

***ANNIE WOOD
BESANT***



AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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PREFACE.

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It is a difficult thing to tell the story of a life, and yet more difficult when that life is one's own. At the best, the telling has a savour of vanity, and the only excuse for the proceeding is that the life, being an average one, reflects many others, and in troublous times like ours may give the experience of many rather than of one. And so the autobiographer does his work because he thinks that, at the cost of some unpleasantness to himself, he may throw light on some of the typical problems that are vexing the souls of his contemporaries, and perchance may stretch out a helping hand to some brother who is struggling in the darkness, and so bring him cheer when despair has him in its grip. Since all of us, men and women of this restless and eager generation—surrounded by forces we dimly see but cannot as yet understand, discontented with old ideas and half afraid of new, greedy for the material results of the knowledge brought us by Science but looking askance at her agnosticism as regards the soul, fearful of superstition but still more fearful of atheism, turning from the husks of outgrown creeds but filled with desperate hunger for spiritual ideals—since all of us have the same anxieties, the same griefs, the same yearning hopes, the same passionate desire for knowledge, it may well be that the story of one may help all, and that the tale of one should that went out alone into the darkness and on the other side found light, that struggled through the Storm and on the other side

found Peace, may bring some ray of light and of peace into the darkness and the storm of other lives.

ANNIE BESANT.

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Chapter I

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On October 1, 1847, I am credibly informed, my baby eyes opened to the light of a London afternoon at 5.39.

A friendly astrologer has drawn for me the following chart, showing the position of the planets at this, to me fateful, moment; but I know nothing of astrology, so feel no wiser as I gaze upon my horoscope.

[Illustration omitted: Horoscope of Annie Besant.]

Keeping in view the way in which sun, moon, and planets influence the physical condition of the earth, there is nothing incongruous with the orderly course of nature in the view that they also influence the physical bodies of men, these being part of the physical earth, and largely moulded by its conditions. Any one who knows the characteristics ascribed to those who are born under the several signs of the Zodiac, may very easily pick out the different types among his own acquaintances, and he may then get them to go to some astrologer and find out under what signs they were severally born. He will very quickly discover that two men of completely opposed types are not born under the same sign, and the invariability of the concurrence will convince him that law, and not chance, is at work. We are born into earthly life under certain conditions, just as we were physically affected by them pre-natally, and these will have their bearing on our subsequent physical evolution. At the most, astrology, as it is now practised, can only calculate the interaction between these physical conditions

at any given moment, and the conditions brought to them by a given person whose general constitution and natal condition are known. It cannot say what the person will do, nor what will happen to him, but only what will be the physical district, so to speak, in which he will find himself, and the impulses that will play upon him from external nature and from his own body. Even on those matters modern astrology is not quite reliable—judging from the many blunders made—or else its professors are very badly instructed; but that there is a real science of astrology I have no doubt, and there are some men who are past masters in it.

It has always been somewhat of a grievance to me that I was born in London, "within the sound of Bow Bells," when three-quarters of my blood and all my heart are Irish. My dear mother was of purest Irish descent, and my father was Irish on his mother's side, though belonging to the Devonshire Woods on his father's. The Woods were yeomen of the sturdy English type, farming their own land in honest, independent fashion. Of late years they seem to have developed more in the direction of brains, from the time, in fact, that Matthew Wood became Mayor of London town, fought Queen Caroline's battles against her most religious and gracious royal husband, aided the Duke of Kent with no niggard hand, and received a baronetcy for his services from the Duke of Kent's royal daughter. Since then they have given England a Lord Chancellor in the person of the gentle-hearted and pure-living Lord Hatherley, while others have distinguished themselves in various ways in the service of their country. But I feel playfully inclined to

