

Author: Mary Elizabeth Hawker (Ps. Lanoe Falconer) (1848-1908)

Text type: Prose

Date of composition: 1907

Editions: 1907, 2008

Source text:

Falconer, Lanoe. 1907. *Old Hampshire Vignettes*. London: Macmillan & Co.

e-text

Access and transcription: November 2012

Number of words: 18,870

Dialect represented: Hampshire

Produced by Jorge López López

Revised by María F. García-Bermejo Giner

Copyright © 2012– DING, The Salamanca Corpus, Universidad de Salamanca

——
OLD HAMPSHIRE
VIGNETTES

BY

LANOE FALCONER

AUTHOR OF 'MADEMOISELLE DE IXE' AND 'CECILIA DE NOEL'

London

MACMILLAN AND CO., Limited

NEW YORK : THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1907

All rights reserved

[NP]

GLASGOW : PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS BY
ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.

[NP]

PETER JAMES DUFF HAWKER

"These to his memory"

[NP]

NOTE

THE thanks of the author are due to Mr. F. Greenwood and Mr. C. Shorter for permission to republish some of these papers.

[ix]

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I	
THE VALLEY,- - - - -	1

II

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

GRANNY BOLTER, - - - - - 3

III

HARKAWAY, - - - - - 9

IV

BETTY LANE, - - - - - 23

V

OLD CASTLEMAN, - - - - - 26

[x]

PAGE

VI

THE POSTMAN, - - - - - 28

VII

MR. FARLEY, - - - - - 31

VIII

DANIELS, - - - - - 34

IX

OLD JACK, - - - - - 38

X

GRANNY LOVELOCK, - - - - - 41

XI

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

FINMORE, - - - - - 45

XII

THE SAILOR, - - - - - 48

XIII

THE LITTLE SHOP, - - - - - 53

[xi]

PAGE

XIV

MRS. TALLY, - - - - - 56

XV

OLD THOMAS, - - - - - 62

XVI

THE FARTHING, - - - - - 67

XVII

LITTLE JEFF, - - - - - 72

XVIII

GRANNY HOBBS, - - - - - 75

XIX

JANE AND ME, - - - - - 79

X

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

SNARES, - - - - - 87

XXI

MRS. MALLET, - - - - - 92

[xii]

PAGE

XXII

MRS. STANNARD, - - - - - 105

XXIII

LADY ANN, - - - - - 112

[1]

I

THE VALLEY

NOT far from the madding crowd lay the valley as we remember it. A journey of barely two hours divided it from London, but the traveller thence, in that brief time, passed from one world to another. He felt the change as he stepped from the train, not merely in the crystalline air, the smoke-untarnished green, the silence broken only by soft pastoral noises. These it had in common with other country places a thousand times more beautiful, but few ever breathed such ineffable repose as this shallow, low-rimmed valley, fed by streams “glassy, cool, and translucent,” as those in which Sabrina knotted “the loose train of her amber-dropping hair.” These waters and the goodly trees they nourished

[2]

were all it had to boast of. The amateur of scenery might bewail the absence of bold outline or of wide outlook, but perhaps for that very reason did the victim of town fever love it and steep himself with rapture in its sleepy calm. The voices of the sea or of the mountains never sounded there, nor any that stir to daring deeds or strenuous effort. "Peace" was the perpetual lullaby of this lowly land, which even the winter winds visited not too roughly and summer half buried in luxuriant bloom. As rest after storm it was perfect; but what of its influence on those who lived and died within its borders? It bred a kindly but unambitious race, noted, so strangers tell us, for their dulness, their apathy, their capacity for doing nothing—invaluable qualities in those times, the source of future sanity and health perhaps, and destined, let us hope, to furnish presently an inestimable drag to the headlong career of the Midlands and the North.

[3]

II

GRANNY BOLTER

OVER Granny Bolter's memory, as over herself, conjecture is still at work and at fault, whilst conflicting testimony leaves us uncertain as to whether she was rich or poor, sick or well, a saintly martyr or an arrant hypocrite.

In appearance Granny Bolter was handsome and refined, with well-cut features and fine spun hair rippling in white curls about her cap. Her manner is best pictured by the word genteel, and genteel as well as pious was the plaintive tone of her whole demeanour and conversation. In language barely tinged by the dialect of the valley, she discoursed with admirable fluency and much dramatic play of look and gesture. These arts of expression were used, though used in vain, to describe the strange agonies

[4]

from which she suffered, but which, as she assured us, no tongue could tell. Her only wonder was that she remained alive, and this amazement was shared by all who knew her and her singular method of self-treatment.

“If you please, mum, Mrs. Bolter is took very bad, and would you kindly let her have a piece of plum cake?”

Pork was another favourite remedy; she partook of it largely without fear, and, what is more remarkable, without regret; and, indeed, her system was so far justified by experience that the only fare her inexplicable constitution ever seriously resented was a surfeit of tinned lobster. By that, indeed, it was rudely shaken; she was declared by her housemates to be dying, but as this was a matter of monthly occurrence, perhaps it was not the fault of the lobster after all.

With a diet of this kind, it will be easily understood that she required a good deal of stimulus. At one bountiful house in the neighbourhood the butler was heard to exclaim, with some anxiety, that “he hoped the cask of Tarragona might outlast the old

[5]

lady!” But it is probable that the contents of this cask, with the wine and spirits supplied by other generous persons, cheered the fainting spirits of more than Granny Bolter. This aged invalid was the central figure in a very unpleasing family group, who, for one thing, proved—as a striking exception is said to prove—the rule of cleanliness in the valley. There was Ada, her pretty granddaughter, who had not time to do anything, not even to bind up the luxuriant hair which often rolled in confusion about her shoulders. There were Ada's two little children, begrimed with dirt and tears, and usually stamping and screaming at their mother. There was Ada's husband, a stranger in the valley, foolishly imported there by Ada herself, not usually to be seen in afternoon visits, but frankly described by his wife and her grandmother as a man of evil temper and selfish

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

ways. All these were supposed to consume so large a share of the good things presented to Granny Bolter that when they withdrew to a distant town there was much rejoicing among her friends. An excellent woman was hired

[6]

to take their place, and wait on Granny Bolter as they had never waited. The cottage was scrubbed and whitewashed. Granny herself was no less embellished, and, nourished by duly served and well-cooked meals, showed signs of gaining flesh and even colour. Unfortunately, this reformation was more appreciated by Granny's visitors than by herself. The advantages were, in her eyes, entirely outweighed by one serious drawback, on which she dilated with all her accustomed eloquence and pathos. It was want of company. The nurse, unlike Ada, was too much addicted to cooking and scrubbing to be constantly chatting with Granny Bolter; and on Sundays the nurse's husband, a hale young man, preferred spending his holiday tête-à tête with his wife to sitting beside Granny's bedside. The result was a dulness that appeared more intolerable than the physical torments which no words could depict. It drove Granny Bolter to a desperate resolution, the very mention of which struck the hearers with dismay.

At Underton, a small town about six miles distant, a daughter of Granny Bolter

[7]

had long been settled. There she lived in a very cramped abode, with a husband addicted to drink, and a large and lively family of small children. This was the cheerful circle in which Granny now fervently desired to end her days.

“There,” she protested, without fear of contradiction, “there I should have plenty of company.” And there was still another allurements, of which she spoke with glistening eyes. “They have a nice fat pig, and in just about a week it will be ready to kill.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

But all this on the lips of so frail a sufferer, who could hardly sit up while her bed was made, sounded like a beautiful but feverish dream, till a crude reality was imparted to the situation by the arrival of her daughter and son-in-law with intent to carry out her wishes. In discouragement of what appeared so dangerous a step, they were informed that the contributions which had hitherto supported her would be discontinued if she left the village. Their dignified rejoinder, that she was quite independent of such assistance, startled all but those—liars and slanderers she would

[8]

have dubbed them—who spoke of her as a lady of ample means.

There still remained the apparently insuperable difficulty of her removal. Its accomplishment, simple as it was unexpected, forms the last in that coruscation of surprises with which her career dramatically closes. Granny Bolter rose from her bed, ate an excellent dinner, and then in a fly drove over to Underton, with no more evil effects than the nervous shock inflicted on the nurse and other spectators of her flight.

With this fell the curtain, and the village knew her no more; nor, indeed, did Underton know her very long, for some weeks afterwards we learned by accident that our poor old friend was dead and buried. Concerning her decease her relatives are reserved. Its immediate cause had not been made plain; and, whether she died of too much company or too much pig, is part of that mystery which will never be dispelled.

[9]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

THOUGH bandy-legged and with a faint resemblance to a bull-dog in the contour of his jaw, Harkaway was at times almost a thing of beauty.

At the due distance behind his master, not a hand-breadth too near or too far, mounted usually upon a restive horse, he rode with that ease and command of the situation, which on his own particular ground invests the proficient with almost regal importance. Every detail of his dress, polished leather, shining button, immaculate cloth, displayed that perfection in detail which seems so easy to attain when it is there, and proves so much the reverse when it is not, being indeed one of those costly trifles whose lowest price is continual trouble.

[10]

His sternly-set mouth and slightly-knitted brows reflected the impassive attention of the well-bred English servant, with a faint suggestion of ferocity in reserve, to be quickly let slip should his master require it, a survival, like his garb, of a turbulent past when outriders were not merely ornamental, and serving-men fought as well as followed.

A good specimen of its class is always of value. And here was the very type and ideal of that now cosmopolitan figure, the “groom anglais,” who in modern fiction, French, German, what not, gives the last touch of elegant realism to studies of high life and low morals.

The expectations aroused by such a first sight were, in the main, fulfilled. The descent to earth was certainly disenchanting. Dismounted, he appeared an insignificant little mortal enough, but he was one of those vigorous personalities who refuse to be represented by their appearance. His punctilious deference to his betters in no wise detracted from his sturdy, Anglo-Saxon independence, or from that complete self-possession which is the mark of high rank

[11]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

in more than social grade. His, too, was the well founded self-confidence which inspires confidence in others. His inferiors instinctively obeyed him, his superiors as instinctively relied on him, and both, on the whole, were justified by events.

An excellent servant was the verdict of each successive employer, whatever may have been the qualifying postscript. He worked indeed after a fashion rare even in a generation less instilled than the present with the doctrines—"that to labour with the hands is degrading, and to do one's best ungenerous to the weaker brother."

In happy ignorance of such subtleties, Harkaway pursued his calling much as in the learned professions men of good breeding follow theirs, with a pride in the work and an interest in its results quite apart from the question of fees pocketed. To this may have been added some of the artist's delight in his handy-work, since the same minute perfection already spoken of in his dress was maintained in every corner of his domain. His horses' flanks shone like satin, every inch of metal on harness or housing glistened brilliantly in the sunlight; and even places

[12]

so unpicturesque as the stable and the saddle-room were invested with what Doudan, quoting Xenophon, has called the poetry of cleanliness and order.

