the family a little unsuited to her notion of polite life, undertook to remodel the household on a genteel plan. And who could know better how to do it? Hadn't she been

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all her life in Cheapside ? and is not Cheapside the very centre of London ? and is not London the centre of civilization ? The sisters took to the learning readily enough, and came out on Sundays in white gowns and smart silk bonnets and parasols ; but old Tommy was impracticable. They would have re-modelled his dress ; but he stuck religiously to his pepper-and-salt coat and corduroy breeches with grey worsted stockings, which never can, under pretence of eccentricity or anything else, be made to look genteel. They called him “ Papa ; ” but that failed. “ Papa ” no more fitted on him, than a new curly, wavy, brown wig would have fitted on his thin grey hair ; and at one o'clock, when Miss Nanny looked out of the door, and daintily lisped, “ Papa, dinner is ready,” Tommy persisted in answering, “ Ay, ay, I'll coom when I ha' dun this bit o' thatching.” Nothing could be done with old Tommy in the way of gentility, so, after repeated and fruitless efforts, they wisely let him alone.

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In some parts the lanes are fenced with low stone walls, cleverly built, without mortar, of flag-stones about an inch thick. The coping is a succession of these, each with its edge resting on its neighbour, like a pack of cards thrown down. These walls might be thought rugged and unpromising features in a landscape, but it is not so here; the want of mortar is quickly supplied by the small white-veined ivy that grasps the whole fabric with its tiny feet. The cranes-bill unfolds its pencilled blossoms in the crevices, and the yellow starwort hangs from the coping.

Behind the village, the land rises higher and higher, until the rich meadow grass yields to the short greensward, mingled with bracken and rushes; and then comes wild, bleak moorland, not high enough or rugged enough to be called mountains, but sufficiently so to ensure the pure, free air so peculiar to a hilly country. And what a view from these high moors! Hill and dale, park

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and wood, town and village, in long succession, till the eye rests at length on the white, glistening waves of the far-off sea.

Once we would see the sun rise from the summit of the highest hill. We rose at two o'clock, shivering and half-repenting, hurried on our clothes, and hastened across the paddock, our shoes wet through before we had gone a dozen yards. The mist lay white and heavy on the lower ground ; every green leaf, every blade of grass, was laden and bent with dew. The birds were just beginning to twitter and chirp ; the rooks gave now and then an awakening "Caw," as if it were time to get up ; nature seemed half awake.

In the higher ground, the furze bushes were wrapped in the delicate web of the gossamer spider, scarcely perceptible in the noonday sun, but showing in the dewy morning air, like that finest Indian manufacture that the Hindoos so elegantly designate "woven wind."

Up and up we climbed, over stone walls and

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through the wet grass, till we reached the summit. The sun rose, but we were enveloped in a cloud, and were not a little startled to see our own shadows wonderfully lengthened, depicted upon nothing, standing within a hundred yards of us. The cloud rolled away, and there we were damp and chilled in the bright sunshine, and came home with a steady determination, which I have adhered to ever since, never again to meet the rising sun on distant hills, being of the opinion of the charity-boy when he arrived at Z in the alphabet, that "it was going through a great deal for the sake of a very little."

The country around here is somewhat peculiar, for this reason: in parts that appear barest or bleakest, you suddenly come upon a ravine or gully, the sides clothed with trees and copse, and a clear brook washing through the bottom. In dry weather it is pleasant to walk up the bed of the brook, now stepping carefully over the green slippery rock, now spring-

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ing on to a large stone, tottering and swaying before you recover your balance, or trusting to a treacherous sod that lets you down ankle deep before you find a resting-place for the other foot. One of these ravines terminates in a waterfall,—not thundering, or rushing, or foaming, or grand, but falling gently and gracefully, with a cool, splashing, murmuring sound. The ferns that sprang up at the sides trembled under the soft showery spray, or they might tremble from cold, for it was always cold down there—the sun never seemed to reach it. A canopy of trees cast a deep flickering shadow on the water below, and in the hot summer time, when the leaves were thick and green, the pretty picture stood in a perpetual twilight.

The path through the wood led to the solitary little farm-house occupied by old Peggy Baines, who lived there all alone, toiling at out-door work like any man for daily bread.

There is a quaint simplicity about the country

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people in Lancashire, that wants a name in our vocabulary of manners, as far removed from the vulgarity of the lower orders in the town on the one hand, as from the polished conventionalisms of the higher classes on the other; a simplicity that asserts itself because of its simplicity, and that never heard, and if it did never understood, "who's who." Imagine the surprise of the new vicar of the adjoining parish, fresh from Emanuel College, Cambridge, in all the dignity of the shovel-hat and garments of a rigidly clerical orthodoxy, accustomed to an agricultural population, that smoothed down its forelocks in deference to the vicar, but never dreamed of bandying words with him,—imagine him losing his way in one of his distant parochial excursions, and inquiring, in a dainty south-country accent, from a lubberly boy weeding turnips in a field, "Pray, my boy, can you tell me the way to Bolton?" "Ay," replied the boy, "yo' mun go across yon bleach croft and

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into th' loan, and yo'll get to Doffcocker, and then yo're i' th' high road, and yo' can go straight on." "Thank you," said the vicar; "perhaps I can find it. And now, my boy, will you tell me what you do for a livelihood?" "I clear up th' shippon, pills potatoes, or does oddin; and if I may be so bou'd, win yo' tell me what yo' do?" "Oh, I am a minister of the Gospel; I preach the Word of God." "But what dun yo' do?" persisted the boy. "I teach you the way of salvation; I show you the road to heaven." "Nay, nay," said the lad; "dunnot yo' pretend to teach me th' road to heaven, and doesn't know th' road to Bow'ton."

Peggy Baines (who by the way was an old maid) took great pride in doing everything for herself, and being independent of the whole world. "Yo' seen," said she, "I han to look after th' bee', as to tend th' pigs and do, an' th' oddin, because yo' seen I han no felly;" then, in a confidential whisper, "and

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it's best I han nobody t' please but mysel' ; an' I reckon th' Squire thinks so too, or he'd a gettin' wed afore this."

She would place a chair for her visitors on the most even space in the earthen floor, and proceed to comment on their appearance and looks with a regardlessness of the usual courtesies of polite life that would be almost startling if the visitors were not fully aware that the highest possible compliment with the country people is, "My word, but yo' looken ill ; yo're *none* long for this world, bell'e' me," implying a delicacy of complexion that can afford to stay at home, and is not compelled either to weed potatoes or make hay.

"I'm thinking, Miss Jane," said old Peggy to a lady whose mother she had known in her youth,—“I'm thinking yo're *none* like yo're mother.” “No, Peggy,” replied Miss Jane, “I am not indeed ; I am not so good-looking as my mother was.” “Yo' sain trew ; yo're mother had a vast pleasant look as yo' hannot.”

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What a variety of lovely walks there were in Riverton!—the hills and moors for the strong and enterprising; the “Pike,” so carefully watched in hay-time, lest a passing cloud should rest upon it, for then was remembered,

“When Riverton Pike puts on its hood,
Anderton Ford may expect a flood.”

The narrow grassy footpaths in the fields were a quieter and less fatiguing walk; but then there was the two-laddered stile at every hedge; so if people were not active in crossing stiles and climbing stone walls, they had better not come to Riverton. The names of the farms and homesteads how quaint and Saxon—“The Mill Riding,” “The Grut,” “The Intack,” “The Knowe,” redolent of the soil, with a sniff of the aromatic odour of peat and fir-trees!

There was the “Robin field,” from which were seen the finest sunsets; “The Rough,” where was to be found the speckled cranberry,

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that is almost disappearing before drainage and improvements ; the deserted lead mines, that, if they were turned to no other account, afforded little mineralogists the excitement of finding and talking of “barytes,” “feldspar” and “mica ;” and there was “Old Place,” the decaying mansion of a nobleman long since dead, that stood alone in a gloomy, sour kind of gentility occupied by farmers,—like a faded, tarnished court train wearing out in the service of the descendants of its original proprietor’s lady’s maid.

Years elapsed before I saw the dear old village again, but I found it little altered—no old houses pulled down, no new ones built up, no mills, for the sake of the water-power, no manufactories for the increasing population ; for the population, if it did increase, went away. John Shaw, the schoolmaster, sat in the same brown wig and white cravat in the canopied pew of his baronial ancestor. Tommy Stone slept with his fathers in a grave adorned

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with flowers, and a tablet equally affectionate and genteel was erected to his memory. A number of young faces of which I had no knowledge, grey hairs that I left wavy brown or glossy black, and thin silver locks where I only looked for grey, with a few more grassy mounds in the churchyard, were all that marked the lapse of twenty years in dear, pleasant Riverton.





MY COUSINS.

“ I have had playmates, I have had companions, in my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days ; all, all, are gone, the old familiar faces ! ”—CHARLES LAMB.



ACCOUNT all people fortunate who have cousins ; it is such a pleasant relationship—intimate enough to call each other by the Christian name, and yet not quite so familiar as brothers and sisters ; the slightest possible shade of reserve, but far removed from the restraint that subsists between mere acquaintances. What pleasant holiday times cousins spend together ! My visits to mine are amongst the brightest recollections

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of my life. We only lived ten miles apart, and the journey was usually performed in a packet-boat on the canal, that set out exactly at seven in the morning, and accomplished the distance by half-past ten. We were obliged to be up before six to be ready in time, which was easy enough to do, as we always went to bed an hour or two earlier than usual, in order to get the night over. We were never detained by breakfast; the excitement was too great to think of it. Our trunks were carried to the boat by the two maid-servants; and after a grand flourish on a horn and a loud "Gee" from the captain, we set off; two horses pulled at the rope, and we went on our way at a speed of three miles an hour.

The boat was covered, and had seats and a table inside; but if the weather were fine, it was pleasant to sit in the fore-part outside, and watch the water sink from the banks of the canal, and the water-lilies and rushes bend their heads as we passed, and then to see the

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swelling wave that followed us, rushing on and filling all up again. This sail in the early morning was a pure and perfect enjoyment. It was gratifying to think that we were five miles away before the people at home had breakfasted. There was a little conscious dignity in being so beforehand with the world; everything was delightful, for our visit of a month was before us, and only one hour of the holiday gone. Presently we came to a lock in the canal. We sailed slowly into a long, deep, dark trap, with solid wooden gates at each end. The sides were of stone—massive, mossy and dripping. The gates were closed behind us, and the sluices were opened. Then began such a turmoil in the water beneath us, such a heaving, roaring, foaming and tumbling, as if some huge monsters were imprisoned in the water, and were churning and lashing in their rage to get free. Imperceptibly we rose and rose into the open day, the gates were thrown back, and we glided through in gentle

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contrast to the hubbub we had so lately witnessed.

A young woman in curl-papers and a coral necklace came round to know if any of the passengers would take breakfast, which she could prepare in a little cabin that separated the best part of the boat from the other. We never took it, because it cost a shilling more, but we sometimes expended twopence in currant-cakes or peppermint-drops, that were carried round in a basket, and regularly repented the last refreshment, longing, like Dives, for a drop of water to cool our tongues. I can taste and smell that peppermint now !

The house my cousins lived in was rambling and old-fashioned, partly brick and partly stone, in a garden pleasanter and prettier than any gardens I ever see now. There was a terrace of gravel along the front of the house, terminating at one end in a brick summer-house, and at the other in an archway cut in beech hedge, that led into the orchard. From the terrace

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there was an abrupt grassy slope to the grass-plat, which was raised again from the lower part of the garden on an embankment of brick-work partly concealed by currant-trees nailed neatly against it, and underneath this embankment was a round fish-pond. The garden terminated on that side by an abrupt high rock, that might have been once a stone quarry, with fox-glove and mountain-ash springing from its cleft, and sycamores and plane-trees overshadowing it from above. A small clear stream rippled at the foot of the rock, and fell into the large brook that bounded the orchard with a little extra splash and disturbance, over a few detached pieces of rock, and this, with a short rustic bridge, answered the purpose of a waterfall. There was no railing or defence between the brook and the orchard; fine large willow-trees hung over the stream, and it was a daring feat who could venture farthest on the round bending branches. Cousin Emily once fell in during

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the exploit, to our great dismay; but we got her out, arranged her clothes, and said nothing about it. I remember every tree in that sunny sloping orchard! The old apple-tree, that to my certain knowledge was called the old apple-tree in the year 1772, with its hump-backed trunk all covered with moss and lichen, and still bore such little, good, sweet apples, that after a stormy night there were early risers to be found searching beneath it. The younger apple-trees were nothing to it. Then there were three cherry-trees, that bore fruit unlike all cherry-trees I ever see now. It is remarkable how fruit has deteriorated; but still I love the cherry-tree, with its shining, peeling, warty bark, oozing out gum, its white blossoms in spring, and its plump, juicy, cooling fruit in summer!

A high fruit wall was covered with plum-trees, Orleans and Magnum-bonums, very good in themselves, and all the better from a little difficulty in getting them; for some of the

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windows of the house overlooked this wall, and gathering plums was forbidden ; so it was a common practice to saunter gently by, and with a small stick knock off a plum in passing, looking quite another way, and in half-an-hour or so return again and pick it up. There was an old wood-house once in the orchard, that was dark within, and harboured toads and bats and weird things ; but it was pulled down and replaced by a Chinese summer-house, that we affected to think was pleasant to sit in with one's work or books. But a summer-house never is pleasant ; it has always a damp, musty smell, and earwigs and spiders are apt to drop on your head ; besides, it is not comfortable sitting on a snail or a woodlouse.

The house and its inhabitants matched the garden precisely : great capability, a little unpruned, but interesting in its freshness and difference from the common run of houses and people.

The sons and daughters were left almost

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entirely to their own guidance ; their mother long since dead ; and the father, when indoors, shut up in his own little parlour (a sanctum no more to be invaded than Blue Beard's chamber), and rarely meeting his family except at dinner. The boys all went to the grammar-school until they were sixteen ; then engaged in some occupation in the neighbouring town. The girls had some instruction from their minister, some from their brothers, and mostly from themselves. Louisa, the eldest, took the cares of the household at sixteen, with only one maid-of-all-work, Ellen, to help her. I don't know how the housekeeping was carried on, but Louisa had a book in which to put down all she expended, and there was a long column of "repairs" and "sundries," but it went on somehow easily and pleasantly enough.

They all pursued their own occupations, and found a number that children or young people on the usual tread-mill of education would

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never dream of: what they did, they did with their might.

Henry wished to learn Italian, and got up in the dark for a whole winter to study it by the kitchen fire before breakfast.

Charles took to the flute, and every spare moment was devoted to "to-tooing" until he was an accomplished player, when that was thrown aside for entomology. Then he was to be seen on a holiday out in the fields and moors with nets and tin boxes and treacle, and all entomologist's gear, and his bed-room was filled with beetles and butterflies with a pin through their bodies and each foot under a slice of cork, and a smell of camphor and worse pervading the atmosphere; and one night he was taken for a thief, when stealthily entering one of the bed-rooms, holding a shaded candle, in search of the "death-watch."

There was a joiner's shop in an out-of-the-way room over the wash-house, fitted up with

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a lathe and bench and carpenter's tools, and here they taught themselves, and practised turning and joinery.

Francis took to chemistry, and by begging and borrowing, procured an array of bottles, which he gathered together in a tiny room over the boot-hole, and called it a laboratory; and it was real chemistry too; for he would pour something out of one bottle into another, and it would fizz or change colour just as he said it would; and sometimes there was a dreadful vapour, and very frequently round red spots on Francis's jacket that resisted all rubbing and brushing.

The girls' education was a jumble of cooking and the classics, ironing and the harp, clear-starching and Shakespere; for when Ellen was cross (and she often was), she required a good deal of help.

How she would stride into the parlour with the dishes at dinner, and set them down with a bang, enough to make us jump from our

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seats, on washing days ; or if any one came unexpectedly, the guests could not fail to be aware, however welcome they might be to the family, they were scarcely so to the maid.

The great charm of "Old Court" was the liberty. It signified nothing if we waded in the brook without shoes and stockings, and broke the ice to do it, or paddled on the pond in a flat-bottomed box, or climbed to the top-most branches of the cherry-trees, or mounted the highest gable of the barn, or made a passage through the trusses of hay and explored it with a lanthorn in search of a coral necklace we had lost. If one straw had got into that lanthorn, we must inevitably have been suffocated; but no straw did. We incurred dangers that would have sent the mammas of the present day into hysterics; but we had no mammas and no fears. Sometimes, indeed, we had a few mischances. As I said before, Emily fell into the brook ; Finney, in giving the old sow

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a lapful of pea-shells, was caught by the pinafore, and but for a timely rescue might have been turned into pork. Then he was very much in the habit of setting his pinafore on fire ; but it was always put out in time, and no harm done ; and when he gave up pinafores, that danger ceased.