grudge the English blood they put into my father's veins, with his Irish mother, his Galway birth, and his Trinity College, Dublin, education. For the Irish tongue is musical in my ear, and the Irish nature dear to my heart. Only in Ireland is it that if you stop to ask a worn-out ragged woman the way to some old monument, she will say: "Sure, then, my darlin', it's just up the hill and round the corner, and then any one will tell you the way. And it's there you'll see the place where the blessed Saint Patrick set his foot, and his blessing be on yer." Old women as poor as she in other nations would never be as bright and as friendly and as garrulous. And where, out of Ireland, will you see a whole town crowd into a station to say good-bye to half a dozen emigrants, till the platform is a heaving mass of men and women, struggling, climbing over each other for a last kiss, crying, keening, laughing, all in a breath, till all the air is throbbing and there's a lump in your throat and tears in your eyes as the train steams out? Where, out of Ireland, will you be bumping along the streets on an outside car, beside a taciturn Jarvey, who, on suddenly discovering that you are shadowed by "Castle" spies, becomes loquaciously friendly, and points out everything that he thinks will interest you? Blessings on the quick tongues and warm hearts, on the people so easy to lead, so hard to drive. And blessings on the ancient land once inhabited by mighty men of wisdom, that in later times became the Island of Saints, and shall once again be the Island of Sages, when the Wheel turns round.

My maternal grandfather was a typical Irishman, much admired by me and somewhat feared also, in the childish

days. He belonged to a decayed Irish family, the Maurices, and in a gay youth, with a beautiful wife as light-hearted as himself, he had merrily run through what remained to him in the way of fortune. In his old age, with abundant snow-white hair, he still showed the hot Irish blood on the lightest provocation, stormily angry for a moment and easily appeased. My mother was the second daughter in a large family, in a family that grew more numerous as pounds grew fewer, and she was adopted by a maiden aunt, a quaint memory of whom came through my mother's childhood into mine, and had its moulding effect on both our characters. This maiden aunt was, as are most Irish folk of decayed families, very proud of her family tree with its roots in the inevitable "kings." Her particular kings were the "seven kings of France"—the "Milesian kings"—and the tree grew up a parchment, in all its impressive majesty, over the mantelpiece of their descendant's modest drawing-room. This heraldic monster was regarded with deep respect by child Emily, a respect in no wise deserved, I venture to suppose, by the disreputable royalties of whom she was a fortunately distant twig. Chased out of France, doubtless for cause shown, they had come over the sea to Ireland, and there continued their reckless plundering lives. But so strangely turns the wheel of time that these ill-doing and barbarous scamps became a kind of moral thermometer in the home of the gentle Irish lady in the early half of the present century. For my mother has told me that when she had committed some act of childish naughtiness, her aunt would say, looking gravely over her spectacles at the small culprit, "Emily, your conduct is unworthy of the descendant

of the seven kings of France." And Emily, with her sweet grey Irish eyes and her curling masses of raven black hair, would cry in penitent shame over her unworthiness, with some vague idea that those royal, and to her very real, ancestors would despise her small, sweet, rosebud self, so wholly unworthy of their disreputable majesties.

Thus those shadowy forms influenced her in childhood, and exercised over her a power that made her shrink from aught that was unworthy, petty or mean. To her the lightest breath of dishonour was to be avoided at any cost of pain, and she wrought into me, her only daughter, that same proud and passionate horror at any taint of shame or merited disgrace. To the world always a brave front was to be kept, and a stainless reputation, for suffering might be borne but dishonour never. A gentlewoman might starve, but she must not run in debt; she might break her heart, but it must be with a smile on her face. I have often thought that the training in this reticence and pride of honour was a strange preparation for my stormy, public, much attacked and slandered life; and certain it is that this inwrought shrinking from all criticism that touched personal purity and personal honour added a keenness of suffering to the fronting of public odium that none can appreciate who has not been trained in some similar school of dignified self-respect. And yet perhaps there was another result from it that in value outweighed the added pain: it was the stubbornly resistant feeling that rose and inwardly asserted its own purity in face of foulest lie, and turning scornful face against the foe, too proud either to justify itself or to defend, said to itself in its own heart, when condemnation was