Work of this kind is neither to be bought, nor to be recompensed by money only, still less the graces that in him accompanied it of kindness to animals and courtesy to men. The creatures in his charge he handled as if he loved them, as probably he did, gentle when they were well, tender when they were sick or sorry. So testified his fellow-servants, but even more convincing was the mute assurance of the animals themselves, as well, in their plump and prosperous condition, as by demonstrations of affection that at ceremonious times became positively annoying.

"Ha! done then!" was often his cry before the front door, when the repeated caresses of the horse or pony at whose head he was standing flecked his livery with foam.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

As to fine manners, they, too, are beyond price, and what better deserves to be so called than the way in which some hirelings pay their due of service; not of necessity, but cheerfully, as if fulfilling not a bargain, but their own heart's desire. This was

[13]

Harkaway's manner, and it was probably not merely manner, if the man or the woman on whom he waited was gently in more than name, for he was keenly alive to graciousness. Here was disclosed that feminine strain, however slight, which is said to be indispensable to the finest work as well as to the finest manners, and to this, no doubt, he owed the tact which, his place, his education, and his career considered, was his most surprising trait.

According to very young people, it was most conspicuous on the question of weather, especially when persons still subject to parents and guardians were bent on expeditions. His practice, in anticipation of Christian science, was firmly to assume, that whatever it might appear, the day in reality was, and would remain, fine. At the hour appointed, fair or foul, with carriage or saddle horse, he was always at the door. If the rain was actually falling, he was sure it would not be anything much. If a hurricane plainly impended, he said there "might be storms," and all this with a look and intonation more eloquent than words, since they hypnotically conveyed to his audience that

[14]

he stood while he spoke under a sky as calm as it was cloudless.

In more complex situations he was equally agile. Composed and respectful, he would slide in and out of slippery places, adroitly conciliating very different and very difficult people. The careless and the punctilious, the dull and the lively, the sportsman, the bookworm, the old master whom nobody pleased, the young master who pleased nobody, were one and all captivated.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

That second sight which detects character, enabled him, no doubt, to choose for everyone the right horse, the right way, the right word. On his own level this was comprehensible enough, but when called upon to soar far above it he was equally happy. The very word "aesthetic" was certainly unknown to him. How, then, when called upon to find a congenial ride for "Lady Sylvia," let us call her, did he instantly propose a glade in the forest, where, as he himself explained, the "primroses was in thousands, and the nightingales sang beautiful!"

The fact is, he was himself an idealist, the stunted idealist, of unpropitious

[15]

circumstances, so little studied because so seldom recognised. They worship what they mistake for the beautiful. Hence, no doubt, his immense respect for form and ceremony and his corresponding abhorrence of any lapse therefrom so often expressed in the phrase: "It looks-se-bad."

"It looked se-bad," for instance, when young people under his charge held their reins, their whips, or, worst of all, themselves in the wrong way. In his remonstrances at such times there was a tone of almost pathetic entreaty.

"What I looks to, Miss," he said, solemnly to one pupil, "is that if you so uses yourself to put your hand upon the pummel, you'll do it some day afore company."

When his feeling of the becoming was outraged by those who, on account of their age or position, could not be so frankly addressed, he contrived to convey his rebuke with less directness but with equal force.

He was once cut to the heart by a lady visitor who persisted in riding his spirited pets as if they had been hired and timeworn hacks. When a natural accident and,

[16]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

doubtless, in his opinion, manifest judgment, ensued, his comment was delivered with marked emphasis, not to the offender, but to some one close beside her:

“You see, Ma'am, these yere osses will stand no cherrapin, nor a-chucken at the reins.”

But there was idealism pure and simple in the character of his work, still more in that of his personal service. By his munificent interpretation of his part in the contract, he succeeded in divesting it of all that was menial, and raising it, to the same degree as the homage of a noble to his king. His master for the time being received from him what in practice was very like warm affection. That master's honour and interests became Harkaway's own, more sedulously guarded than his own. That master's wishes, as well as his orders, were studied and obeyed with a zeal that nothing less than sympathy can inspire. To that master's convenience or caprice he was ready at any moment to minister with complete self-forgetfulness, with careless resignation, if need be, of food and sleep, comfort and rest, and that not merely willingly but eagerly, thus recalling

[17]

to some of us St. Francis de Sales' distinction between those who in a Higher Service only walked and those who ran. All he had to render he rendered in full measure, pressed down and running over, and had more been required that, doubtless, would have been forthcoming. Like many others in the back-waters of life, he suggested greater things than he achieved, and was able to make certain to those who knew him best that in the hunting field or elsewhere, had the safety of his lord, still more of his lady, demanded the sacrifice of his life, that, too, would have been laid down, as a soldier lays his, simply, promptly, and as a matter of course.

After this the experienced reader will be prepared for a decrescendo, and perhaps may foresee in what particular direction. In spite of all that has been said, sooner or later, to all employers of and friends of this engaging little person, there came a day of shock and discomfiture. An unprofessional sloping of the whip if he were on the coach-

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

box, a most unwonted slouch of the shoulders if he were in the saddle, a mysterious lack of poise if he stood upon the

[18]

ground, first startled attention, and then disclosed to it an almost incredible transformation. Gone was the keen and clever, if ugly, little face, and in its stead a flushed and sodden mask, smiling in sickliest fashion at the dismayed beholder. If any doubt remained as to his condition, it was dispelled by his articulation when he endeavoured to speak. It is true that the attack, like that of the temper, which in Leech's sketch wrecks the drawing-room, was "over in a minute," or to speak more precisely, in a day or two. After that as alert as ever, and less abashed than might have been expected, the veritable Harkaway reappeared, and continued to do and to be all that could be wished until the same episode was repeated.

It was characteristic of his influence on those around him that they all, high and low, at once began to make excuses. It was the fault of the coachmen under whom he had graduated; it was the fault of his wife, who was slovenly and dirty; it was the fault of his children, who were strangely perverse; of one master who overworked him, or of another who over-indulged him.

[19]

To this was added the suggestion, that Harkaway drunk was on the whole more efficient than most stablemen sober, especially

in comprehending and executing orders. It was probably not so much these considerations as the power of personal fascination which inspired them that made one master after another so long-suffering towards him. But even to this there was a limit, and it was always at last overstepped. Danger may be accepted more readily than ignominy, and no milder word depicts the fate of those whom he habitually escorted. During these "attacks," which were not to be foreseen and forestalled, his regard for

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

appearances, with every other sane and useful instinct, was for the time in abeyance, and he was capable of presenting himself in the plight described even “afore company,” and considerable company too, on public and festal occasions; when Lady Margaret Bellenden's confusion of face was not greater than that of the unfortunate person, especially the unfortunate lady, of whose cavalcade or equipage, at the front or the rear, his was the leading or completing figure! Repeated humiliations of this kind saddened and

[20]

silenced his warmest advocates, and so with profound regret and recommendations as excellent as decency would permit, Harkaway would be dismissed.

Not without protest or interference did this course of things continue. At least one gallant attempt to reclaim him was made by a missionary as young as she was hopeful. Harkaway responded readily, too readily, to her appeal. He took the pledge with the greatest alacrity, shortly to break it, alas! with equal alacrity. To the various remedies of various advisers, from the particular beer that by nourishing his body, to the study of wood-carving that by occupying his mind, were to ensure him against temptation, he gave a hearty reception and a fair trial, betraying no resentment, nor even marked discouragement, when they one and all signally failed. The real dejection was on the point of his self-elected guide. No amount of eloquence on her part, or of gratitude on his, could bring their feelings on the point at issue into absolute accord, as may be judged from the often cited answer to the question:

“Harkaway, what is a Rechabite?”

[21]

“I don't know exactly, Sir, but it's something a deal worse than a teetotaller.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

The truth is, so many sayings, scenes and incidents in the same merry key enlivened the course of this forlorn hope in the way of conversion, that the onlookers, especially the younger ones, almost forgot it was not altogether a farce.

And yet amidst all the laughter, the giddiest of them could not but feel “the pity of it,” of this slow but sure deterioration whose outward and visible sign was the gradual translation of the spare, pale “groom anglais” into a bloated, unwieldy gnome.

At last Fate, as if weary of him, struck one final and crushing blow, literally as well as figuratively, for, as he lay one day, where he had fallen, stupefied with drink, in the stable, he received on the thigh an accidental kick that left him an incurable cripple.

For years after a pitiable figure might be seen limping about the courtyard of the White—or Black—Hart, on market days, gleaning stray sixpences and half compassionate, half contemptuous greetings by

[22]

holding or harnessing the horses of those who had known him in his prime. Thus ends, as a tract on Temperance might do, this disappointing story, one of the many that would seem to shew that the artist of real life is often as inartistically moral as Dante or Shakespeare.

[23]

IV

BETTY LANE

FOR one virtue they were conspicuous in the valley—the shining attribute that ranks next to godliness. In that they reached such pre-eminence as, like the munificence of the widow with her mite, is only to be attained by the very poor. For what thanks have we

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

for the cleanliness which costs us neither pains nor sacrifice!—whereas only by labour willingly added to a laborious day, and money cheerfully resigned from a scanty pittance, were some of these poor little homes kept as they were—immaculate, radiant.

In one of these Betty Lane lived in maiden solitude. She is remembered, not for her quaint sayings, but for her proficiency in the now almost lost art of being happy. In this she excelled, and under

[24]

circumstances, too, which at first sight might appear unfavourable. No relative remained to her, no companion of any kind shared her tiny cottage. Her income consisted of one gallon of bread and one or two shillings a week, and of this one whole shilling was swallowed by the rent, and some precious pence must have been spent upon the soap and soda to maintain the dainty cleanliness already described. Lastly, she could neither read nor write. It will be seen, therefore, that, to speak in the language of the hour, she was physically, emotionally, and intellectually stunted, if not starved. But, after all, perhaps privation contributes to delight, since that existence which the rich and the learned and the loved can find so flavourless, this poor, ignorant, lonely woman tasted with exquisite relish. In these sad days, when the air is full of moanings over the weariness and emptiness of life, her friends are perforce reminded of this gifted being, as often they have seen her, in her lilac cotton gown and coarse grey shawl, eating with keen enjoyment her simple meal of bread steeped in the tea which some visitor from the Vicarage or the Manor had

[25]

bestowed on her, turning towards us as we read or chattered to her, brows furrowed, eyes hollowed, lips sunk with age, and yet all alight with the glow of inextinguishable cheerfulness.

[26]

V

OLD CASTLEMAN

BESIDE the huge fireplace, where the wood fire crackled, old Castleman sat all day long in an arm-chair of the least luxurious kind, resting, as on the brink of the grave a man has good right to rest whose working day has been nearly eighty years long. Carefully valeted each morning by a devoted daughter, he appeared always in full dress, as it were; in a suit of thick, dark cloth, with hat and gaiters, all assiduously brushed. He himself was very handsome, with clear, fair skin, blue eyes, and an aquiline profile; one of the remaining few or a fine type that flourished, it would seem, in the hard times and languishes perversely in these properous days. From his warm ingle nook he viewed with sleepy indifference the play in which his part was over, kindling into sudden

[27]

eagerness if a word or a face recalled actors on whom the curtain had long fallen.