Within doors, the amusements were as attractive as without ; for we found them for ourselves. We had the panelled parlour to sit in, with deep-set windows and window-seats, so warm and sunny on fine days, so snug and comfortable on wet ones ; the furniture not good enough to require much care ; so there was no " Don't touch this," or " Don't spoil that :" we did just what we liked in it. A wash of dolls' clothes was a particular pleasure ; but the cream of the entertainment was the mangling. The mangle was a form from the school-room, turned upside down, in which as many of us sat as could be accommodated, and were pushed backwards and forwards on two

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rolling-pins borrowed from the kitchen. There was always some odd experiment going on in the cupboard by the parlour fire,—an acorn fructifying in a bottle of water, or zinc suspended from the cork to make a zinc tree: once it was a hard-boiled egg filled with mites, and the progress of its decay must be watched. Then there was an electrical machine that was my terror, for it brought out sparks from my knuckles, and twitched my wrists very unpleasantly; and beside this they had a planisphere, a kaleidoscope, and a velocipede.

The walls of the rooms were decorated with a few paintings and engravings, in dim old frames that did not shame the rest of the furniture. There was a strong feeling for “art” and the “artistic,” but it was necessarily art cheap, art in plaster-of-paris. There were plaster casts from the antique on plaster brackets in the hall and landing, and a plaster altar to Friendship, or Love, or Faith, or

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something, stood in the summer-house in the garden.

The head of the house dabbled a little in painting himself, and exhibited a specimen of his skill in a moonlight scene on the panel over the chimney-piece. In those days we held this work of art in the highest respect, but now that the artist is gone, I may just venture to whisper that the moon in the corner was marvellously like a well-worn shilling. Pictures came home at intervals, like genteel paupers, in a tattered condition, but bearing very good names. I particularly remember the "Adoration of the Magi," said to be Rembrandt's, but cleaned and restored; and restored it had been with a vengeance, for the restorer has given the Holy Child six toes, which, with all his love of startling effects, Rembrandt would scarcely have contemplated.

Then one day, two very large pictures of life-sized figures in the slightest possible drapery,

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came from the Duke of Hamilton's sale. One was of "Fame," life-size, and hung up in the dining-room, and was such a positive distress to a particular maiden friend, she could by no means sit opposite to it during dinner; so it was suggested that during her stay, Diana in the lobby should be put into a tippet, and Venus furnished with a petticoat. The other picture of "Bacchus and Ariadne" was sent up stairs, and placed behind a crimson curtain that drew up and down, after the manner of gems in a nobleman's collection. I thought this very artistic indeed, and because I had learned to draw, and had seen the Elgin Marbles, professed to admire it excessively (which I'm sure I didn't). But we all like to have something on which to pique ourselves. If we have no money, it is family; if our grandfathers are myths, or our grandmothers went out charing, it is money; if we have neither family nor money, we are sure to seize upon intellect; but if we are hopeless dunces, and we

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know we are, then we take our stand on the folly of education and the mischief it will do to mankind in general.

It was not at all requisite at "Old Court" to keep things exclusively to their proper uses. One night a bat, which flew in at the window, was placed under the hall-lamp inverted, and was fed with flies; and natural history was studied upon it until it died, before which event the lobby was in total darkness for a week. The floor of the spare bed-room was strewn with star-grass, one whole autumn, spread out to dry before being made into baskets and table-mats. A large fire-balloon was carefully stowed away under Francis's bed, which every morning for a whole month Ellen indignantly routed out, and every afternoon Francis stoically put back to its place. Apples lay on the floors of the attics; specimens of entomology were to be met with on the stairs. Tadpoles were kept in water-jugs in the bed-rooms, in the hope of seeing their tails drop

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off and turn into frogs; and chrysalises were buried in flower-pots in the parlour, that they might be at hand at the moment of transformation.

The girls were skilful needlewomen, and did all that was needed for themselves and the family; they could do anything with their needles. I have seen a white frock worked, made, washed, ironed, and worn, in an incredibly short time. They would make work-boxes, bind books, or sketch the solar system; excelled in nature-printing, and carved intaglios in sulphate of lime.

Their reading was chiefly of their own selection. Sometimes they would take a fit of excellence, and work diligently at history, natural philosophy, Latin or French. Then, again, the charms of that dusty old book closet were too irresistible; for in it were "Scenes in Feudal Times," all about Jacqueline and the baron, and a voice crying, "This is the place!" and there was "Queenhoo Hall," and

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the Lady Matilda de Botelar, and in which everybody who made a speech prefaced it with "Certes;" and besides this, there were the "Mysteries of Udolpho," which we took care to read in bed, with the curtains tucked tightly in on the other side; and a story called "Blanche and Osbright," that took such hold on our imaginations that four of us registered a vow our eldest sons and daughters should be Blanches and Osbrights; yet in spite of that vow we have no Blanches and no Osbrights.

Sometimes dear good Louisa would tell us a tale after we were in bed. I heard "Guy Mannering" and the "Sicilian Romance," and no end of novels, in this way. There is no possible luxury like hearing a story in bed; no trouble of turning over leaves, or advocating one's right to the best share of the candle; nothing to do but listen, and listen, till the baron and the corridor and the white-robed

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Jacqueline, and the blood-red dagger and the black velvet pall, all join together in hazy confusion, growing fainter and fainter, until one by one they disappear altogether, only leaving a little doubt the next morning whether it was the castle that had been buried or the marchioness.

I think I have no more to tell about my cousins ; some died, and some married. "Old Court" was divided and let to strangers. I saw it again many years ago. The house and garden were there, but something smaller than I remember them ; the panelled parlour was eighteen feet square, the "Rock" a rugged bank, the fish-pond a little pool, and the Chinese summer-house no bigger than an aggravated hen-coop. Last year I was travelling by railroad to a distant part of my own county, when all at once I came upon a scene, familiar yet strange, like a half-remembered dream, or something I had seen before but

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could not tell where; and by the time I had made up my mind that the grim, bare, half-town, half-country, dwelling that I saw was indeed "Old Court," I had flown over the most secluded nook in the garden at the rate of thirty miles an hour.





GRANDMAMMA.

*"An age that melts in unperceived decay,
And glides in modest innocence away."*

VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES.



HERE are no real old grandmamas now; the race has gone out. All old ladies of the present time have smart caps with flowers, lace collars and bracelets; but the grandmamma whom I remember wore a mourning dress, a white handkerchief pinned in folds over her bosom, a black crape hood, clear white apron, and low-cut velvet shoes. Her out-door costume was

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a "mode" bonnet, and cloak trimmed with bear-skin, with the addition in winter of a muff and tippet of the same fur; and in walking she leant on a gold-headed cane. What a delight it was to visit her as a child! The awful, mysterious feeling of seeing the fingers of the clock pointing to ten at night, and we not in bed! The breakfast of coffee and muffins, the drinking tea in the parlour, and the absence of lessons, all combined to make a visit to grandmamma's the happiest event of childhood. The clock above mentioned was the wonder of my young life. At the moment the hour struck, a small door flew open, and out burst a little bird, calling "Cuckoo! cuckoo!" until the striking ceased, when the door shut as suddenly as it had opened, and the clock ticked on as quietly as if nothing had happened. When older, I took great delight in hearing stories of her youth; and as her remembrance extended over a period of seventy years or so, her tales were like dipping

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into an old magazine beginning at the year 1745.

She remembered the Rebellion perfectly, and how the rebels stole the tongue of the chapel bell near her father's house, to melt for bullets. She had danced at George the Third's Coronation ball; and because the hairdresser was in great demand, each lady's head requiring two hours to dress, hers was done over-night, and she was propped up in bed for fear of disarranging the fabric. The town near which she lived was remarkable for its attachment to the Stuarts, and many of its inhabitants joined the ill-fated expedition that terminated so disastrously at Culloden. In the barbarous spirit of the times, when law was terror and punishment vengeance, the heads of several ring-leaders were impaled on the Exchange of their native town, and amongst the rest the two sons of an eminent non-juring clergyman residing there. She said it was a touching sight to see the white-haired, venerable father,

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as long as he lived, take off his hat, regardless of the weather, and remain uncovered, whenever he came in sight of the ghastly remains that were once so dear to him. To this day, when any of the Stanleys pass through Church Gate in Bolton-le-Moors, they uncover their heads in respect to the memory of James, seventh Earl of Derby, who was beheaded there in 1651. Another of the so-called rebels, who if on the winning side would have been lauded as patriots, had a mournful and romantic story attached to his name, which was afterwards celebrated by Shenstone in one of his most admired ballads. The lady to whom he was engaged, anxious to testify her attachment even to the last moment of his life, insisted upon accompanying him to the scaffold; but the devoted heart could bear no more; she expired before the awful ceremony was concluded.

In grandmamma's young days, female education, with few exceptions, was limited to little

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more than reading, writing, cooking and needle-work. She attended a school, Mrs. Ravald's, where a professional cook instructed young ladies in the mysteries of roasting, boiling, pastry and confectionery. She said one of her sisters was looked upon as a learned lady because she understood a little astronomy; accuracy in spelling was quite unnecessary—indeed, was a little pedantic. I suspect her marriage had not been a very happy one, though she never said so. Grandpapa intended to offer his hand to her youngest sister, and going to the house for the purpose, found, to his grief and astonishment, that she had just expired. It seems he was bent on allying himself to the family, for after a time he proposed to the other sister, some years older than himself, who accepted him, and they were married. The death of the young sister was commemorated in a ring which she wore—the figure of a lady, a quarter of an inch long, worked in hair, leaning upon an urn, and a little old man with

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a stick, meant for her father, on the opposite side, overshadowed by a weeping willow, in a circle of garnets. She had a number of rings of this kind, and always wore them, except after the recent death of any of her relatives, when she took them off, that being her sign of deeper mourning than usual. She was fond of telling anecdotes of her father's household, which seems to have been composed of somewhat heterogeneous material. Both her parents had married twice, and the three respective families lived happily together, besides one or two grandchildren, adopted when their parents died, amounting in all to fifteen. The only difficulty seemed to be how to distinguish the three Miss Pollys.

The great event of her married life was a journey to London, four days on the road, where, like Winifred Jenkins, she saw "the king and the queen, and the sweet young princes, and the elephant, and the piebald ass, and all the rest of the royal family."

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She told us that once, when she was a young girl, she had seen at Knowsley the crown worn by the Earls of Derby as sovereigns of the Isle of Man; nay, more, it had been placed upon her own head. She could trace the rise and progress of most of the families about her, for be it remembered she lived in a manufacturing district; whoever was mentioned, her general remark was, "I knew his or her mother before she was married." She had a variety of old-fashioned terms for dress, such as we find in comedies of the last century; spoke of how well her wedding-dress, a peach-coloured satin "saque," became her, and how exquisitely she embroidered her aprons and "ruffles." A little boy's dress she always called a "jam," and her babies wore frocks of Irish linen.

One favourite amusement was cleaning her plate. She allowed us to bring out what we liked, smear it with whiting, and rub it as long as we pleased. A clumsy old tankard was an especial favourite—something to take hold of,

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and make a good show when done. What effect all this rubbing produced I have forgotten; probably more pleasure to us than benefit to the silver.

Our visits to her occurred at all festivals connected with good things to eat. Christmas had its mince-pies; Shrovetide its pancakes; Mid-lent its simnels, a particular kind of spiced currant bread, made into cakes, small or large, but all of one pattern, turned up at the edge with a hem, and the centre garnished with candied lemon-peel and sprinkled with shot comfits. The popular name was "cymblin;" but whether cymblin is a corruption of simnel, or simnel a corruption of cymblin, I leave to any antiquarian head that likes to solve. Easter had its little heavy spiced currant dumplings, made without suet and boiled without a cloth, called Easter balls. These were eaten cold, and there were always as many as grandmamma had been years married; the last year of her life we had fifty. Whitsuntide brought

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the Sunday-schools' treat, besides the excitement of the races; for though we never went, the bulk of the population did. And in August we had the rush-bearing, which was the annual gathering of rushes to strew the aisles of the parish church and keep it warm during the winter. The rushes were most artistically piled on a cart in the form of a hay-stack; the front was covered with a white cloth, and adorned with silver tankards, cream-jugs, teapots, spoons arranged in patterns, and whatever could be borrowed in the way of plate, which was always cheerfully lent. These were interspersed with flowers, and always a large G.R. in marigolds, sunflowers or hollyhocks; dahlias were unknown. The cart was drawn by four and sometimes six fine horses, adorned with ribbons and bells, that jingled merrily as they walked; a dozen young men and women, streaming with ribbons and waving handkerchiefs, preceded the cart, dancing the morris dance. There was the shepherdess, with a

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lamb in a basket and a crook in her hand, dressed in white, with a green bower borne over her head, and always two watches at her side. There was the fool, a hideous figure in a horrid mask, with onions for ear-rings and a cow's tail for a pig-tail, belabouring the crowd with an inflated bladder at the end of a very long pole. It was a point of honour to appear much amused with his antics, but many a little heart quaked under its assumed bravery.

The procession was closed by two garlands, carried aloft, of coloured paper cut into familiar devices; and at the close of the day, the rush-cart was taken to pieces, the rushes strewed in the church, and the garlands hung in the chancel, to remain until replaced by new ones the following year.

The peculiar eatables for the fifth of November were treacle-toffy and "hard-cake," a mixture of oatmeal and treacle, baked in thick cakes,—an abominable compound when the meal was coarse. Then the bonfire at night

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in the "little orchard," of all the sticks and rubbish that could be gathered together, besides pilferings of coals and wood. How good those apples and potatoes were, half-baked, half-charred, seasoned with occasional tugs at the tough treacle-toffee that *would* draw out into strings, and could not be got rid of! And by the time these delicacies had faded from the memory, Christmas and the mince-pies were come again.

The second person in my affections was a servant of grandmamma's, a young woman rather superior to her station, who, I remember, told me the whole tale of "Cecilia," and a novel in six volumes called "Santo Sebastiano," besides setting my hair on end with the black pall that moved in the marchioness's chamber in the "Mysteries of Udolpho." How I have dived down under the bed-clothes, and remained there curled up in a ball, after she took my candle away at night! Her stories were sometimes inter-

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rupted by a low whistle at the back door, whereupon Betsy was immediately under the necessity of fetching coals for the parlour fire, and was so long about it my patience was sorely tried. I am ashamed to say, the family prayers were a positive nuisance to me. It was too hard to be taken off from Valancourt and Emily in an arbour; or just when Delvile and Cecilia were being married, and the deep voice from behind the pillar forbidding the ceremony; or when all the characters in the tale were skating on a pond, and the ice broke,—to be carried off at any such crisis to prayers was a trial. I can see now the pattern of the horsehair cover on the seat of the old-fashioned chair to which I knelt, and can almost feel its pricking on my bare arms, or it might be my cheek when I could hold up no longer.

Time went on. Betsy sought the fate of too many of her class—married, contended for years against poverty, children, and an idle

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husband—sunk under it, and died. Her mistress attained fourscore years, and ceased to live rather than died; her lamp of life had burnt so feebly, it was scarcely perceptible when finally extinguished. Looking back, the happiness of my young life is associated with her; looking forward, I have comfort and satisfaction in the hope of rejoining dear grandmamma.





MAUDESLEYS

*"Sweet childish days, that were as long
As twenty days are now."—WORDSWORTH.*



HERE are few people I remember better or regret more than my mother's old friend and relative, Mrs. Weston ; partly because, in virtue of relationship, she claimed a right to tutor, direct and advise me ; but chiefly because that same relationship procured for me the charming privilege of frequent visiting at her house from my earliest recollection until the

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time when she, alas! could welcome me no more.

Maudesleys, where she lived, and had lived all her life, was a steady, comfortable, respectable, unpicturesque dwelling, with a red brick front, a portico, and two windows on each side of the door, with five above. Old people deplored the brick front, and would lament the straight avenue leading to the black-and-white house that once stood there, with the front door studded with knobs of iron, and a twisted massive iron ring for a latch. I lament it too now, but then I did not care, and found the bright red front quite picturesque enough to please me; for the old domain around the house was there, with all the room and freedom belonging to a large farm. Mr. Weston was a thriving merchant in the large town seven miles off, and in addition to his interest in bales of cotton and packs of grey calico, was smitten with farming, and cultivated acres and acres for his own particular pleasure; and

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so between steam-churns and turnip-cutters and threshing-machines and divers breeds of cattle, contrived to lose a very tolerable income each year, as most gentlemen farmers do. Then he could not give much personal attention to it; for he drove to town in his gig early in the morning, dined in his warehouse in a comfortless room, commanding a grim view of carts loading with cotton bags, enlivened by a very suggestive rope, with a large hook at the end, dangling from the teagle above; and in winter rarely saw his pretty home by daylight.

It was a pretty home (in spite of its bright red front), with its velvet lawn and belt of shrubbery, and a broad winding gravel walk leading up to the front door, so smooth and level—not one pebble out of place. Indeed, how should it? when old Diggle, the gardener, followed the wheels of a departing carriage with his roller, and neither the family, nor those who were very intimate, ever dreamed

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of driving up to the front of the house, but always alighted at a side door close to John's pantry, which arrangement spared both John and Diggle much trouble.