loudest: "I am not what you think me, and your verdict does not change my own self. You cannot make me vile whatever you think of me, and I will never, in my own eyes, be that which you deem me to be now." And the very pride became a shield against degradation, for, however lost my public reputation, I could never bear to become sullied in my own sight—and that is a thing not without its use to a woman cut off, as I was at one time, from home, and friends, and Society. So peace to the maiden aunt's ashes, and to those of her absurd kings, for I owe them something after all. And I keep grateful memory of that unknown grand-aunt, for what she did in training my dear mother, the tenderest, sweetest, proudest, purest of women. It is well to be able to look back to a mother who served as ideal of all that was noblest and dearest during childhood and girlhood, whose face made the beauty of home, and whose love was both sun and shield. No other experience in life could quite make up for missing the perfect tie between mother and child—a tie that in our case never relaxed and never weakened. Though her grief at my change of faith and consequent social ostracism did much to hasten her death-hour, it never brought a cloud between our hearts; though her pleading was the hardest of all to face in later days, and brought the bitterest agony, it made no gulf between us, it cast no chill upon our mutual love. And I look back at her to-day with the same loving gratitude as ever encircled her to me in her earthly life. I have never met a woman more selflessly devoted to those she loved, more passionately contemptuous of all that was mean or base, more keenly sensitive on every question of honour, more iron in will,

more sweet in tenderness, than the mother who made my girlhood sunny as dreamland, who guarded me, until my marriage, from every touch of pain that she could ward off or bear for me, who suffered more in every trouble that touched me in later life than I did myself, and who died in the little house I had taken for our new home in Norwood, worn out, ere old age touched her, by sorrow, poverty, and pain, in May, 1874.

My earliest personal recollections are of a house and garden that we lived in when I was three and four years of age, situated in Grove Road, St. John's Wood. I can remember my mother hovering round the dinner-table to see that all was bright for the home-coming husband; my brother—two years older than myself—and I watching "for papa"; the loving welcome, the game of romps that always preceded the dinner of the elder folks. I can remember on the 1st of October, 1851, jumping up in my little cot, and shouting out triumphantly: "Papa! mamma! I am four years old!" and the grave demand of my brother, conscious of superior age, at dinner-time: "May not Annie have a knife to-day, as she is four years old?"

It was a sore grievance during that same year, 1851, that I was not judged old enough to go to the Great Exhibition, and I have a faint memory of my brother consolingly bringing me home one of those folding pictured strips that are sold in the streets, on which were imaged glories that I longed only the more to see. Far-away, dusky, trivial memories, these. What a pity it is that a baby cannot notice, cannot observe, cannot remember, and so throw light on the fashion of the dawning of the external world on the

human consciousness. If only we could remember how things looked when they were first imaged on the retinae; what we felt when first we became conscious of the outer world; what the feeling was as faces of father and mother grew out of the surrounding chaos and became familiar things, greeted with a smile, lost with a cry; if only memory would not become a mist when in later years we strive to throw our glances backward into the darkness of our infancy, what lessons we might learn to help our stumbling psychology, how many questions might be solved whose answers we are groping for in the West in vain.

The next scene that stands out clearly against the background of the past is that of my father's death-bed. The events which led to his death I know from my dear mother. He had never lost his fondness for the profession for which he had been trained, and having many medical friends, he would now and then accompany them on their hospital rounds, or share with them the labours of the dissecting-room. It chanced that during the dissection of the body of a person who had died of rapid consumption, my father cut his finger against the edge of the breast-bone. The cut did not heal easily, and the finger became swollen and inflamed. "I would have that finger off, Wood, if I were you," said one of the surgeons, a day or two afterwards, on seeing the state of the wound. But the others laughed at the suggestion, and my father, at first inclined to submit to the amputation, was persuaded to "leave Nature alone."