“Here is Miss Julia come to see 'ee, father. Do 'ee know her?”

“O! I knows 'er well enow, an' knowed 'er granvather an' 'er great-granvather too; I knowed 'un well. Many a time I've a-zeed 'un, riding wi' 'ees dogs about 'un, in a red coat, wi' a pigtail down 'ees back. An' your great-grandmother, she was jest about a fine lady; the manliest spoken women i' the county.”

Still, he was sufficiently alert in mind as well as body to welcome a little “company,” and even some reading from other books besides the Bible. He enjoyed a joke, too—in due season. Once only his sense of humour was known signally to fail, when an afternoon reading had been slightly prolonged. Then even the antics of his favourite heroine, Mrs. Brown, were received with such unwonted coldness that the

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

reader, dimly conscious of failure, paused to ask timidly and tentatively, “She was a funny old lady, wasn't she, Castleman?”

“Ay, and mine's a funny old stomach; it wants its tea.”

[28]

VI

THE POSTMAN

THE road through the Valley was a very lively one. Sometimes no less than six vehicles would drive past in one day, and as we knew them all, as well as their drivers, the procession was always entertaining. At least twice a day there would pass along the road a low yellow pony-cart drawn by a swift little pony, to whom the driver, a small dark man with a meek and deprecating expression, would whistle encouragingly. It was the boast of Good, the local postman, that the affectionate little animal required no harsher urging; but there were those in the valley who did not hesitate to suggest that the whistling worked such wonders because firmly associated in the pony's mind with the stab of a sharp goad, used without mercy by Mr.

[29]

Good in his travels, when rabid lovers of animals—like the young ladies from the Priory, for example—were not there to see. This was not the only instance in which, according to his own statement, Mr. Good was the victim of cruel misrepresentation. He very nearly lost his situation because, seeing his pony-cart so often and for so long a time stationed at the door of the “Ashbourn Arms,” uncharitable observers had inferred that he went in there to drink the beer for which the inn is famous, when his real errand was to buy a Bible which he was taking out in parts. Evidently, there was some difficulty in collecting those parts; so much so that on more than one occasion Mr.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

Good came forth a little confused by the delay, when accidents occurred which, though trifling in themselves, created a good deal of annoyance. Mr. Blank, for instance, was much vexed when his post-bag, instead of being conveyed as directly as possible to the nearest post town, was left hanging all night on a post by the wayside; and Mr. Dash, was no less displeased when the valuable plans he had despatched to his architect one day were

[30]

found on the next reposing in the avenue. How Mr. Good appeased Mr. Blank is forgotten, but he explained to Mr. Dash's tender-hearted wife that the plans must have slipped out when he was wrapping his own coat round his little son to protect him from the damp cold of a November evening. With what special object the infant at such a time accompanied him remains unexplained. But who could be long angry with Mr. Good! How engaging was his confidence in the sympathy of others, as when, at the local midsummer races, he leant over the barrier which divides the enclosure from the common ground to propose that Uncle Herbert should then and there advance him his usual Christmas box wherewith to back the favourite, and how sweet the temper that enabled him to receive with complete good humour the rebuff of a prompt and decided refusal!

[31]

VII

MR. FARLEY

ONE of the showiest equipages that drove past was undoubtedly Mr. Farley's, a high spring-cart drawn by a young and animated horse not long accustomed to the restrictions of harness. Directly he became so, or—as too often happened—smashed the

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

shafts to atoms, he was exchanged for another not always his superior in years or in wisdom. But horse-breaking, fondly as he loved and foolishly as he followed it, was not Mr. Farley's chief or ostensible profession. He wore the fur cap of a costermonger, and the red-wheeled cart conveyed from door to door the fish and the fruit by whose sale he earned his living, and partly defrayed the expenses of his more dramatic but less lucrative calling. He was a slightly-built man with a thin brown face and keen black

[32]

eyes, over which his forehead puckered shrewdly. His words were few but, like his wit, ready, and the high-bred calm and self-possession of his gaze and manner nothing was ever known to ruffle. With what equanimity did he meet those rebuffs which attend the display of inferior merchandise. "I don't think much of your oranges," observed Uncle Herbert once, when a basket of this fruit was submitted to him by Farley. "Fust-rate oranges." "Hum! How much?" "Ten a shillin'." "Ten a shilling! Why I can get them at Brown's for a penny each." "Brown ain't gawt any like these." "A good deal better."

Farley silently proceeded to peel one of the calumniated oranges with a rusty pocketknife and a remarkably dirty thumb. The fruit thus daintily prepared he then offered to my uncle with the gracious words. "Try 'un." "No, thank you," said Uncle Herbert, recoiling, "I'd rather not." "Then I will," said Farley, and ate it forthwith with equal relish and philosophy. Uncle Herbert or some one else did, for old acquaintance' sake, buy a shilling's worth of his oranges, but on the whole we were

[33]

unprofitable customers and suffered accordingly. "You never come to see us now, Farley," said my Uncle in a tone of gentle reproach one day when we chanced to meet him. "What's the good: you never buys nothin'."

Yet with true greatness of soul he still cherished a kindly interest in our comings and goings, especially on horseback. And once when a new purchase was being tried for

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

the first time he called at our gates to offer some stony lemons and to observe over his shoulder as he drove away, "Met the young lady and the new mare; all a-goin well."

[34]

VIII

DANIELS

IT must be by the law of contrast that after Farley's lithe and erect figure, Daniels' should next present itself to the memory; Daniels shambling along in his shabby little cart with the reins left dangling, as safely they might be, on the shaggy back of his sleepy old horse. Daniels kept a small dairy farm and executed commissions for the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. He was fat, and swarthy in colour, wore rings in his ears, with a vivid blue handkerchief under his copper-coloured chin, and bore a vague general resemblance to the "countryman" of the stage. Though, unlike Farley, who made his home in the nearest town, Daniels spoke without any Cockney admixture, the true vernacular of the valley, he was not a Saxon, *pur*

[35]

sang. A Celtic strain was suggested by his complexion, his volubility, and his almost Oriental courtesy. The last quality imparted a grace to the dullest business interview, so adroitly did he interweave its dry details with delicately insinuated professions of admiration and regard.

"I zeed a young 'eifer, zur, t'other day at Varmer Coles over by Sarton there as 'ad just about zute you. I zays to Varmer Coles, zays I, there's a gent up our way as is a var sight better varmer nor you and me, zays I; and that there 'eifer, zays I, might zute 'e."

"What was it like?"

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

“A little beauty, zur, you may depend on 't, fur I shouldn't wish to offer you no other.”

“How much does he ask for it?”

“Well, 'e did name——pounds.”

“Oh! nonsense. I shouldn't think of giving anything like that.”

“Jest what I zays to 'un, Maester Blank; jest what I zays to 'un. 'Tis no use, zays I, to try and impose upon that gent, zays I, fur 'tis a gent as knaws a lawt about cattle, and I wouldn't stand by to see un put upon neither, zays I,” etc.

[36]

On such a high-strung level as this it is not easy to maintain one's footing. Even Daniels himself made a slip at times, never failing however to recover himself instantly with equal agility and grace.

“Have you seen the cattle Thompson has in his yard just now?” asked someone who did not love Thompson.

“I've a seen 'um! I've a seen 'um! shockun' baad they look, to be shure; shockun' baad.”

“You know he has one of mine amongst them?”

“Now, I thowt I zeed won as zimmered better nor the rest.”

A person so fitted to shine in society was naturally tempted to linger at the “Ashbourn Arms” with consequences which led to what in the Valley was called “onpleasantness” between himself and his female relations. His niece Polly in particular, who had lately risen in the social scale by a brilliant marriage with a young man in the ironmongery line, objected to her uncle calling at her house on his way home from market in an advanced state of intoxication. One afternoon we met him

[37]

so overpowered with sorrowful emotion that he had not a pretty speech ready for one of us. His story as he told it, though affecting, was difficult to follow; but we gathered that Polly, with almost Regan-like brutality, had flatly refused to receive him till he was sober. "Ow would you like it?" he sobbed, addressing my uncle and waving his whip towards the niece, who stood waiting in the background, "Ow would you like it if you was zo zerved by that—that outstander there?"

[38]

VNiVERSITAS
IX
STVDII
OLD JACK
SALAMANTIINI

AWAY from the villages and the water-meadows, on higher and bleaker ground, whose solitary silence is broken by soft tinklings, old Jack spent his days. In more senses than one might he be spoken of as a son of the soil. He had the appearance of having sprung from it, and of betraying even in his colour the nature of his origin; for the hue of his long loose smock, and of as much of his skin as hair untrimmed by razor or scissors permitted us to see, was the same as that of his native mould when rains have not deepened its delicate shade of brown. There remained his eyes, closely resembling—though without the same gleam of intelligence—those of his constant companion, the sheepdog. For in profession Jack was one with the curled darlings in

[39]

rain-bow tinted garments who, in some spheres of art, are called shepherds. Never has the clash between realism and idealism been more painfully illustrated! Nevertheless,

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

Jack was an excellent shepherd, and here nearly ends the record of what is positive concerning him. The rest is chiefly negative. He could not read, nor write, nor calculate, nor even take thought for the morrow, insomuch that his master was required to take it for him, and pay the chief part of his wages in needful food and raiment. Of interest or opinion—beyond his sheepfold—of fear, or hope, or joy, or sorrow, or any emotion whatsoever, he gave no sign, save indeed that of one perennial aspiration which found utterance in the only words he was heard by most of us to utter—“I should like to drink your health!” “A fine day. Jack.” “Yes, Sir; I should like to drink your health.”

“Have you seen my little dog, Jack?” “No, Miss; I should like to drink your health.”

This was his one form of greeting, of response, and of comment, addressed in the same placid one to all new-comers, from

[40]

the pedestrian who nodded good-day to him across the hurdles to the rider who, as, in one instance, thrown most unwillingly across them, landed horseless and discomfited before him. And though it is easy to laugh at this homely phrase, it would be difficult to find another at once so brief, so genial, and so generally appropriate.

[41]

GRANNY LOVELOCK, towards the close of an active and healthy life, was confined to her bed by paralysis, which did not, however, diminish the sharpness of her wits or of her tongue. And, picturesque as she appeared, propped up against her snow-white

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

pillows in scarlet jacket and stiff-frilled cap, her large-featured face, with its keen, cynical eyes, was far from suggesting that meekness and resignation which we too readily expect in the aged poor.

Like most persons of repellent manner and short temper, she received a good deal of attention, and received it all as her due. Unprofitable servants were we made to feel ourselves, even when we approached her with propitiatory offerings, and there was always some point on which we failed to please

[42]

her, some sin of omission or commission. For instance, how painfully dull was our village compared with the next in the valley, where, as she often severely reminded us, “the gentry did zummat to amuse poor folks!”