A walk through the fine-grown laurels led into the flower-garden, so sheltered, warm and sunny, that in the early spring, before the neighbouring gardens had recovered from their winter sleep, this was gay with the bright blue hepatica, the graceful jonquil, and the pale lilac flowers and broad spotted leaves of the dog-toothed violet. One side of the garden was bounded by a high wall, covered with peach and nectarine trees, and in autumn a matting was nailed below, in order to catch any fruit that might fall. Many an earnest inspection have I made of that matting! The fruit-trees were interspersed with climbing roses, the sweet-scented clematis, and the trumpet honeysuckle; and then came the greenhouse, of an obsolete construction—a mere shed of glass, such as Cowper might have sat

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in, and apostrophized the friendly goldfinches that cause mankind to blush. In front of the greenhouse were beds of ranunculus and anemones, dazzling in their rich crimsons and purples; and in autumn the gorgeous scarlet geranium or verbena, that gem of a flower, whose brilliant colouring seems to emit a light of its own. A gravel-walk, neatly edged with box and bordered with flowers, encircled the garden, and in the centre was a smooth lawn, dotted over with azaleas, rhododendrons, pink thorns, and the magnificent tree peony. A pleasant, sweet smell floated about in that garden, warm, aromatic and fragrant,—a gentility of scent, so to speak, that is quite indescribable, and which I have never perceived in cottage gardens, or farm-house gardens, or nursery gardens, though there may have been as many flowers, or more. A laurel hedge on one side of the garden divided it from a large park-like meadow of undulating land, surrounded by a belt of plantation; and being

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used as a ley (from which, probably, the place derived its name, Maudesleys), was usually enlivened by sheep and cattle. A pond, near the edge thickly set with water-lilies, was at once a mournful interest and a solemn warning; for long ago, when Mrs. Weston was quite young, she had a little brother Willie of five years old, and his mamma was very ill, and died, and Willie was forgotten; and when all was over, and the children gathered together, there was no Willie; they searched everywhere, and at length he was found floating amongst the water-lilies, and his hands still grasping the dazzling white flowers that had cost him his little life; so that pond was always a reminder of little Willie, and the danger of gathering water-lilies. The large farm-yard beyond the garden teemed with live things—horses, cows, dogs, pigs and poultry, the pet pony, "Gipsy," that would carry three at a time, and (when she condescended to dawdle out so far) the pet lap-dog, "Sylph."

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I can hear now the gobble, gobble, of the turkey-cock, the queer shrill cry of the guinea-fowls, the jovial quack, quack, of the ducks, and the inward, complacent crooning of the hens, as they pecked about in the train of the lord of the seraglio, a fine large game-cock, always on a visit at Maudesleys, and sent by the Lord of the Manor for board and education until wanted for the cock-pit, a provision for which, and also for the support of a foxhound, was empowered by a clause in the lease. There was often a brood of turkeys airing on fine days under a coop on the lawn, the mother's blue-and-pink head coming out at all points to recall the wandering chicks. Of all feathered things, the turkey is the most difficult to rear; but these generally did well, under the especial care of Cicely, the maid, a steady, severe-looking damsel, who had lived in the family from her youth up, and, demure as she looked, had "kept company" all that time in the laundry, on the off-nights of the

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wash, with bass William of the chapel choir. Cicely was a strict Presbyterian, with a sour, uncompromising manner, and was in the habit of displaying her love of Dissent and stiff-necked opposition to Episcopacy by flinging open the front door widely, with a warm smile of welcome, to all Dissenting callers, but held conversation in a forbidding, "don't-come-in" tone, through the narrowest possible chink, with all orthodox visitors. Cicely kept an eye on the doings of the establishment; didn't "quite approve of John," though he did set up an air of integrity and uprightness as dauntless as his red waistcoat; looked suspiciously on the red cheeks and bright cap ribbons of Mary, the housemaid; detected flirtations in the dairy, and expressed her sentiments thereupon in no measured terms, and with very indifferent success; for the principal culprit, Charles the cowman, would retire to the shippon whistling and muttering, "When sarvants is cross I ne'er heed 'em; poor folks' anger means now't; I

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care for her no more than my shoe ; hoo's like missis, hoo's a gradely grumbler."

There was a fine large fruit garden near the farm-yard, filled with strawberries, gooseberries, cherries, apples, pears, and all manner of tempting things but it was enclosed partly by a wall and partly by a hedge, and had a gate that locked, and of which the old gardener kept the key for reasons of his own. Still, fruit was to be got at somehow ; for Maggie was not very well one night, and, being questioned closely, acknowledged to having eaten sixty green chisel-pears during the day. There was the same plentiful, "well-to-do" air in-doors as out ; no aim at grandeur, but thoroughly comfortable. None of the rooms were large ; the dining the most spacious, furnished with bright solid mahogany chairs and tables. A portrait of Mrs. Weston's mother over the chimney-piece, and a round mirror suspended by chains from the beak of an eagle, and in which the reflection of the

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room appeared half a mile off, were all the decorations. The colour of the walls was a pale buff, kindly suggested by the great Sir Charles Barry, who was luckily on a visit when the house was being painted; but then he was only Mr. B., a young beginner with a portfolio full of drawings from Athens, just to show what he could do, and employed in the construction of the neighbouring church. However much that church may have done for the spread of the gospel, it has done uncommonly little for the spread of architectural taste. But nobody talked then of "Early English," or "Later Norman;" and such notions as "transept," "nave," or "clerestory," were obsolete, or savoured of Popery.

Up stairs, the front rooms were devoted to visitors, who occupied the "best room," the "chintz room," or the "green room," according to the place they held in the hostess's estimation. She herself occupied a bed-room over the kitchen, and commanding a view of

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the stable-yard. The colour of her bed was a grave drab, and right opposite to it on the wall was a good round clock, by which she could regulate the rising of the maids and the punctuality of the men. Next to her bedroom was the work-room, where Cicely might always be found seated at work before a lead pincushion that had once been scarlet, but pricked out of all colour; and there Cicely could and did furnish, to all who were willing to listen, the gossip of the district for miles round. Of the other parts of the house, my memory rests most distinctly and lovingly on the store-room, and the very promising scent that came out when the door was open,—a fragrant combination of sugar, apricots, candied lemon-peel and gingerbread.

In the early part of my recollection, the only conveyance kept at Maudesleys for the use of the family, besides Mr. Weston's own particular vehicle, was a heavy gig with a hood, drawn by old "Smiler," who varied his

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occupation between airing the mistress and carting the coals. But prosperity advanced; and ambition, like appetite, "grows by what it feeds on;" so the old gig was exchanged for an inside car, and that again made way for a real green chariot, and then the boundary was passed between respectability and gentility. Mrs. Weston (or, as her husband always called her for shortness, Mrs. W.) had a strong love of the genteel; and an overweening preference for those she conceived to be "somebody" was the one little weakness in her character. In other respects she was eminently strong-minded, and in manner the exact counterpart of Cicely. If there' was a disagreeable truth that need not be mentioned, it was sure to come out. She openly disapproved Mrs. Thornton's new velvet curtains, bordered with needlework done by the dowager Mrs. Thornton with incredible pains, and made a call on Mrs. T. purposely to let her know it. She would earnestly request any friends removing

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to a larger house, to "think well what they were doing, or they were certain to get into debt;" and begged to be permitted to pay her annual visit to her friend Miss Marriott in winter instead of summer, at which season she hoped she should not find it so "very disagreeable." In the company of a steady Whig of the old school, she was sure to speak slightly of Charles Fox; and in that of a Dissenting minister was certain to lament the necessary inferiority of Dissenters' education. She entertained one gentleman caller, particularly tenacious about family and proud of his own, by assuring him that his wife's father had once been a stay-maker. That gentleman dropped her acquaintance; but if he did, there were others who did not; and the old teas and suppers were put down with the gig, and dinner-parties succeeded at the fashionable hour of five; and besides all this, there was a fire in the drawing-room every day, instead of only on Sundays. The first

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effort in the dinner line was rewarded by Mrs. Philips remarking loudly, when oyster-sauce was offered with her boiled turkey, "Well, I did not expect to have met with this here!" But Mrs. P. was a sour old widow, that would not have been asked, only she was related to the Philipses of the Park; so what she said did not signify. And Mrs. Weston lived all that down, for her dinners were capital. And as years went on, she in turn began to wonder who was visitable and who ought not to be noticed; and became so very difficult, that though the Bilberrys purchased silver corner-dishes for the purpose of conciliating her and getting her to dine with them, they could never accomplish it. I remember the drawing-room re-furnished three times—damask succeeding chintz, and satin, all the way from Paris, taking the place of damask; and in her old age, the best bed of brown and yellow print, with lions' heads at the corners, that had been a marvel of grandeur in its youth,

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was put aside for a piece of blue-and-white modern upholstery, for the very efficient reason, that at the sale of the furniture that must follow her death, "the old bed would look so shabby." Whoever before furnished for their own sale? When strong symptoms of gentility had broken out, she consulted a few intimate friends on the desirability of calling Cicely "Farrar," as ladies'-maids are usually called by their surnames; but popular opinion ran against her; for Cicely, in her morning gown and close muslin cap with a plaited border, looked so very unlike "Farrar," that she deviated from her usual rule when asking advice by adopting it. As to John, so little would be gained by calling him "Jones," that no alteration was made.

Cleaning must have been a very favourite pastime with her. She was for ever painting or scouring or shaking the carpets; the silver was bent and thin with John's continual rubbing; and the knives were worn to a point

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with the energy of his daily exercise in the boot-hole. John had a habit of letting down visitors, from being company, to forming a part of the family, in a manner peculiarly his own. The first few days he made a grand display of plate, and would then withdraw it piece by piece—first the wine-coolers, then the best dessert knives, an extra cream-jug or butter-cooler, till in about ten days he had got down to what was commonly in use, by which time he concluded the visit was, or at any rate ought to be, over.

Maudesleys was a lively, cheerful abode ; for though Mrs. Weston had no children of her own, she contrived to adopt many of other people's, one niece or another always living there ; and a kind and ready hospitality, that invited not only her own friends, but her friends' friends, ensured a plentiful supply of visitors. She dearly liked children about her, but not in the way of fondling or caressing them. With all her kindness, I never heard

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her say "my love" or "my dear" to any human being; but she liked superintending children through her spectacles, smoothing their hair, examining their nails, or diving into remote corners in order to see if they were well washed; and if no others came in her way, must needs invite a selection of boys from the minister's school, to the discomfiture of both the nieces and Cicely; for school-boys are no company for girls, and Cicely vowed they ate more sponge-cake in the day than she could make in the week. But Mrs. Weston liked boys; indeed, all her tastes inclined to the masculine. She rarely occupied herself with feminine accomplishments, such as embroidery or knitting. Her pleasures were a sound biographical or historical work, especially approving those with a leaning to the Tory side; meddling with the farm, managing the house, or looking after the poor. In and out, in and out, all the day long; now stepping up to Mr. Whipp the butcher, to remonstrate with him

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on the exorbitant price of meat ; now seizing the opportunity of upbraiding Liddy Compton on the folly, not to say guilt, of adding another offshoot to the family tree, but concluding the argument by telling her to send for her dinner to Maudesleys for the next fortnight ; selecting fruit or vegetables to be sent to neighbours who had no gardens, or taking a delicate mother or an ailing child an airing in the old gig. Always active, always employed, she rarely sat down ; but when she did, it was in the dining-room (which she greatly preferred to the drawing-room), at a polished mahogany table, with a large brass-bound desk before her and on it her book or accounts.

Her interests lay with the land, the roads and the Poor-law Guardians,—a taste so thoroughly appreciated by her humbler neighbours, that when she inquired of Mike Lancashire, the overseer of the poor (whose society gave her unqualified pleasure), if he had yet seen Mrs. Blackburne, the new rector's lady,

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“Ay, I have,” said Mike, “and a nice lady hoo is, hoo’d just suit you ; a good, pleasant woman as ’ud go into a drain like o’wt.” There was nothing in the parish she would not undertake. She set herself to disentangle the differences of that tangled web, the Book Society. But that was an eminent failure ; for the Society eventually split and dissolved upon the question whether a Tractarian or an anti-Tractarian bookseller should supply the literature, which, as the reading was chiefly confined to novels, travels and biographies, was a matter too important to be overlooked. The feud ran high between High Church and Low Church, but neither would yield ; so between the two the Society fell to the ground.

The brightest, cheeriest thing at Maudesleys was Maggie, the daughter of a brother of Mr. Weston, who resided in France ; but owing to the demolition of property occasioned by that very common event, a Revolution, Maggie was glad to accept an invitation from Maudesleys

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to pay a visit that ended only with the lives of the inviters. Half English, half French, the gayest, liveliest, merriest little cricket was Maggie. A face by no means pretty, and a figure a little warped, yet she slid along sideways in a fashion of her own, that was positively graceful ; looked up to as an oracle of fashion, and a very mirror of taste, such little jaunty hats she wore set sideways on her "crêpèd" curls, such well-made gigot sleeves, and petticoats judiciously shortened to show the pretty foot that in her inmost heart she was so proud of ; kindly, sprightly, loving, what would Maudesleys have been without Maggie ? The great secret of her popularity was her warm and hearty sympathy in the interests of those about her ; she was as busy and interested in the school-going and well-doing of the poor weavers' children, as in the plan of a conservatory or the make of a new velvet gown for Mrs. Thornton, her wealthy neighbour. At a wedding, a birth or a death, Maggie was always

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ready with blithe, cheery congratulation, or kind and tender sympathy. It was charming to see her at a Sunday-school fête, in her white dress and blue ribbons, flitting about with the buns, holding the cups of tea to the mouths of the little ones, or helping a teacher out of a difficulty, who, in earnest anxiety to promote the amusements of the occasion, had got quite fast in a song about Chloe and Colin ; though she was no great singer herself, wasn't Maggie, and only knew one song throughout, " The Miller's Daughter," taught her in very early life by Phœbe, her grandmother's maid. Maggie knew no accomplishments : her music was limited to " Oh dear ! what can the matter be ? " played with one hand on the piano ; she never covered an inch of cardboard with her pencil drawing, or canvas with her oil painting ; her nearest approach to design was worsted work of a weak, ineffective character, or paper patterns for needlework traced on the window-pane ; she knew no German, no Italian, and

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did not understand a single "ology." She spoke and understood French well, but that came to her without much trouble ; for in spite of Jemmy Smethurst's (the writing-master of her youth) earnest and imploring, "Magaret, attend!" attending was, as she observed, "a thing that she was not in the habit of doing." Her acquaintance with flowers was marvellous, but she only knew them by their common country names; if she came to a botanical term, it was pretty sure to be wrong, and, in defiance of all teaching, would still say "nemophula" and "rhododendrum;" but she did manage her flowers to perfection. There was never anything prettier in gardening than a device she called her "Charlotte," a circle of short larch poles with the bark on, set upright, and the centre filled with soil; then, within this, another circle rising somewhat higher, and a handle of twisted rope over all. The soil was thickly covered with blue lobelia, scarlet verbena, or any gay low-growing flower; the golden

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moneywort hung over the sides, with its straight, tight-fitting shoots; and the handle was encircled by the lilac petunia and the yellow tropæolum: in the sunshine, Maggie's "Charlotte" was the perfection of colouring. Gentle and simple liked Maggie. She mollified the misanthropic schoolmaster, whom his mother called "morbid," but his pupils didn't, to admitting her when all the world was denied; and was the favourite listener to Mr. Winter's two pet stories, the one of his lowering the price of fish in Douglas market after he cast in a net for mere amusement, and the other, the fabulous price of his green-dragon china dessert service, purchased in Bath, and his hope, fear, anxiety and final rapture at securing the treasure. So, after all, Maggie did possess a few accomplishments, however little heeded then, that may possibly avail her now: the music of cheerfulness, the languages of kindness and sympathy, the poetry of hope and charity.

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All country customs and rural pastimes found encouragement at Maudesleys. At the rush-bearing, the morris-dancers danced their best in the court-yard behind the house, to a tune of their own, that I could furnish at this moment to any one who wants it; and though accompanied by all the children and rabble in the country, that swarmed on the horse-block, drank from the pump, climbed on the gate-posts, invaded the porch, and turned the steady decorum of the premises upside down, giving Charles and old Diggle a world of trouble to get all straight again,—in spite of all this, the rush-bearing was as welcome as ever next year. At Easter, the pace-egggers were admitted into the kitchen, and went through their performances in the presence of the family. A group of young men dressed in frightful masquerade, some in women's clothes, one with a horse's head, and each furnished with a flat wooden sword, went through a sort of drama, the plot of which at this distance

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of time seems somewhat complicated; but I know that one was St. George, and fought the dragon with the horse's head and slew him; then everybody fought with St. George. And there was a little man called Jack, that they all struck with their flat wooden swords, and the blows had a particularly cheerful sound suggestive of harlequin; Jack fell down dead, and then a cry was raised of "A doctor! a doctor! ten pounds for a doctor!" The doctor, arrayed in a wig and spectacles, came in at the back door, with a bottle in his hand, which he applied to Jack's mouth with, "Here, Jack,

"Take a little out of my bottle,
And let it run down thy throttle;
And if thou be not quite slain,
Rise up, Jack, and fight again."

So Jack rose up, and the performance was concluded.

Life went on smoothly and evenly at Maudesleys for forty years and more, and

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then came a change, in the failing health of Mr. Weston; when his daily visits to his warehouse were discontinued, and the account-book and ledger, which were hitherto his principal studies, were laid aside for "Blair's Sermons" and "Porteous's Lectures," steady, respectable divinity that could be taken in moderate doses, and was doing something towards preparing for the inevitable journey. He had never played a very important part in the establishment; no need of that; but he had fulfilled the two duties which my friend Miss Humble assures me she conceives to be the sole advantage in husbands, "finding the money and frightening the servants."