About the middle of August, 1852, he got wet through, riding on the top of an omnibus, and the wetting resulted in a severe cold, which "settled on his chest." One of the most

eminent doctors of the day, as able as he was rough in manner, was called to see him. He examined him carefully, sounded his lungs, and left the room followed by my mother. "Well?" she asked, scarcely anxious as to the answer, save as it might worry her husband to be kept idly at home. "You must keep up his spirits," was the thoughtless answer. "He is in a galloping consumption; you will not have him with you six weeks longer." The wife staggered back, and fell like a stone on the floor. But love triumphed over agony, and half an hour later she was again at her husband's side, never to leave it again for ten minutes at a time, night or day, till he was lying with closed eyes asleep in death.

I was lifted on to the bed to "say good-bye to dear papa" on the day before his death, and I remember being frightened at his eyes which looked so large, and his voice which sounded so strange, as he made me promise always to be "a very good girl to darling mamma, as papa was going right away." I remember insisting that "papa should kiss Cherry," a doll given me on my birthday, three days before, by his direction, and being removed, crying and struggling, from the room. He died on the following day, October 5th, and I do not think that my elder brother and I—who were staying at our maternal grandfather's—went to the house again until the day of the funeral. With the death, my mother broke down, and when all was over they carried her senseless from the room. I remember hearing afterwards how, when she recovered her senses, she passionately insisted on being left alone, and locked herself into her room for the night; and how on the following morning her mother, at last persuading her to open the

door, started back at the face she saw with the cry: "Good God, Emily! your hair is white!" It was even so; her hair, black, glossy and abundant, which, contrasting with her large grey eyes, had made her face so strangely attractive, had turned grey in that night of agony, and to me my mother's face is ever framed in exquisite silver bands of hair as white as the driven unsullied snow.

I have heard that the love between my father and mother was a very beautiful thing, and it most certainly stamped her character for life. He was keenly intellectual and splendidly educated; a mathematician and a good classical scholar, thoroughly master of French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, with a smattering of Hebrew and Gaelic, the treasures of ancient and of modern literature were his daily household delight. Nothing pleased him so well as to sit with his wife, reading aloud to her while she worked; now translating from some foreign poet, now rolling forth melodiously the exquisite cadences of "Queen Mab." Student of philosophy as he was, he was deeply and steadily sceptical; and a very religious relative has told me that he often drove her from the room by his light, playful mockery of the tenets of the Christian faith. His mother and sister were strict Roman Catholics, and near the end forced a priest into his room, but the priest was promptly ejected by the wrath of the dying man, and by the almost fierce resolve of the wife that no messenger of the creed he detested should trouble her darling at the last.

Deeply read in philosophy, he had outgrown the orthodox beliefs of his day, and his wife, who loved him too much to criticise, was wont to reconcile her own piety and his

scepticism by holding that "women ought to be religious," while men had a right to read everything and think as they would, provided that they were upright and honourable in their lives. But the result of his liberal and unorthodox thought was to insensibly modify and partially rationalise her own beliefs, and she put on one side as errors the doctrines of eternal punishment, the vicarious atonement, the infallibility of the Bible, the equality of the Son with the Father in the Trinity, and other orthodox beliefs, and rejoiced in her later years in the writings of such men as Jowett, Colenso, and Stanley. The last named, indeed, was her ideal Christian gentleman, suave, polished, broad-minded, devout in a stately way. The baldness of a typical Evangelical service outraged her taste as much as the crudity of Evangelical dogmas outraged her intellect; she liked to feel herself a Christian in a dignified and artistic manner, and to be surrounded by solemn music and splendid architecture when she "attended Divine service." Familiarity with celestial personages was detestable to her, and she did her duty of saluting them in a courtly and reverent fashion. Westminster Abbey was her favourite church, with its dim light and shadowy distances; there in a carven stall, with choristers chanting in solemn rhythm, with the many-coloured glories of the painted windows repeating themselves on upspringing arch and clustering pillars, with the rich harmonies of the pealing organ throbbing up against screen and monument, with the ashes of the mighty dead around, and all the stately memories of the past inwrought into the very masonry, there Religion appeared to

her to be intellectually dignified and emotionally satisfactory.