“Why, here,” she cried reproachfully once to a maiden lady, no longer in her first youth, “I never see sech a place; we doan't have so much as a weddin'!”

Religious reading was another matter in which it was difficult to satisfy her; for if we did not read a “chapter” we were guilty of neglect, and if we did she made us feel, by her constant interruptions, that our rendering was spiritless and tedious. Any attempt to improve the occasion she at the close wisely forestalled, by herself delivering a short address on what she considered the moral.

“There, now, hearken to that! Doan't that show what senners has to look to ef they doan't mind their ways? But 'tes no good for anyone like Bill Jones to call 'iself a Christian and then go spreen' about all over the country wi' a lot o' low fellows. Ah! some makes a wonderful

[43]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

profession, to be sure, but they doan't hold to it, bless 'ee. Why, Mrs. Brand, when she come here five years sence, she was singin' hymns half the day; she'd whoop and she'd hollar, you'd ha' thought 'twas an angel from heaven!"

In spite of these strictures, Granny Lovelock's own religious position appeared so indefinite that somebody ventured to ask her one day to what religious body she herself belonged.

"Well, I am nothin', so to say," Granny Lovelock candidly replied, and then went on to recount how she had been driven from the bosom of the Established Church by the inhospitable conduct of Mrs. Smart, the pew-opener, who had turned Granny out of a pew, into which, shortly afterwards, she had unblushingly introduced her own father-in-law and his wife; at which gross instance of nepotism Granny rose and rebuked Mrs. Smart before the congregation, and then withdrew for evermore. This did not prevent her highly disapproving of those who changed their religion on insufficient grounds; and especially did she condemn Mrs. Sturt, who, having given

[44]

the Methodists all the trouble of converting her, immediately joined the Baptists.

In politics she took a lively interest, but of such a kind as to justify the accusation that her sex is incapable of any but narrow and personal views; for her judgment of measures was apt to be decided by their indirect effect on the movements of the "family at the mansion"; and abhorrent to her was the man or the party who, by prolonging the Parliamentary session, delayed the return of these kind friends.

"What a ter-rable bother, to be sure!" she once exclaimed. "Mester Gladstone seems a nice, kind sart of a gentleman; why ever doan't they let 'un have his way?"

[45]

The Salamanca Corpus: *Hampshire Vignettes* (1907)
FINMORE

ONE hears the long, quivering note of the dabchick, one smells the dank scent of the water-weeds, when one remembers Finmore, the old, old water-keeper. Though bowed with age and lame with rheumatism, he was still fresh-coloured, bright-eyed and content, still absorbed and satisfied by the one great interest of his life, “the veesh.”

He spoke with singular purity the dialect of the valley, which his sons speak only in a debased form, his grandsons not at all. Greatly did he confound therewith the strange fishermen whom it was often his duty to attend. Them he regarded generally with benign contempt, and spoke of their achievements in such dark sentences as this: “A come 'ere, an' a throwed a line al av a snarl, three voot avore 'ees

[46]

vace, an' caught nara veesh!” But he was bound to confess that a line thrown, however deftly, by sons of the valley and masters of the craft might yet be thrown in vain to creatures whose wiles and caprices were a perpetual astonishment to their oldest and most intimate neighbours. The outcome of nearly seventy years' study of these mysterious beings was summed up by Finmore in this brief verdict, heartily confirmed by all who pursued them: “Veesh is the curiousest things as is”—and, like all unfathomable things, endowed with an irresistible and unfailing charm. With more than merely professional ardour, so long as he could crawl, did Finmore pace the sedgy banks, and, peering through water transparent as the air above it, mark the shadowy tails that by the fringes of the dark weed masses waved slowly to and fro.

He fought in defence of his favourites once—fought and conquered, too. His short and dramatic struggle with a poacher he tersely related thus—

“‘I'll putt 'ee in waater,’ says 'ee, ‘I wull.’”

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

[47]

“Wull 'ee?’ says I. Then I put he in waater.”

There came a time when, for the film that dimmed his eager eyes, he could only see to count the largest fish, but Finmore did not guess what this was or signified, with so light a footfall does death draw nigh to some of us. He only said: “There be but vew veesh i' the river, but the 're vine veesh what there be o' 'un.”

[48]

XII
THE SAILOR

IN a tiny cottage living-room there once hung a picture imprinted by a fiercer sunlight than that which beats upon these English meadows. It depicted a cluster of graves in a foreign cemetery, on whose white stones we could detect the English names and verses; and foremost of all stood the monument erected, as the inscription told us, by the officers and men of one of her Majesty's ships to the memory of the young seaman who died of Malta fever, in his twenty-fourth year.

What it recalled first to most of us was the olive-skinned, dark-eyed little boy who, swayed by some strain of gipsy blood it may be, or in reaction against the sombre though kindly tone of a Methodist household in which he was the only child, bid

[49]

fair to be the black sheep of the village, or, at least, the proverbial rolling-stone. However, after for some years scandalising the neighbours and disquieting his relations, one day he took a turn, as the Scotch say, and started upon a new track. With determination written in his face and sounding in his step, he walked up to what, in his

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

eyes, was a big house, rang the bell, and asked to see “Miss Julia.” Standing very erect before her, and stiff with resolution as much as with shyness, he professed his desire to join her Majesty's Navy. He received encouragement and directions, and called once more to say good-bye and tender his thanks on his way to the training-ship.

After that, his career was smooth, prosperous, and, above all things, steadfast. From time to time he appeared in the valley, looking swarthier than ever, as well as bigger, in his coarse blue jersey or coat with the shining buttons. Afterwards, these visits ceased, and the postman brought to his home, instead, letters that had travelled days, and even weeks, to reach it—letters dated and stamped with mysterious names, which the recipients could not decipher, of

[50]

places to them unknown and unconceivably distant. Simpler epistles were never written by the pen or a most unready writer, saying little save that he was well, that he read his Bible as adjured to do, that he sent kind greetings to friends and neighbours, that there had been a great storm, that the heat was terrible, that the captain had been pleased with him; and yet they afforded that exquisite delight, they had even about them that atmosphere of suggestion for which the artist labours. As “Miss Julia” read them aloud beside the cottage chimney corner, the miniature horizon of the listeners widened, and to herself came glimpses of wild seas and foreign harbours, with a fleeting perception of that continual strain of heart-strings which is part of the cost of a world-wide Empire.

But the day of greatest triumph to all concerned was that of his return after a long voyage. When, grown impressively tall, and even handsome in the dress of a full-blown bluejacket, he walked down the village street, on Sunday afternoon, with a train of its admiring youth behind him, he was a person with whom one felt proud

[51]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

to be on bowing, far more speaking, terms. And yet, as remembered at this, his best, he was by no means the traditional tar, jovial if not rollicking. The unforeseen result of his training had been to refine as well as to develop him. Quite as noticeable as the courtesy of his manner was its quiet self-possession. In his fine eyes there was even a shade of pensiveness; but, perhaps, as he was then engaged to be married, no less a master than Love himself was giving the finishing touches to this education. Finishing so far as this life is concerned, for during his next long voyage the looked for letters failed, and after a long, inexplicable pause came one from the far South, in a stranger's handwriting, with the news that this brief career was over—cut short by that invisible foe who, more persistently than bullet or blade, thins the ranks of our two great armies. Later was sent the photograph of his grave, an inartistic record of an unpicturesque scene, a graceless presentation of a fact full of grace. For when we remembered by whom, as well as to whom, the pile was raised, that everyone from the captain to the shipboy gave, as it were, his

[52]

stone to the cairn, thus raising a memorial not only of what was lovable in the lad himself, but of what was loving and reverent in his shipmates, of that tenderness which, as Dibdin long ago sang to us, goes hand in hand with the highest daring; of all, in fact, that makes the typical English sailor the darling of the English heart—why, then we felt that the end of our sailor's poor little story was not such a lame and impotent conclusion after all.

[53]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

THE developments of modern trade had been anticipated in the valley. Before the “universal provider” had arisen, some of our leading shops catered in the same spirit if not to the same extent. One in particular combined with the Post-office, the emporium of the chemist, with consequences not always agreeable to captious customers. Too often, it was said, the distribution of letters was interrupted because somebody was making up Mr. Anybody's prescription; and occasionally that concoction itself was not exactly what had been expected because the compounder was preoccupied about a missing letter.

As to one annoying habit of the postal staff that consisted in opening interesting-looking parcels in order to examine, or

[54]

perhaps try on, their contents, and then forgetting before forwarding them, to refasten them; of this there was forthcoming no more satisfactory explanation than that the post-mistress was a widow with a large family.

It was one of this interesting group, doubtless, or their equally eccentric assistants who, searching one day in an out of the way corner of the shop, was heard to exclaim:

“Dear me! Here is a letter for Miss Blank. How ever did it come here?”

Perhaps it was his brother, who in answer to a question from a small messenger: “Please, sir, mother says, is this poison?” replied:

“Poison? Well not particularly poison.”

Admirable, no doubt, was the caution of this statement, though one might wish for a more definite account of something one was actually to swallow; and, moreover, it by no means invariably applied to all the drugs prepared behind that counter. There were some which, judging from their effects at least, were quite particularly poison.

When more than one life had been endangered by these potions, when more than

[55]

mere patterns had been lost or destroyed by the informal examination already complained of, the impatience of the neighbourhood refused to be any longer stemmed by the plea of the widow and the orphans. They were at last dismissed, and the business, divided, was in other hands worked henceforth on lines safer perhaps, but unquestionably duller.

[56]

XIV

MRS. TALLY

AGAINST our pastoral background the figure of Mrs. Tally shewed somewhat strangely. Her appearance, her household arrangements, and her language when displeased, were disagreeably reminiscent of a town slum, and from thence, indeed, did she emigrate to the valley when her husband accepted a situation as groom in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Tally was never at home in the country, or at one with its inhabitants. Her manner was so unfortunate as to satisfy neither high nor low, estranging her equals by its insolence, and her betters by its servility.

To the ladies of the family in which her husband was servant, Mrs. Tally was especially subservient and especially displeasing. If she met them in the fields or

[57]

lanes, she bowed herself before them, metaphorically and actually, and by profuse and abject apologies suggested that they resented as a liberty her being out of doors. When they, much wounded, strove to repel this imputation by assurances of their sympathy

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

with her love of exercise and fresh air, she replied by incoherent thanks and murmurs, as if overwhelmed and rendered inarticulate by kindness and condescension so amazing. Nor did a further acquaintance induce Mrs. Tally to modify her opinion of these harmless and unassuming gentlewomen, and always her demeanour in their presence might have graced the court of an Eastern despot. If, however, in response to fervent invitations, they ventured to call upon Mrs. Tally, the visit was accomplished with difficulty and delay. The door fast locked and a death-like silence would imply that Mrs. Tally was not at home; but when, encouraged by the neighbours, they had waited and knocked for a considerable time, emerging at last from the recesses of what was truly her castle, their hostess unbolted and threw wide the door with exclamations of rapturous delight. She would then

[58]

observe, in explanation of this state of barricade, that she had been outside doing a little gardening, or upstairs, doing a little needlework. There was something peculiarly unconvincing in these excuses, especially the last, as the work of that needle was nowhere to be seen, was indeed conspicuous by its absence; and more credible was the cynical interpretation of her neighbours, that Mrs. Tally was thus entrenched against importunate creditors, and wisely admitted no one, until, from an upper window or other coign of vantage, she had satisfied herself as to the quality and intention of her visitors.

