BLACK HELEN CECELIA

NOTABLE WOMEN AUTHORS OF THE DAY: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Helen Black

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Содержание

Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches

MRS. LYNN LINTON

A blue sky and a bright sun belie the typical foggy month of November, and while entering the elevator which glides rapidly and smoothly to the eighth floor of the gigantic pile of buildings once cynically termed "Hankey's Folly" – now Queen Anne's Mansions – you feel justified in anticipating a glorious view over the great city. You step out into a corridor where are arranged a stand of grenades with a couple of hydrants, backed by printed directions for their use, and are shown into the library of the distinguished author; but ere there is time to look around, the door opens, and Mrs. Lynn Linton enters.

Her personality may be described thus: tall, upright, and stately in appearance, the keen, but kindly bright blue eyes smiling through the gold-rimmed glasses which she always wears. She is clad in a suitable black dress, trimmed with jet, a white lace cap partially covers the thick grey hair, which escapes in a tiny natural curl or two on each side of the smooth, intellectual forehead. The eyebrows – far apart – are straight and level, but shaded off so delicately that they impart a look of benignity and softness to the aristocratic nose, while the curves of the well-cut lips indicate straightforwardness, sincerity of disposition, and power. Can it be possible that you had felt a momentary trepidation before meeting the gifted woman for whose genius you have ever entertained the greatest reverence? But Mrs. Lynn Linton will have none of it! Her kind and friendly greeting puts you at once at ease. She says that she has an hour or two to spare, that her work is well on, and that there is no immediate fear of her being disturbed by an emissary from the printers, so you settle down to have a good talk, and to learn from your hostess some particulars of her early life, and her subsequent eventful career.

Mrs. Lynn Linton was born at Keswick; her father being the vicar of Crosthwaite, Cumberland. When only five months old, her mother (a daughter of Dr. Goodenough, Bishop of Carlisle) died, leaving a family of twelve children. She was brought up plainly and frugally, with no particular advantages of education; nevertheless, at an early age she developed a strong taste for reading and a thirst for knowledge. Casting aside her childish story books, she dived into such ancient literature and chronicles as she found on her father's book-shelves, and at the age of eleven determined to train herself to be a writer. About this time she became keenly interested in Polish affairs, in which her favourite brother took an active part. In those days there were not the same facilities for procuring books as in later years, but the young child-student managed to overcome all obstacles, and educated herself, mastering French, German, and Italian. The one aim and end to which her ambition was directed buoyed her up through early years of what were somewhat rough times to the shy, nervous, short-sighted girl, who always seemed in everyone's way.

To this repression and self-training may be attributed the independence of thought, the thoroughness, the originality of idea, as well as the deep sympathy with young and struggling authors which are Mrs. Lynn Linton's prevailing characteristics. One of her earliest recollections is of the poet Southey, and that to this day she can recall to mind his peculiar face, his dark eyes, full of fire, his eagle nose, and thin figure. She wrote her first novel, "Azeth, the Egyptian," when she came to London, at the age of twenty-three, and from that day to this has supported herself entirely by her pen; but she says that this "first book" gave her a whole year's hard work to write, and she thinks it is now probably "unreadable." For her second, "Amymone," she will ever have the tenderest memories, and the blue eyes kindle when she remarks that it was the means of bringing her into contact with

Walter Savage Landor, and securing for her his lasting sympathy and friendship. She says he was her literary father, her guide, philosopher, and friend, and that one of her dearest treasures is a large packet of letters from the poet, beginning "My dear daughter," and signed "Father" only, or "Your affectionate father," as well as those verses which he addressed to her, ending with the line, "Pure heart, and lofty soul, Eliza Lynn."

Between the production of "Realities: a Tale," in 1851, and "Witch Stories," there was a gap of ten years, which the young writer devoted principally to journalism. She was, indeed, the first of women journalists. She contributed to several of the daily papers and magazines. Presently a series of pungent and clever essays began in the *Saturday Review*, which increased its fame, and took the world by storm. "The Girl of the Period," "The Shrieking Sisterhood," "Paying One's Shot," "Mature Sirens," have now passed into proverbs. They made a famous topic of conversation at dinner-tables, and proved a decided hit. For many years a certain lady of rank had the credit of the series, until at last, after many futile efforts, Mrs. Lynn Linton was allowed to collect her own papers and publish them under her own name.

"I never mind how much I slash," says Mrs. Lynn Linton, "because I always feel I am not slashing at a personality, but at a type. Thackeray never drew Becky Sharp from one individual; we all know a Becky Sharp."

In 1858 the young writer married Mr. Linton, the well-known wood engraver, and in 1861 began again the interrupted series of fifteen novels, amongst which were "Under which Lord?" "Patricia Kemball," "The True Story of Joshua Davidson," "Lizzie Lorton of Greyrigg," "Sowing the Wind," "The Atonement of Leam Dundas," "The World Well Lost," "The Rebel of the Family," "My Love," "Paston Carew, Miser and Millionaire," "Jane Stewart," "Through the Long Night," and "Christopher Kirkland." This last is deeply interesting, as a history of the author herself, her theories, philosophy, and religious opinions.

The writing table in the cosy library – or as Mrs. Lynn Linton often calls it, "the workroom" – is placed slantways to catch the best light, and commands a beautiful view from the windows, full south over the Surrey hills.

The cut-glass inkstand has been in constant use for over fifty years. Papers, reviews, and books of reference are tidily heaped up; the table is full, but in perfect order; commenting on this to your hostess, she says it is "part of her nature, she could find anything in the dark." She is altogether a believer in method, regularity, and punctuality, which last quality gained for her from Charles Dickens the remark that she was "good for anything, and thoroughly reliable."

Opening a well-worn "Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities" lying on a side-table close at hand, Mrs. Lynn Linton remarks it was bought with nearly her first earnings, and that she has by degrees purchased nearly all the books, which seem to occupy every available recess. The two deep cases opposite are filled with treasures of literature, and the tall revolving bookstand contains chiefly her collection of favourite poets – Landor, Arnold, Swinburne.

A Persian carpet of subdued tints covers the floor; on a large round table, over which hangs a lamp of graceful design, is heaped, with extreme precision, a mass of journals, magazines, and periodicals; not a paper is awry. The great accumulation of literature has indeed necessitated the fitting up of two tall, narrow recesses at the other end of the room, each neatly hidden by a long tapestry curtain. A tender light comes into Mrs. Lynn Linton's face as she points out three photographs hanging on the wall. The first is of her beloved brother, "without fear or favour," who died of a broken heart after the death of an adored wife; the second is of her "father" Landor; and the third is of Mr. Linton – "brother, father, husband," she says, with infinite tenderness for the memory of all three.

Asking to be allowed to see the famous view from the drawing-room, which it is said "looks over St. James's Park and Carlton Terrace, and embraces the whole of the park from Buckingham Palace to the Horse Guards," "*Did* embrace it," amends Mrs. Linton, mournfully, "but come and see." She leads the way to the opposite side of the flat, into a rather long drawing-room, the windows of

which look due south over the uninterrupted view one might reasonably have expected to see. Alas! a tall and ugly erection of bricks and mortar has sprang up to the left, obscuring a portion of the prospect. "They have given me only a vista," says Mrs. Lynn Linton, "where I once had a view." What is left, however, is very fine, and from the great height above ground the people look like pigmies dotted about. Queen Caroline once talked of shutting up this lovely park, and converting it into a noble garden for the palace. She consulted Walpole as to the probable cost; the witty minister replied, "Only three crowns, your Majesty," and the idea was abandoned.

There is a peculiarly long, narrow frame hanging on the opposite side of the wall, and as Mrs. Lynn Linton permits an inspection of everything, you examine it carefully, while she explains the subject. It is nearly four yards long, and represents the Parthenon frieze – the Panathenaic procession – and the fight of the Amazons and Athenians, reduced and restored by John Herring. As the slate matrix was broken, it is now extremely valuable. It is in plaster of Paris, mounted on red, and is the property of Mr. Linton, who has bequeathed it to the National Gallery in America. The small statuette of "Margaret," modelled by Geefs, is another and very rare gem. Mrs. Lynn Linton is also the possessor of a quaint grey vase, a relic of the Great Exhibition of 1851. On one little table, covered with an Oriental cloth, crowded with favourite photographs, the portrait of a graceful, pretty girl occupies a prominent place. "That is my Beatrice, my Bee, my dear adopted daughter," she says, "dear as if she were my own; and these," pointing to two large framed pictures, "are both likenesses of my friend Mr. Fuller, a nephew of Sir Arthur Helps. We first became friends through correspondence. He sent me his book, 'Culmshire Folk.' His wife invited me to Ireland last year, and the result was my first and last political work about that country."

You ask Mrs. Lynn Linton to tell you about some of the celebrated people whom she has met. After musing awhile, she mentions Captain Maconochie (the convicts' friend), Sir Charles Babbage, Kinglake, Miss Jane Porter, Mrs. Milner Gibson – "she was my social godmother; but these all belonged to a past generation. In later years I was more or less on intimate terms with Harrison Ainsworth, George Eliot, Sir Henry Layard, Sir Henry Rawlinson, Tom Taylor, Thackeray, Dickens, Yates, Wilkie Collins, Swinburne, Sir Roderick Murchison, Rider Haggard, Dr. Elliotson, and William Spottiswoode, late President of the Royal Society. *He* was a prince among men, and I loved and reverenced his noble character."

Unlike many literary women, Mrs. Lynn Linton is a great adept with her needle. The beautiful silk embroideries – of which she is very proud – cushions, chair seats, and the handsome fire-screen are all the work of her skilful fingers, and made from her own designs. The big green frog and the swallows hanging on the left are a present from Mr. Oswald Crawfurd, the famous consul at Oporto. The Tunis plates and various photographs indicate that your hostess has made sundry journeys abroad, and travelled in many foreign lands where she has picked up a few picturesque "bits" as mementos of the places which she visited; but she says her most cherished possession is the gold cinquecento basket standing yonder, the gift of Walter Savage Landor.

Yet more books! Each recess in the opposite wall is well filled, also the low dwarf bookcase under the large mirror, and another under the Herring "slate."

You are curious to know if Mrs. Lynn Linton reads and is influenced by criticisms on her works? She says she has never striven for popularity, and has boldly put forth her opinions, without caring for the consequences. She was once called "selfish." *Selfish!* Have you not known, and been told by a score of young authors, that they owe their success and a deep debt of gratitude to her! In despair, one after another has taken to her an article, a story, a three-volume novel, a play; what not? With patience she would pore over a crabbed manuscript, word by word, suggesting, correcting, improving, advising. She has a large number of young friends, who confide all their troubles, hopes, and wishes to her, with the certainty of absolute sympathy and wise counsel. Far from being stern or severe, as some of her books might lead one to think, she is bubbling over with the milk of human kindness, and her chief desire is to be of use or help to some one. The tender, motherly manner

casts its spell over you too, and you find yourself presently pouring out confidences as if she were an old acquaintance.

Mrs. Lynn Linton generally enjoys the best of health. She keeps early hours, works in the morning, takes plenty of exercise, and "plain living" keeps the *mens sana in corpore sano* for "high thinking." Although in her sixth decade, she possesses a splendid physique, of which she is pardonably proud. She says she finds residing in her exalted flat far preferable to a house. There she is out of the reach of burglars and beggars; she lives at less expense, combined with incomparably more comfort; whilst the servants of the gigantic establishment all respect her, and "Ellen," who has been there for eleven years, she calls her "child," and looks upon her as a personal friend.