To me, who took my religion in strenuous fashion, this dainty and well-bred piety seemed perilously like Laodicean lukewarmness, while my headlong vigour of conviction and practice often jarred on her as alien from the delicate balance and absence of extremes that should characterise the gentlewoman. She was of the old *régime*; I of the stuff from which fanatics are made: and I have often thought, in looking back, that she must have had on her lips many a time unspoken a phrase that dropped from them when she lay a-dying: "My little one, you have never made me sad or sorry except for your own sake; you have always been too religious." And then she murmured to herself: "Yes, it has been darling Annie's only fault; she has always been too religious." Methinks that, as the world judges, the dying voice spake truly, and the dying eyes saw with a real insight. For though I was then kneeling beside her bed, heretic and outcast, the heart of me was religious in its very fervour of repudiation of a religion, and in its rebellious uprising against dogmas that crushed the reason and did not satisfy the soul. I went out into the darkness alone, not because religion was too good for me, but because it was not good enough; it was too meagre, too commonplace, too little exacting, too bound up with earthly interests, too calculating in its accommodations to social conventionalities. The Roman Catholic Church, had it captured me, as it nearly did, would have sent me on some mission of danger and sacrifice and utilised me as a martyr;

the Church established by law transformed me into an unbeliever and an antagonist.

For as a child I was mystical and imaginative religious to the very finger-tips, and with a certain faculty for seeing visions and dreaming dreams. This faculty is not uncommon with the Keltic races, and makes them seem "superstitious" to more solidly-built peoples. Thus, on the day of my father's funeral, my mother sat with vacant eyes and fixed pallid face—the picture comes back to me yet, it so impressed my childish imagination—following the funeral service, stage after stage, and suddenly, with the words, "It is all over!" fell back fainting. She said afterwards that she had followed the hearse, had attended the service, had walked behind the coffin to the grave. Certain it is that a few weeks later she determined to go to the Kensal Green Cemetery, where the body of her husband had been laid, and went thither with a relative; he failed to find the grave, and while another of the party went in search of an official to identify the spot, my mother said, "If you will take me to the chapel where the first part of the service was read, I will find the grave." The idea seemed to her friend, of course, to be absurd; but he would not cross the newly-made widow, so took her to the chapel. She looked round, left the chapel door, and followed the path along which the corpse had been borne till she reached the grave, where she was quietly standing when the caretaker arrived to point it out. The grave is at some distance from the chapel, and is not on one of the main roads; it had nothing on it to mark it, save the wooden peg with the number, and this would be no help to identification at a distance since all the graves are thus

marked, and at a little way off these pegs are not visible. How she found the grave remained a mystery in the family, as no one believed her straightforward story that she had been present at the funeral. With my present knowledge the matter is simple enough, for I now know that the consciousness can leave the body, take part in events going on at a distance, and, returning, impress on the physical brain what it has experienced. The very fact that she asked to be taken to the chapel is significant, showing that she was picking up a memory of a previous going from that spot to the grave; she could only find the grave if she started from *the place* from which she had started before. *Another proof of this* ultra-physical capacity was given a few months later, when her infant son, who had been pining himself ill for "papa," was lying one night in her arms. On the next morning she said to her sister: "Alf is going to die." The child had no definite disease, but was wasting away, and it was argued to her that the returning spring would restore the health lost during the winter. "No," was her answer. "He was lying asleep in my arms last night, and William" (her husband) "came to me and said that he wanted Alf with him, but that I might keep the other two." In vain she was assured that she had been dreaming, that it was quite natural that she should dream about her husband, and that her anxiety for the child had given the dream its shape. Nothing would persuade her that she had not seen her husband, or that the information he had given her was not true. So it was no matter of surprise to her when in the following March her arms were empty, and a waxen form lay lifeless in the baby's cot.