For the insolvent condition thus disclosed, Mrs. Tally was not wholly and solely responsible. It was to be chiefly attributed to the expensive taste that led Mr. Tally to spend so much of his time and his money at the public-house. On the other hand, it was urged by his friends, who were many, that his conduct, though blameworthy, was not inexcusable to those who had seen his home. It did, indeed, leave much to be desired. For one thing, it was strikingly dirty, and that although Mrs. Tally was

[59]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

continually cleaning it. So she averred, and so, in fact, it appeared, for the boards, though grimy, were generally damp and sticky as if lately deluged with water. Under these circumstances comfort was out of the question, and ornament was not attempted, for, by another paradox, Mrs. Tally was for ever so busy, she never had time to do anything, not even to mend her children's clothes, or the cast-off gowns of benefactors slimmer and taller than herself, so that these garments, as she wore them, gaping at the waist or trailing in the dust or mud behind her, completed the domestic picture that was said to drive Mr. Tally to drink and despair. Yet such are the contradictions of human nature, that this almost culpable indifference to externals was combined with a punctilious observance of social etiquette.

“No, I was not at the funeral,” said Mrs. Tally, speaking of a deceased friend, “I should ha’ liked to have gone, but I heard it was not fashionable for ladies to go to funerals.”

As a mother, Mrs. Tally was pursued by the same untoward fate that frustrated her

[60]

endeavours as a wife, and a housekeeper. Her little sons, bright and intelligent children, were the scourge and the terror of the neighbourhood, and their capacity for mischief was only equalled by their capacity for lying—boldly and directly—when confronted with their misdeeds. The climax to a long record of scattered game, lamed ducks, stolen eggs, and other injuries was the setting fire to their own house, during the absence of their mother. Mrs. Tally returned from a shopping expedition to find her cottage in flames, the neighbours extricating her furniture, and the infant incendiary, in his own defence, extemporizing a wonderful story of a passing tramp as the actual author of the crime.

“You see, Mem,” said the village policeman, “tis dangerous to leave such young children in the house alone.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

“I never does,” cried Mrs. Tally, “I never does. I was but just gone down to the shop for some sugar, but I never leaves 'em in the house by themselves—never!”

Though naturally much inconvenienced by the accident, Mrs. Tally was not insensible to the dignity and interest of her

[61]

position in a scene so exciting, so tumultuous, and so crowded with spectators. She withdrew as soon as possible to the new abode assigned to her, where her furniture had been hastily set down, and, without an attempt to put it or anything else in order, held a kind of *levée* during the whole afternoon, receiving with an air of modest self-consciousness her numerous visitors and their condolences. Even when these extended to the character of her children, Mrs. Tally was able to hear them with the calm and candour of an untroubled conscience.

“I never knew such bad children,” she said, solemnly, “but it's not my fault. I does my duty by 'em as a mother should. I beats 'em, and I flogs 'em and I bangs 'em, till the blood comes.”

[62]

XV

OLD THOMAS

THE scent of sweet and homely plants will embalm the memory of old Thomas, for the little, thick-set figure, with weather-beaten face and small, shrewd eyes, that his name recalls, is best remembered leaning upon his spade, or moving, with stiff, short steps, about the box-bordered paths of the garden. The garden was, indeed, his especial domain, and that in which he shone to most advantage, though far from being the only

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

one in which he aspired to eminence. In his quiet demeanour, gentle movements, and a voice not merely low, but reduced by some mysterious form of catarrh to a hoarse stage whisper, there was not the faintest suggestion of arrogance; nor can he justly be charged with it, but there was undeniably some slight approach to that foible in

[63]

his determined refusal ever to admit that he was ignorant or incapable of anything whatever. The habit may have added to his reputation in some ways; in others it forcibly detracted therefrom by the embarrassing positions in which it landed him. As when, for instance, he undertook to clip a pony, without the faintest notion of how to begin, far less complete that delicate task. *L'audace*, which can accomplish so many things, was here insufficient, for the outcome of the whole performance, and notably of his ingenious and original method of trimming the tail, by tying a string round it and hacking at it with a rusty pocketknife, failed to satisfy even the very modest standard of the animal's young and unexacting owners.

His purely intellectual pretensions were better supported, and his complete ignorance of reading or writing was almost elaborately concealed. Feigning to suffer from that treacherous memory which we learn is the chief result of elementary education, he never omitted to insist on receiving a written list of such commodities as he might be directed to procure at shop or

[64]

at market. He wisely supplemented this entirely useless document, however, by a stratagem closely resembling that adopted by Monsieur Jourdain, with the same object:

“Vous savez le latin sans doute?”

“Oui, mais faites comme si je ne le savais pas. Expliquez moi ce que cela veut dire.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

In the same manner old Thomas, though not for one moment suffering it to be suggested or suspected that he could not decipher the list, always required the writer to read it aloud to him.

A mixture of indulgence and sternness characterised his dealings with his employers. In administering reproof, he was markedly tender of their feelings, but with regard to certain blemishes in the appearance of the garden, he would vary his accusations according to his listeners. To Miss Mary, the maiden aunt, he would deplore that “our little folk do so paddle about here,” whereas to the little folks' mother, he descanted chiefly on the perverse behaviour of “Miss Mary's little dog.” But a severer tone was adopted when it came to such momentous questions as the design for the summer garden.

[65]

It was a point which, in due season and with marked ceremony, he invariably submitted to his mistress; invariably also receiving her decision with what she herself called “respectful derision,” and, as was plain in the sequel, with complete disregard. It was perhaps to this combination of opposite qualities that he owed the signal success which attended the bringing up of his numerous children, not one of whom became a trouble or a burden either to their parents or the parish. It would be instructive to know how old Thomas, without consulting any of the various modern writers on this erudite subject, so distinguished himself in what, we are now assured, is one of the most difficult of arts; but stray hints as to his guiding principles are all that have been preserved to us.

He was in his social relations professedly select, to an extent, indeed, that must have seriously restricted the circle of his acquaintances. To the marriage breakfast of his eldest son, Thomas' fellow servants, the cook and the housemaid, were the only guests invited from a large and eminently respectable village, because, as old Thomas

[66]

candidly explained, he “didn't want no riff-raff.”

To this extreme fastidiousness he added a virile grasp of economic truths, transmitted to his children in such formulas as this:

“I've allus a-said to them: 'ev you've a shellun in yer pawket, you've a friend in yer pawket, and ef you aint, you've gawt ne'er-a-won.”

[67]

XVI

THE FARTHING

HAVING boasted of the high standard of cleanliness in the valley, it is grievous to acknowledge another marked exception to this admirable rule.

“When he first come,” observed the cook of the modest establishment in which he figured as gardener, “I thought he was a dark young man, but on Sunday, when he washed his face, I see he was a fair young man.”

This was not the only picturesque comment that the new gardener provoked from his fellow-servants. He was pronounced by the groom to be “eleven-pence three farthings short of a shilling,” and this phrase, repeated in the drawing-room, was felt there to so happily portray the intellectual calibre of the subject of his sketch, that he was ever afterwards spoken of as “The Farthing.”

[68]

During his short stay with the family from whom these reminiscences have been culled, it was less by his talent for horticulture than by impressed them.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

“Miss Julia,” whose bedroom was over the kitchen, complained of being roused earlier than she desired by the hum of a voice below, uninterruptedly declaiming.

“What is that noise?” she asked a little handmaid one morning.

“It is only Thomas, Ma'am. He comes in at breakfast, and do go on so, it tires anyone to hear him, saying that nobody has any religion but hisself, and that he is the only one that is saved.”

On the theme of his engagement, “The Farthing,” if more genial, was equally tedious. A love story, as we know, is almost invariably received with indulgence, especially by women, but even their patience was exhausted by the pertinacity of “The Farthing's” confidences. Perhaps, too, their sympathy was a little chilled by his extravagant praises of his love, Maria, a being, according to him, so eminent for every grace and virtue, that one marvelled in the end that she had

[69]

fixed her eyes, far more her choice, on so insignificant and dingy a little suitor. To every advantage of mind and person she added many notable accomplishments. Like Desdemona, she was both delicate with her needle and an admirable musician. Her lover said that she could sing beautifully, as well, indeed, as “Miss Julia” herself, a comparison which to that young lady herself seemed a lamentable anti-climax, but in the kitchen gave mortal offence, as a piece of insufferable presumption.

The event of the day for “The Farthing”—and indeed for all his fellow-servants, owing to that openness of character already mentioned—was the arrival of the post. It contained, or it did not contain, a letter from Maria. If it did not, then the house, or at least the servants' domain therein, resounded with bewailings, and touching messages were conveyed to the drawing-room to learn if by any chance the letter had been overlooked in the bag. If, on the contrary, he received a letter from Maria, its contents were shared with the whole household in a manner possible only to characters sturdily independent of sympathy

[70]

and support. "The Farthing" reading aloud one of these love-letters to the groom, who, without semblance of attention except a contemptuous curl of his upper lip, steadily pursued his work of cleaning and hissing—this was a spectacle to move with envy those supersensitive temperaments who are always at the mercy of their audience.

If it is asked how, with all these preoccupations, his gardening progressed, it may be frankly acknowledged that it progressed very little. The time, however, was that slack season when there is least to do in the gardens; fortunately, in this special case for its owners, as the Farthing's energies were further engaged in the business of preparing a house for his bride, an under-taking rendered all the more serious by his pleasant notion of constructing the furniture himself, quite undeterred by the fact that carpenters are made not born, and that he had had no opportunity of becoming one. Still the reward of self-approbation was his when the work was finished—if that is a term which can be rightly used here, for its most conspicuous quality was its lack of finish—that, and a general unsteadiness.

[71]

The chairs and tables rocked at the slightest touch, and neither stood on all four legs at once, whilst in the still more astonishing chest of drawers he manufactured, each drawer stuck out of its socket at the strangest and most untidy angle. Yet the Farthing not only contemplated his handywork with delight, but invited all his neighbours, high and low, to do the same.

How poor Maria relished the bower thus prepared for her remains unknown. With her coming and his marriage a change came over the Farthing, a change which, though deplored by more frivolous spirits, was welcomed by the elder members of the family, to whom it seemed desirable that a well-paid gardener should produce something more substantial than food for constant merriment. He became a more useful and less

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

amusing person, and the last anecdote preserved of him only records how at a servants' Christmas party he extorted the admiration even of his detractors by playing the flute with his nose!