But the clock strikes. You have been unconscionable. The time has sped so rapidly that the promised hour has doubled itself. You say good-bye, and as Mrs. Lynn Linton kindly asks you to come again on her "Saturdays, to one, or to all," you look down on the small white hand which holds yours, and notice the long slender fingers. The memory of its hearty clasp remains on your mind as you are conveyed down the eight stories of Queen Anne's Mansions, and so, into the street, where you become one of the aforenamed "pigmies."

MRS. RIDDELL

The sleepy little village of Upper Halliford, Middlesex, has one peculiar charm. Though within ten minutes' walk of Walton Bridge, it lies quite off the main line of traffic, and is consequently free from the visits of Cockney tourists, affording in this, as in many other respects, a striking contrast to Lower Halliford, which, situated on a lovely reach of the Thames, welcomes annually thousands of visitors.

There the inevitable steam-launch cuts its swift way through the water; there boating-men, clad in all the colours of the rainbow, are to be met with, on or after Good Friday, when the "season" begins; there persistent fishermen, seated in punts warily moored, angle day after day, and all day long, for the bream, roach, and gudgeon, to be found in such abundance; there furnished houses let at high rents; willows dip their branches in the river, and from thence the trees of Oatlands show well on the upland on the opposite sides of the glistening Thames.

It was between Lower Halliford and Walton Bridge – half of which is in Surrey and half in Middlesex – that, at a point called the Coway Stakes, Julius Cæsar is believed to have crossed the river. The name "Coway Stakes" originated in the fact that there Cassivelaunus fortified the banks, and filled the river with sharp-pointed stakes to prevent the enemy from crossing the stream, but notwithstanding these precautions the Roman leader and his legions accomplished their purpose, and, a little way above where the Ship Hotel (so well known to boating-men), now stands, a terrible battle was fought in the year 54 B.C. between the Britons and Romans. Several relics have been dug up about this part of the Thames, also a number of the stakes taken from the bed of the river, black with age, but still sound.

Any one who cares to walk on to Walton should make a point of visiting the old Church of St. Mary – an edifice of great antiquity – in order to see a curious relic, dated 1632, a scold's bit, or bridle, bearing the following inscription: —

"Chester to Walton sends a bridle
To curb women's tongues that talk too idle."

Upper Halliford, unlike Lower Halliford, or Walton, has nothing to show in the way of beauty or relic. It boasts no history, it has no legend, or old church, or historic mansion. It is only a quaint little hamlet, which might be a hundred miles from the bustle and roar of London; there, however, the famous author of "George Geith of Fen Court" has for the last seven years made her home, where she lives in absolute seclusion.

Her little cottage stands slightly back from the high road. It is built flush with the ground, and covered with trellis-work, which in summer time is concealed by clustering white roses and clematis. The porch is in the centre, and the rooms on each side have broad bay windows. There is a large field in front, and so many evergreens about the cottage, that, when snow comes, the place looks like a winter "transformation scene."

A great, old-fashioned garden stretches far out at the back, and it was chiefly the tranquillity and privacy of this delightful garden, with its grand old hedge of holly, now bright with red berries, which attracted Mrs. Riddell, and decided her to settle down, away from the world, after long and fierce buffeting with the stormy seas of sorrow, disappointment, losses, and bereavement, of which she has had so large a share.

The gentle, quiet face tells its tale of early struggles, heavy burdens, severe trials; yet time has not laid its ruthless hand over-harshly on the author. Not a silver hair is visible on the soft, brown hair, which is simply rolled into a neat coil, high on the back of her head, and fastened by a large tortoise-shell comb. The deep grey eyes are undimmed, and wear a look of peace and resignation,

nobly won; while "ever and anon of griefs subdued, there comes a token" which recalls the past. But Mrs. Riddell can smile sweetly, and when she smiles, two – yes two – absolutely girlish dimples light up the expressive countenance. She is tall, has a good carriage, and is dressed in black; she has worn no colours for over ten years.

The little room is very simply but prettily furnished. It is lighted by one bay window reaching to the ground in front, and a glass door at the side. Soft, white rugs lie here and there on the dark red carpet, and an old-fashioned bookcase contains the works of her favourite authors. There are no particular curiosities or decorations to be seen, save one valuable bit of old Dresden china, two or three plates of ancient Crown Derby, together with a couple of quaint Delhi-work salvers, and a few pictures hanging on the walls. Of these last, two are particularly attractive. One is the Head of a Christ crowned with thorns, beautifully painted on copper; the other, over the fire place, represents the Castle of Carrigfergus, which, though built nearly a thousand years ago, is still strong enough to hold a troop of soldiers.

Mrs. Riddell was born in Ireland, at The Barn, Carrigfergus. She was the youngest daughter of Mr. James Cowan, who held the post of High Sheriff for the county of that town.

"Yes, I am from the north – the black north," says your hostess in a low, soft voice. "My grandfather was in the navy, and my great-grandfather fought at Culloden, so I may fairly claim to be English, Scotch, and Irish. My mother, Ellen Kilshaw, was a beautiful, graceful, and accomplished English woman. On most subjects people have two opinions, but I never heard a second opinion about my mother. Even amongst those who only knew her in later life, when stricken with disease, and changed by long years of sorrow, she stands out a distinct personality, as one of those possessed of the manners, appearance, and ideas, that we associate with the highest bred women of the past!"

"And she was good as she was beautiful. I wish you could hear how rich and poor who knew her in the old time at The Barn still speak of her. As for me, while I speak, the grief of her death seems sharp and present as on that sixteenth of December when she left me."

Last autumn, after a lapse of twenty-five years, Mrs. Riddell revisited her native place. "Such of our old friends as were left," she says, "I found as kind as ever."

It must have been sad, yet sweet, for the author to recall the old reminiscences of her girlish home as she saw once more the pretty bungalow-like house, with its gardens, hot-houses, and vineries, and to visit again the spot where, at the age of fifteen, she remembers writing her first story.

"It was on a bright moonlight night," she says – "I can see it now flooding the gardens – that I began it, and I wrote week after week, never ceasing until it was finished. Need I add it was never published?"

She goes on eloquently to tell you of yet further recollections of the old house, the memory of her father's lingering illness, and the low, sweet tones of her mother's voice as she read aloud to him for hours together. "From my father," says Mrs. Riddell, "I think I got the few brains I possess. Undoubtedly he was a very clever man, but *I* never knew him at his best, for as far as my memory goes back he was always more or less a sufferer, blessed with the most tender and devoted wife man ever had."

On her father's death, the property passed into other hands, and with but a small jointure the broken-hearted widow and her daughter left their old home. They lived afterwards, for a while, in the charming village of Dundonald in the County Down, where the young author subsequently laid the scene of her novel, "Berna Boyle," and then, after a good deal of meditation, they decided to come to London. In later years she wrote three other Irish stories, "The Earl's Promise," "The Nun's Curse," and "Maxwell Drewitt," which last contains an exciting account of an election at Connemara.

"I have often wished," says Mrs. Riddell "we never had so decided, yet in that case, I do not think I ever should have achieved the smallest success, and even before we left, with bitter tears, a place where we had the kindest friends, and knew much happiness, my mother's death was – though neither of us then knew the fact – a certainty. The illness of which she died had then taken hold of her.

She had always a great horror of pain mental and physical; she was keenly sensitive, and mercifully before the agonising period of her complaint arrived, the nerves of sensation were paralysed; first or last, she never lost a night's sleep the whole of the ten weeks, during which I fought with death for her, and – was beaten."

Mrs. Riddell's first impressions of London are well worth recording. Coming as strangers to a strange land, throughout the length and breadth of the great metropolis, she says, "We did not know a single creature! During the first fortnight, indeed, I really thought I should break my heart. I had never taken kindly to new places, and, remembering the sweet hamlet and the loving friends left behind, London seemed to me horrible! I could not eat; I could not sleep; I could only walk over the 'stony-hearted streets' and offer my manuscripts to publisher after publisher, who unanimously declined them." The desolation of her spirit can be more easily imagined than described. Conceive the situation of the young girl, burning to earn a living by her pen, knowing that it was within her to do so, yet unacquainted with a single literary or other person; friendless, unknown, with an invalid mother, and terribly insufficient means! And when, at last, she sold a story, called "Moors and Fens," that beloved mother had passed away; and your eyes moisten as the daughter mentions the touching and filial use to which her first twenty pounds were applied.

But Mrs. Riddell has something pleasant to say for those who declined her MSS., and it must be related in her own words: "Looking back I *must* say, as a rule, they were all very kind to me. I was too ignorant and heartsore to understand how gracious they were to my simplicity, even more than to my youth. Yet I shall never forget how charming Mr. George Bentley's manner seemed the first day I saw him. His father – the kindest, most impulsive, most sympathetic of men – was alive then, and for many a year afterwards; but it so happened that Mr. George Bentley was the partner whom I saw, and," she adds smiling, and naïvely, "though he, like everyone else, refused my work, still I left his office not unhappy, but thinking much more about how courteous and nice he was than of how entirely the wrong person in the wrong place I seemed to be. Ere long, with some publishers I became quite on friendly terms, and I have now known three generations of the Bentleys."

After a short silence Mrs. Riddell resumes the subject, saying, "I must name also Mr. Charles Skeet, of King William Street, who was good enough to keep my mother supplied with books. Long as it is since he retired from business, our friendship remained unbroken until his death. He was most kind to me always. He published 'The Rich Husband,' 'Too Much Alone,' 'The World and the Church,' and 'Alaric Spencer.'"

"I could always, when the day was frightfully cold – and *what* a winter that was when I first came to London – turn into Mr. Newby's snug and warm office in Welbeck Street, and have a talk with him and his 'woman of business.' I am glad to mention her name – Miss Springett. She was a lady, always kind, nice, and capable; she remained with him till her death, I believe. Everyone was good to me in those days; but, indeed, I have received, all my life through, an enormous amount of kindness, and have not a word to say against a world which has treated me far better than I deserved."

A year after the death of her mother the young author married. Mr. Riddell belonged to an old Staffordshire family, a branch of the Scotch Riddells, of long descent and gentle blood. "Courageous and hopeful, gifted with indomitable energy," says his widow, "endowed with marvellous persistence and perseverance; modestly conscious of talents which ought to have made their mark, he, when a mere lad, began his long quest after fortune, one single favour from whom he was never destined to receive."

Gifted with much inventive genius, Mr. Riddell was also possessed of considerable general knowledge, and was deeply versed in literature, medicine, science, and mathematics. To him his wife turned for all the information she needed in her novels; the chemistry in "Too Much Alone," the engineering in "City and Suburb." He supplied all the business details in "George Geith," and "The Race for Wealth"; while in "Mortomley's Estate" Mrs. Riddell says she has "but told the simple story of what, when in ill-health and broken in spirit, he had to encounter before ruin, total and complete,

overtook him." Too early in youth overweighted with a heavy burden, under which a strong man might have found it hard to stagger, she declares that, "in spite of harassing trouble and continuous misfortune, their twenty-three years of married life were happy as few lives are, simply by reason of his sweet, patient temper, and his child-like faith." Suddenly and unexpectedly, the end came, and the crowning sorrow of a much-tried life was laid upon the devoted wife when death claimed her gifted husband. Over that grief a veil must be drawn. Suffice it to say that it is a sorrow which will ever be keen in her remembrance "Until the day break and the shadows flee away."

"I never remember the time," Mrs. Riddell says, "when I did not compose. Before I was old enough to hold a pen I used to get my mother to write down my childish ideas, and a friend remarked to me quite lately that she distinctly remembers my being discouraged in the habit, as it was feared I might be led into telling untruths. In my very early days I read everything I could lay hands on, the Koran included, when about eight years old. I thought it most interesting."