My brother and I were allowed to see him just before he was placed in his coffin; I can see him still, so white and beautiful, with a black spot in the middle of the fair, waxen forehead, and I remember the deadly cold which startled me when I was told to kiss my little brother. It was the first time that I had touched Death. That black spot made a curious impression on me, and long afterwards, asking what had caused it, I was told that at the moment after his death my mother had passionately kissed the baby brow. Pathetic thought, that the mother's kiss of farewell should have been marked by the first sign of corruption on the child's face!

I do not mention these stories because they are in any fashion remarkable or out of the way, but only to show that the sensitiveness to impressions other than physical ones, that was a marked feature in my own childhood, was present also in the family to which I belonged. For the physical nature is inherited from parents, and sensitiveness to psychic impressions is a property of the physical body; in our family, as in so many Irish ones, belief in "ghosts" of all descriptions was general, and my mother has told me of the banshee that she had heard wailing when the death-hour of one of the family was near. To me in my childhood, elves and fairies of all sorts were very real things, and my dolls were as really children as I was myself a child. Punch and Judy were living entities, and the tragedy in which they bore part cost me many an agony of tears; to this day I can remember running away when I heard the squawk of the coming Punch, and burying my head in the pillows that I might shut out the sound of the blows and the cry of the ill-used baby. All the objects about me were to me alive, the

flowers that I kissed as much as the kitten I petted, and I used to have a splendid time "making believe" and living out all sorts of lovely stories among my treasured and so-called inanimate playthings. But there was a more serious side to this dreamful fancy when it joined hands with religion.

Chapter II

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And now began my mother's time of struggle and of anxiety. Hitherto, since her marriage, she had known no money troubles, for her husband was earning a good income; he was apparently vigorous and well: no thought of anxiety clouded their future. When he died, he believed that he left his wife and children safe, at least, from pecuniary distress. It was not so. I know nothing of the details, but the outcome of all was that nothing was left for the widow and children, save a trifle of ready money. The resolve to which my mother came was characteristic. Two of her husband's relatives, Western and Sir William Wood, offered to educate her son at a good city school, and to start him in commercial life, using their great city influence to push him forward. But the young lad's father and mother had talked of a different future for their eldest boy; he was to go to a public school, and then to the University, and was to enter one of the "learned professions"—to take orders, the mother wished; to go to the Bar, the father hoped. On his death-bed there was nothing more earnestly urged by my father than that Harry should receive the best possible education, and the widow was resolute to fulfil that last wish. In her eyes, a city school was not "the best possible education," and the Irish pride rebelled against the idea of her son not being "a University man." Many were the lectures poured out on the young widow's head about her "foolish pride," especially by the female members of the Wood family; and her persistence in

her own way caused a considerable alienation between herself and them. But Western and William, though half-disapproving, remained her friends, and lent many a helping hand to her in her first difficult struggles. After much cogitation, she resolved that the boy should be educated at Harrow, where the fees are comparatively low to lads living in the town, and that he should go thence to Cambridge or to Oxford, as his tastes should direct. A bold scheme for a penniless widow, but carried out to the letter; for never dwelt in a delicate body a more resolute mind and will than that of my dear mother.

In a few months' time—during which we lived, poorly enough, in Richmond Terrace, Clapham, close to her father and mother—to Harrow, then, she betook herself, into lodgings over a grocer's shop, and set herself to look for a house. This grocer was a very pompous man, fond of long words, and patronised the young widow exceedingly, and one day my mother related with much amusement how he had told her that she was sure to get on if she worked hard. "Look at me!" he said, swelling visibly with importance; "I was once a poor boy, without a penny of my own, and now I am a comfortable man, and have my submarine villa to go to every evening." That "submarine villa" was an object of amusement when we passed it in our walks for many a long day.

"There is Mr. ——'s submarine villa," some one would say, laughing: and I, too, used to laugh merrily, because my elders did, though my understanding of the difference between suburban and submarine was on a par with that of the honest grocer.