Mrs. Weston was indefatigable in her attentions to her husband; stood over him whilst he ate, with a determined, "doing-my-duty" air; saw that he followed exactly the doctor's prescriptions; walked out with him, sat with him, and spared no trouble or fatigue in the

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endeavour to lengthen out his days ; but in vain. Death would come ; so she waited with a calm endurance for the blow, watched the moment of departure with a sad serenity, and immediately mounted a chair and stopped the clock.

She showed his memory every respect. The mourning was solemn and decorous ; John was stripped of the red waistcoat for ever, and came out in a full suit of black, with a tuft on his shoulder. Mrs. Weston's cap was of the most widowed build ; her bombazine was of the finest, her crape of the deepest ; but a despairing widow she was not. Indeed, despair depends a good deal on the income : hers was rather diminished, which decided her on leaving Maudesleys, and taking a house at a short distance, and in a rather more genteel neighbourhood—a gentility that amply compensated for any grief she might feel at leaving the home of her life. Changes and misfortunes, it is said, never come singly. She

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was scarcely settled in her new abode, when Cicely one morning announced her intention of marrying forthwith. She said it reluctantly, with every mark of regret, and would for her own part have continued her engagement for the term of her natural life ; but bass William was growing infirm, and thought Cicely might as well attend on him as any one else ; and there was no time to spare, as she was past fifty and he verging on three-score. So, with many admonitions on the folly of marrying young, and how uncomfortable she would find it, and how inferior her table and accommodation would be to Maudesleys, and how disagreeable men were in general, and Cicely promising faithfully to come back whenever she was wanted, her mistress was won over to consent, and presented her with a feather bed, and the stair-carpets with needlework borders, and a work-table, and that eternal lead pincushion, and a variety of oddments brought to light in the removal. The wedding

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was strictly private. The bride and Mary the housemaid set out in the carriage, driven by John (who, as he shut the door, indulged in an extraordinary demonstration with his thumb at the end of his nose, glancing sideways at the cook), and were met at their own peculiar chapel by the bridegroom, in his best coat and drab leggings; and the faithful pair were speedily and irrevocably made one. But Cicely had no mind that the union should begin there and then for the benefit of the observers; for, the service concluded, the happy pair took their leave of the company, and each, with a bundle tied up in a handkerchief, set out on their wedding journey, taking opposite sides of the high road, and in that fashion pursued their way until they were out of sight.

Mrs. Weston reckoned without her host if she calculated on commanding Cicely's services in the future; for in spite of the promise that deluded her into consenting to the

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marriage, the very first time she wanted Cicely to accompany her as usual on a visit to Ireland, bass, doubly bass William, with a total disregard to both their feelings, observed, he'd "rather hoo didn't go; mebby hoo'd be sick, or mebby hoo'd die, or (and the gist of the matter lay in the third reason) mebby I should be poorly while hoo were away." So poor Mrs. Weston learned the lesson "The Tatler" tells us, so prettily, he was taught a hundred years before, that his sister, after her marriage, would have him to know that she was no longer "Jenny Distaff, but Mrs. Tranquillus."

I rather owe Cicely a grudge myself; for once, when her mistress was feelingly regretting to her my very large family, she replied, in a most unsympathizing tone, "Serve her right; she and Miss Phillis were always laughing at large families;" and I do think the weight of the dispensation might have softened even her uncompromising notion of retributive justice; but it didn't.

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Servants who have lived more than thirty years in one family acquire ways of their own that would scarcely be tolerated under a new dynasty. There was many a tiff between John and his mistress about the mode of putting coals on the parlour fire, which resulted in his placing the coal-box on the rug, and retreating a few paces, with an air of lofty magnificence, and a determination to wait until she had helped herself to her own satisfaction.

Phillis, one of Mrs. Weston's nieces, had found a Strephon in the neighbourhood, and was carrying on a flirtation unknown to her aunt, but discovered by John, who knew all the news in the parish, acquired in the kitchens of the houses about, whilst waiting with his lanthorn to follow the ladies home from the tea-parties, and regularly disburthened his mind of it to the younger branches by the way. It so happened Strephon was a little lame, but "quite an elegant lameness," Phillis said; and that atrocious John would

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walk solemnly behind his very unconscious mistress, and in advance of Phillis and her companions, in order, as he said, "to light them both at once,"—indulging in a very unmistakable limp as he swung the lanthorn to and fro down the lane.

At one time, Mrs. Weston was wishful to alter the name of Maudesleys for one more picturesque or significant. Her neighbour, Mrs. Ramsbotham, had built a high brick wall between her own dwelling and the high road, and called it in consequence "Wallfield;" but Mrs. Weston inclined to "Daisy Bank," only for this difficulty. Thanks to Tommy Diggle's care and attention, the lawn was so trim and velvety, there was never a daisy to be seen; all were carefully rooted out; and her zeal for "Daisy Bank" was somewhat quenched when, relating the dilemma to a gentleman friend, he replied, "Then, Madam, suppose you call it Lack-a-daisy Bank." The names of the farms and demesnes all around were

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quaint and old ; in use, possibly, since Lancashire was a county—"Hollinhurst," "Ditch Ash," "Thatch Leach," "Besses o' th' Barn," "Poppy Thorn," "Sheep Hey," could not well mingle with "Daisy Bank" or "Mount Pleasant." Then "Woodley" was proposed as meeting every requirement, and "Woodley" it remains.

I saw it again after the lapse of forty years. The kind hostess was no more, the nieces all dispersed, the friends all gone, the house was let to a stranger, and I was forgotten.





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*“A story in which native humour reigns
Is often useful, always entertains;
But sedentary weavers of long tales
Give me the fidgets, and my patience fails.”*

COWPER.



WAS seven years old (and now I am—no matter what) when, owing to my mother's illness, it was thought desirable to send me out of the way for a time; so I was packed off to my grandpapa in the country, greatly to my own satisfaction—perhaps rather more so than to

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his. It was a populous manufacturing district, still the country, inasmuch as it was some miles from a town. The poorer classes, almost without exception, were hand-loom weavers, earning seven shillings a week by sixteen hours of toil a day. If the family was numerous, the mothers and younger children were employed in winding bobbins to supply the father's or elder brothers' and sisters' looms, and so eked out a subsistence without leaving the family roof. I liked nothing better than sitting with the weaver on the bench, watching the work with its mysteries and difficulties; the shuttle flying to and fro with such precision, the two long brushes, dipped in "sow," or sour paste, smoothing the warp under and over, followed by that awful red-hot salamander that dried it without burning; but the wonder of all was, how the feet could hit the six or eight treddles below accurately without looking. I thought I could have managed old Sammy Ogden's loom, that had

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only two treddles, for he wove nothing but coarse grey calico. The young women sung at their work, loud and shrill, "Sally in our Alley," and a favourite ballad about going to the races, of which all I recollect was that the company came "from Chorley and Chowbent, likewise from Cockey Moor." The continued monotonous "clickety-click" of the loom was heard from every cottage door, and to this day the old familiar sound conjures up a host of memories that would otherwise be dormant for ever. I often begged Lizzy Fallows to let me wind the bobbins for her, whilst she went off to a game at "hop-flag," but the weavers never liked my winding. When the thread breaks, the ends are fastened together with what is called a weaver's knot, but I found this troublesome; so when a thread broke, I wetted the end, stuck it on, and wound again, which made a fault in the cloth. These cottagers were simple people, great psalm-singers and chapel-goers, and very

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uncouth in speech and manner. The women wore petticoats of linsey-wolsey, and bed-gowns of the strong blue-striped gingham they wove. The men were dressed in fustian coats and knee-breeches, seldom fastened; and one and all wore wooden clogs, with strong upper-leathers fastened by a clasp. Many of them had a little garden, with a black-currant tree in the middle—a leaf of which was a favourite addition to their tea—some gooseberry-bushes and an onion-bed, with balm, thyme and camomile. Then for flowers, stocks (which they called gilly-flowers), polyanthus, wallflowers, a border of double daisies, and a few auriculas (in their tongue, bazures). There was a society of gooseberry-growers in the county, where the fortunate producer of a gooseberry, so immense that it had neither taste nor flavour, was rewarded with a copper tea-kettle, which was hung up with great pride from the kitchen ceiling, and duly brightened every week, but never on any account used.

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I have seen six of these hanging in bright array from one roof.

Most of the weavers were stern Presbyterians, and duly attended the old whitewashed chapel, built somewhere about the close of the seventeenth century. They scorned the Church as the "scarlet woman," abjured an organ, and roared through the psalms with the assistance of a double-bass-viol and a bassoon; the unlucky scraper on the first instrument becoming so part and parcel of his Sunday vocation, that he was known through the entire country by the somewhat unenviable sobriquet of "Bass William." This chapel was attended by many of the wealthier inhabitants of the community, some of whom were of a Puritan stock, and the parish church was two miles distant; but innovations crept in, to the great disgust of old Mr. Taylor and his wife and daughter, descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers, to say nothing of the dismay of old Samuel Taylor and his daughters Leah and Rebecca.

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Young people were very apt to become "back-sliders" and "castaways." Mrs. Philips, the richest member of the congregation, presented the minister with a gown, the first on record in our chapel. The elders shrugged their shoulders; took counsel together; and mourned "the degeneracy of these days." "You must have your ways and your doctrine so fine-spun now; we like 'em better 'ith rovings;" but the minister was young, thought it looked better, held by the gown, and prevailed. I thought it a great deal more cheerful to go to church than that dull old chapel; one would see something of the world there, and the fashions too, for it was a highly genteel congregation, from the Countess of Riverton to Mrs. Tring, the bleacher's lady. The only grandees of the chapel were the Percivals; but they were devoted to learning, and wore the plainest of bonnets, so there was nothing much to see there; besides, it was much more "the thing" to attend church. I rather think

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Dissent was very vulgar indeed, but I was too young to appreciate gentility in its fullest and sublimest sense, or to understand that there is quite as much of it in religion as in station. Who ever heard of a genteel Methodist, or an elegant Baptist, or an extremely polished Ranter? The thing is impossible. There was always a rush to the church door after service to watch my Lord and Lady enter their carriage; and though my Lord and Lady, and their fathers before them, had entered their carriage at the same door and at the same hour for years and years, still the rush was no less. It was well, to be sure, if her Ladyship wore flounces before the dresses for the season were completed; and though pretty Mrs. Lavington went to London now and then, and brought the most becoming of bonnets home, it was safer to see my Lady's also. I enjoyed watching the Countess in her large pew, with a staircase of its own, and the curtains and cushions the colour of the family

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livery. She and her friends looked so apart from the rest of us, and so supremely above us, that I was a little startled once when she used her pocket-handkerchief, as commoner people are in the habit of doing. So, as I said before, the congregation was highly genteel; and those who did not belong to it, if rich, were eccentric, and if not, very low indeed, A thousand a year enables you to hold any opinions you please.

At the time I speak of, a wet summer brought a bad harvest; wages were being reduced, and provisions rising; flour was unsound, potatoes as dear as apples. Hard fare and privations were beginning to engender discontent and bitterness among the working classes; a factious spirit rose amongst them, first complaining, then threatening. Men gathered in groups, conversing in a low, suppressed tone. Then on a still night might be heard far off in the hills the word of command given, and the tramp, tramp, of the nightly drills. Then

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followed petitions to Government, public meetings, arrests, imprisonments, and, in a few cases, executions. Then a lull for a few years, disturbed again by some real or fancied invasion of the masters on the workmen's rights. Then the same round again.

There was one fearful night I shall never forget. The authorities of the neighbouring town received information of a plot that had been devised, and was to be carried into execution—that was, to destroy the town, or at least put it entirely in the hands of the people. The mob was first to surround it, then set fire to the mills, and whilst the soldiers were drawn off to their assistance, seize the barracks, possess themselves of all the arms and ammunition they could find; then take the jail, release the prisoners; and, lastly, plunder the bank. What next was to be done I do not know, but there was a sufficiency of horrors for one night.

On the strength of this information, all the

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gentlemen of the town armed themselves with whatever came to hand—old swords, pistols, daggers, life-preservers, or bludgeons—and paraded the streets all night, expecting the foes, who never came, and the signal for whose coming was to be the tolling of the Old Church bell. How we listened for that ominous toll! But no sound broke the silence, except at intervals a gun was fired to show that all was safe as yet.

This is now a matter of history, and the fearful conspiracy is supposed to have been a hoax; but at that time the public mind was so excited by Luddites and Radicals, Reformers and Blanketeers, that nothing was too absurd to be believed, or too atrocious to be dreaded.

With all their progress and their politics, the weavers were steeped in superstition; believed devoutly in “boggarts” and “signs of death;” and some of them had seen “jingling Annice,” a female figure in white, without head, dragging a chain. Peggy Corless almost sent me

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into a fit with her real experiences. "I were sitting," she said, "one night with Mary, the housemaid, in the kitchen (it were afore I were wed), and master and missus were out, and nobody were in the house but Mary and me; and all at once, I heard a foot on the stairs, and I said to Mary, 'that's John Butcher's foot;' and two year after John Butcher died, and that were a sign." I shuddered at the thought of Peggy hearing *my* foot on the stairs; nobody likes to die, old or young. I know Betsy Walker at eighty fell ill, and could no longer, as she said, "keep scratting afoot;" so her son, thinking her time was come, sent for the minister, to help her to make a good end. The worthy man talked with her, prayed with her, and exhorted her to repent of her sins, and depicted the joys and blessings of the next world to the penitent sinner, and was feeling comfortably satisfied at the frame of mind into which he had brought her, when he was somewhat taken aback by the invalid's calling out,

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“It’s all very well, Mr. S., but Old England for me!”

I never did see a real ghost, but I saw something very like one once. Grandpapa’s maid-servant, Betsy, a fine young woman, full of fun, wrapped herself in a white tablecloth, made a torch of brown paper and pitch, lighted it, and glided slowly through the plantation in front of a row of cottages. Presently little Ann Hollows came out, and flew back like a shot, with—“Oh, mother, mother! I’ve seen a sperrit, I’ve seen a sperrit.” The alarm spread; all the neighbourhood was roused; they all saw it; but nobody dare go to it. At length, Joseph Grindrod, plucking up a spirit, said, in a voice much louder than the occasion required, “I’ll see what it is; I’ll know whether it is a ghost or not;” and was moving slowly towards the shrubbery, when Betsy, who heard all, trod out her torch, slid off the tablecloth, gathered it under her apron, and disappeared, to the mystification of the

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wondering group, who, if any of them are living now, will still have firm faith in the "white sperrit" that arose and vanished in the Hill-farm shrubbery.

Many years before this, somewhere about the middle of the reign of George the Third, a Fast-day was appointed to be observed throughout the kingdom—for what cause I forget. Some gentlemen who lived near, wishing to amuse themselves at the expense of their superstitious neighbours, wrote on an egg in a greasy substance these words from Isaiah: "This is not the fast that I have chosen, saith the Lord." By placing the egg in a strong acid, the part left exposed was eaten away, leaving the writing in relief; it was then deposited in the hen-house of a little farm close by.

The mysterious egg was found; the consternation was fearful; some looked upon it as a voice from Providence, some as a machination of the devil; the fame of it spread far and

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wide. What ought to be done with it? At length, one old, very old man, examined it attentively, and broke forth—"I'd set it, I'd set it; it'll haply hatch a witch; and if hoo spit fire a field's breadth, I'd pin her to the cop wi' a pikel."





MR. CROKER.

*“ Let’s talk of graves, and worms, and epitaphs ;
* * * * *
Let’s choose executors, and talk of wills.”*

RICHARD II.



N a leading thoroughfare to one of our largest manufacturing towns, there stands by the road-side a long, low, thatched cottage, that still preserves its old-world look, and, with its inhabitants, is as much apart from the din and turmoil around it as it was some ninety or a hundred years ago, when the family who now own it first become its possessors. I fancy

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at one time the house was prettily situated in the country ; but the high road had been widened, and encroached upon the garden and curtailed the court. The fine row of elms was cut down in order to raise and widen the foot-path, and the cottage had sunk imperceptibly a little below the level of the road. The front door—which was so small that no gentleman of average height could enter without stooping—opened into a little vestibule partitioned off the kitchen, and down two steps was the common sitting-room. Within this room was another parlour, a little larger, that was called the best parlour, and both rooms had very low, raftered ceilings. The windows were latticed, and had once opened with a little door, held out in its place by a long hook ; but when the traffic in the road increased, they were carefully improved and made quite fast, so that they never could open again ; for if air came in, dust came in with it, and soiled the curtains, and did no good to the plants on the spotless

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white window-sill. But every Saturday, the leaves of those pretty camellias, capsicums, cyclamens and bigonias, were sponged singly with tepid water, which was intended to compensate for the absence of fresh air. How the family lived with windows that would not open, I cannot think. There was a door into the garden behind the house, out of the best parlour; and when both that and the front door were left open, it created a thorough draught, which was all the ventilation they possessed.