Mrs. Riddell describes the way in which the situations and characters of her books are often suggested. She observes everything almost unconsciously; but if asked, directly after, her impressions, she could scarcely describe them. Later on, perhaps, when between the border-land of sleep and waking, scenes, words, people whom she has noticed seem to be photographed on the brain; sentences form themselves, and in the morning she is able to reproduce them at length.

The intimate knowledge of the city possessed by this novelist is the result of personal experience. Whilst on her once fruitless expeditions to publishers she learnt every short cut, every alley and lane by heart. Little as she relished these excursions at the time, they laid the foundation for many a scene afterwards so faithfully depicted in "George Geith," "City and Suburb" (in which most of the poetry was quoted from the works of her young sister-in-law, a genius who died at the age of nineteen), "Daisies and Buttercups," "The Struggle for Fame," "Mitre Court," "My First Love, and My Last Love," "The Earl's Promise," and also that entrancing book, "The Senior Partner," in which the old Scotch merchant, M'Cullagh, "plain auld Rab," worthy but saving old gentleman, is a distinct creation. "In all the old city churches and graveyards, such, indeed, as are left," Mrs. Riddell says, sorrowfully, "you could take no better guide than myself; but, alas! many of the old landmarks are now pulled down to make room for the ever increasing business of the great metropolis."

"Austin Friars" described her first home after her marriage, when, without much practical knowledge of business, she was greatly impressed by the lives of business men. This old house is now a thing of the past, and the Cannon Street railway runs over the place where it once stood.

The author's latest work – a story of seaside life, and her twenty-ninth novel – is called "Grays Point," and will be brought out in three volumes in the coming year. She lately was invited to write an article for *The Lady of the House*, a new journal which appeared in Dublin last year, and this is the first time that she has ever written a line for an Irish paper. Of her own books, Mrs. Riddell says that she prefers "The Mystery in Palace Gardens" and "Too Much Alone." The latter she considers made her name, though the first edition was only a short one, and but four copies were sent out for review. "A Mad Tour, or A Journey Undertaken in an Insane Moment through Central Europe on Foot," in one volume, is a recent work, and describes accurately her own experiences in company with a young friend. It gives a bright and amusing account of their misadventures.

Mrs. Riddell's latest published novel in three volumes, "The Head of the Firm," fully bears out the high literary reputation of the author of "George Geith." Carefully and conscientiously worked out, each character is drawn with an unerring hand, and sustains its interest to the final page, whilst here and there are not wanting those touches of humour which have always distinguished her works.

After a snug luncheon in the comfortable dining-room, in which, by the way, unexpected little steps and deep cupboards seem to be built promiscuously – as, indeed, they are throughout the cottage – your hostess takes you round the garden, which is well worth seeing, mid-winter though it be. She points out the great height of the holly hedge, and laments that she has been obliged to have twelve feet cut off the top. Notwithstanding, it is still twenty feet high. The japonica is the admiration of

passers-by in the early spring, being then covered with a mass of scarlet flowers. The apricot tree is sadly in want of root pruning, but, as she says, "I cannot persuade the old gardener to do it, and as I am never equal to arguing, I let him take his own way." There is an extraordinary plant which you have never seen before; its flowers are green, and Mrs. Riddell says that she never saw one like it except in her old home. The huge weeping ash, although now bereft of leaves, is a great feature, and the high box borders divide large squares of ground, wherein good old bushes of lavender, rue and lad's love grow profusely.

Your hostess points out the adjoining cottage, the home of her old gardener, aged eighty, and remarks that another old man who preceded him begged from a neighbour enough elm to make him a coffin. It was given to him, and the hitherto unnecessary article made. He kept the gruesome object for some time, but finding it took up too much room in his small abode, he altered it into a cupboard.

A turn round the last walk leads to the poultry-yard, which is a great delight to Mrs. Riddell. She has several fine breeds of fowls and geese, amongst which last are two handsome but noisy specimens from Japan. One little peculiarity of interest must be noticed. The wall which supports the granary steps is pierced by two holes for dog kennels, an arrangement of great antiquity.

Mrs. Riddell loves walking. The church she attends lies rather more than two miles away towards Laleham, which place Arnold left with so much regret, and where Matthew Arnold is buried. She speaks of Littleton in the neighbourhood as being the village she described in "For Dick's Sake," and says, laughing, "It has stood still for over two hundred years. There is no resident rector or squire, or doctor, or lawyer, or publican, or farrier, but it is a sweetly peaceful spot, and the woods in primrose time are a sight to behold, whilst at Sunbury," she adds, "to show you how little change may take place, in one hundred years there have been only two vicars, and one of them is alive now!"

But it is getting dark, and tea is ordered as a preparation for your cold journey; whilst sipping it, she says that as you are so much interested in her own early "struggle for fame," she will mention one more anecdote *à propos* of Mr. Newby, as it is amusing, and she relates it thus: "In those early days he – Mr. Newby – was good enough to take a book of mine. Of course he only knew me by my maiden name, because after my mother's death Welbeck Street lay quite out of my way, and I fear I ungratefully forgot the cheerful fire, and the talks about authors, which were once so pleasant.

"For this reason he knew nothing of my doings. The years came and the years went, till after the crash came in our affairs; when I was looking about me for every five-pound note I could get, I bethought me of this and another old book, which I can never sufficiently regret republishing. Well, I found I could sell both of them, and forthwith repaired, after all that time, to Mr. Newby's, where nothing looked much changed, and no one seemed much older, except myself, who had lived many lives in the interval.

"Of course both Mr. Newby and Miss Springett had a vague memory of me, when I reminded the former that he had published 'Zuriel's Grandchild.' What I wanted was a copy of the book. He feared he had not one, but promised to ascertain. I can see them both now in that warm, comfortable back room, into which, as a girl, I had often gone shivering.

"He took a seat on one side of a large table, she on the other. I sat facing Mr. Newby – a most anxious woman, yet amused.

"'Have you,' he said delicately, 'gone on at all with literature?'

"'Oh, yes,' I answered.

"'Have you – published anything?' with great caution, so as not to hurt my feelings.

"'Several books,' I replied.

"'Indeed!!!' *amazed*. 'Might I ask the names?' – tentatively.

"'Well, amongst others, "George Geith."'

"A dead silence ensued, during which I had the comfort of feeling that they both felt sure I was saying what was not true. I sat quite quiet, and so did they. If I had not been so burdened with care I must have laughed out loud. As it happened, I comported myself, as I have often done since, in many

difficult and humorous positions, with decent gravity, and then this came from Mr. Newby, the while the ribbons on Miss Springett's cap were tremulous:

"'*If*– you *really* wrote "George Geith," *then* indeed you have achieved a success!'"

And so you part; with loving tender sympathy. Though the morn of this distinguished woman's life has been so clouded, the noon so stormy, the noble, self-reliant spirit has battled through it bravely and patiently, and you leave her with the inwardly-breathed prayer that "at evening time there shall come light!"

MRS. L. B. WALFORD

A thick fog obscures the whole of London. You grope your way through Liverpool Street station with considerable risk, now colliding with a truck full of luggage, anon canoning against an angry passenger. Not a yard can be seen in advance, more by good luck than good guiding the right train is somehow found, and, half an hour later, it is delightful to find the enemy is left behind, and that there is once more cheerful daylight. The sun at first looks like a sullen ball of fire, but presently, shaking off, as it were, the heavy clouds, he begins to shine out brightly, as, after a drive of something under a mile from the station, the carriage turns into the old-fashioned lodge gates of wrought iron on the left. A long road between two low wire fencings, running nearly straight through the park, which is dotted about with clumps of trees and spinneys, suddenly rounds into a wide space in front of the house, and breaks off into one of those quaint old rights-of-way which are so common in this part of Essex.

Cranbrooke Hall is a substantial red-brick, many-windowed building, dating nearly two centuries back, but it has been greatly added to and improved during recent years. The lofty, spacious entrance-hall, laid down with parquet, branches out into five reception rooms, opening one into another, all facing south, and overlooking some seven-hundred-and-fifty feet of lawn, bordered by a lake formed of clear, running water, the overflow of a spring which is a hundred-and-fifty feet deep, and has never yet been known to run dry. This is, in its turn, bounded by a shrubbery, which leads round to one of the principal features of the Cranbrooke Gardens, the "Lovers' Walk," an ivy colonnade, carpeted with thick, soft moss.

Passing through the ante-room, a door opens on the left, and the picture which presents itself to the eye is a thoroughly domestic one. A huge fire, heaped with acacia logs, blazes brightly in the low deep grate, flanked with brass dogs; tall standard lamps shed a soft light over a merry family group; a silver urn stands on the cosy five o'clock tea table, where a young, fair girl presides. A few guests are present, and two younger daughters of the house are flitting in and out with plates of Scotch scones, cakes, and muffins. The three nursery little ones have come down to say good-night; the youngest, a fair-haired, blue-eyed little maiden of four years, is nestling on her mother's lap. Rising from amidst them, Mrs. Walford comes forward to welcome you. She wears a pretty steel-blue tea-gown, richly embroidered in silks by her own hand; for your hostess loves needlework, and looks on it as a great resource for a weary brain. She has a clear, fair complexion, dark brown hair, and laughing grey-blue eyes; and the bright, sunny smile, which in childhood gained for her the pet name of "the laughing girl," lights up her expressive countenance, and just reveals two rows of white, even teeth. She gives you the impression of being a thoroughly happy, contented, and sweet-tempered woman, and her subsequent conversation assures you that your judgment has been correct.

Mrs. Walford is of Scottish birth. Her father was the second son of Sir James Colquhoun, the tenth Baronet of Luss, to whom Burke wrote on one occasion that he was "*the* Baronet of Scotland, just as Sir William Watkin Wynn was *the* Baronet of Wales." For seven hundred years the Colquhouns of Luss have held the same lands, and, unlike those of many other ancient families, they are still in as flourishing, or, rather, more flourishing condition, than they have ever been. The Sir James Colquhoun who – with four of his keepers and a ghillie boy – was drowned in Loch Lomond, nearly seventeen years ago, was a widower with an only son, the present baronet. Mrs. Walford's mother was the daughter of Mr. Fuller-Maitland of Stanstead, Essex.

Whilst the other visitors are leaving, the opportunity arises of examining the room more minutely. The polished oak floor is covered here and there with Persian carpets; near the door is a lovely Dutch marqueterie bureau, a husband's gift to a busy wife, and at which most of her well-known novels were written. Mrs. Walford says they "furnished their home as a jackdaw does his nest, stick by stick. From many an old farm-house and wayside inn they collected piece after piece, handsome old oak cabinets, chests and chairs, scarcely a single article having passed through the dealers' hands,"

indeed, you shrewdly suspect that the large carved settle whereon you are seated has been part of some despoiled church or sacred edifice.

On a table yonder stands a miniature set of china under glass, "Jane Eyre's own doll's tea service," by which Mrs. Walford sets great store, as she became possessed of it when visiting the house of Charlotte Brontë. The dainty, antique spinning-wheel known as "Lady Helen's wheel" (it belonged to an ancient dame of the Colquhoun family) is so old that the woodwork has begun to crumble away; but a more modern specimen opposite, covered with a cloud of flax, is often used by your hostess's own nimble fingers. The relic she treasures above all, however, is a gold "mazer," inherited by Mr. Walford through a long line of ancestors. This is a real curiosity, there being but few of these "mazers" now left in England. The little "silver table" holds many a prized bit of old Highland silver, including one which was picked up on the field of Bannockburn. Big bowls of Oriental china are filled with *pot-pourri*, which gives out a delicious fragrance. This, Mrs. Walford adds to afresh every year from an old recipe. Her children laughingly declare that "whenever they go out to gather flowers for the tables, mother, with a pair of scissors in hand, has snipped off all the finest roses and quietly slipped them into her pocket."