My mother had fortunately found a boy, whose parents were glad to place him in her charge, of about the age of her own son, to educate with him; and by this means she was able to pay for a tutor, to prepare the two boys for school. The tutor had a cork leg, which was a source of serious trouble to me, for it stuck out straight behind when we knelt down to family prayers—conduct which struck me as irreverent and unbecoming, but which I always felt a desire to imitate. After about a year my mother found a house which she thought would suit her scheme, namely, to obtain permission from Dr. Vaughan, the then head-master of Harrow, to take some boys into her house, and so gain means of education for her own son. Dr. Vaughan, who must have been won by the gentle, strong, little woman, from that time forth became her earnest friend and helper; and to the counsel and active assistance both of himself and of his wife, was due much of the success that crowned her toil. He made only one condition in granting the permission she asked, and that was, that she should also have in her house one of the masters of the school, so that the boys should not suffer from the want of a house-tutor. This condition, of course, she readily accepted, and the arrangement lasted for ten years, until after her son had left school for Cambridge.

The house she took is now, I am sorry to say, pulled down, and replaced by a hideous red-brick structure. It was very old and rambling, rose-covered in front, ivy-covered behind; it stood on the top of Harrow Hill, between the church and the school, and had once been the vicarage of the parish, but the vicar had left it because it was so far

removed from the part of the village where all his work lay. The drawing-room opened by an old-fashioned half-window, half-door—which proved a constant source of grief to me, for whenever I had on a new frock I always tore it on the bolt as I flew through—into a large garden which sloped down one side of the hill, and was filled with the most delightful old trees, fir and laurel, may, mulberry, hazel, apple, pear, and damson, not to mention currant and gooseberry bushes innumerable, and large strawberry beds spreading down the sunny slopes. There was not a tree there that I did not climb, and one, a widespreading Portugal laurel, was my private country house. I had there my bedroom and my sitting-rooms, my study, and my larder. The larder was supplied by the fruit-trees, from which I was free to pick as I would, and in the study I would sit for hours with some favourite book—Milton's "Paradise Lost" the chief favourite of all. The birds must often have felt startled, when from the small swinging form perching on a branch, came out in childish tones the "Thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers," of Milton's stately and sonorous verse. I liked to personify Satan, and to declaim the grand speeches of the hero-rebel, and many a happy hour did I pass in Milton's heaven and hell, with for companions Satan and "the Son," Gabriel and Abdiel. Then there was a terrace running by the side of the churchyard, always dry in the wettest weather, and bordered by an old wooden fence, over which clambered roses of every shade; never was such a garden for roses as that of the Old Vicarage. At the end of the terrace was a little summer-house, and in this a trap-door in the fence, which swung open and displayed one of

the fairest views in England. Sheer from your feet downwards went the hill, and then far below stretched the wooded country till your eye reached the towers of Windsor Castle, far away on the horizon. It was the view at which Byron was never tired of gazing, as he lay on the flat tombstone close by—Byron's tomb, as it is still called—of which he wrote:—

"Again I behold where for hours I have pondered,
As reclining, at eve, on yon tombstone I lay,
Or round the steep brow of the churchyard I
wandered,
To catch the last gleam of the sun's setting ray."

Reader mine, if ever you go to Harrow, ask permission to enter the old garden, and try the effect of that sudden burst of beauty, as you swing back the small trap-door at the terrace end.

Into this house we moved on my eighth birthday, and for eleven years it was "home" to me, left always with regret, returned to always with joy.