[72]

XVII

LITTLE JEFF

INTO the same modest establishment the Farthing had adorned, little Jeff made his entrance as stable boy. He was then very small and young, and had not yet developed that self-confidence for which he was afterwards noted. This diffidence, however, was at times so expressed as to be liable to be mistaken for a very different quality.

When in answer to an invitation from "Miss Julia" to attend her children's Christmas party, he wriggled, shrugged his shoulders, and observed in a reluctant tone, "he did not moind," this reply was not instantly recognised as a form or rapturous consent.

"However could you speak to Miss Julia so?" cried the cook, "she will never let you come to her party now."

[73]

Whereat he subsided into tears. "I couldn't help it," he sobbed, "I didn't know what to say. I baint accustomed to speak to Queens and Lords." He was present at the feast, and there proved a delightful, because so unsophisticated, a guest, to whom everything provided was a surprise and a delight, even the lollipop in the folds of the cracker.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

With time his terror of “Queens and Lords,” or those whom he was pleased thus to entitle, entirely disappeared, and when he left to better himself, he was kind enough to say he had improved a lot.

“When I come here,” was his argument, “I did not know how to speak to a lady, now I can speak to Miss Julia quite well.”

To these conversational advantages he did not in after life do remarkable credit. A trustworthy stableman he was always, but no one ever ascribed to him any striking graces of mind or of manner. The foundation of a beautiful demeanour, as defined by Emerson, he did indeed possess, in a self-reliance which nothing ever shook, not even the sudden transition to a new and unfamiliar sphere, when once, at his master's

[74]

shooting-box, in a case of emergency, he was called in to wait at table. “Miss Julia,” being present at this small, and (fortunately) unceremonious dinner, had the good fortune to be a spectator of her protégé's bearing under these trying circumstances. It was kindly as it was composed, and his sympathy with the company's enjoyment of the very simple fare provided, was only tempered by some anxiety lest, by what he evidently considered their intemperate indulgence in the first course, they should imperil their enjoyment of the one—and only one—that was to follow; insomuch that while beef and potatoes were still on the board, he called out in a voice of affectionate warning: “There's asparagus comin'!” Nor was he the least disturbed when his mistress called his attention somewhat severely to the huge finger marks upon the tumbler he had placed before her.

“La, Mem!” he cried, reassuringly, “'tes only my hot hand.”

[75]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)
GRANNY HOBBS

IN living-rooms decorated with portraits, and aglow in the evenings with radiant little lamps, old people would discourse musingly of the days of their youth, when photography was unknown, and the light of the cottage, and indeed sometimes of the Manor House, was a “rush” or a “dip.”

A curious commentary on the children's critical notice of the menu at school-feasts, were these reminiscences of their grandparents, these glimpses of a time when the daily fare of the cottagers was bread and potatoes, flavoured on high days and holidays by scraps of bacon or dripping, when sugar was a luxury, and the now indispensable tea was, at six shillings a pound, a cordial reserved for invalids. Then, indeed, there was no money to spare for artificial

[76]

flowers or feathers, or other flummery. Too sparingly was it paid, too hardly was it earned. Granny Hobbes could remember how at eight years old she herded pigs and geese in such weather that the icicles fringed her bonnet. And her mother worked so long during the day at harvest time, she was often up nearly all night to do her washing and cooking.

“Do you mind the time o' the mobs?” asked another Granny, forgetting the age or rather the youth of the visitor. “They was terrible times to be sure. There wasn't a night but you saw the ricks burning somewhere. And then the mobs come about. I can remember the day the mob came along the road to go to the Mansion. I can seemingly see them now. Yes, at the lodge. We lived at the lodge, and mother she says to me: ‘You go and open the gates for them and then come in; don't 'ee bide out.’ So I did, and they come, and what they called the ringleader he come into the house, and my! she was frightened! She didn't know what he might do. He had a great big bludgeon in his hand, and so they all had, everyone of them, bless you!

[77]

An' he says: 'Missus where's your husband?' And she says: 'He's up at the House.' 'No,' he says, 'he is here!' And she said, 'No, he's never at home in the day, he's up at the House.' 'I'll see that,' he says, and he goes right through. And my poor grandmother she sit there by the fire, so old she couldn't see nothing, only hear what he said, and she was so frightened. She said: 'O, Measter, don't 'ee, pray, hurt me, nor my daughter, nor the children, for we can't help nothing,' And he come up to her—I can mind it so well—and he says: 'Don't you fear. Granny, we wunnat hurt you; but we want all the men, you see, for the times is going to be changed.' 'And can you change them, do you think?' she says. 'Aye, that we shall,' he says. 'Everyone shall have cheese and meat that can hardly get bread now.'"

In the fading afternoon one went home musing over the wrongs that could have spurred to violence a leader, who even in his wrath remained tender towards the weak.

The sound of clinking spades came from the beautiful village gardens, and through the misty air rang the voices of playing

[78]

children, blooming children in frocks and brisk, white pinafores. From cottage after cottage the issuing film of smoke proclaimed that the kettle was singing for five o'clock tea. Outside, the baker waited with piles of amber-tinted loaves, fresh and fragrant from the oven. The butcher's less alluring cart was not absent.

For good or for evil, the words of that unconscious prophet had come true!

[79]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)
JANE AND ME

THE devotion of woman to woman, still incredible to many, was in early youth made familiar to many of us by the spectacle of Jane and Me. Since then we have lived to see other examples in loftier stations, in more lettered circles, but perhaps the first was the most convincing, because presented on so humble a stage by actors so simple; for the leading scenes were a kitchen and a pantry, where Jane was a housemaid and Me was a cook.

It will be easily divined that Me's peculiar name had not been the gift of her godparents at her baptism. Much later in life she had acquired this title, quite unintentionally, by her continual use of the phrase: "Jane and Me," when other people, Jane especially included, would simply have said, "I."

[80]

"Jane and Me feels the heat." "Jane and Me likes batter pudding." "Jane and Me would like to go for a walk." And so on from morning till evening, from Christmas to Midsummer, whilst the position of the pronoun as well as its—from a grammatical point of view—indefensible case, so exactly represented Me's place and part in the duet, that it was adopted, and, save in her presence, employed by all who knew her best.

For in Hampshire valleys as in Parisian courts, the game of friendship, it would seem, is played much the same, with one who receives and one who renders, and here the last was undoubtedly Me. Not, of course, absolutely or entirely. Jane was not wholly lacking either in good nature or affection. She paid her share, and, if not so large as Me's, it should be weighed in the balance with the widow's mite, for everyone does not, like Me, overflow with almost unlimited devotion. Fewer still can dethrone the tyrant Ego in favour of another, as she contrived to do, and this without any of that ascetic renunciation that is often, and needfully, prescribed for

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

[81]

the moral athlete. Me's self remained unimpaired. Ginger was still hot in her mouth, and cakes, if not ale, were still sweet. She partook of such good things, and entirely enjoyed them, but not till Jane had first been served and satisfied.

This kind of attitude is not so common in the world as to pass unnoticed, but what even more impressed the beholders, especially those young in experience as in years, was that Jane, not Me, should play the first fiddle. For Me was unquestionably the superior. To begin with, it is obvious to the most democratic mind that a cook is more important than a housemaid, as well as less easily to be found; and the mere fact that Me filled, and very creditably filled, such a post was the proof of a degree of intelligence and capacity to which Jane did not even pretend.

In the matter of looks it was the same. That Jane was clean and wholesome-looking was the best that could be said of her, whereas Me was pretty, and would have been lovely if her face had finished as well as it began. Besides the golden brown hair and fair skin of a true blonde, she

[82]

had large blue eyes and a delicate aquiline nose, while to preserve intact their charm, she had been endowed with a graceful and useful accomplishment, almost entirely peculiar to the heroines of romance—she could cry becomingly. Her eyelids did not swell, her nose did not redden, her transparent skin remained untarnished, while the dew on her cheek, the tremor of her lip, imparted to her homely little face an unaccustomed touch of refinement and sweetness.

As to the even weightier matter of personal charm, Jane was not without her own, so grateful in an age of scurry—the solid repose that hardly anything can disturb. But even the pleasing effect of this has its limits. Though soothing it is not endearing, unless accompanied by some more distinctly amiable quality, or some shew of interest in others and their affairs. And in anything of the kind Jane was strikingly deficient. In the

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

hour, not precisely of pain or sickness, but of discomfort or anxiety, of the small emergencies of daily household life, when Me's light shone like a beacon, Jane's was apt to disappear altogether.

[83]

The help that was eagerly proffered by Me had to be as eagerly extorted from Jane. Only by persistent ringing was she drawn to the field of action at all, and only by equally persistent vigilance was she there retained. Meanwhile her whole demeanour expressed disapproval rather than sympathy; and it was plain that the question uppermost in her mind was not, for instance, how the delayed Mr. A. was to catch his train, or the rain-drenched Miss B. escape a cold, but how long Jane's next meal must be deferred, or her usual time of repose curtailed by the untimely carrying to and fro of luggage or hot water. In the end it was usually Me who, with sublime indifference to the privilege of place, herself filled the breach with cans or portmanteaux and unfailing goodwill.

But in the source of this unwinning trait lay the secret of Jane's advantage over the quicker-witted, better-looking, more attractive Me—a certain mixture of selfishness and stolidity against which, as against stupidity, the gods themselves contend in vain. At least so does outrageous Fortune, for what are her sharpest slings and arrows

[84]

to the mortal who does not feel them; and though occasionally displeased by small disturbances or discomforts, Jane was philosophically superior to more serious troubles. It may be questioned, perhaps, if she ever had any! Still she was subject, like others, to mischances that most people would have considered misfortunes, which Me did so consider and vicariously bewail.

There was, for example, Jane's young man. To the young man himself, or rather to the institution, Me was very far from objecting. On the contrary, she approved of it, as

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

well as of anything else that contributed to Jane's convenience or importance. Everybody of any consequence kept a young man. In deference to custom Me herself kept one, whom she used as a companion in walks and expeditions when Jane was not available. Of this accommodating person little was heard or known, though much might be inferred as to his patience and humility from the manner in which he was treated. Strikingly different was the case of Jane's young man. It is difficult to imagine that any human candidate for such an office would have entirely satisfied

[85]

Me. Judge then her feelings when, by that perversity of fate, which delights in incongruity, the impassively steady Jane attracted and accepted the unsteadyest young man in the village, whom Me, in a burst of exasperation once aptly described as a “trumpery fellow.” Nor did his good luck greatly improve him. Like all trumpery characters, he was persistent neither in good nor in evil, and in the annoyance they occasioned to others his conversions were as bad as his relapses. He was for ever getting into scrapes, and then having to be got out of them by his relations, with a great expenditure of money and of trouble, as well as with storms of emotion, whose reverberations echoing through the village, could not but be heard by the lady of his heart and her housemates. At such times her tranquillity perforce inspired respect.