Mrs. Walford has inherited her literary tastes. Her father's well-known book, "The Moor and the Loch," now in its eighth edition, and full of spirited engravings, is considered as a classic amongst sportsmen; and who has not read and laughed over, in by-gone days, "Holiday House," and other delightful stories, by her grand-aunt, Catherine Sinclair, daughter of Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, himself one of the most distinguished men of his day? In spite of Catherine Sinclair and her sister being authors (the latter was known as the "good" Lady Colquhoun, and the writer of many religious books for the Scottish poor), so little was literary reputation then thought of by some members of the family that, when Sir Walter Scott appeared at Rossdhu to take notes for "Rob Roy," he was shown round *by the butler*, and never forgave the affront. In consequence he never mentioned the Colquhouns in that great romance or in the "Lady of the Lake."

Speaking of Rossdhu, you tell your hostess that you have been taken over those ancestral halls and round the great picture galleries, and had noticed with much surprise that there was no portrait of her to be seen. This omission may however some day be repaired.

Mrs. Walford remarks that it was not until after her marriage that she took seriously to novel writing. Whilst yet in her teens she was wont to steal out into the shrubbery with paper and pencil and write short stories, one of which was called "Macgregor, our Chieftain," but as she burnt these early effusions as fast as they were written, nothing remains of Macgregor's adventures. In 1872 delicacy of health prevented her pursuing the active out-of-door life which she had always enjoyed; so, as the necessity arose for finding vent for her energy, the young author spent a long period of bodily rest in mental activity, its first fruits being "Mr. Smith: A part of his Life." This character was drawn from life; even the name was the same, and he was found dead as described in the book. She sent the MS. anonymously to Mr. John Blackwood, the late distinguished editor of *Blackwood*, who – much struck with its promise – at once accepted and published it.

Brought up from her childhood in the stately homes of her own people, now in Scotland, now in England, and reared in the atmosphere of healthy country life, Mrs. Walford has been enabled to write with the frankness and accuracy which make her books so thoroughly characteristic and enjoyable.

A propos of "Mr. Smith," an amusing anecdote is told. The Queen had had the story read to her twice, and, being much interested in it, expressed a wish to see the author. She was presented on her marriage by the Duchess of Roxburghe, who on the occasion happened to take the place of the Mistress of the Robes, absent from indisposition. It is said that as the young novelist made her curtsey before the Royal presence, the Duchess softly breathed into Her Majesty's ear the words, "Mr. Smith."

A series of short stories soon followed this first success and appeared in *Blackwood*, beginning with "Nan, a Summer Scene," and under this name they have since been collected and published in one volume. "Pauline" next ran through the same magazine as a serial; "Cousins" was written in

1879; "Troublesome Daughters" followed in the ensuing year. "The Baby's Grandmother," which is perhaps the most popular of all, was written in 1885. Then came "A Stiff-necked Generation," "A Mere Child," "A Sage of Sixteen," "The Havoc of a Smile" "The Mischief of Monies." The latter book is more on the lines of "Mr. Smith" than any of Mrs. Walford's recent works of fiction, and proved a great success in *Longman's Magazine*. Then came "A Pinch of Experience," and later on, she wrote a series of Biographical studies on "Famous Authoresses of Bygone Days," for *Far and Near*, an American Magazine. This is coming out as a Christmas gift or prize book. A little volume of Christmas Tales illustrated by T. Pym (Mrs. Levett) is shortly to appear, and will be called "For Grown-up Children," being stories *about* children *for* grown-up people. Besides this, she is a constant contributor to the *St. James's Gazette*. She also writes a weekly letter for the American *Critic* on literary subjects; one called an "Epidemic of Smartness" made a special sensation; and she has, in addition, stories in two Christmas numbers, *The Queen* and *Atalanta*.

One great aim of this author has ever been to make herself thoroughly acquainted with all the details of her subject. So particular is she to ensure absolute accuracy, that every item of military life is submitted to one or other of her soldier brothers (two of these were respectively in the 4th Dragoon Guards and the 42nd Black Watch), and every detail of sport to her father; indeed, so well up was she in the latter, that a reviewer of "Mr. Smith" – when the sex of the author was yet unknown – caustically observed, that the writer was "more up in woodcock shooting than in religion!" the young author not having yet learnt to verify a quotation, even from Holy Writ.

An ardent lover of the old Scottish kirk, Mrs. Walford says that she "would go any distance to hear a good, long sermon from some of its divines." She is an indefatigable walker, and has traversed on foot twenty-three miles, from Arrochar to Inveraray – "from milestone to milestone" she is careful to add, knowing what Scotch and Welsh miles are supposed to be. She is extremely fond of poetry, and has a good collection of her chief favourites, whilst she keeps habitually on her own table copies of Tennyson, Jean Ingelow, and Coventry Patmore's work.

In earlier days your hostess gave much of her time to water-colour drawing, but her children have claimed for the decoration of their schoolroom all her pictures, the majority of which, they proudly remark, were "exhibited and hung on the line in the R.A. of Edinburgh." Mrs. Walford is just saying that she was married at St. John's, Edinburgh, when the door opens and in comes the bridegroom on that occasion. He is a native of another part of Essex, in which county his forefathers have held lands for several centuries, his grandfather having been High Sheriff in the famous "Waterloo year." He is a magistrate for the part in which he now lives, and, amidst the claims of a busy life, he finds time to sit on the bench perhaps oftener than do many of his less occupied colleagues. Looking at the noble, genial face, you secretly wonder if he can ever find it in his heart to pass severe sentences on offenders. He is extremely popular, has made a distinct mark for himself in his own circle, and it is his wife's pride to recognise that he will never be known as "Mrs. Walford's husband."

An hour later you are taken into the dining-room, through the ante-room, in the latter, a table near the great bay windows is filled with all the newest books and magazines; these are regularly changed and brought up to date by Mrs. Walford, and are a constant source of attraction to visitors. On your left at dinner sits your host's elder son, "Desborough," a fine manly young fellow, just of age; he is full of intelligence, and possesses great powers of observation. He is delightfully entertaining throughout the meal, and asking him about the pictures, which literally cover the walls, he explains that they are a complete collection of Boydell's fine old Shakespearian engravings, and, he adds modestly, these, and all the many etchings and pictures in the house, were framed by his father.

It is quite apparent in this happy home that there is perfect love and sympathy between the parents and the children. The children are as proud of their good, distinguished-looking father as they are of their pretty, gifted mother; the elder ones are keenly interested in her books, and look out eagerly for the new copies, each confiscating one for his or her own room. Mr. and Mrs. Walford

have ever been in touch with each individual member of their family. The children have never been put aside for her work, and they are constantly with their mother. They have all inherited her talent for drawing, and many of them bid fair to be no mean proficients in the art.

On the following morning your hostess announces that she has "given herself a holiday," and she proposes to take you out for a turn. The season is late and, though within but a very few weeks of Christmas, the sun is shining brightly over the grounds and the air is pleasantly warm. What was once said of a famous lawn at Oxford may well be applied to Cranbrooke Hall. A stranger inquired of a solemn old gardener what was done to keep it so fine and smooth? "Well, sir," was the reply, with the utmost gravity and good faith, "first we sows the seed, and then we rolls it and we mows it for three hundred years." Skating will soon be largely indulged in on the glittering lake, and many merry moonlight parties are looked forward to during the coming severe weather, which is predicted by the great holly trees covered with red berries. After a stroll round the pleasant demesne, and a peep into the vineries, in which is the old black Hamburg vine, sister of the famous one at Hampton Court, you return through the billiard-room into the Camellia house, which, a little later on will be a mass of bloom, sometimes as many as two thousand being in flower at a time, in every variety of colour.

The billiard table is decorated at the sides with groops of hand-painted flowers, exquisitely designed, and the cues are arranged in a round oak niche, which you feel sure once contained the image of a saint in some old cathedral. Just above the seat backs, and extending all round the room, is a perfect picture gallery of friends' photographs, placed closely side by side, and above these there is a wealth of engravings and etchings which would take days to examine.

Mrs. Walford has had three old-fashioned predecessors in the paths of literature in her own neighbourhood, namely, Thomas Day, who, exactly a hundred years ago, wrote "Sandford and Merton," at the little village of Aybridge, within half a dozen miles of Cranbrooke; Anne and Jane Taylor, whose "Original Poems" were, according to Sir Walter Scott, "known to four continents."

Before leaving, you ask to see your hostess's own special portrait gallery of her seven children. First comes "Desborough," then the eldest daughter, in her *débutante's* drawing-room dress of last season; next, two young girls yet in the schoolroom, and then the three "nursery" children, one of whom is taken in her mother's arms. Lastly, you are shown a faded portrait of the famous author herself, taken at the age of fourteen, and called "A Yellow-haired Lassie," and, in the bright, radiant smile, you recognise the appropriateness of her childish cognomen of "The Laughing Girl."

Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet,

RHODA BROUGHTON

The ancient and historic village of Richmond is too well known to need much description. It is thronged with kingly memories. Entering the old park by Kew Bridge, you drive past the large and beautiful Royal Gardens, extending along the banks of the Thames to Richmond, which were cultivated under the immediate superintendence of King George III. The old manor garden became Crown property in the reign of Edward I., when it was known as Shene, and was converted into a palace by Edward III.; but, being destroyed by fire in 1498, it was rebuilt with great splendour by Henry VII., who changed the name to Richmond, after his title of Earl of Richmond, ere he ascended the throne. Here was Philip I. of Spain right regally entertained. Here was the Princess Elizabeth shut up by her sister Mary, and here occasionally resided Charles I. On the right stands the Observatory, built by Sir William Chambers two centuries ago. When the road turns into the New Park south of Richmond, the coachman points out the massive brick wall encompassing the eight miles of its circumference, and remarks that in the reign of George II. an attempt was made to exclude the public, which was frustrated however by an enterprising inhabitant, who, pluckily going to law, recovered the right of way, and thus secured the everlasting gratitude of later generations.

It is for this picturesque and attractive place Miss Rhoda Broughton has deserted her quiet little home at Oxford, where she had lived for twelve years. On the high ground overlooking the Terrace Gardens, she and her sister, Mrs. Newcome, have established themselves in the quiet and peace they both love, in a comfortable house, standing back from the road, which commands an extensive view of the river, winding serpent-like through a forest of trees. Ushered upstairs into the drawing-room, where the author receives you with much cordiality, the first thing which strikes you is the sweet rich voice in which her welcome is uttered. Standing facing the setting sun, with its golden light reflected on her, you observe that she is above the middle height, and graceful in figure; the hair, rolled back from the low broad strong-looking forehead, is becomingly tinged with grey over the right temple, harmonizing well with the darker shades on the neat, well-shaped head. The mouth and chin indicate firmness and resolution. In repose, the expression might almost be called sad, but as she speaks, the frankness in the grey eyes, set well apart, at once dispels the idea, and the pleasant musical laugh betrays the vein of fun and wit – entirely of an original kind – which runs through her books. She is dressed in some fabric of dark green, with velvet sleeves and bodice; the latter relieved at the upper part with a paler shade of embroidered vest. The windows open on to a broad trellised verandah, which runs the whole length of the house; and, stepping out to it, Miss Broughton bids you look at the exquisite view. It is a lovely day in latest autumn, the trees, turned to every shade of gold, copper, and brown, are shedding their leaves profusely. The sinking sun is leaving the sky deeply tinged with waves of pink and purple, and the river looks like a silver stream, with here and there a tinge of reflected colour, unbroken by a single boat. The air is pure and still, with a faint suspicion of a coming frost. For a few moments you both stand in rapt silence admiring the beautiful prospect, yet sighing to think that the winter is so near at hand; then your hostess leads the way back into the drawing-room, where tea is served, and as you settle comfortably in a luxurious couch covered with tapestry of the first Empire, and sip the fragrant beverage out of a cup of old Spode, the eye travels round the quiet restful room, and notices the many little knick-knacks that fill it.