Almost immediately afterwards I left my mother for the first time; for one day, visiting a family who lived close by, I found a stranger sitting in the drawing-room, a lame lady with a strong face, which softened marvellously as she smiled at the child who came dancing in; she called me to her presently, and took me on her lap and talked to me, and on the following day our friend came to see my mother, to ask if she would let me go away and be educated with this lady's niece, coming home for the holidays regularly, but leaving my education in her hands. At first my mother would

not hear of it, for she and I scarcely ever left each other; my love for her was an idolatry, hers for me a devotion. (A foolish little story, about which I was unmercifully teased for years, marked that absolute idolatry of her, which has not yet faded from my heart. In tenderest rallying one day of the child who trotted after her everywhere, content to sit, or stand, or wait, if only she might touch hand or dress of "mamma," she said: "Little one" (the name by which she always called me), "if you cling to mamma in this way, I must really get a string and tie you to my apron, and how will you like that?" "O mamma, darling," came the fervent answer, "do let it be in a knot." And, indeed, the tie of love between us was so tightly knotted that nothing ever loosened it till the sword of Death cut that which pain and trouble never availed to slacken in the slightest degree.) But it was urged upon her that the advantages of education offered were such as no money could purchase for me; that it would be a disadvantage for me to grow up in a houseful of boys—and, in truth, I was as good a cricketer and climber as the best of them—that my mother would soon be obliged to send me to school, unless she accepted an offer which gave me every advantage of school without its disadvantages. At last she yielded, and it was decided that Miss Marryat, on returning home, should take me with her.

Miss Marryat—the favourite sister of Captain Marryat, the famous novelist—was a maiden lady of large means. She had nursed her brother through the illness that ended in his death, and had been living with her mother at Wimbledon Park. On her mother's death she looked round for work which would make her useful in the world, and finding that

one of her brothers had a large family of girls, she offered to take charge of one of them, and to educate her thoroughly. Chancing to come to Harrow, my good fortune threw me in her way, and she took a fancy to me and thought she would like to teach two little girls rather than one. Hence her offer to my mother.

Miss Marryat had a perfect genius for teaching, and took in it the greatest delight. From time to time she added another child to our party, sometimes a boy, sometimes a girl. At first, with Amy Marryat and myself, there was a little boy, Walter Powys, son of a clergyman with a large family, and him she trained for some years, and then sent him on to school admirably prepared. She chose "her children"—as she loved to call us—in very definite fashion. Each must be gently born and gently trained, but in such position that the education freely given should be a relief and aid to a slender parental purse. It was her delight to seek out and aid those on whom poverty presses most heavily, when the need for education for the children weighs on the proud and the poor. "Auntie" we all called her, for she thought "Miss Marryat" seemed too cold and stiff. She taught us everything herself except music, and for this she had a master, practising us in composition, in recitation, in reading aloud English and French, and later, German, devoting herself to training us in the soundest, most thorough fashion. No words of mine can tell how much I owe her, not only of knowledge, but of that love of knowledge which has remained with me ever since as a constant spur to study.

Her method of teaching may be of interest to some, who desire to train children with least pain, and the most

enjoyment to the little ones themselves. First, we never used a spelling-book—that torment of the small child—nor an English grammar. But we wrote letters, telling of the things we had seen in our walks, or told again some story we had read; these childish compositions she would read over with us, correcting all faults of spelling, of grammar, of style, of cadence; a clumsy sentence would be read aloud, that we might hear how unmusical it sounded, an error in observation or expression pointed out. Then, as the letters recorded what we had seen the day before, the faculty of observation was drawn out and trained. "Oh, dear! I have nothing to say!" would come from a small child, hanging over a slate. "Did you not go out for a walk yesterday?" Auntie would question. "Yes," would be sighed out; "but there's nothing to say about it." "Nothing to say! And you walked in the lanes for an hour and saw nothing, little No-eyes? You must use your eyes better to-day." Then there was a very favourite "lesson," which proved an excellent way of teaching spelling. We used to write out lists of all the words we could think of which sounded the same but were differently spelt. Thus: "key, quay," "knight, night," and so on, and great was the glory of the child who found the largest number. Our French lessons—as the German later—included reading from the very first. On the day on which we began German we began reading Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," and the verbs given to us to copy out were those that had occurred in the reading. We learned much by heart, but always things that in themselves were worthy to be learned. We were never given the dry questions and answers which lazy teachers so much affect. We were taught history by one