No recollection of the two survives more vividly in memory than the picture of Jane, pensive but composed, sewing placidly in the pantry, and of Me, in the scullery, vigorously scrubbing her pans, while bathed in the tears we have already described, and shaken like a child by sobs.

[86]

“Why, cook! what can be the matter?”

“’Tis—Jane's young man—He have—got drunk again.”

[87]

XX

SNARES

IN deep-set lanes that skirt the well-fenced coverts we used to meet "Snares," in a brown velveteen coat, with an old muzzleloader over his shoulder, and in his eye the sparkle of satisfaction with which a professed raconteur marks the approach of an audience. This sociable feeling was rarely reciprocated. The dull and subordinate position of a listener is one to which the human mind can only be reconciled by some touch of the dramatic, or, at least, the unexpected, and of this there was not even the semblance in Snares's interminable discourses on one invariable theme. In the days of his youth he had been servant to a local squire, a soldier and a great authority on sport, whom Snares simply designated as

[88]

"th' old Cournel." What th' old Cournel did, what th' old Cournel said, what he liked or disliked, what he approved or disapproved, Snares was for ever informing an indifferent and impatient generation; and as all roads are said to lead to Rome, so every conversation, with him, whatever might be the opening theme, imperatively ended with th' old Cournel.

"Fine day, Snares!"

"Ay, fine, to be sure, wi' the wind i' the sou'-west. Jest sech weather as th' old Cournel could not a-bear. 'Wi' this putrid wind,' he'd say, 'there's nothin' whatever to be done, so I shall pack and go to Lunnon.' And straight off he'd go, you may depend on't, to his mansion in Darset Place. Yes, go he would, and never come back till"—and so on.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

“How are you. Snares?”

“Thank you kindly. Miss Julia, I be middlin', I be middlin'. I feels o' the rheumatiz o' times; but there, I bain't so young as I was when I was along o' th' old Cournel. I was a great favouright wi' the old Cournel, and”—

But at this point Miss Julia, like most

[89]

of his hearers, was compelled by pressing business to bid him good-bye, and forego the continuation of this oft-repeated tale. But even this way of escape was not always open—at shooting expeditions, for instance, when Snares was in his place as keeper, and the sport of the day was at stake. Then these reminiscences provoked unholy outbreaks from the many masters whom he served in turn; the shade of th' old Cournel was consigned to perdition, or Snares was discharged on the spot. Indeed, excellent and ardent keeper though he was, having exhausted the patience of every neighbouring squire, he was for some time out of employment, till the vicar of his parish, taking pity on him, engaged him as coachman; engaged him, however, on conditions that shortly proved intolerable—that he should never speak till he was spoken to.

Nor were his fortunes much mended by the return of th' old Cournel's grandson from foreign parts to settle in the land of his fathers. Once, and once only, did Snares attend him. That bright October day when the young man and his friends

[90]

set forth to tramp the Hampshire Downs together was one of probation for muscles and for tempers, as the partridges disobligingly and persistently refused to arrange themselves where they could be killed. But at last, after much fruitless “driving” and hours of weary walking through fallow, stubble, and covert, these captious creatures were “scattered” in a turnip-field. In solemn and breathless silence, the guns alone

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

advanced upon them, when high and clear rose Snares's piercing voice, "Now, th' old Cournel——"

Whirrh! went the birds as they dispersed in perfect safety, and then from th' old Cournel's grandson fell language that was neither mild nor measured. "Well, Sir," Snares responded with dignity, "I was only going to tell you that your grandfather would ha' worked they birds a defferent way."

Probably the only time that Snares had a fair hearing was during the three weeks he spent at the County Hospital. Not that the inmates of his ward were more captivated than other people by his biographical sketches; but, for obvious reasons,

[91]

they could not avoid them, and nothing, except chloroform, could reduce Snares to silence.

And yet at last Time, in his march, brought him one auditor who did not fly from Snares or bid him hold his peace: a blue-eyed stranger, young and beautiful, admirably fat, and nearly three feet tall. He ended a triumphal progress through the village by calling, with his nurse, upon the old keeper.

"Sir," said old Snares, lifting his cap from his snow-white head, "I am proud to see you. You are the fourth generation of your fam'ly I've a-seen, Sir. I knowed your father, and your grandfather, and your great-grandfather, th' old Cournel."

If anyone smiled, it was not with mere amusement, as the old man bent humbly before the little child. It was the quaintest touch between the past and the present, a past that reaches back to feudalism, a present that is hurrying us—whither?

[92]

The Salamanca Corpus: *Hampshire Vignettes* (1907)
MRS. MALLET

ONE approaches with some diffidence the subject of Mrs. Mallet, whose first appearance on the printed page was hardly what had been expected by her admirers. The one study from the life in a group of imaginary characters, she was denounced as unnatural, impossible and overdrawn. So far, indeed, this confirmed the fidelity of the copy, since the original herself was undoubtedly overdrawn, and, as her portrait was said to do, verged on caricature.

In form and feature the touch had been more restrained. There was nothing grotesque, if something slightly comic, in the outward aspect of this little, round, sturdy brunette of middle age, invariably trim and neat in her appearance alike in her poor as in her prosperous days.

[93]

She had been, so she informed us, much admired in her youth, but the self-conscious simper that she usually wore, referred less, we imagined, to her past beauty than to the ever present gentility on which she especially prided herself. She belonged to the era of Martin Chuzzlewit, was essentially a female, and before and above all things genteel; a travesty, in fact, of the early Victorian heroine and her elegant debility of mind and body.

When first she entered upon our service, Mrs. Mallet was a widow. Before the death of her husband, an army pensioner, she had drifted with him from the seaport where she was born, to the townlet in the valley where we first discovered her, striving to support herself by her needle. Her husband's pension had died with him. The arrangement was naturally displeasing to her, but no less displeasing to the rate-payer would have been the reform she proposed.

“It is my h'opinion,” was her decision, “that h'every female relative of a soldier should have a pension.”

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

And here it is timely to point out the oratorical advantages of the superfluous letter

[94]

“H,” which thus placed before the word “every,” undoubtedly increases our impression of the number as well as of the clamour that might be.

In the household to whose gaiety she added so much, Mrs. Mallet first set foot as a dressmaker, thus adding one more to that list of talented people who have entirely mistaken their true vocation. No higher compliment was ever paid than by the luckless young people with limited allowances whose wardrobe she undertook to set in order. The loss and destruction of material that ensued, entailed months of privation on the part of the owners, but from this at the time their attention was diverted and enthralled by a dazzling flow of reminiscence. Fluent, eloquent, she was something more. A born story-teller, she made everything she told interesting, and moreover the scenes she depicted, however trivial, had for us the charm of the inaccessible.

Fragments of these records still haunt the memories of her listeners.

The Sunday walk of her whole family on the battlements, in the early summer sunshine, when she herself in the bloom of

[95]

her youth, and a bonnet with white ribbons, heard one passing sailor remark to another: “I say, who is that pretty, little dark-eyed Girl?”

A servants' ball at the Manor house, with priceless details of conversation and deportment, where, however other people may have been carried away by mistletoe and excitement, Mrs. Mallet preserved intact her dignity and almost bashful reserve.

The interesting episode of Mr. Daniel Dunce, whose neck, like the rest of him, was of such ample proportions that he could not get a shirt-collar that did not throttle

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

him, till, late in life, he met, and employed Mrs. Mallet, when naturally and properly he formed for her a passionate though unrequited attachment.

Or, as when she touched a softer note, that day in her sister's home within sight of the sea, and sound of saluting guns, when her brother-in-law, returning from a short cruise and a sharp action, was introduced for the first time to his son, and rejoiced, as he said, that he had one arm left wherewith to nurse his baby.

As we listened, spell-bound, we forgot

[96]

the main object of Mrs. Mallet's visit, till the time for "trying on" came, and more than the garments were tried as the unfortunate wearers contemplated their reflections in the glass. Mrs. Mallet, so far from sharing our despondency, was never without an enlivening if not entirely comforting word. Whatever defects our own survey might disclose, she was firm in the assurance that it was "beautiful at the back," whilst for effects that were neither beautiful nor at the back, she was provided with one infallible remedy that could cover anything and embellish everything—"a careless bow." Charming as this amendment might be, with such further suggestions for our adornment as "a white piqué" piped with scarlet at the seams, and a bonnet trimmed with beadles, presumably a mixture of bugles and beads, all this entertainment proved, as already hinted, so expensive that it was almost a relief when during a prolonged interval between the speeding of one cook and the welcoming of another, Mrs. Mallet was transferred from the sewing-room to the kitchen.

Her sobriety, honesty, and cleanliness were above suspicion, and the very plain cooking

[97]

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

required she did well enough to fairly satisfy the household, and fully to satisfy herself. At least, so we may conclude from the class of advertisement she selected to answer when at one time she proposed to change her situation.

“But Mrs. Mallet,” said somebody in reference to one of these, “can you make ices and entrées?”

“O, well,” Mrs. Mallet frankly responded, “I daresay they keep a kitchenmaid.”

Fortunately this novel division of labour was never attempted, and for some time, in our less exacting service, the dishes usually assigned to the kitchenmaid, were prepared by Mrs. Mallet with occasional lapses of attention and accuracy by no means peculiar to herself.

“The receipt says: ‘Mix all the ingredients thoroughly together,’” once insinuated someone concerning a cake that in more than one sense had not risen to the occasion. “What do you think is meant by that, Mrs. Mallet?”

“Ho!” with as lightly contemptuous intonation, “I should think it was just for something to say.”

[98]

A check like this was the more serious because a direct attack had its own disadvantages. Indeed, when it came to plain and even sharp speaking from less long-suffering members of the family, the expression of Mrs. Mallet's feelings that followed can only be described as “roaring and crying.” For hours afterwards her wails might be heard through more than one partition, rising and falling, rising particularly at the entrance of the butcher or the baker, or any other newcomer, to each of whom in turn the story of her wrongs was unfolded without any underhand endeavour to conceal what she was saying from the person of whom she complained.

But the same high standard of gentility that exacted this extreme and almost hysterical sensibility under provocation, prescribed in terms of peace the strictest

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

decorum of tone and manner. Her horror of vulgarity and indelicacy exceeded that of the elegant society one meets in some American novels. To younger and less sedate underlings, her constant exhortation as quoted by herself was:

“Ho! pray don't let us have anything low.”

[99]

It was doubtless the same high-pitched refinement that led her to assume that her surroundings were worthy of it, however far from being so they actually were; and to speak of the cottage in which she condescended to take office as a “mansion” and an “establishment.”

“The carpenter has just set his ladder against the mansion.”

“No,” I says to the tramp, “I cannot give you anything, it is against the rules of this h'establishment.”