On the right stands an antique writing table, with pigeon-hole drawers, and old blue china grouped over the top. The two ancient oak cabinets are covered with pretty "bits"; growing in a cunningly-concealed basket is an immense pyramid of ferns and palms, which are Miss Broughton's particular delight. On the little plush-covered table by the side of a delicately wrought iron Italian stand – whereof the copper bowl is filled with autumnal flowers – lies a business-like work-bag, filled to overflowing, which gives a home-like look to the room and indicates that it is useful as well as ornamental. On asking Miss Broughton for a peep into her sanctuary, she smiles indulgently,

and begs you to descend. The white-painted fresh-looking staircase is partially covered with Persian carpet of warm colour, and, throughout, the dado is composed of Indian matting, above which hang many engravings and photographs. The large black-and-white lozenge-shape tiles give the hall an indescribably bright appearance, which here and there the long Indian rugs subdue, yet throw up into relief. You enter the room sacred to the gifted authoress, and look round. Where are the manuscripts, the "copy," the "proofs," which might reasonably have been expected? There is no indication of her work on the old oak knee-hole writing-table beyond a single blank sheet of paper reposing on a large wooden portfolio, exquisitely painted on both sides by her friend Mrs. Andrew Spottiswoode at Dresden. A solitary penholder lies on a china inkstand, flanked by a pair of large green jars from Hyères. She half guesses your look of interrogation, and remarks that she is "resting" awhile, now that her latest book "Alas!" is published, before launching another, entitled "Mrs. Bligh." *Elle recule pour mieux sauter*, but at the present moment, as she kindly causes it to be understood that no encroachment is being made on her valuable time, you do not hesitate to ask for some details of her literary life.

Rhoda Broughton was born at Segrwyd Hall, Denbighshire. Her father was a clergyman, and held the family living in Cheshire, where her childish days were passed, varied by visits to her grandfather, Sir Henry Broughton, at Broughton Hall, Staffordshire. Her father was a student, and himself grounded her in Shakespeare and the English classics, and imparted also the rudiments of Latin and Greek. She was brought up strictly, and the hours of study were long, but made interesting by her scholarly instructor. Asking Miss Broughton if her father had been an author, she replies, "only of his sermons, and I do not believe any of my relations wrote a line in their lives." It is a surprise to hear that her great gifts, her originality of style, her wonderful descriptions of scenery, her subtle humour, are not hereditary. Keenly interested, you ask her how then the idea of writing occurred to her.

She says she remembers a certain wet Sunday afternoon when she was about twenty-two; she was distinctly bored by a stupid book which she was trying to read, when "the spirit moved her to write." It was on the leaves of an old copy-book lying at hand that she delivered her soul of the ideas which poured in on her brain. Day after day, night after night, she wrote swiftly and in secret, until at the end of six weeks she found a vast heap of manuscript accumulated, to which she gave the title of "Not Wisely, but Too Well." Miss Broughton kept it by her until January, 1865, when she crossed over to Ireland on a visit to her uncle-in-law, Mr. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, then editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*; she selected two chapters at random and read them aloud to him. He at once prognosticated the success of the book; accepted it as a serial, and later on, suggested to Mr. Bentley that he should bring it out in three volume form. Here, however, a check occurred. The reader pronounced so unfavourably of its merits, that Mr. Bentley held off. But the inspiration, once set in motion, could not be stopped, and soon found vent in a new work, "Cometh up as a Flower." This was well received. A couple of columns of favourable criticism in the *Times*, and various eulogistic notices in other papers, soon caused it to become such a marked success that Mr. Bentley reconsidered the matter. His deliberation happily ended in the purchase of "Not Wisely, but Too Well" from Tinsley, so that the two books were actually brought out in the same year. The home of Miss Broughton's ancestors, Broughton Hall, built in the reign of one of the old Tudors, is so well depicted in "Cometh up as a Flower," that none who have read the book and seen the place can fail to observe the absolute truthfulness of the description.

A propos of this novel, Miss Broughton tells an amusing anecdote: – "It was claimed by other people," she says; "a lady told an acquaintance of mine that her son had written it, which diverted me much."

The fame of these books went far afield. Some years ago a graceful tribute was paid to the author. Captain Markham, of H.M. ship *Alert*, begged to be introduced, and told her that in a remote Arctic region they had by common consent christened an icebound mountain, "Mount Rhoda," in

grateful acknowledgment of the pleasure which her books had given the officers of the ship on their perilous voyage.

"Temple Bar" secured her next two novels, "Red as a Rose is she" and "Goodbye, Sweetheart." About once in two years Miss Broughton delights the world with a new book. "Nancy," "Twilight Stories," "Joan," "Second Thoughts," "Dr. Cupid," "Belinda," followed at about these intervals, but her latest work, "Alas!" must take a high stand, if only for her faithful delineation of life in Florence, her intimate knowledge of all things artistic, her scenes laid in Algeria, which place she visited last year, and her vivid and graphic descriptions of those lovely countries, which are an education in themselves. And the humorous touches! How much everyone sympathises with the meek, but excellent "Amelia," whom no one thoroughly appreciates until after her death. Uneducated in art, she appeals pitifully in the following words to her lover, who finds out her worth too late.

"And now, where shall we go? that is the next thing – not to any gallery or church, I think, if you don't mind. I say such stupid things about art, and the more I try the stupider they are; let us go somewhere into the country. I can understand the country, I am not afraid of saying stupid things about it."

You tell her later of an observation made to you quite lately by her sister author, Miss Braddon, ever keenly appreciative of the gifts of another, on reading a striking description in "Alas" of the sea after a storm, which runs thus: – "A sea even more wonderful than radiant; no servile copy of the sky and clouds to-day, but with astonishing colours of its own; a faint yet glorious green for a part of its watery breadth; then what our poverty compels us to call blue; and then a great tablecloth of inky purple, which looks so solid, that the tiny white boats which are crossing it seem to be sailing on dry land." Miss Braddon remarked, "Rhoda Broughton is a genius and a prose poet." Your hostess is charmed with the kindly speech.

No solitary copy can be seen, in the well-filled book-cases, of the author's works. She says that she sells them out and out at once, and then has "done with them"; but, "Come," she adds, "we have talked long enough about my books; let me show you a few of my treasures," and she points out a small sketch by Hamilton Aidé, two busts of Lord Wolseley and Mr. Carlyle, presented to her by Sir Edgar Boehm; presentation copies from Matthew Arnold, Lord Lytton, Henry James, Andrew Lang, etc., etc., and an ornamental plate rack, by which she sets great store, from Adelaide Kemble (Mrs. Sartoris); a very ancient engraving of Titian's "Danaë" hangs over the mantelpiece opposite three lovely photographs of "Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy." The floor of this delightful room is covered with peacock-blue felt and a few rugs of Eastern manufacture; a small aviary of birds stands by the window, which is open, for your hostess is a "great believer in plenty of fresh air and a good fire." Ere taking leave, you ask if the two fine pugs basking on the rugs are especial pets. "Yes," says Miss Broughton, "but," mournfully, "they are a degenerate race; and not the dear dog heroes of my books. *They* are all dead and gone!"

MRS. ARTHUR STANNARD ("JOHN STRANGE WINTER")

Emerging from the Earl's Court Station, where once stood the old manor house of the De Veres, and glancing at the noble row of buildings across the road, which until quite lately was the site of a *maison de santé*, it seems impossible to realise that it was at the end of the last century a miniature private zoological garden. Yet here the great anatomist and surgeon, John Hunter, kept a collection of rare and foreign animals; here, too, was the kitchen and the great cauldron in which he performed the gruesome operation of boiling down the giant O'Brien, whose skeleton can be seen in the museum of the College of Surgeons. It is to be hoped that the ghost of the big Irishman was safely laid when the work of destruction was carried on! Turning to the left, you go down Trebovir road, past the great red-stepped house of the well-known and successful "crammer" and army coach, Captain Pinhey, which leads out into Nevern square. Perhaps in nothing more than in the present style of building does the growing artistic spirit of the day assert itself. Although the houses are not erected with the solid masonry of other days, which seemed to defy the hand of time, they rejoice in more picturesque effects, and certainly the handsome, spacious Nevern-square, with its large gardens, its three well-kept tennis courts, and its fine red-brick dwellings, is a striking instance of the fact. It is barely a decade and a half of years since this site was occupied by large nursery gardens, through which a winding country lane lead to St. Mathias' Church yonder; now it is surrounded by stately mansions, broad roads, and pleasant gardens. On the south-side a ruddy gleam of fire-light through the red window-blinds marks the residence of the popular author, John Strange Winter. Passing through the outer and inner entrance doors, with mounted antlers, and Swiss carvings hung between them, you reach the long, narrow hall, where the tesselated black-and-white paving is covered for the most part with heavy Wilton carpets; the rich, deep-red walls are profusely decorated with quaint old prints, whose sombreness is relieved by Nankin and Spode china. A later inspection shows these to include some choice engravings by Morland, a few miniatures, and a group of family silhouettes. ("Had we any more black relations?" Mrs. Stannard, when a child, once asked her mother on being told which members of her family they portrayed.)

Entering the dining-room on the right, your hostess is discovered, deeply engaged in dressing dolls for an approaching juvenile festivity, when each little guest is to receive some gift. Clouds of filmy muslin, embroidery, lace, and silk lie before her, and several of those already attired repose in a row on the sofa. She extends a firm, white hand in cordial greeting, and as there is only one more doll to complete the set, you settle down beside her to watch the process, and notice the deft and nimble fingers, as they swiftly run up a flounce or adjust a tiny trimming. She is dressed in a black and grey tea-gown, which looks like fine tapestry, with grey satin sleeves, panels, and front.

Mrs. Arthur Stannard is a tall, handsome young woman. She has fine, dark brown eyes, which sparkle with intellect and humour, level eyebrows, and dark hair curling over her low forehead, and well-shaped head; she has a pretty but firm little mouth, and clear-cut chin, indicative of strength of will. Her face has settled somewhat into gravity as she pursues her occupation, for she has put into this apparently trivial matter, just as she does in greater things, her very best efforts with that thoroughness which characterises her; but as she suddenly looks up, and catches you intently watching her, she smiles a sweet, bright smile, and laughs a low, rippling laugh, as she seems to guess exactly what are your thoughts. "It is for the children," she says softly, and in those few words she betrays at once the sympathy of her nature, that sympathy with these little ones which has caused the children of her pen to live so vividly in the hearts of her readers.