The sitting-rooms were furnished with massive mahogany chairs and tables. The only difference in degree between the best parlour and the other was a Brussels and a Scotch carpet. On one solid table in the sitting-room were two mahogany cases the shape of a salt-box, with hinges and locks of silver, each containing a set of green-handled, round-ended knives and two-pronged forks. By the fire there always stood a chair of a triangular form, with the corner in front, and each arm had a

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flat circular end that would hold a glass. In each room was a sofa, covered with chintz and filled with feathers, that puffed up like a bed, and on which a sitter left an impression so vast, it was almost startling. A quantity of old china punch-bowls and tea-cups were displayed in a corner cupboard, and some engravings by Woollet, in black frames, illustrative of the pleasures of shooting, completed the decorations. They were light, cheerful rooms, for each had a window looking into the road, and another opposite into the garden.

The bed-rooms were so low that a good-sized person had much ado to stand upright in them ; and across a passage up stairs there came a beam so much below the usual level of ceilings, that one of the family always accompanied a visitor to give timely warning.

The nominal master of the house (for I am sure he was not the real one) in my young days was Mr. Croker, the Co. in the firm of Taylor, Weston and Co., in the large town,

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who regularly walked down to his warehouse at eight in the morning, and duly returned to a good hot supper at eight in the evening. The rest of the household consisted of his widowed mother, maiden sisters, aunt and great-aunt. The result of this maidenly companionship was a profound contempt for the intellects of women in matters of business, and an earnest desire to see all females solely occupied in cooking and sewing, with eight pounds a year for their private expenses, that being the sum allowed to his great-aunt in the days of her youth, in 1742.

His notion of educating men was to bring them up as roughly and clumsily as possible, to make what he called "good men of business." No young man well dressed or wearing gloves, which were the objects of his unqualified contempt, could ever do any good. "Poor soft molly-coddles," he would say, "that cannot say shoo to an 'en, how should they get on!" A poor man was his aversion; he had

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“no opinion of him ; he was a mere man of straw.”

The eldest aunt, Mrs. Anne, was a byword for sourness and ill-nature, and had that pleasant way of making rude, disagreeable speeches that those who make them call sincere. About eighty years before I knew her, Mrs. Anne had the small-pox, which left her with a scarred complexion and a weakness in her sight, for which she ever after wore a little black bonnet that half covered her face. She was one of those odious, excellent people who have a great notion of doing their duty, and in the doing of it contrive to make themselves and all around them much more uncomfortable than if they had let the duty alone. She had sacrificed herself, and remained single all her life (no such difficult task, one would think, and see that little black bonnet and red, ferrety eyes), for the sake of her two orphan nieces, Miss Peggy and Miss Betsy. I had a wholesome horror of Mrs. Anne, which was not lessened

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by her vicious inquiry of mamma, "what she brought that child for?" and the legends of her sourness were so numerous and appalling, I would not have been left alone with her on any terms. No civility softened her, no forms of good-breeding ever stood in the way of her tongue. In the memorable small-pox, when she was only six years old, a kind friend came to the bedside and gently whispered, "Anne, love, I've brought you a bit of gingerbread." "And a bit it is, if you've brought it," was the polite reply. In her last illness, when her half-sister, who, at much personal inconvenience, came to bid her an affectionate farewell, she was told "it would look better of her to stay with her husband than come to see her;" and that was pure sourness, for she did not believe in husbands, and held them too cheap to require any attention at all. Some relations once paying her a visit, and prolonging their stay beyond Mrs. Anne's contemplation or wish, were somewhat taken aback one morning

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before they were up, by hearing her call out loudly on the stairs, "A fine morning for cousins to go home!" Whether cousins took the hint and departed we never heard, but it was a caution ever after not to prolong a visit until the hostess found the morning fine enough for "cousins to go."

Miss Peggy was a niece after her own heart; held marriage in scorn; "did not see what she had done that she should be any man's slave." I know the grandpapas of several of my young companions had laid siege to that obdurate heart (for Miss Peggy was a co-heiress, and had an abundance of offers), but she was inexorable.

Miss Betsy was not so stern. She married, though greatly against the wish of her sister and aunt; an unfortunate step for poor Miss Betsy, for her husband was in trade, and in addition to the indecorum of marrying, in course of time took the liberty of failing also, which Miss Peggy could not overlook. She

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offered to take her sister and her family to her home, but on condition she should separate from her husband. Mrs. Croker, like a good wife as she was, refused the bounty that he must not share ; but when he died, Miss Peggy merged the impropriety of having a husband in the sorrow of losing him, forgave all, and took the whole family under her especial care.

Of all mankind she could only tolerate her nephew ; no other man was ever permitted to sleep under that maidenly roof. One old gentleman indeed, a former aspirant, was regularly invited to dine on Christmas-day, but he never stayed all night, and his wife was not included in the invitation ; it might be because she was the second wife. Marrying once might be pardoned ; it was a first error ; but twice was an enormity Miss Peggy could not countenance at her table. How neat and trim she looked in Spanish leather shoes with high heels and pointed toes ! The fashion of her dress did not alter much : a white dimity petticoat, with a

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chintz gown over it, and two corners carefully drawn through the pocket-holes, was her general costume. I never could be quite clear about her age; for being born in 1752, when style was altered, I could not be sure whether Miss Peggy had cheated time of eleven days, or time had cheated Miss Peggy. She was a woman of rare courage; for once in her youth, being attacked by a stirk or young bull in an open field, without a possibility of escape, she resolutely turned round, took off her high-heeled shoe, and struck the animal a sharp blow on the forehead with the heel, walking gently backwards and repeating the blow until she reached the stile by which she escaped. The same story is told of the mother of Thomas Day, the author of Sandford and Merton; only she used no more formidable weapon than her own eye, under which it is said (for I cannot say I have tried it) all the brute creation quails.

Now and then a few ladies were invited to

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tea and a quiet pool at quadrille. The card-table was such a queer little thing, with bent legs and a green cloth top, and in each corner a little hollow scooped out of the mahogany to hold the fish. Oh, what good, abundant teas those were! All manner of cakes and tea-bread, of which you were pressed to eat until you could eat no more! The tea-cups were the thinnest and daintiest of foreign china, without handles,—a sad perplexity to young fingers when the tea was hot; the sugar-tongs were light pierced ebony, as the weight of silver might snip the edges of the cups and saucers. When the silver tea-pot was used, the blinds were carefully drawn down, lest the display of plate should excite the attention of passers-by. On ordinary occasions a black earthenware tea-pot served, and the silver one, with the little cream-jug on three legs, was snugly esconced in an ingeniously contrived nook, a little way up the parlour chimney, as a precaution against thieves. The refreshments after the pool were

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wine and cake ; but none of your poor Savoy biscuits or seed-cake in thin slices ; it was a fine large plum-cake, profusely garnished with macaroons, and such good thick slices, and no comments on coming again ! They adhered to the custom of presenting wine and cake to all callers, no matter how short a distance they had come,—a laudable habit which procured for them the pleasure of my company, and the company of a good many besides myself, much oftener than the usual forms of polite friendliness demanded.

The amusements they found for young people were as old as Mrs. Anne, and might have been selected by her, they were so like her. One was called “tiring-irons,” a set of iron rings and two iron bars fastened together ; if on the bars, the rings were to be got off, and if off, were to be got on ; iron impossibilities that looked like thumb-screws or instruments from the Inquisition. Puzzle-pegs were another distraction : a set of loose wooden pegs, that by

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some impossible process were to be put together something like a fir-cone. But the cream of the entertainment was a doll that had been Miss Peggy's, in a yellow satin hoop, and flaxen hair drawn up over a toupee. There was a dissected plan of a ship in a box, adorned with coloured straws, made by the French prisoners, of the same manufacture as the Indian chiefs on the chimney-piece, carved out of mutton-bones. And the evening often concluded with a game of Snip-snap-snorum, when instead of counters we used shells, which Miss Peggy kindly informed her young guests "came from the sea-shore."

The family lived on and on, with no alteration but that which time inevitably makes. Change they one and all abhorred. Thatching went out of fashion, and it was difficult to get the roof repaired, for the thatcher lived thirty miles off, and the danger from fire increased tenfold as building surrounded them; but they submitted to all the inconvenience and expense

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rather than live under a slated roof, because "it was always thatched." They baked their puddings in splendid foreign china dishes because "aunt Anne did it;" and in later days, "it was always our custom, grandmamma did it."

When Mrs. Anne died, her name and mantle fell worthily on Miss Anne, Jun., whom it was easy to see would be Mrs. Anne in time. She went about the house scolding in a clear shrill voice, and shouted in sweet, gentle Mrs. Croker's ear, "Mother!" pronouncing the first vowel as it is in "bother," a method of rendering the soft word mother I have only heard once besides. They all shouted in that establishment, from Sally the maid-servant up to Miss Peggy, for somebody was always deaf; and by the time the elders died, the juniors were become quite deaf enough to need shouting. I don't know how it was, but marriage seemed inimical to the family. Miss Peggy, Jun., tried it after her aunt's death (she would

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not have ventured in her life), but it did not answer; she soon died. And Sally, when she was prevailed upon to accept the hand of a well-to-do brewer in the neighbourhood, never looked up after it. What a tongue Miss Anne was blessed with! Her brother declared she was the only woman living he could not manage; so after repeated trials of strength, in which he always had the worst of it, he gave it up, and consoled himself by always calling her "madam." How madam evaded matrimony, I can't think, for she was remarkably handsome; but it is not everybody that is born to be married. Mr. Croker himself had once thought of perpetrating such an enormity, and though he never reached the offer, had got as far as an understanding; but the family fate pursued him, and the lady died; yet he was faithful to her memory; forty years afterwards, the sight of her initials on a needle-book in the work-box of one of her nieces, brought up a blush, followed by a sigh, as fresh and genuine

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as if the object of his attachment had died only yesterday.

When the elders were gone, and he was really the master of the house, then he in turn collected some nieces to tutor, and train, and instruct in economy and manners, according to his own ideas. I have seen three or four of the poor girls seated for the afternoon on separate chairs round the room, doing nothing ; for sitting quite still, with your back to the wall, was his notion of good-breeding ; and he ought to know, for once in his life he had been abroad for a month, both in Germany and Holland, and was never weary of relating his travels, and how curious it was that the Dutch name for butter should be so very like English. He had ever after a hankering to travel, and wished to go to France and Italy, to see Calais and Rouen, which he pronounced like Gowan, and above all "Florence," with the emphasis on the last syllable ; but the expense deterred him, and as he grew older the trouble also.

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The only expensive pleasure in which he indulged was a funeral; then he luxuriated in hearses, and coaches, and mutes, and scarfs, and large macaroons in white paper sealed with black; and the relatives to whom in life he would have grudged a drive out with one horse, he willingly accompanied in their last airing with four. The Crokers "had always been carried to the grave by four horses," and "such being our custom," it must be adhered to. Then he incurred a great expense in hiring a man to sit on the grave every night for a fortnight, after which time he conjectured the body-snatchers would not consider the remains of his relative available. Upstairs there was an old bureau, in which he kept all the gloves he had ever received at the funerals of his friends and acquaintances, with their respective names and dates; and this collection was the source of much secret pride and gratification. I never much liked that bureau. A queer little figure of a Negro boy smoking a pipe

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stood on the top, and the whites of his eyes and little grinning teeth looked very unpleasant in the dusk of the evening; but to Mr. Croker this museum of ghostly remembrance was as gratifying, to use his own expression, "as the cabinet of the connyshure filled with the most costly articles of virtue." What an enjoyment it was to be invited to a funeral that he had no right to calculate upon! A pleasure is so much enhanced when unexpected! On the death of his half-cousin he doubted whether his relationship entitled him to a place in the procession; but when he received a notice to attend, his heart so expanded with geniality and good fellowship, that on his fellow pall-bearer inviting him to dinner, he tapped the coffin emphatically with his knuckle and said, "Sir, on a day like this I can refuse nothing!" All his grief for the departed merged in the pleasure and interest of arranging the funeral. When his partner, Mr. Weston, died, for whom he had a warm

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attachment, he was sent for to consult upon the necessary arrangements, and was soon absorbed in vaults, and graves, and palls, and staves; but one point he could not settle to his mind, and, ringing the bell, requested the presence of the sister of the departed, who was cherishing her grief upstairs. Down she came, handkerchief in hand, ready to receive him with a flood of tears or a fit of hysterics, as it might happen. But there was no time for either. He calmly advanced to meet her with, "Mrs. G., what are your feelings about lead?"

Time went on. The grim messenger called again at Mr. Croker's door, and again the four black horses took their sombre way to the parish church. He in turn bequeathed the quaint thatched house to his maiden nieces; but it seemed the spirit of Miss Peggy's antagonism to man was rife within him. The property was to be held with this proviso: "no man was on any pretence to sleep under the

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roof." If one sister chose to marry, she must go and the other could remain; but if both married, they forfeited all claim to the dwelling of their ancestors; and on that tenure it abides to this day.





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"Let us be genteel, or die."

CRICKET ON THE HEARTH.



WONDER what constitutes gentility! Not always birth; there are many vulgar people high-born. Certainly not money for the "vulgar rich" has almost passed into a proverb. It is not talent; for authors and authoresses, though they may be clever, are not necessarily "genteel." What is it? What is this myth that every one is so anxious to grasp? I believe, in assuming to yourself and others that you are genteel; and only assume it enough, and all

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around you will come into the belief. In every country neighbourhood there is a genteel family; it may be poor—that is of no consequence; if it thinks itself genteel, the neighbours think so too.

The stronghold of gentility in the circle where I lived was Whitfield Hall, the residence (I had almost said the seat, but not quite that) of Mr. Dickson and his three maiden sisters.

If not county gentry themselves, they were related to those who were, and held up their heads accordingly. Whitfield Hall was rather an imposing-looking mansion, white and rough-cast, three stories high, with a gabled roof. It stood on high ground; and as each story projected a little over the one below it, the old building looked a little top-heavy, and as if the next high wind might carry it away; but it had stood its ground manfully since the civil wars, and might have stood much longer if it had had no more ruthless an enemy than time to contend with. A very broad gravel

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walk led up from the high road to the garden gates, beyond which no carriage could pass. The windows in front were long, low, latticed casements, but on the garden side had been enlarged, and commanded a fine view of an undulating country, the least bit in the world disfigured by a tall chimney here and there vomiting smoke. An old chapel stood within the outside gate, and, though used as a barn, had rather an ecclesiastical air, and suggested dim visions (which were never realized) of a family chaplain.

The house belonged to the Earl of Derby, who owned most of this part of the country, and Mr. Dickson was his agent. An agency, be it observed, is much more genteel than trade; it has a smack of a profession; and the agent rides grandly over the property, and is only second-hand lord of the soil. Here he lived many years with his sisters, Miss Dickson, Miss Deborah, and Miss Violetta. There was a little niece bequeathed to their care, of nearly

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my own age, about whose education and bringing up they each took the liveliest interest; and as they could not be brought to be of one mind on the matter, it was settled that each sister should have the entire charge of the little girl for a week in turns; and this was tolerably easy to arrange, as each lady had her own sitting-room.

It was rather a distinction to be invited to Whitfield Hall. I can remember the conscious dignity with which I held up my head, turned out my toes, and affected to hold running races, bowling hoops, or swinging in the barn, as vulgar and unladylike. I would not have had them know I was addicted in private both to climbing trees and playing marblès for the world.

Never did house and tenants fit in so cleverly; both were a little *passé*, but stately and dignified withal; neither looked affluent, as the somewhat decaying timbers and falling plaster of the one, and the faded furniture of

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the others, bore abundant testimony. In a red-brick house in a row, the Dicksons would have looked like a fine old portrait in a blue-and-white frame from a broker's; and Whitfield Hall with very rich new people in it, no better than the village artist's "Queen's Head," crown and sceptre and all, encircled by an elaborate specimen of mediæval carving.

There were long queer passages leading to nothing; a room here, up a few steps; another there, down a few more; a winding staircase to a turret chamber; and in the highest story, a very fine banqueting-room, with the arms of the Stanleys, encircled by a world of ornament, in stucco, that covered the whole ceiling. There was a tradition that in the civil wars the Royalist family at the Hall threw all their plate into the pond in the grounds rather than yield it to the Puritan soldiers, and this valuable plate has never been fished up unto this day.

Miss Dickson was a stately old lady, very

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deaf, and used a trumpet ; with sweet, soft manners and a very gentle voice, as deaf people usually have. She was kind and indulgent to children, questioned us about our lessons, and was always wishful to compare her niece's attainments with those of her young companions. In her week, the young Serena learned her lessons in a rational manner, and was dressed like other girls, in white or gingham frocks and a straw bonnet.

I don't know where Miss Deborah's sitting-room was, for I never saw it ; but she had one certainly. She was rather coarse-looking, with a stout, over-grown figure, arrayed in a white gown and a black satin or velvet turban, and rouged without the slightest attempt at deception. I always fancied Miss Deborah like "Herodias, his brother Philip's wife." In *her* week, Serena played with her doll, rode on her donkey, or worked in her garden ; but such a little sight she was at church, in a short scarlet pelisse, a scarlet

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Polish cap with a band of fur, white trousers, and boots laced in front with scarlet ribbons!