It is a large, lofty room, pale green in colour, with carved oak dado. A bright, clear fire blazing in the wide, tiled hearth makes the heavy, polished brass fender and "dogs" glisten like gold. On the

high, black, carved "chimney shelf," as Mrs. Stannard calls it, stand three valuable old blue jars, and the low, broad overmantel is composed of genuine Dutch tiles, three hundred years in age, framed in wood. Over this is grouped a collection of ancient blue Delft; the walls are hung with a few good proof engravings; at night the room is amply lighted by the huge hanging, crimson-shaded lamp, which casts a soft, becoming glow over every corner; the floor is covered with a thick Axminster carpet of subdued colouring, and with the exception of a handsome old carved oak dower-chest and grandfather clock, with loud and sonorous strike, which both date back into the last century, the rest of the furniture is mahogany; pieces picked up here and there, restored, modernised, and chosen with an eye to effect as well as to comfort.

Mrs. Stannard is the only daughter of the late Rev. Henry Vaughan Palmer, rector of St. Margaret's, York. For some time Mr. Palmer had been an officer in the Royal Artillery before his convictions led him to lay down his sword and enter the church militant; he had come of several generations of soldiers, and to the last day of his life found his greatest pleasure in the society of military men; this perhaps accounts for Mrs. Stannard's almost instinctive knowledge of army men and army ways. Asking her if, when a child, she loved books, and gave promise of her brilliant gift, she says, smiling, "Well, as regards my lessons, most emphatically no! I was a restless, impatient sort of child, who tired of everything before it was half done. I think, like all very enthusiastic people, that I was never as happy as with books, that is to say, novels. I was just eleven when I went to my first school, but I had read Thackeray, Dickens, Charles Reade, and Whyte Melville up to date, besides many others, and I was never restricted in my reading; I never remember in my life my father or mother telling me not to read any particular book, and," speaking very impressively, "I am all the better for it. Years afterwards, when my father died – I was twenty-one then – I felt that the few stories I had written and sold up to that time, were but child's play. Then I began to work in real earnest, studying certain authors that I might clearly realise the difference of their method and style." But the thought at once arises, that the touching and simple pathos of her style is entirely original, and born of no earthly model.

And then, as ofttime happens when two women are sitting together in friendly converse, a word is dropped about her married life. Ah! here, though much could be said, in deference to your hostess's wishes the pen must be stayed. All who know Mr. and Mrs. Stannard know how complete and perfect is their union. Mr. Stannard is a civil engineer, and at one time served under the late General Gordon. He is very pardonably proud of his clever wife, and efficiently transacts all her business arrangements, the two – so perfect an one – working, as it were, hand in hand.

Her *nom de guerre*, "John Strange Winter," was adopted by the advice of the publishers of her first books, because they thought it wiser that works so military as "Cavalry Life" and "Regimental Legends" should be assumed by the world to be written by a man, and that they would stand a better chance of mercy at the hands of the critics than if they went forth as the acknowledged writing of a woman, and for a time it was so assumed; but when "Booties' Baby" made such a success, and people wanted to know who the author was, and where he lived, it soon became known that "he" was a woman, although, as she did not add her name to the title-page, it was a good while before it was generally believed. It may here be remarked that Mrs. Stannard holds very strongly the opinion that there should be "no sex in art," and whilst never desiring to conceal her identity, deprecates the idea of receiving indulgence or blame on the ground of her work being that of a woman, as both unjust and absurd. In private life she carries out her ideas on this point so effectually that few acquaintances would gather from her conversation (unless it were necessary to "talk shop") that she was a literary woman at all, as, except to a fellow worker, she would rather talk on any subject under the sun than literature.

"The author to whom," according to Ruskin, "we owe the most finished and faithful rendering ever yet given of the character of the British soldier" can portray, too, in a wonderful degree the

beauty of child-life. Of modern creations there can be none better known to the public, or which have excited more sympathy, than "Mignon" and "Houp-là."

Correct in detail, as those can prove who were in India at the time of the terrible mutiny of 1857, she might have written "A Siege Baby" on the spot had it not been that she was only born on the thirteenth of January in the previous year, and at that time was an infant in arms. Fertile in imagination, acute in observation, sprightly and wholesome in style, there is a freshness and life in her books which charm alike old and young, rich and poor, at home and abroad; and that her popularity is fully maintained is testified by the gratifying fact that a late story, "He went for a Soldier," one of the slightest of her efforts, had a larger sale during the first month after publication than any previous work from her pen in the same period. One practical result of this book must be mentioned. The scene is laid at Doverscourt, a few miles from Mr. and Mrs. Stannard's pretty summer home at Wix. She had been greatly distressed, when visiting that seaside place, by the sight of the overloaded hackney-carriages, with their poor, broken-down horses. Immediately after her indignant comments on this fact in her story, bye-laws were passed bringing these vehicles under effective police supervision.

Besides those already named, amongst some two or three and twenty novels, which are all so well known as not to need description – for are they not to be found in every library and on every railway bookstall in the United Kingdom? – "Beautiful Jim," "Harvest," "Dinna Forget," and a most pathetic story called "My Poor Dick," remain fixed on the memory. This last is perhaps the author's own favourite. "Booties' Baby," as all the play-going world knows, was dramatised and brought out four years ago at the Globe Theatre in London. It has been on tour ever since, and there seems no intention of terminating its long run, dates having been booked far into the year. A late story, entitled "The Other Man's Wife," has been running in a serial in various newspapers, and is now issued in two-volume form. One great element in the author's success and world-wide literary reputation is undoubtedly to be found in her creations of the children of her military heroes, alike among the officers' quarters and those "on the strength." She has the happy knack of depicting them at once simple, natural, and lovable.

"I never begin a novel," says Mrs. Stannard, "until I have got a certain scene in my mind. I cannot write any kind of story without having one dramatic scene clearly before me; when I have got it, I work up to that; then the story arranges itself. But this is only the germ, the first conception of the tale. As I write one thread after another spins itself out, to be taken up afterwards to form a consecutive, concise whole. Sometimes I lose my original story altogether, but never any dramatic situation towards which I am working, and the end is often quite different to what I had intended. When this happens I very seldom try to fight against fate. I think all stories ought more or less to write themselves, and it seems to me that this must make a tale more like real life than if it were all carefully mapped out beforehand, and then simply padded up to some requisite length."

By this time the last doll is finished and added to the row on the sofa. They all look as if they had been turned out of a first-class milliners' establishment. Mrs. Stannard suggests a move to her study, and leads the way up the wide staircase, the handrail of which is protected by a broad and heavy brass guard, put there for the sake of the little children of the house. A broad settee on the wide conservatory landing invites you to rest awhile and look at all the odds and ends which your hostess says are so precious to her. Here are two handsome Chippendale chairs picked up in Essex, many photographs of the house at Wix, a dozen pieces of Lancashire Delph porcelain, made specially as a wedding present for Mrs. Stannard's grandmother in 1810, some Staffordshire hunting jugs, and some quaint little figures, "all rubbish," she says, smiling, "but precious to me." There is, however, a Spode dinner service in blue which is emphatically not rubbish, and a set of Oriental dishes, blue and red, which are very effective. The landing is richly carpeted; the windows and the doors of the conservatory are all of stained glass, while above hangs an old Empire lamp of beautiful design filled in with small cathedral glass. The first door on the left leads into the author's study. It is a charming room, small but lofty, with pale blue walls hung with many little pictures, plates, old looking-glasses,

and chenille curtains of terra-cotta and pale blue softly blended. A pretty inlaid bookcase stands opposite the window, filled with a few well-selected books. The horseshoe hanging yonder was cast in the Balaclava charge. She has indeed a goodly collection of these, and owns to a weakness to them, declaring that her first great success was achieved on the day that she picked one up at Harrogate. There must be many hundreds of photographs scattered about in this room, and it would be a day's occupation to look through them all; but each has its own interest for her, and most of them are of people well known in the literary, scientific, artistic, and fashionable world. "I never sit here," she says. "It is my work-room, pure and simple. Sometimes my husband comes up, and then I read to him all my newly-written stuff, but this I do every day."

The next door opens into the drawing-room, where there is a rich harmony in the details of the decoration and furniture, which suggests the presence of good and cultivated taste, combined with a general sense of luxury and comfort. The entire colouring is blended, from old gold to terra-cotta, from Indian red to golden brown. On the left stands a cabinet crowded with choicest bits of china, in the middle of which is placed the bouquet, carefully preserved, presented to the author by Mr. Ruskin on her birthday. A lovely Dutch marqueterie table contains a goodly collection of antique silver, and among the pictures on the walls are a painting by Lawrence Phillips, Batley's etching of Irving and Ellen Terry, also one of Mrs. Stannard, and a series of all the original and clever pen-and-ink sketches in "Bootles' Children," by Bernard Partridge, drawn as illustrations to the story in the *Lady's Pictorial*.

After lingering long over afternoon tea, you express a wish to see the children before they sleep. Mrs. Stannard leads the way first to a room next her own, which is occupied by a fair little maiden, seven years of age, with grey-blue eyes, sunny hair, and a wild-rose complexion, who asks you to "go and see the twins." Accordingly their mother takes you on to a large night-nursery, where the two little ones, boy and girl, are being prepared for bed. They are just turned four, and are called Eliot and Violet Mignon, after two of the characters in Mrs. Stannard's books. They are perfectly friendly, and as you bend to kiss the baby girl last, she looks reproachfully out of her great dark eyes, and sternly commands you to "kiss Gertie, too." (Gertie is the under nurse.) This raises a hearty laugh, under cover of which you hastily retreat.

Above all things, Mrs. Stannard is a thoroughly domestic woman. Popular in society, constantly entertaining with great hospitality, she yet contrives to attend to every detail of her large household, which consequently goes like clockwork. She writes for about two hours every morning, and keeps a neat record book, in which she duly enters the number of pages written each day.

Presently Mr. Stannard comes in, and soon suggests an adjournment to his study downstairs, a snug, business-like room, half filled with despatch-boxes, books, and MSS. On a table stands a large folio-like volume, which is Mrs. Stannard's visiting book, containing many hundreds of names. She looks ruefully at a clip containing some sixty unanswered letters, and candidly confesses that she finds considerable difficulty with her private correspondence and her calls, both of which accumulate faster than she can respond to; though, as she says, her many friends are very indulgent to her on those scores, and are "quite willing to make allowance for a poor woman who has the bulk of her literary work cut out for a year or two in advance, three little children, and a houseful of servants to manage; but, happily," she adds, "good servants. I have been so lucky in that way."

Just now, indeed, she claims especial indulgence in respect to social observances, for, as though so busy a life were not enough to exhaust her energies, early in 1891 she added a new burden to her indefatigable pen, by starting a penny weekly magazine under the title of *Golden Gates*, subsequently altered to *Winter's Weekly* in deference to the opinion of those who objected to the somewhat religious sound of the former name. The little paper was the first weekly periodical that was ever exclusively owned, edited, and published by a popular novelist, and its fortunes have been watched with vivid interest by all who know how treacherous and adventuresome are such enterprises. The fresh, frank individuality of *Winter's Weekly* has, however, made friends for the journal wherever it has gone, and if John Strange Winter can keep it at its present point of unconventional interest, it may consolidate

into a valuable property. Already it seems to have suggested the publication of new journals on similar lines, though no other woman novelist has yet had the courage to follow suit.

Later works of this favourite writer are "Mere Luck," "My Geoff," "Lumley, the Painter," also a powerful and pathetic novel, in two volumes, entitled "Only Human." Her last is a story called "A Soldier's Children," which she has given for the benefit of the Victoria Hospital for Children, Chelsea.

But with all this accumulation of business, these domestic cares, and social claims, somehow Mrs. Stannard never seems in a hurry. The kind and hospitable young couple are always ready to do an act of kindness, and to welcome with help and counsel a new aspirant to fame in the thorny paths of literature. Small wonder that they are so much sought after in society, and so heartily welcomed wherever they go – and one is seldom seen without the other. You go on your way with every hearty good wish that each year may bring them ever-increasing prosperity and success, for in such union there is strength.