It so happened that I went to spend the evening there chiefly in the weeks under Miss Violetta's rule, and consequently remember her better than her sisters. She was poetical, had written verses in her youth, and must have been remarkably handsome, with the fine loveable complexion that never hardens, and if it wrinkles is loveable still. Her costume, morning or evening, indoors or out, was a white gown, a silk cloak or shawl, and a bonnet on her head with a plume of black feathers, and a parasol in her hand. She rouged, as well as Miss Deborah, but more gently, and wore little strips of pink calico within her bonnet, that might be supposed to cast a faint tinge on her cheek. The room she sat in was the family dining-room, square and low, with a Turkey carpet and old-fashioned mahogany table and chairs. In one corner stood the piano, a small square one, on the thinnest of

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legs, and the maker's name, "Clementi," in a wreath of roses over the keys. Above the piano hung a picture, containing the full-length portraits of Mr. Dickson and two friends, precise little gentlemen in the first, third and fifth positions; the coat of one scarlet, another sky-blue, and the third black, with cocked hats, and one gentleman held his arms a-kimbo. There were two or three other portraits in oval frames, and on the chimney-piece, which was much too high to be reached without standing on a chair, were some old glass lustres and screens of a date unknown; probably Miss Violetta's own painting.

In the week she was in the ascendant, Serena devoted herself to music, French, dancing and drawing. Her music never came to much; indeed, it would have been surprising if it had, for she could scarcely distinguish the "Old Hundredth" from "Cease your Funning;" but Miss Violetta constantly assured us that her music-master thought her

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so talented, that it was his earnest wish she should forsake the piano and devote herself to the organ ; and considering the tones of the instrument he wished her to forsake, I have no doubt it was.

The Dicksons had an accent and phraseology of their own—a northern provincialism (but not of our county, for they came from another), with a dash of the south engrafted upon it, and a clipping of e's and i's and a's that filled us with deference and astonishment. "Vestly" was their pet word. They were "vestly happy to see us," the day was "vestly oppressive," or my new bonnet was "vestly becoming." They talked a good deal, too, of people of "Femily and feshion," and brought us all to believe that they were the embodiment of both in the neighbourhood.

Miss Violetta delighted in French words ; "recherché" was a great favourite, but she would say "reserché," which was a little mysterious. We, however, were only learning

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French ourselves, so could not venture to be critical. She was rather addicted to making presents that did not cost much; for she was not only kindly disposed, but it afforded an opportunity of scattering a few flowers of rhetoric that might otherwise have bloomed unknown. I remember her sending a doll, with a congratulatory note, to a little girl on her ninth birthday. The note she wished to be in French, and requested Monsieur Pasquier, the French master, to translate it for her, a somewhat difficult task when one sentence was a congratulation on her young friend's "having successfully got through the campaign of infancy." She periodically distracted the Dissenting minister by a present of Windsor soap. I don't mean that he despised the soap, but the hint it afforded that it would be well to use more of that indispensable appendage to the toilette was too aggravating.

After tea, for we always had tea at Whit-

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field Hall—(our good friend Mrs. Ranby, where we visited also, gave us our choice once between green-gooseberry tart with cream, and tea ; I chose tart, but Serena said tea, and rather looked down upon the vulgarity of my choice, so I preferred tea in future)—after tea, we were generally taken up stairs to amuse ourselves in the drawing-room, a fine large room, rarely used, with black-and-gold chairs placed all round, and old-fashioned settees in the window. The carpet was covered with green baize, and had never been removed or shaken for twenty years, which invested it with a certain mysterious interest as to what there would be beneath. But the pride and glory of the room and the family was a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds, a beautiful full-length figure of a lady in white satin, standing in a garden, with her hair drawn high up, like the portraits of Mrs. Thrale, and exquisite hands held out as if inviting the spectator's attention. Then always came the

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story. Long and long ago, Sir Charles Bampfylde was an intimate friend of Mr. Dickson, and had a beautiful wife whose charms he wished to perpetuate, and requested Sir Joshua to paint her portrait; but, alas! between the time of giving the commission and its completion, the fair lady forfeited her husband's good opinion, and a divorce ensued. The portrait came home, but it was no longer her home, and the incensed husband threw it contemptuously to Mr. Dickson, and desired him "to use the canvas to pack his trunks in." This was a pleasant story to tell; it was agreeable to possess one of Sir Joshua's portraits, because no one else within any reasonable distance, except the Earl of Derby, had one; though Lady Betty's might have been discarded for the same reason. Then it was pleasant to show the friendship that had existed with a Baronet. They stood much on their intimacy with the "Bampfylde" at Whitfield Hall, and talked quite familiarly of

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Prebendaries and Deans, Canons and Bishops, "in residence" and "out of residence," which mystified us extremely, who had no cathedral in the county, and had never seen a Bishop but once, at a confirmation. Their tone was decidedly ecclesiastical and High-Church, with an unmitigated contempt for Dissent in all its branches. How Serena came to learn writing from Jemmy Smethurst, the village schoolmaster, cousin to a Dissenting minister, I cannot think; but the error was repented of afterwards, and she would willingly have forgotten Jemmy's instruction, to begin again with more orthodox pot-hooks. Her drawings were chiefly views of cathedrals, and her own parish church from twenty different aspects drawn from nature; and surely never was a picturesque country church so hardened and stiffened and astray in its perspective as this. The "Church" was their prevailing idea, and it must be the right Church too; not half-and-half Evangelism, that says, "Read your

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Bible and think for yourself ; but if you think differently from me, without doubt you will perish." They thought with the Church, and the Church thought for them, and that was enough. Even Hannah the housemaid objected to listen to the new curate because he was, as she said, "not a graduate."

They doted, too, on the Peerage, of which a worn copy lay on the table, to be referred to constantly on the mention of any name of rank ; but as it had been published about the year '99 or so, the information it could give would not have been very available, but for a happy device, peculiar, I should think, to the family. By a daily careful inspection of fashionable births, marriages and deaths, recorded in the St. James's Chronicle and the Morning Post, and interlining the same in their proper place, their Peerage was kept very well up to the time, and frequently had the proud privilege of containing later news than the new one of the year. Trade

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they ignored; that it existed there was no denying; but the less said about it the better.

The only blot in the gentility of the family escutcheon was the name, which could not by any device be made uncommon or aristocratic; for in the nearest town, which had a low habit of earning its livelihood by trade, there was Dickson the brush-maker, Dickson the linen-draper, and Dickson of the glass shop. But at length a bright idea suggested itself to a lady correspondent; she directed her letter Dickson with a long *f*. The notion was seized on with avidity; and from that time forth the family were Dicksons with a long *f*.

What wonders the putting in or leaving out a letter achieves in a name! That valuable *e* final to Smith or Brown is next best thing to a coronet. The omission of the *p* in Simpson, the *k* in Jackson, or the *i* in Jamieson, makes a wonderful difference in

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their gentility; it is only a pity the sound is the same. I own I am puzzled with Smijth. Has it some extraordinary pronunciation of its own? or is it like ffooks, where two little letters only go for one big one? *Y* is a most respectable letter; happy those who can get it in the middle of their names! What would Aylmer or Leycester or Wygram be without their *y*'s? It adds centuries to the age of the family without further notice.

Miss Violetta survived her brother and sisters some years, but rarely went out of her own grounds except to church, in a machine which ninety years ago was called a "whiskey" (such as I have seen, in old magazines, pictures of the Prince of Wales driving out in, with Mrs. Fitzherbert); but she kept herself wonderfully *au fait* with the fashions and doings of the world without—at least she talked as if she understood them. But by degrees she

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withdrew from seeing callers ; then we heard of a long declining, and the unwearied care and attention of her niece ; then of her death and funeral ; genteel to the last, for the inhabitants of two or three cottages close to the gate, who paid their rent to the house, were requested to follow her to the grave as “tenantry ;” and the last I ever heard of Miss Violetta was her maid’s presenting to a lady friend the plume of black feathers, under the shade of which she lived and in which she literally died, thinking her friend might wish to preserve so touching and characteristic a memorial of her.

All are gone now. The Dicksons of Whitfield Hall, their gentility and their long *f*, are alike extinct ; the stately old house is pulled down and replaced by a pert brick mansion—so red, it might be blushing to find itself intruding on those precincts of dignity. The

DICKSON WITH THE LONG S.

very name is almost forgotten ; and truly it may be said with the Psalmist, "The wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more."





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"And learn the luxury of doing good."—GOLDSMITH.



HERE is much less individuality now than there once was, that is certain. If I were to live to a hundred, I should never see another Aunt Dorcas. If she were living now, I think she would be strong-minded; but women were not strong-minded in her day; only each held a character of her own, and hers was not more remarkable than many others of her age and class.

There is a sweet, quiet village, two miles

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from the high road, where the houses are detached, in pleasant gardens. A bright little stream, crossing the road, winds round the green, and passing the church, flows down by the inn, till it loses itself in the meadows. In one of the pleasantest houses in the village lived "Aunt Dorcas." She professed to live alone; but there was so often a delicate niece to be cared for, or a sick nephew to attend upon, or a friend who wanted change of air, or young people who would like amusements for the holidays, that her spare rooms were generally occupied. She would have filled a dozen if she had them. But the house was small: two parlours and a kitchen on the ground floor, and four bed-rooms up stairs, were all the accommodation. There was indeed a little room over the stable, that she called the powdering-room; but when powder went out, it fell into disuse, and, from being filled with lumber and all manner of odds and ends, was generally termed "Noah's Ark." The sitting-

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rooms were light and cheerful, with plants in very red flower-pots on stands before the windows. The curtains in both were white dimity, trimmed with black; the sofas were chintz, stuffed with feathers like a bed; and in one corner stood Aunt Dorcas's own peculiar rocking-chair.

Over the chimney-piece were hung framed silhouettes of all her departed relations, a dismal reminder of buried affections; but Aunt Dorcas liked dismals. I can't think she ever wore a coloured gown;—yes! at her marriage perhaps, but I don't know, and I dare say it was grey. At the mature age of fifty, she concluded a courtship of nineteen years, and married the late Mr. Fincham; and whether she found the nineteen years' courtship a pleasanter division of the acquaintance than the two years of her married life, I don't know; but she strenuously advised all her young friends to wait until they were fifty also, which some of them were not so well inclined to do; and

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besides, they had not her good reason for waiting. Her engagement was disapproved by her mother—for what reason we never knew; possibly for religion's sake, for Mr. Fincham was a Churchman, and Aunt Dorcas's family stiff Dissenters. But we all knew that when her mother was safe at chapel, she was in the habit of meeting her lover in the arbour in the garden; and this flaw in the crystal of her filial obedience was an unspeakable satisfaction to her own niece Eveline, a graceless young damsel who engaged herself quietly, unknown to her family. And how could Aunt Dorcas remonstrate when she had done the very same thing herself? But she never married in her mother's life, and after her death considered it her duty to wear mourning twelve years before she consented to be married.

Whatever the bridegroom was, the bride was "not winsome." Report said he was tall, thin and shambling, with only one eye, for he lost the other in holding a branch aside which

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obstructed her path in one of their lover-like walks, and a small twig entering it, destroyed the sight. Aunt Dorcas was rather proud of his one eye, and held it as a mark of his gallantry and devotion ; and would observe, in a triumphant tone, that she was sure "Eveline's lover would never lose his eye for her ;" nor indeed did Eveline wish for any such attention.

Mr. Fincham's time seems to have been divided between gardening and teaching his favourite cat, "Trap," to sit up and beg when he said "Roga," an adaptation of classical lore that pussy could well have dispensed with. His devoted attachment to his wife was not to be disputed ; her name was the last word he wished to utter ; and when he felt his end approaching, requested he might be spoken to no more, and repeated, "Dorcas, Dorcas, Dorcas!" more and more feebly, until he died. Then, indeed, her grief was intense. She put herself and her household into mourning for life ; and

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it *was* mourning! Fancy a tallish spare figure, with a stern grave face marked with the small-pox, and piercing black eyes, in crape and bombazines up to the throat, without a scrap of white to relieve it, and a widow's cap! And such a cap! Not the little gauzy fabric we see now, becomingly adjusted behind the braided hair; this was a real widow's cap, with as strict an attention to the unbecoming as the most exacting husband could require. First, there was no hair visible; then her cap was composed of several tiers of broad-hemmed muslin, with a smooth round stick run through each hem; and a piece of muslin in the same fashion, went under the chin, and was pinned to the cap on each side.

The effect was in strict accordance with what must have been the original intention in devising the widow's costume—effectually to check any aspirant to the vacant marital post. When seven years had expired, she went into her second mourning, which only differed from

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the first in adopting a false front of straggling black hair; but if any of her relations died, then she took off the front until the mourning for them was over. Her household manifestations of sorrow were somewhat unusual. The garden gate was painted white, picked out with black; the front door white, with a black knocker. The sun-dial had a broad piece of black twisted round it. The hen-pen was in solemn mourning; and the window-curtains were bordered with black, and looped up with black roses. The late Mr. Fincham's hat, in a band of black crape, hung in the lobby, serving a two-fold purpose: first, the keeping him in continual remembrance; and secondly, it was hoped, suggesting to any thief who might call, that there was a man in the house able and willing to protect it. There was a rumour that Aunt Dorcas secretly cherished her grief by going at night to sit by the tomb in the chapel-yard, which was only a field's breadth from her own garden. This tomb had a long

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inscription, recording his merits and her be-reavement ; but the stone was dark and weather-stained, so that I never could bring away more than the word "conjugal," which I called conjugal, and wondered much within myself what kind of a man a conjugal man could be.

Aunt Dorcas was generally employed in the morning in some mysterious cooking operations, and had a few recipes on which she piqued herself surprisingly. Mock mock-turtle without calves' head was one, very nourishing for invalids ; pickled mussels was another, very relishing for those in robust health. Then she was constantly preparing little messes for the sick, or baby clothes for the poor, and in the last task enlisted the services of all her young visitors who wore thimbles, an invasion on the privileged idleness of the holidays I never could forgive, and revenged myself by large stitches and careless seams. I wonder she approved of baby clothes at all ; only when evil is done, the true Christian forgives it.

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Once, indeed, she was outraged beyond her patience when a poor woman brought her seventh olive-branch to be clothed and fed, and dismissed her sharply with, "My good woman, if you indulge in these luxuries, and bread so high, I can relieve you no more." She understood better than the doctors the medicine of the fields and gardens; prescribed camomile-tea for the bilious, dandelion-tea for the dropsical, decoction of sage for sore throats, and balm-of-gilead for bruises; gave cowslip-wine for the measles, and blackberry-jam for a cough. Her cures were wonderful, though perhaps not equal to one I know, where a tender mother, who was always doctoring and coddling, fancied her son growing crooked, and sent for her favourite physician to examine him. After much manipulation and pressing with his thumbs, he declared "she was right—the spine had a lateral curve;" but he would send him a pill that would set it all to rights—and it did!

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I fancy Aunt Dorcas's income was not large, economy was so frequently the theme of her conversation ; and it was not only theory, but practice, with her. With the assistance of her maid-servant Margaret, she painted and papered the inside of her house, and the bedrooms afforded as unique a specimen of amateur papering as her own or any other county could produce. Pieces of all shapes and all patterns were pasted on the walls, producing the effect of a tapestry of patchwork, frightful enough to common observers, but to her a tender and affectionate memorial of departed love. She had done it for the purpose of amusing her husband during a long period of weakness and decay ; and who can tell but each figure and each pattern recorded some look or some tone to be treasured up, that without its assistance might not have been remembered, so mysterious is the sympathy between sensation and memory ! A piece of needlework of the most unimaginative kind

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will, on returning to it, recall the ideas passing through the mind when occupied upon it, and the thread of thought may be taken up and pursued from where it broke off.

It was amusing to see a touch of family pride cropping out amidst her economy and benevolence. Her great-grandfather was a Baronet; her grandfather High Sheriff for the county; the portraits of two grim gentlemen in armour, with ladies to match, hung on the stairs, and attested the fact of her gentle blood. This gentility was shared with the wife of the minister of Aunt Dorcas's chapel, who eked out the stipend of seventy pounds a year by cultivating a little farm, and made the butter and managed the household as cleverly as if she had not a drop of blue blood in her veins. She loved to tell of her first interview with her grandmother, Madame Dukinfield; and how the old lady waved her away with disdain because her mother had disobeyed her by

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marrying, and how frightened she was ; and then her grandmamma relented, and had her to stay with her, and took her to chapel, and a tall footman went before to open the door of the pew and carry the Bible and hymn-books. No wonder, then, that sometimes she would draw up her little figure, fling the soap-suds from her arms, and smooth down her check apron with, "I am a Dukinfield," or be very particular in always accosting the Squire as "cousin Robert."

Aunt Dorcas had some shreds of scarlet trappings that had decorated the High Sheriff's horse, which she preserved with singular pride and satisfaction—sometimes, I think, as a set-off against the pretensions of the other Mrs. Fincham, the widow of her husband's brother, who lived near, with a family of sons and daughters, and claimed descent from a nobleman, dead and gone long ago, and the title extinct, to be sure, but still a Baron, which is greater than a

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Baronet, and the eldest son was called by his name.