MRS. ALEXANDER

About three miles north-west of St. Paul's lies a comparatively new suburb of the great metropolis, which but forty years ago was described as "a hamlet in the parish of Marylebone," and through which passes the Grand Junction Canal, almost reaching to Kilburn. London, with her ever-grasping clutch, has seized on the vast tract of ground, which erstwhile grew potatoes and cabbages for the multitude, and, abolishing the nursery and market-gardens, has transformed them into broad streets, of which one of the longest is Portsdown-road.

Not altogether inartistic is the row of substantially built houses where Mrs. Alexander Hector has been for some years located. It is far enough away to enable the popular authoress to pursue her literary vocation in peace and quiet, yet sufficiently near to keep her in touch with the busy world of literature and art, wherein she is deservedly so great a favourite. The blue fan, serving as a screen for the window, is a sort of land-mark distinguishing the house from its fellows. You are shown into the library, where Mrs. Alexander is seated at a handsome oak writing-table, busily engaged in finishing the last words of a chapter in her new story. She looks up with a smile of welcome, and is about to discontinue her occupation; but you hastily beg her to go on with her work, which will give you time to look around; and as she complies with the request, she says pleasantly, "Well, then, just for three minutes only."

Your glance lights again on the gentle author herself, and you watch the pen gliding easily over the page, which rests on a diminutive shred of well-worn blotting-paper. The face is fair and smooth, the hair, slightly grey, is simply parted back from the forehead, and the three-quarter profile, which presents itself to your gaze, is straight and well-cut. She wears a little white cap, and a long black gown, trimmed with jet, and close by her side lies an enormous Persian tabby cat of great age.

The study is divided from the adjoining room by heavy curtains drawn aside and a Japanese screen. It is all perfectly simple and unpretending, but the rooms are thoroughly comfortable and home-like.

The chapter being finished, your hostess rises, declares herself entirely at your service, and mentions that she is now engaged on a new three volume novel, which is to come out early next year in America, and is as yet unnamed.

Mrs. Alexander was born in Ireland, though no touch of accent can be detected. She never left that country until after her nineteenth birthday. Her father belonged to an old squirearchal family, the Frenches of Roscommon. He was a keen sportsman, and a member of the famous Kildare Hunt. The few old pictures which hang on the wall are all family portraits. One represents a paternal ancestor, Lord Annaly, painted in his peer's robes. He was one of the Gore family, of whom no less than nine members sat at the same time in parliament shortly before the Union. Another picture of a comfortable-looking old gentleman in a powdered wig is the portrait of a high legal dignitary, well known in his day as Theobald Wolfe, a great-uncle of Mrs. Alexander. A third is a seventeenth-century portrait of Colonel Dominic French, who looks manly and resolute, in spite of his yellow satin coat, flowing wig, and lace cravat, drawn through his buttonhole. This gentleman was the first Protestant of the family, and is credited with having given up his faith for love of his wife, who simpers beside him in an alarmingly *décolletée* blue dress, suggestive of the courtly style in the time of the Merry Monarch. Her husband, with the ardour of a convert – or a pervert – raised a regiment of dragoons among his tenantry, and fought on the winning side at the Battle of the Boyne.

Mrs. Alexander remarks that her "kinsfolk and acquaintance in early life, were, if not illiterate, certainly unliterary." "I always loved books," she adds, "and was fortunate, when a very young girl, barely out of the schoolroom, in winning the favour of a dear old blind Scotchman, whose wife was a family friend. He was a profound thinker, and an earnest student before he lost his sight. My happiest and most profitable hours were spent in reading aloud to him books, no doubt a good deal

beyond my grasp, but which, thanks to his kind and patient explanations, proved the most valuable part of my very irregular education. In reading the newspapers to him, I also gathered some idea of politics, probably very vague ideas, but so liberal in their tendency that my relatives, who were 'bitter Protestants' and the highest of high Tories, looked on me, if not as a 'black sheep,' certainly as a 'lost mutton.' The tendency has remained with me, though my consciousness of the many-sided immensity of the subject, has kept me from forming any decided opinions."

The only bits of ancestry she values, Mrs. Alexander says, are her descent from Jeremy Taylor, the celebrated Bishop of Down and Connor, and the near cousinship of her grandmother to Lord Kilwarden, who was the first victim in Emmet's rising; that high-minded judge, whose last words, as he yielded up his life to the cruel pikes of his assailants, were, "Let them have a fair trial."

The above-mentioned Jeremy Taylor, and the Rev. Charles Wolfe – whose well-known poem, "The Burial of Sir John Moore," was so greatly appreciated by Lord Byron – were the only literary members of the family on her father's side; on her mother's, she can claim kindred with Edmund Malone, the well-known annotator of Shakespeare.

On leaving Ireland, Mrs. Alexander, with her parents, travelled a good deal, both at home and abroad, occasionally sojourning in London, where, while still young, she began to write. Her first attempts were made in the *Family Herald* and *Household Words*, beginning with a sketch called "Billeted in Boulogne." This is an account of their own personal experience, when they endured the inconvenience of having French soldiers quartered on them.

It was about this time that she was introduced to Mrs. Lynn Linton, by the late Adelaide Proctor, with whose family she was on terms of some intimacy, and with whose charming grandmother, the once well-known and admired Mrs. Basil Montague, she was a prime favourite. From this introduction arose the long, close friendship with the brilliant author of "Joshua Davidson," which Mrs. Alexander values so highly, and of which she is so justly proud.

In 1858 she married Mr. Hector, and wrote no more until she became a widow.

Mr. Hector was a great explorer and traveller. He had been a member of Landor's expedition to seek the sources of the Niger, and immediately after his return to England he joined General Chesney in his attempt to steam down the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf. He was also with Layard during his discoveries in Nineveh, and spent many years in Turkish Arabia. A man of great enterprise and ability, he was the pioneer of commerce, and was the first who sent from London a ship and cargo direct to the Persian Gulf, thereby opening up the trade between the two countries.

It was after her husband's long illness, which terminated fatally, that Mrs. Alexander again turned her thoughts to literature, to seek distraction from her bereavement. It was then she wrote "The Wooing o't." The book was a great success; it ran first through the pages of *Temple Bar*; it was then published in three volumes, passed through many editions, and has a world-wide reputation.

"I always write leisurely," says Mrs. Alexander; "I never will hurry, or write against time. No, I have not much method," she answers, in reply to your question, "nor am I quite without it. My stories are generally suggested to me by some trait of character or disposition, which I have adapted rather than produced. My people are rarely portraits, they are rather mosaics; and, I *must* say, I am exceedingly shy of dealing with my men. Women I *do* understand. Character to me is all-important. If I can but place the workings of heart and mind before my readers, the incidents which put them in motion are of small importance comparatively. Of course, a strong, clear, logical plot is a treasure not to be found every day! I am not a rapid writer; I like to live with my characters, to get thoroughly acquainted with them; and I am always sorry to part with the companions who have brought me many a pleasant hour of oblivion – oblivion from the carking cares that crowd outside my study door."

There is one point on which you would fain differ from the author. An intimate knowledge of her books convinces you that her power of dealing with her "men" is very great, and that her habits of observation have stood her in good stead, whilst depicting with ready wit and considerable skill the characters of her heroes. As you follow step by step the career of the fascinating Trafford, in "The

Wooing o't," and watch the workings of his mind, the struggles between his natural cynicism and pride, and his love for the humbly-born but high-souled little heroine Maggie; his graceful rejection of the hand and fortune of the proud heiress, and the final triumph of love over pedigree, you can with truth echo the author's words, and feel that you too are "sorry to part" with him and his wife, and would gladly welcome a sequel to their histories.

Mrs. Alexander observes that there *is* one character in that book drawn from life, but adds, with a laugh, she "will not tell you which it is." You have, however, a suspicion of your own.

"Her Dearest Foe" was the author's next work. It is constructed on entirely different lines, but it is equally absorbing. The varied fortunes of the brave heroine of the "Berlin Bazaar," of the masterful Sir Hugh Galbraith, and the faithful cousin Tom, keep up an engrossing interest from the first line to the last.

Her husband's Christian name being Alexander, she elected to write under that appellation, fearing that her first book might be a failure. Having begun with it, she has ever since kept the same *nom de plume*, and she remarks, "It does just as well as any other."

The great success which attended these two books justified Mrs. Alexander's further efforts. "Maid, Wife, or Widow," a clever little story, is an "Episode of the '66 War in Germany"; "Which Shall it Be?" "Look Before You Leap," and "Ralph Wilton's Weird" were brought out during the next few years. They were all favourably reviewed, and many of them passed into several editions. These were followed at intervals by "Second Life," "At Bay," "A Life Interest," "The Admiral's Ward," "By Woman's Wit." Mrs. Alexander wrote "The Freres" during a long residence in Germany, whither she went for the education of her children. The fact that she was on intimate terms with many of the good old German families enabled her to write graphically from her personal knowledge of the country.

In "The Executors" Mrs. Alexander broke new ground. The life-like delineation of Karapet is drawn from her own observation and experience of Syrian Christians, but the incidents are, of course, imaginary.

"Blind Fate," "A Woman's Heart," "Mammon," "The Snare of the Fowler," followed in due course, also some clever little shilling stories. The author's latest published work in three volumes is called "For His Sake," a pleasant and interesting novel, well worthy of the writer of "The Wooing o't."

Mrs. Alexander's great ambition originally was to write a play; indeed, her first few stories were planned with that object in view, but she soon abandoned the idea, and says she "turned them into novels instead." That there was some dramatic power in a few of her earlier efforts is evident, as she was applied to for permission to dramatise "Her Dearest Foe" and "By Woman's Wit." "Though," she adds, "it seems to me that the latter is not suited to the stage."

Mrs. Alexander writes best in England. She says that London "inspires her." She holds strong views upon education, and maintains that girls, as well as boys, should be trained to follow some definite line in life. She would have any special talent, whereby its possessor could, if necessary, earn her own living cultivated to the utmost; and, consistently following out her principles, she has sent her youngest daughter, who has a decided genius for painting, to work in one of the best-known studios in Paris, where she takes a fairly good place, and by her diligence and ardour for her art at least deserves success. Another daughter fulfils the onerous task of being "mother's right hand." But she has yet a third, who has found a happy career in the bonds of wedlock, and has made her home at Versailles. She is now on a visit to her mother, and whilst you are conversing, the door opens, the young wife comes in with a lovely infant in her arms, and the "first grandchild" is introduced with pride. He is a perfect cherub, and makes friends instantly.

Asking Mrs. Alexander about her early friends in literature, she mentions with grateful warmth the name of Mrs. S. C. Hall, "whose ready kindness never failed." "To her," she says, "I owe the most valuable introduction I ever had. It was to the late Mr. W. H. Wills, editor of *Household Words*. To his advice and encouragement I am deeply indebted. His skill and discrimination as an editor were most remarkable, whilst his knowledge and wide experience were always placed generously at the service

of the young and earnest wanderer in the paths of literature, numbers of whom have had reason to bless the day when they first knew Harry Wills."

Mrs. Alexander is pre-eminently a lovable woman. In the large society where she is so well known, and so much respected, to mention her name is to draw forth affectionate encomiums on all sides. You venture to make some allusion to this fact; a faint smile comes over the placid countenance, as she says inquiringly, "Yes? I believe I have made many friends. You see, I never rub people the wrong way if I can help it, and I think I have some correct ideas respecting the true value of trifles. Yet I believe I have a backbone; at least I hope so, for mere softness and compliance will not bear the friction of life."