The sisters-in-law conducted themselves with a decent, arm's-length civility, that is more unlike friendship than an open quarrel and have done with it. One cause of heart-burning with Aunt Dorcas was, that the furniture bequeathed to her by her husband was at her death to descend to his brother's family; and so conscientious was she to return it as she received it, that if a towel or duster wore out, it was carefully replaced with a new one; though she would pathetically observe, "it was hard to find dusters for other people's furniture;" and it was hard. Besides, Mrs. John Fincham had a peacock, that would come into Aunt Dorcas's garden, and eat up her peas even to the second and third sowing, and quite disregarded the scarecrow in a widow's bonnet that was set up to protect them; and compliments politely vicious were exchanged between the two ladies upon the nuisance. Then Mrs.

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John Fincham and her family went to church, and Aunt Dorcas went to chapel; but that difficulty resolved into a lofty contempt for the intellect of all those who went to church, after the usual fashion of Dissent, great and small.

The garden into which the peacock so provokingly found his way, sloped pleasantly to the sun in front of the house, with a stone-fruit wall on one side, and a terrace bordered with flowers under the windows. Plants for show and plants for use were not classed separately in that garden; gooseberries and roses grew side by side, wallflowers shed their perfume over onions, and camomile sat at the feet of sweet peas. In the furthest corner was an arbour of privet and hornbeam, so thickly interwoven, it was dark and gloomy at noonday, and not pleasant to sit in even then; for earwigs and spiders would drop from the roof, and snails would leave a slimy path on the seats. But in the twilight or evening, that

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arbour was not to be approached on any terms ; for Aunt Dorcas's mother, or, as she called her even when she was sixty, " my mamma," had been seized there with a fit of apoplexy, and died immediately ; and I don't feel sure that I have not seen old Mrs. Chester, in her black gown and a quantity of thin muslin about her neck, like the picture of her in the parlour, sitting in that arbour ; but I never dared to go any nearer than the cherry-tree, which was at some little distance ; so I may be mistaken. I never see cherry-trees bear fruit like those. How, day by day, we climbed up to a high branch and ate our fill, and still there were plenty left ! With the sauciness begotten of abundance, we would only eat those with a peck from a bird's beak on one side ; and they know the best, those throstles and blackbirds ; it is quite safe to follow them. They took so many, however, that Aunt Dorcas allowed a gentleman friend to bring his gun into her garden, and he shot three throstles and a blackbird, all of which

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we ate for dinner, and suffered so much from remorse in doing it, we had no more shooting of throistles. What glorious summer days were those spent with Aunt Dorcas! Except, indeed, the babies' shirts, nothing to do but amuse ourselves all the day long; taking distant excursions in a cart, with a plank across, and a bolster tied carefully on, and covered with a patchwork quilt, for a seat, that went bump, bump, over the rough stones, enough to shake the life out of older people; or picnicing in the hills; or wading in any stream that looked clear or inviting; or gathering peas for dinner and strawberries and gooseberries for dessert in the garden! And those were strawberries that would have justified the quaint old writer's assertion, that "Certes, God Almighty might have made a better berry than a strawberry, but certes, God Almighty never did!"

On wet days, our recreations were reading love-stories in her old magazines, revelling in the tumult inspired at the sight of a certain

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pink satin saque, in a heart throbbing within an embroidered waistcoat and a sky-blue coat. Playing Schimmel was a vast resource,—a German game just come into fashion, played with four or five painted cards: on one was a white horse, on another an inn, on the third a bell, on the fourth a hammer, and on the fifth both a bell and hammer; there were several dice too, and the game required a number of counters, instead of which we used cherry-stones, and felt it a duty to keep up a constant and unlimited supply. Sometimes we were permitted to rummage through an old walnut cabinet that stood on the stairs, with pigeon-holes and secret-drawers, and all manner of mysterious contrivances. It is curious how maiden ladies (and Aunt Dorcas had only just escaped being an old maid) all hoard the same kind of things. There were Ladies' Magazines beginning about the year 1777; old lace on blue cards; every device in mourning rings and brooches,—cypress-trees overshadowing urns,

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worked in the hair of the departed ; initials and true-lovers'-knots in seed-pearls on bracelets and lockets ; leather housewives, with casings for thread that never could be got in ; a silver apple-scoop, used by " my mamma " when her teeth failed her ; pocket-books and old letters, in which paper and ink had acquired two shades of the same colour, brown and browner, written on coarse unglazed paper, before envelopes were heard of, and in which the writers had signally failed in the difficult achievement of turning the ends in well and neatly ; and the whole collection was plentifully bestrewed with broken heads of lavender, and crumpled, faded, yellow rose-leaves.

There was also a fortune-telling screen, that whirled on a pivot, and told your fortune just where you stopped it, and which I thought told truly, and discovered in after-life that it did not.

I have said before that Aunt Dorcas was a strict Presbyterian ; so on Sunday morning,

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when the chapel bell began to toll, the dinner was put into the oven, the tea-pot and table-spoons carefully placed between two feather beds, the doors were locked, and the whole establishment set forth to chapel. This was a little, grey, old stone building, half covered with ivy, and one bell, that rang, and rang, from ten o'clock until the minister was fairly seated in the pulpit. The pews were grey and worm-eaten, of all sizes and shapes. Some seemed not to have borne age so well as their neighbours, and to have sunk a little on one side under their infirmities. One was distinguished by a wooden canopy over it, and had once belonged to that *rara avis*, a Dissenting Peer. One of his descendants, no other than the village schoolmaster, occupied the pew, and in the pride of his descent had painted on the door, "Lord Hugh Willoughby." When did Dissenters know anything of heraldry? or the difference between Lord Hugh and Hugh Lord? It converted the baronial ancestor

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into quite another person. But it did just as well ; a Lord's a Lord all the world over, and Burke's Extinct Peerage had not come out. There was no vestry in our chapel ; but the minister wore no gown, so no robing-room was required. The bier stood at one end, a perpetual *memento mori*, and over it hung the bell-rope, looped up on a peg. The minister walked straight into the pulpit from the outer door, and service began with old Thomas Lathom, the clerk, giving out the hymn in a thin, feeble, snuffling voice :

“ O praise ye the Lord, prepare a new song,
And let all His saints in full concert jine ; ”

and, lest any of the congregation had not caught the number of the hymn, assisted their memories by writing it in chalk on a slate, and suspending it from a nail on the pulpit over his head ; the rubbing-out of this chalk, ready for the next hymn, occupying a good deal of his time and attention during the succeeding prayer.

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The music was a bassoon and a violoncello, with a pitch-pipe to enable them to start fair, and the singing was confided to the congregation in general. The doors and windows were left open in summer, for no sound could enter more disturbing than the twitter of a bird or the bleat of a lamb. Flies came buzzing in, or a bee hummed her way round, and perhaps settled in one of the posies carried on Sundays by the country girls, and esteemed a sovereign remedy against sleeping during service. It would be difficult to sleep anywhere with such a rich combination of sight and scent as those nosegays of lad's-love and thyme, wallflowers, pinks, and roses.

The grave-yard was grassy, still, and peaceful ; not a gravel walk up to the door ; all was grass, silent and calm. The weekly worshippers held it in affectionate reverence, for there they had laid their own kindred, and there they expected to be laid in turn. After service, the congregation dispersed, seriously and

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quietly ; those who lived in the same direction walking together, discussing the sermon or inquiring after each other's affairs ; but all in a hushed, subdued tone that belongs to Sunday in the country. I could fancy there was a stillness in the air peculiar to the day, as if all nature, animate and inanimate, rested the one day in seven, and worshipped in reverential silence. It was a matter of sad regret that the only sister of Aunt Dorcas had married a Roman Catholic, and had been received into that communion ; though it ill became a dissenter from the church to complain of a dissenter from the chapel. But her indignation knew no bounds when the sister actually wrote to beg for one of their mother's brocaded silks, to cut up into vestments for the priest. What ! The gown of a Dukinfield cut up for any such purpose !—she that was taught to spit out in passing a Catholic ! The petticoat of Nonconformity on the shoulders of Papacy ! Never ! It

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would be enough to make "my mamma turn in her grave!"

Her latter years were principally occupied in cherishing the sick or mourning for the dead, and the hair-front was adopted or discarded in turns, according to the degree of relationship she bore to the last departed. Kind, good Aunt Dorcas, your mourning is over now!





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*"Great schools rejected then, as those that swell
Beyond a size that can be managed well."*

COWPER.



SOME years ago—more than I care to tell—Mrs. Ruleit was at the head of a very select ladies' school in Wriothesley Place, Russell Square. I don't know what she termed it, but she would neither have it called a school, nor an establishment, nor a seminary, nor a house. Such names she rejected as low, or, to use her favourite expression, "twopenny." It was

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simply, "Mrs. Ruleit's, Wriothesley Place." On the same principle, the girls were not called young ladies, whatever their rank or station; they were only "the girls." The school had fallen off considerably before I went. From twelve pupils—which was the limit—it was reduced to five. There must have been some prejudice at work somewhere; for, before my going was quite decided, our old friend, Mr. France, the clergyman, took pains to inquire from the family of one of the pupils what they thought of the school, and received for reply, "Oh! we like the school very well, and the masters are very efficient; but we don't think sincerity is taught there." I suppose my father trusted I had learnt sincerity before, though I never had a sincerity-master. At all events I went, but with a caution not to repeat what I had heard on any account; and this secret lay like a load of lead upon my mind all the time I was there.

Mrs. Ruleit and her daughter, with the

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teacher, Miss Radley, and we five girls, composed the household. Miss Radley slept in our room, walked out with us, and never left us. She was about thirty years of age, with coarse red hair, white eyebrows, and a turn-up nose. What a life she had with us! for we were more frequently impertinent than polite; and how lonely too! for she belonged neither to us nor to Madame. At half-past six in summer it was her duty to call us, and about seven we came down-stairs. One of us was then sent off to the piano in the front drawing-room, another to the piano in the back, and a third to the piano in the parlour below, to practise till breakfast. It was a long time for growing girls to wait, but we often stayed our appetites with a hard biscuit. At nine, Madame came down, and prayers were read by one of the girls; after that, breakfast of tea and solid squares of bread and butter, which was very good, every morning except Mondays, when it was a day old.

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We lived entirely in the study—a good room, with a view of the back walls of the mews. There was a long deal table, with a form down each side, in the centre of the room, and forms all round close to the wall. These forms contained lockers for our books: no carpet; only a hearth-rug before the fire, which it was a forfeit to cross. We were quite satisfied with our accommodation; for the terms of the school were called high—two hundred a year—so we felt very genteel and select, and never missed the carpet. Breakfast over, Mrs. Ruleit placed herself at the head of the table, and heard one of us read French, which was all the teaching she undertook herself; except assiduous attention to our deportment and carriage, to which last task she was gradually falling a sacrifice, according to her own account. She was very short and very stout; but we were constantly assured she was worn to a thread with entreating us to hold up—nay, to a ravelling.

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Monday morning brought Mr. Gresley, the English master, whose lessons were held in the deepest reverence ; for Mrs. Ruleit wisely considered that to speak and write English in purity was far better than middling French or imperfect Italian. The idea of German was never entertained ; we should as soon have learnt Runic. A tradition existed that Mr. Gresley had sold his head to the surgeons, and there was something imposing in being taught by a head that was worth buying ; so we were all very attentive, and a little awe-struck. We read poetry with him, besides the grammar and parsing lessons ; and sorely tried he must have been at times. I recollect a tall girl, nearly twenty, who had been in various schools all her life, repeating Young's lines :

“ But their hearts, wounded like the wounded air,
Soon close—where past the shaft no trace is found.”

He interrupted her with “ Miss G., what do you mean by the shaft ? ” “ Something belong-

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ing to a cart, sir." How he grinned, clapped his hands, and shuddered !

Our instructor in French was a little, shrivelled old emigrant, without teeth, who mumbled his language all to mash. He had a perpetual cold, too, and was for ever using his handkerchief, and interrupting the reading with, " Mon nez me demand." He corrected the exercises, heard us read in " Epochs d'Angleterre," and got as far in the beauties of La Fontaine as " Une grenouille vit un bœuf."

Two mornings in the week we came down to breakfast, in full evening dress, for Monsieur Roverre, the dancing master, a dapper little gentleman (ballet master at the opera, who came in his own carriage), preceded by Mr. Chip, with his fiddle in a green bag, who sat near the door playing it during the lesson. Oh ! his earnest endeavours to make us graceful ; his despair in our elbows ; his hopelessness in our backs ; and his glare of indignation at our mistakes ! But what could we do ? English

girls are not French girls, who are born dancers. We did our best, and he ought to have known it, but he didn't; so we hated him as only school girls can hate, and revenged ourselves by calling him—when nobody heard—Old Roverre.

Music was the great end of education at Mrs. Ruleit's, and an evening of excitement was that when Mr. Dragon gave his lesson. Then Mrs. R. and her daughter sat, with coffee, in the front parlour; and each of us in turn, with her music in her hand, had to enter the room, curtsey, and take her seat at the piano, with three sets of the most formidable eyes in the world fixed upon her. I am agitated now to think of those Tuesday evenings. After all those odious practisings in the front drawing-room, without fire, to find your fingering erroneous, your time defective, taste and feeling wanting, and diligence questioned, and finally, as you left the room, to hear, with a contemptuous sigh, "*She* will never make

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anything of it," was more than a girl's nature could bear. How thankful I was to get to bed after it, and be soothed to sleep by the boy in the mews calling "Beer, beer"! Happy boy, to have no music master!

On Wednesday mornings we were generally indulged at breakfast with a running commentary on the shortcomings of the previous evening, accompanied by plaintive lamentations on the inferiority of the present set of girls, as compared with those of former years, in everything worth knowing generally—and music in particular.

Then we heard, for the twentieth time, of Miss Timmins, who so appreciated the advantage of learning from such a master as our Dragon, that she could scarcely be induced to leave the piano. *She* never complained of the cold in the back drawing-room, or that the instrument in the parlour had several dumb notes. Miss Timmins knew her duty, and did it, and may be doing it yet, and I

hope is. I never saw her, but I hated Miss Timmins.

I did better in drawing than music, and had one master, in hessian boots, all to myself; for I drew chalk heads, which no other girl did. I felt very grand standing at my easel with my port-crayon, rubbing in a large head of Calypso, or a great ugly Syrian woman from the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, which I talked of as "after Raphael." But the crowning point was copying Canova's Hebe from the cast, or, as we technically called it, the round. Then I felt indeed an artist.

Our studies were suspended at one o'clock by the entrance of a plate of dry bread for luncheon. Mrs. Ruleit shut up her desk and sailed out of the room, while we proceeded upstairs to dress for our walk. Two whole hours were spent every fine day in the nursery gardens in Euston Square. But we were not compelled to keep together; so I often took a book, and in the cold weather was much in

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the greenhouse, and in the warm by the side of the pond, under shade of a large white thorn that hung over it. I wonder where the pond and the large white thorn are now? We returned home in time to dress for dinner at four. This was a plain, substantial meal, soon over; and after it, we were left to our own devices and Miss Radley until tea at seven. The interval was filled up with reading, talking, or learning lessons. Our stock of entertaining books was not very extensive—"Countess and Gertrude," "Rosanne," "The Poetical Keepsake," "The Swiss Family Robinson," and "Paul et Virginie," were all I remember. Then was the time for revelations to each other of our previous lives and experiences. Only one of us (it was not myself) had ever a lover—that grand object of attainment to a school girl—and that secret was not spoken loud out, but only to me in the retirement of the nursery-gardens. It was an officer in the East India Company's service, never likely to

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come to England again, and who had never made a direct offer ; so he was but a shadowy kind of lover after all ; only it did to talk about, as we had nothing better. But one of the girls had spent the last holidays with a beautiful cousin who was engaged to an officer in an English regiment, whose name was Mannering ; and this engagement served as an illustration of all the sentiment and love-making that could be at any time broached. Meantime, Miss Radley read, or worked, or walked backward and forward in the study, holding a backboard ; and when it grew dusk, and she thought we could not see, mounted a hair-pin across her nose, in the vain hope of curbing its aspiring tendencies. If by chance she heard the word gentleman, we were instantly interrupted by some question as to what age we were, or how many brothers and sisters we had at home. She did not like so well to tell her own age ; for once, when we got on the subject of ages, she asked us how old we thought her. We all

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believed her thirty, but thought it would be very ill-bred (and we piqued ourselves on our good-breeding) to tell her that she had arrived at that age when hope is outlived and despair even survived ; so we unanimously said twenty-seven, and she would not tell us the truth after all. She rebuked me once viciously for saying "an old lady of fifty." I understand it now, alas ! but then I thought it very unjust. Fifty is not so old as it once was.

When candles came, Miss Radley gathered us round her, and heard us read the Bible, or questioned us in ancient and modern history or heathen mythology ; and sometimes we read poetry. She was of a tender, sentimental turn, in spite of red-hair and a turn-up nose ; and in moments of confidence would show us a little box of treasures, to be gazed at lovingly when *we* were asleep. The gem of the collection was what I took to be a paper of tobacco, the contents being about that colour and texture, with this inscription outside : "The sweet

remembrance of my beloved brother." She soon set my error at rest by explaining that it was her brother's whiskers, which he had cut off on returning from the wars, and she had treasured them up ever since. This was a remarkable brother too, for he was very deaf when he went into battle, and the roar of the cannon did something to his ears, for he heard quite well when he came out.