HELEN MATHERS.
(Mrs. Reeves.)

Although it is but two o'clock in the afternoon, the streets are black as night. With the delightful variety of an English climate, the temperature has suddenly fallen, and a rapid thaw has set in, converting the heavy fall of snow, which but two days before threatened to cover the whole of London, into a slough of mud. It is a pleasant change to turn from these outer discomforts into the warm and well-lighted house which Mrs. Reeves has made so bright and comfortable.

You have judiciously managed to arrive five minutes earlier than the hour appointed, in the hope of being able to make a few mental notes before Helen Mathers comes in, and your perspicacity is rewarded, for a bird's-eye glance around assures you that she possesses a refined and artistic taste, which is displayed in the general arrangement of the room. Lighted from above by a glass dome, another room is visible and again a glimpse of a third beyond. The quaint originality of their shape and build suggests the idea, of what indeed is the fact, that the house was built more than a century and a half ago.

The first room is very long, and its soft Axminster carpet of amber colour shaded up to brown gives the key-note to the decorations, which from the heavily embossed gold leather paper on the walls to the orange-coloured Indian scarves that drape the exquisite white overmantels (now wreathed with long sprays of ivy, grasses, and red leaves), would delight the heart of a sun-worshipper as Helen Mathers declares herself to be.

As she now comes in, she seems to bring an additional sense of the fitness of things. She carries a big basket of China tea-roses, which she has just received from a friend in the country, and the long white cachemire and silk tea-gown which she wears looks thoroughly appropriate, despite the inclement season. It is her favourite colour for house wear in summer or winter, and certainly nothing could be more becoming to her soft, creamy complexion, and the natural tints of the thick, bright copper-coloured hair, which, curling over her brow, is twisted loosely into a great knot, lying low on the back of her head.

The conversation turning upon the peculiar structure of the rooms, Mrs. Reeves proposes to take you into the one innermost which is truly a curiosity. A very old cathedral glass partition opens on to a square and lofty room, used as an inner hall, with great velvet shields of china and brasses on its gold leather walls, and quaint old oak chairs, cabinets, and high old-fashioned clock. A portrait in sepia of Mrs. Reeves, done by Alfred Ward, hangs over a paneled door on the left. It was to this picture that Mr. Frederick Locker wrote the following lines: —

"Not mine to praise your eyes and wit,
Although your portrait here I view,
So what I may not say to you
I've said to it."

Opposite is a very wide, high door that opens into the oak-panelled room, which may well have been a banqueting hall of the last century. It is lighted from above, and each pane of glass has in its centre, in vivid colours, the initials of the royal personage who, if the coats of arms abounding everywhere are to be trusted, may have occupied this room over a hundred years ago. By the way, the harp is absent from these armorial bearings.

One entire side of the room is filled by a vast mirror, set in a magnificently carved oak frame, and supported on either side by colossal winged female figures, that are matched (and in the glass reflected) by the caryatides who appear to hold up the massive carvings above the door, which is

itself covered entirely by superb carvings of beast and bird, and laughing boys playing at Bacchus with great clusters of grapes. Round this unique room runs an oak paneling of about five feet in height, surmounted by a ledge, now decorated with trails of ivy, and above the oak cupboards are panels representing a boar hunt, and worth, it is said, a fabulous sum. But the glory of the room is the mantelpiece, reaching to the roof. It was probably once an altar piece, as the centre panel represents the Crucifixion. Two busts – one of Queen Elizabeth, the other of the Earl of Leicester – frown down on you from a great height, and do not please you half as well as a bronze Venus of Milo below. The hearth itself (of an incredibly old pattern, with heavy iron fender, which suggests a prison) has on either side two odd-looking figures, that are supposed to represent Joan of Arc and her keeper. He carries a knotted whip in one hand, and seems to look ferociously on poor Joan in her half-manly, half-feminine garb.

"I am very fond of these two," says Mrs. Reeves, looking affectionately at them, "and often dust their faces, but I am not at all fond of sitting in this room. I much prefer my sunny quarters upstairs, and these high carved oak chairs are uncomfortable to sit in, especially at dinner!"

But pleasant as it is, there is other business on hand, and you cannot linger over these beautiful antiquities; the afternoon is wearing on, and Mrs. Reeves leads the way to the drawing-rooms, which are also oddly shaped, and open one out of the other, like those downstairs; but those rooms are very different to look upon, and are, in your hostess's opinion, "much more cheery." You can step from the long windows on to a flower-filled balcony that looks up and down Grosvenor Street. The hangings of the first room are of yellow satin, of the second room pink; the furniture is merely of basket work, but made beautiful and comfortable by many soft cushions; and a long glass set in a frame of white woodwork, its low shelf covered with rare old yellow china and flowers, reflects the gold and cream leather walls, and the overmantel crammed with a lovely litter of china, pictures, and odds and ends, in the centre of which is a horseshoe. "Picked up by my boy, Phil," says Mrs. Reeves, as you examine it, "and we always say it has brought us luck."

But when you ask to see her writing-room – for there is not a sign of pen, ink, and paper to be seen on a modest white escritoire behind the door – she shakes her head and laughs.

"I have no writing-room and no particular table," she says, "indeed I can't say in the least how my books get written. I jot down anything that I especially observe, or think of, on a bit of paper, and when I have a great many pieces I sort them out, and usually pin them together in some sort of a sequence. At home, where I had an immense room to write in over the library, the boys used to say no one must speak to me if my 'authoress lock' were standing up over my forehead, but if I ever display it nowadays, nobody," she adds, ruefully, "is deterred by it! Often, just as I have settled down to do a good morning's work, and have perhaps finished a page, someone comes in and puts letters or account books on it, or my boy Phil rushes up and lays his air gun or his banjo on the table, or my husband brings in some little commission or a heap of notes to be answered for him. I always tell them," laughing, "that everyone combines to put out of sight the story which is being written, and often it is not touched again for a week; but my composition, when really begun, is very rapid, and my ideas seem to run out of my pen. At my old home they used to say I wrote the things that they thought, which was a good, lazy way of getting out of it."

This leads to the subject of her "old home," and Mrs. Reeves imparts some interesting details of her youthful days. She was born at Misterton, Somersetshire, in the house described in "Comin' thro' the Rye," and she has always most passionately loved it. Mrs. Reeves was one of twelve children, who spent the greater part of their time in outdoor sports and amusements, in which the girls were almost as proficient as the boys. Their father was a great martinet, and never permitted any encroachment on the regular lesson hours with their governess. "When I was only eight years old," says your hostess, "our grandmamma Buckingham (after whom I take my second Christian name) sent us a biography of famous persons, arranged alphabetically. I looked down the list to see if a Mathers were amongst

them. It was not, and I took a pencil, and made a bracket, writing in my name, Helen Mathers, novelist; so the ruling idea must have been in me early."

The colour of her hair was Helen Mathers's greatest trouble in her childhood. It was a rich red, and in the familiar home circle she was called "Carrots," to her great annoyance, until she was sixteen. She says: – "It gave me such genuine distress that before I was nine years old, I had written a story depicting the sufferings of a red-haired girl who wanted to marry a man who was in love with her golden-haired sister. I inscribed this in an old pocket-book, looking out the names and places in the *Times* each day, and afterwards, in agonies of shyness, I read it aloud to the assembled family, who received it with shouts of mirth!"

At the age of thirteen, she was sent to Chantry School, and, unfortunately for her, she was placed at once in the first class, consisting of girls many years older than herself. Always ardent and ambitious, she worked so hard that quite suddenly her health broke down, and she became deaf – an affliction which has partially remained to this day. No doubt this trouble drove her more into herself, and helped her to concentrate her thoughts on literature. She wrote and wrote incessantly for pure love of it, and before she was sixteen had completed, her poem, "The Token of the Silver Lily." This she gave to a friend of her family who was acquainted with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The great man read it, and sent her a message to the effect that, if she persevered, she bid fair at some future day to succeed. This highly delighted the girl, who was always working while the others played in the beautiful place to which her parents had removed when they left Misterton. This later home is described as "Penroses" in her late novel, "Adieu!" which previously ran as a serial in a monthly magazine.

Her first appearance in print is thus described: – "It was hay-making time, and everybody, boys and girls, children, servants, and all, were down in the hayfield, when someone brought me a shabby little halfpenny wrapper with the magic word 'Jersey' at the top. I gave a sort of whoop, and fled down the lawn and across the orchards, and into the bosom of my family like one possessed. 'Boys, girls!' I cried; 'it's *accepted*– it's here in *print*! Look at it!' And never did a prouder heart beat than the heart under my white frock that day for my first-born bantling of the pen. I had been yachting with my brother-in-law, Mr. Hamborough, a short time previously, with this result, that I wrote a sketch of him and his wife and the place, and, signing it 'N.' – short for 'Nell' – I took counsel with Mr. George Augustus Sala, whom I did not know in those days, but who was very kind in replying to me, and he despatched it to *Belgravia*. When it *did* appear Jersey was very angry, and declared it was libelled, and I should not have ventured to go over there again for a long while!"

About three years later she produced her first novel, "Comin' thro' the Rye." It proved a great success, and was rapidly translated into many languages; indeed, a copy in Sanscrit was sent to her. This work was written unknown to her family. "My poor father," says Mrs. Reeves, sadly, "I got him into the story, and though I did not mean to be unkind or disrespectful, I could not get him out again. I hardly drew a free breath for months afterwards, fearing someone would tell him I had written it, and that he would be grievously offended; but I was young and foolish, too young a great deal I often think to succeed, but it makes me feel a sort of Methuselah now."

A story is told that many years ago a very youthful writer supplemented a story of her own with several pages of this book, and wrote to Messrs. Tillotson, saying she had written the twin novel to "Comin' thro' the Rye," and would they buy it? The publishers told Mrs. Reeves of this application. She was much amused, and in high good humour wrote back to say that she had always understood twins appeared about the same time, and that she had never heard before of one arriving seven years after the other.

In 1876 Helen Mathers married Mr. Henry Reeves, the well-known surgeon and specialist on Orthopædics. He has been on the staff of the London Hospital for nearly twenty years, and he, too, is an author, but his works bear more stupendous and alarming names than those of his wife, such as "Human Morphology," "Bodily Deformities" – sad, significant title! But not only as the

skilful surgeon, the renowned specialist, the student, and author, is Henry Reeves known. There is another section of the world – amongst the poor and suffering, the over-worked clerk, the underpaid governess, the struggling artist, where his name like many another in his noble profession, is loved and revered, and where the word "fee" is never heard of, and the "left hand knoweth not what the right hand doeth." Did you not know all this from personal experience, it is almost to be read in the kind, benevolent face. His wife says, laughing, that "he is so unselfish, he never thinks of himself, and I have always to be looking after him to see that he gets even a meal in peace"; and she adds, in a low and tender tone, "but he is the kindest and best of husbands." They have but one child – "Phil" – a bright, handsome boy of fourteen. He is the idol of their hearts, and like quicksilver in his brightness. His mother says when he was only three, he was found sitting at her desk, wielding a pen with great vigour, and throwing much ink about, as he dipped his golden curls in the blots he was making. "What are you doing?" his mother asked. "Writing "Tory of a Sin,'" he said, with great dignity; and now that he is older he composes with great rapidity.

"He is at school now," says Mrs. Reeves, "and the house is like a tomb without him. If it were not for my needlework (my especial vanity) I could not get through the long weeks between his holidays. Children, flowers, needlework – these are my chief delights; and as I often have to do without the first two, my needle is often a great comfort to me."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.