At this time of the evening we were allowed now and then to subscribe, and send the housemaid out for hardbake, parliament, apples or biscuit, or a cocoa-nut, which we peeled, sliced and boiled in brown sugar, then turned out on a dish, and called ambrosia. Seven o'clock brought tea, and Madame took her place again at the head of the table. Each girl had a large breakfast-cup full; we might have more if we liked, but we never had. After tea, one read aloud in that cheerful specimen of polite literature, Rollin's Ancient History (I have never looked into it since), while the rest

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worked. I hate Cyrus to this day. We had a very little joke upon Darius, who was nicknamed Dosen, because he made promises that he did not keep, like our next-door neighbour, Mr. Moses, who promised to send Mrs. Ruleit a bag of coffee, and didn't; so we called him "Dosen," and held him in contempt. At nine o'clock we put up our work, the Prayer-book was brought out, and we knelt in a circle before Madame. Prayers were read by the girls in turn; and after "bon soir," we were dismissed for the night—not without suspicion that Mrs. Ruleit and her daughter had something good to eat after we were gone; but this was never confirmed, and cook would not tell.

Our Italian master, Signor Gagliardini, only taught the girls who could sing; for to pronounce the words of Italian songs properly was the chief object of the instruction. Occasionally he brought his little boy with him, who informed us in a thin, shrill voice that his

name was "Titus Telemâque Terence Themistocle." The weight of his name seemed to have crushed his growth.

The Signor gave a concert on a plan common enough at the time. A lady in Upper Brook Street lent her house for the evening, on condition of having a certain number of tickets for herself and friends. Mrs. R. took two or three of us herself, accompanied by Cadney, a neighbouring greengrocer, dressed in black, and whom we were told to call "James" (his name was Isaac) when he went out with us, that he might look like our own footman. The concert was in the dining-room, and the suite of drawing-rooms was open to the company, who examined the ornaments, lolled on the sofas, read the cards, and counted the candles, under the very eyes of the owner herself, for anything they knew. The notes and cards of the greatest and most fashionable acquaintances were uppermost, as usual. The unfortunate giver of the concert must have

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passed a wretched evening. Signor Ronzi de Begnis was late ; Sapio never came at all ; the lady singers were capricious ; so between hoping and fearing, and filling up gaps himself, and apologizing, and a wonderful air with variations on the harp, and "Adelaide" by a gentleman sorely afflicted within, the concert terminated.

One of the girls was to be left at home for the night in Hanover Square ; and as we watched the footman give her a bed-candle, and saw her glide up the painted staircase, we drew ourselves up, and affected to think it very grand but very comfortless, as all people do who are not grand themselves. I don't know that we had any such very particular comforts in Wriothesley Place ; but we thought the Hanover Square carriage might have taken us, and it didn't ; so it was pleasant to despise carriages and luxuries in general.

But all this time my secret about sincerity lay heavy on my mind ; and one unlucky

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morning (the first of September, I remember it well), for want of a secret to tell about a lover—for I had not one—I confided this to one of my companions, in return for the excitement I experienced about the shadowy captain in the East Indies. I repented it from that moment, for if she should reveal it I was a lost character. I pictured to myself the disgrace I should fall into at home with good Mr. France, with the family who told us in confidence, and, above all, the disturbance it would cause in Wriothesley Place. Oh, what I suffered! I had no pleasure in the thought of going home; the sunshine was taken out of my life; I had committed a breach of trust society could not overlook. My distress reached its climax when, one morning, Madame received a letter from a friend in the country, saying she considered it her duty to tell her that Mrs. Horseman, our neighbour over the way, had been visiting in the country, and there said in company that

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there was one school in London where she would not send a girl, and that was Madame Ruleit's; and this opinion was calculated to do great injury, as Mrs. Horseman was called intellectual, and looked up to by a certain set who would like to be intellectual too. The excitement amongst us was intense; we freely used the words calumny, malice, falsehood; and one girl, a soldier's daughter, said "lying." But it was all right in such a cause; for the more vehement our indignation, the more complimentary to Madame. I was in a fright, to be sure, lest my confidante should, in the excitement, forget her solemn promise not to tell, and let out my secret. The subject was discussed day by day by us to please Madame; by Madame, in sad earnestness. At length she requested her friend Miss Montague, a great lady in Grosvenor Square, to ascertain the truth of the matter; for she knew a little of Mrs. Horseman's sister, and could ask her; which I suppose she did, for in a few days she came to

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Mrs. Ruleit with the result of the interview. Miss Chickworth, the sister, wishing to be well with Grosvenor Square, denied it in toto, "felt convinced her sister had never said anything in disparagement of Madame, but trusted Miss Montague would excuse her being told of the "occurrence," as "it would infinitely distress her, and might be prejudicial, as she was a nurse." We knew nothing about being a nurse—how should we?—so we decided it was only a ruse; and when we went out to walk, relieved our feelings by looking daggers at the house opposite.

When the holidays came we went home, and the school dwindled and dwindled, and poor dear Madame drooped and drooped, until she was compelled at last to let her house, and accept the kind offer of some relations to make her home with them. I never saw her more; but I retain a grateful recollection of her

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painstaking anxiety for my improvement; and I learned from the anguish I witnessed there, never to say one word lightly or unadvisedly in disparagement of a ladies' school.





INVITED OUT
FROM
WRIOTHESLEY PLACE.

“ Love me, love my dog.”



HOSE girls who had friends in London were occasionally invited by them to dinner, or to spend the day, and sometimes for a few days. My first experience in this line was an invitation from a relation of my father's, an elderly widow lady (she might be forty-eight or so), who was enjoying a green old age—as I considered it then—and a good income in the neighbourhood

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of Russell Square. She was a woman of mystery ; I found that out directly. The carriage came to the door at the appointed time, as she told me it should, and immediately one or two of the girls peeped at it from an upper window, as was always our custom when we could slip away unseen by Miss Radley. They said it was empty ; so I deliberately finished my toilette, and bestowed a very elaborate "Good morning" on the girls all round, when the steps were let down, and lo ! there was Mrs. Tuite studiously secreting herself in one corner, and had done it so cleverly, she had effected her object ; but then I had done wrong by keeping her waiting.

We drove gently to her house, and I was forthwith carried up stairs to take off my bonnet and spencer. As I came from the country, and had never been in town before, she regarded me much as a newly-caught savage ; so she was sufficiently occupied in setting to rights everything I said, or did, or

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wore, during the day. First thing, she threw a handkerchief over my neck, and with a kindly, patronizing air, told me I might keep it; the handkerchief was pretty enough, but the hint it afforded that my frock was too low was unpalatable. Then, "My dear, don't you wear a pocket? All my young friends do. I beg, when you come again, you will wear one." "Your hair is not dressed as it is done in town; let me recommend a visit to Diamond or Truefitt." I was silent; for, to tell the truth, I thought it possible Diamond or Truefitt might indulge me with the observation a lady I knew had been favoured with from her own hairdresser when wishing her head to be fashionably dressed like her pretty sisters, "I would, ma'am, willingly, but indeed I cannot; yours is not a face to be trifled with." Mrs. T. called my attention to the luxury she indulged in of a fire in her room, night and day, at the present price of coals; I could not see the indulgence, for, coming from a coal country, I had never

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heard their price discussed, they were used so freely. She proceeded to dazzle me with the sight of a grand new gown of salmon-coloured brocade ; but the only effect it produced on my mind was the excessive unsuitability of such a garment at—what seemed to me—her advanced age. “ Did you ever see a brooch like this ? ” holding one up with a good-sized diamond in the centre. “ Yes,” I replied, quite viciously, “ it is a diamond, but it is not a very good one, or it would have been clearly set.” I knew very little about diamonds, but I just happened to know that, and was glad that I did.

When she had sufficiently surprised me upstairs, we came down into the drawing-rooms, front and back, stuffed to the brim with sofas, cabinets, tables, pier-glasses, and china vases. There was a magnificent Bird of Paradise under a glass shade, and she seemed a good deal surprised that I knew enough of natural history to be able to tell what it was. One cabinet came from Wanstead House at the

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break-up of that vast establishment, and I was requested to guess the sum it cost.

Her loyalty and Toryism were excessive, so the walls were hung with engravings of George III., Queen Charlotte, George IV., the Duke of York, and sundry members of the Royal Family. Her ardent desire was to "kiss the King," meaning George IV. in the latter part of his career—an enjoyment few of her fellow-subjects would have grudged her.

There was a particularly muffy speech of old Lord Eldon's, written in letters of gold, and framed in brown wood all twirls and birds' eyes, which she said was "heart of oak," as the speech deserved; but the especial reason of her interest in Lord Eldon was, she had once on the terrace at Windsor heard Queen Charlotte sweetly address him as Sir John Scott, and so impressed was she with the queenly dignity of the one and the polished courtesy of the other, that she was a firm believer in Queens and Chancellors from that moment.

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Then her mysteries were really fatiguing. Her friends never seemed to have any names; they were "old friends," or "young friends," or "friends of mine." One lady, indeed, was Mrs. Morgan from Wales, which is about as definite as Mrs. Smith from England. She introduced me as a young cousin from the country, and nobody likes to be called a country cousin.

The late Mr. Tuite was never mentioned by name; it was "him that I have lost." She had a good deal of sentiment, and talked of love in the abstract, and, I saw, wished me to understand the intense and romantic attachment which had existed between her and the departed "him." I believe he was a very charming man, but I knew he was thirty years her senior, and I could not bring myself to the idea of romancing with a man just the age of my grandpapa. At the same time, I knew he was rich, and very kind to her, of which a memento existed in a scarlet Indian shawl,

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and moreover was once High Sheriff for Glamorganshire ; so I did not so much wonder at her regret for "him she had lost."

She informed me confidentially in the course of the day that she was called to Winchester the following morning on some matter of business (your mysterious people are always on a "little business"), and she had arranged for horses to arrive unexpectedly, in order that her servants might lay no plans of their own for her absence ; and she intended to come down upon them just as suddenly, to see if they were good servants and minding their business. She once dropped suddenly upon a good fire in the drawing-room, and a cheerful rubber at whist, with suitable refreshments on the side table. She told me, after extorting a promise of secrecy, the wages she gave her footman ; but I was not at all surprised at that, for at home we had no footman, and I knew nothing about wages, so that shaft fell harmless.

What provoked me most was her ignorance

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of the county I came from, and in which she herself was born. My father was the only person in it whose name she could remember accurately, and him I believe she did truly love and respect. She addressed him as "cousin," and he called her "Mary," and they kissed each other in a quiet, old-fashioned way when they met or parted. But my dear Aunt Eldersworth she would inquire after as Mrs. Eldersmore ; but perhaps that was from her mysterious habit of resolving all the people she knew into "friends of mine." Mrs. Ruleit with her was Mrs. Tulip ; and a family I visited occasionally in London, whom she did not know, of the name of Bagot, she would mention incidentally as your friends "the M'Craggits." She could remember well enough the names of great people. My dear father, in his kindness and hospitality, often urged her to come down into the country and see her relations ; but she would tell me, "I have no friends in Lancashire ; the ties of consanguinity, my dear, are

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too feeble and attenuated to be worth repairing unless the parties assimilate, which I scarcely think in this instance would be the case." I thought so too, and what a nuisance it would be to be repairing the ties of consanguinity with her; so the subject of the Lancashire relations was dropped between us.

She never let my accent and pronunciation rest, and made me repeat most of my sentences once or twice. I was the more disturbed at this because she herself said "noospaper," and I dare not tell her so. My dresses were ill made; but that was excusable, and rather my misfortune than my fault, for, as she condescendingly observed, "you could not be expected to go to my milliner." My dancing shoes were wrong; but she did repair that error by having me measured by her own shoemaker for a pair of black satin, which never fitted. If, weary of so much tutoring, I leaned back in despair and my head touched the wall, I was speedily aroused by the insertion of the

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aforesaid "noospaper" behind me, with, "My dear, the paper is light, and you may possibly use hair-oil; one can never be too careful."

She piqued herself exceedingly on her foot and ankle, and passed a good deal of time on the sofa admiring both in a smart silk boot; and then I supposed her imagination wandered away into the bygone years of her youth, for she always talked sentiment after admiring her foot. I was very much provoked one day when I went to see her in a pretty new frock, and was rather parading it before her, to be met with, "Yes, my dear, I dare say you think it pretty, and so it is for the country, but we don't see such dresses in town." "That is very odd," I replied, "when I only got it last week at Swan and Edgar's." She was stirring the fire so vigorously at the time, no wonder she could not hear what I said. From this time there was a perpetual antagonism between us, on her side to surprise me, and on mine a steady determination not to be surprised. I

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believe, if she had told me she drove an elephant, I should have thought it would "look inferior in harness to our rhinoceros."

If she gave me a pleasure, it was shrouded in such a web of mystery that it was almost lost in the doubt. One time she promised to take me to the Zoological Gardens, which I was most anxious to see. On the way, the carriage stopped at a house door, to take up an old lady, nameless as usual, and then we drove to Regent's Park. We got out at the Colosseum, and went all through the exhibition; and judge my dismay when the horses' heads were turned home without going further. I was obliged, however, to bear it and say nothing. We deposited "nameless" at her own door, and I thought we were going home, when Mrs. Tuite turned again, and off we went to the Gardens, giving herself all that extra trouble for the sake of the mysterious surprise. I was not so much obliged as I ought to have been, which perhaps she saw;

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and then she would dilate eloquently on the attachment with which she had inspired some mysterious Hester (who Hester was, I never could make out); and once, when she, Mrs. T., was very ill, Hester got up softly twice in the middle of the night, and the weather bitterly cold, to listen at her door, and hear how she was going on, which conduct was rewarded by Mrs. Tuite being godmother to Hester's first child.

Like all married ladies without children, she had a few pets on which to lavish her superfluous affection. The chief favourite was a little Blenheim spaniel called Psyche; and the wonderful abilities, sagacity, good sense and tenderness of Psyche were fruitful topics of conversation. Psyche dined at our time, and I could scarcely take my dinner, I was so pestered with her cleverness; she only ate once a day, and, with a plateful of food before her, would leave off or begin again just as her mistress bade her. I was not over-fond of

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Pysche, and could not share in Mrs. Tuite's regret at her death ; but she did all that mortal mistress could do, and had her stuffed and seated quite naturally on her usual cushion at her feet ; but I found Psyche's presence in the body infinitely pleasanter when absent in the spirit. There was a pair of pheasants, too, under a netting in the little space behind the house that was called the garden ; but, alas ! for the fate of all pets, the male bird died, and his mate mourned and drooped, and paced incessantly in the small enclosure, and refused to be comforted. Mrs. Tuite drew a touching parallel between the widow and herself : " Just so, my dear, have I paced to and fro for hours together in my bereavement ; I shall get that bird another mate." Whether she had any intention of carrying on the similitude between herself and the pheasant I don't know. I had heard a rumour that there were some love passages between her and Mr. Petre, a lawyer in Bedford Row. I was obliged to hear his

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name, for his two daughters were invited to spend the evening with me. They were nice girls, and I was rather sorry Mrs. Tuite sent me home at nine o'clock, fearing, as she said, "Madame would be displeased if I stayed later." But it was not fear of displeasing Madamè, as I found out afterwards; for the next time I saw Miss Mardell, Mrs. Tuite's maiden sister, she said, "So you met the Miss Petres in Rachel Place?" "Yes." "And you liked them?" "Yes, very much." "Did any one come for them, or did they go home alone?"

My first dinner there was an inexpressible annoyance. Before I tasted, I was expected to admire the beauty and clearness of the glass, and then exhorted to feel the weight of the forks, and be surprised at the richness of the chusing. Mackerel had just come in, and there was one on the table which she assured me cost her two shillings—it might have cost two pounds for what I cared, I thought it so bad;

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but after the cloth was drawn, she exacted a solemn promise from me that I would never reveal in Wriothesley Place what we had for dinner ; and this prohibition I thought particularly hard, for when we went out we thought a good deal about the dinner, and estimated our friends very much by the way in which they entertained us, and I expected to excite the envy of all my schoolfellows by dilating on the ducks and custards ; but I was much too conscientious to break a promise when I had made it, so I kept my secret in spite of all questioning, and even bore with Sophy Stephenson's unkind remark, that she was "sure I must have had a very poor dinner, or I would have told." The only day I really liked to spend with her was Sunday, for then I escaped Tavistock Chapel, and the weary round through a few dull streets and squares, instead of our usual walk in the nursery gardens ; but I could never love her, though she gave me a number of presents, and some

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people I liked much better gave me nothing. A white silk dress, a handsome fan, a beautiful scarf, and five guineas, are not to be despised by any school-girl ; but somehow I never liked her.

Well! peace to her memory! She dearly loved a mystery ; 'twas her interest in life, and clung around her even in death. One morning, she did not come down at her usual hour ; her servants were alarmed, broke open her door, and there she lay, cold and dead, with the last mystery, that we must all one day solve, unfolded before her.