In due harmony with the same ideal, Mrs. Mallet was extremely and ostentatiously timid, and on the slightest excuse ready to fall or faint. An example of this, as well as of the dramatic turn and rhythmic flow of her sentences, is afforded by her account of her attempt to cross, unaccompanied and unprotected, two open fields with a few yards of copse between them that divided one village from another.

“When I come to the wood,” was her blood-curdling climax, “I met a man!”

An awful pause.

“I thought I should ha' died; died I thought I should!”

[100]

But her heart must have been in excellent condition, for it survived many such shocks abroad and at home—for even there she was not safe from tramps daring enough

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

to ring the front-door bell, or look in at the kitchen window. There was indeed a terrible time when a veritable murderer, with police in pursuit, was supposed to be at large in the county, when Mrs. Mallet tremulously awaited him every hour of the day, and at night refused to go to bed till the outer gate, then most inopportunately out of repair, had been ostensibly enforced by a bar of wood that a sturdy child might have removed.

On the other hand, this dislike to the neighbourhood of robbers and murderers by no means diminished interest in their doings when at a safe distance. That peculiar taste which in persons of higher rank is fed by the “shocker” and the realistic drama, was in Mrs. Mallet gratified at firsthand by the police reports in the daily papers. She may be said to have literally supped, or at least dined on horrors, reserving, as she did, the chronicles of such “which made the cold chills run over

[101]

her” as a relish or dessert for her midday meal.

But persons of this type, whether in drawing-rooms or kitchens, are not dependent for excitement upon material terrors, being alive to manifestations that are commonly and quaintly called “spiritual.” Mrs. Mallet read fortunes neither in teacups nor palms, but could draw inferences, usually of the most lugubrious kind, from every-day domestic incidents. As to spirits, they did not merely come when she did call them, they flocked to her uninvited, even in the least propitious circumstances, *i.e.* in a peculiarly airy and sunny house, inhabited chiefly by cheerful sceptics. Yet no mediæval dungeon could have furnished a more constant supply of creaking steps, wandering lights, rustling garments, with other even more awe-inspiring sounds.

“I can only compare it,” she said of one experience that had disturbed her slumbers, “to the draggin' of 'eavy furniture, which I really thought, Miss, it were you a-coming up to waken me.”

But however it may sound or read to less highly-strung persons, no visitation so

[102]

impressed and depressed her as one that made memorable the winter night when, the family having gone to a Christmas party, she and a satellite, awaiting their return, kept vigil by the kitchen fire. For the first few hours the spirits might have followed the example of the family, so complete was the quiet, but as the clock struck twelve, in full view of Mrs. Mallet and her companion the door was by invisible agency pushed slowly open. Wonderful to say, Mrs. Mallet abstained from fainting, but grew white as death. This she herself informed us; then, as if detecting in the minds of her hearers some ungracious conjecture as to how exactly she was aware of the fact, she added with much dignity and decision:

“Which I looked down my nose and it were like a corpse’s.”

Yet let no one venture to dub Mrs. Mallet a coward till they have well weighed the superb intrepidity as well as deep philosophy of her most persistently remembered and requoted saying. A clattering fall of saucepans in the scullery had been at first interpreted by her as a signal of grave calamity to follow.

[103]

“But,” was her remarkable statement, “I had a dream that night, and a spirit seemed to whisper in my ear: ‘Don’t be afraid, it is only a token of death.’”

But long before any of her prophecies had been fulfilled, Mrs. Mallet had withdrawn from the scene of our lives as suddenly as she had entered it. She had for some time announced her intention of returning to the little town where we had first met her. Reasons for leaving us she vouchsafed not, but the gossips of the valley supplied this deficiency by maintaining that she went to join the man to whom she had already been secretly married. Why secretly instead of openly they did not explain, and Mrs. Mallet herself was far from throwing any light upon this mystery, for this tale, when repeated to her, she received with a complacent smile, but without either confirmation or denial.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

Alone she took her departure, and, as far as we could gather, alone she repaired to her native seaport.

Thence drifted to us vague and elusive rumours that could not be called news. Somebody had seen Somebody who had

[104]

met her in the street. Somebody had heard of Somebody who knew the house where she lodged. At last even these faint echoes of her existence faded. She had apparently melted into thin air. And, far from sylphlike as was her form, this exit seemed not out of keeping with one who was always a surprise and a problem to the ordinary mind, inconceivable, and, as it proved, incredible, less like a denizen of our commonplace world than like a phantom that had strayed from the dreamland of Dickens.

[105]

XXII

MRS. STANNARD

YOU could see the little farm from the high road. It nestled in the hollow of declining fields, and the tall row of firs beside it stood in dark relief against the fallow tones of yard and homestead and the violet haze of the distance.

On the doorstep would often stand Mrs. Stannard, the bailiff's wife, a portly, handsome brunette, contemplating with mingled pride and anxiety her broods of chickens, ducklings, and turkeys.

The farm was not let in those days. The landlord, poor young man, was farming it himself, and often observed, greatly to Mrs. Stannard's credit, that her particular department, the poultry, was the only one that paid its way.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

Like the triumphs of genius in higher

[106]

places, this was not accomplished without severe effort as well as judicious employment of the smallest opportunities.

“Dang they geese!” Mr. Stannard might be heard exclaiming. “There they be in the carn again every one o' them. Albert, you just go and drive them out, this minute!”

“Why, whatever harm will they do?” Mrs. Stannard in blandest accents would then enquire, “the little as they take? Albert!” with a sharp change of tone, “if you frighten them poor birds in that rough way, I'll just about give you the stick.”

For, indeed, in her concern for her poultry there was a tinge of maternal fervour. Who can forget the indignation outpoured by this kindly-tempered woman on the head of a young retriever—the Squire's though he was—who, whilst his master and the gamekeepers were lunching at the farm, contrived to capture and consume one of her favourite pullets? Or, again, the day when in the field beside the homestead, the Squire's groom tried in harness for the first time a peculiarly wild and rebellious little cob? Never out of a circus was a more entertaining

[107]

exhibition, and no one of the spectators viewed it with such cheerful interest as Mrs. Stannard, until, quite by accident, it was suddenly discovered that a stray infant from her latest brood of ducks had been, during the performance, crushed underfoot or—more correctly—under hoof! Horse and horse-breaker were at once dismissed, and with the scantest courtesy, while the remainder of her grief and anger effectually dispersed all those who, though merely as on-lookers, had become implicated in this fatal and even criminal finale.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

Next to the prosperity of her poultry, Mrs. Stannard's chief care was for the cleanliness of her home. She was on this point an enthusiast, and, like so many enthusiasts, was denied the complete support and sympathy of her housemates. One day, when some of us called at the farm for eggs, home-made jam, or harmless gossip, of which she retailed the very best, we found our charming hostess dissolved in tears. As her head was bound up and she had been awake all night with toothache, the reason of this grief seemed obvious—but no!

“No, I don't mind about the toothache,

[108]

'tis the master have a-vexed me dreadful, saying 'twas all my own fault if I did have the faceache, for I was always a-cleaning and a-scrubbing and a-messing with water.”

Mrs. Stannard, young as she was, had children old enough to be abroad in the world, while three yet remained under the family roof. Of these, Albert, whose difficult position in relation to the geese has been mentioned, was the one who gave most trouble and called most frequently into action ingenious forms of punishment devised by Mrs. Stannard as variations and improvements on “the stick,” like that which consisted in the culprit holding a Bible or prayer-book at arm's length for half an hour. Such chastisements did he incur not so much by deliberate evil-doing, as by thoughtlessness and ill-timed mirth—or what his parents so considered—as when, for instance, he laughed, not in his sleeve, but openly and loudly at the play performed by the gentry of the Manor house. As the entertainment was not merely actually, but intentionally comic, the actors took an entirely different view of his behaviour, and at their intercession he was pardoned. Of

[109]

the other children, two timid little girls, nothing worse was recounted than occasional attacks of dementia like that in which Helena was moved to black and polish her new

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

brown cloth boots. Such aberrations were discouraged by the stick or the prayer-book, while for the minor fault of peevishness or discontent, Mrs. Stannard's acquaintance with the habits of the upper class afforded often an impressive rebuke.

“Maria don't like the winter. She come down this morning, saying it was so cold getting out of bed so early. ‘Ah!’ I says, ‘what would you do if you was a lady and had to take a cold bath first thing every morning?’”

Towards the class to whose hardships she was so keenly alive, Mrs. Stannard cherished a loyalty of feeling almost feudal in its character. To her own children, as well as to those of Mrs. Hodge, her neighbour in the farmstead, she spoke of the Squire's sisters in such awe-inspiring terms that when they visited the farm, they were flattered by seeing the infant Hodges fly before them, and at last, in the extremity of their terror, take refuge in a drain!

[110]

Nor was the elder of these misrepresented young women altogether satisfied with Mrs. Stannard's free translation of her careless assent to the suggestion that Mrs. Hodge's baby was old enough to be weaned.

“O, she have a-weaned it now, Miss. Soon as ever you was gone, I went in and told her: ‘You just take and wean that child this very day,’ I says, ‘for Miss Sophia says you are to, and if you don't she will be very angry with you.’”

Despite her sharp-eyed superintendence of poultry, children, and neighbours, there was a mystic strain in Mrs. Stannard's temperament. She came of a different stock to our somewhat stolid valley people, and brought with her from a western county tastes and predilections that in a higher rank of society would have found ample employment and the highest honours. As it was, she unfolded her lore to inattentive ears, and all that is remembered of it is a form of incantation, whereby, on St. John's eve, an unmarried person might conjure up the phantasm of his or her future spouse. It began most unpalatably, with the eating of a boiled egg in which the yolk had been

[111]

replaced by salt; it concluded with the recital of the solemn lines:

“Come in your apparel, come in your array,
Come in the clothes as you wears every day.”

The efficacy of this rite has never been put to the test by any of Mrs. Stannard's young and heedless listeners, but she herself, in early youth, had by means of it, in proud independence of Mahatmas or others, compelled Mr. Stannard, then absent, distant and unknown, to project before her what, by the light of modern revelations, we now understand to have been his astral body.

[112]

XXIII

LADY ANN

AS one ties those scattered pages together, how clear across the distance shine the faces of their first readers, and of her who asked that they should be written!

Against the background of the tapestried chamber looks out the sweet, girlish face, with its eager eyes and ready smile of sympathy, and of humour no less kindly than her sympathy.

Above the mists of the valley lived Lady Ann, in the old home upon the beech-crowned heights, where the deer browse slowly on through sun and shade, and the dust and din beyond are shut off, as from some enchanted garden, by phalanxes of immemorial trees. Very grateful was its green shade to Lady Ann, who was never quite at ease in the modern kingdom of

[113]

women, always a little homesick for those more congenial days, when, to re-quote the Bishop's apt quotation, as yet unseen on the platform or the playground, "Lady Emily was in the parlour," the shaded and rose-scented parlour.

The fragrance of that sheltered and secluded past might be felt in all Lady Ann's words and ways, and above all in her veritably singular tastes and distastes; her hatred of publicity and notoriety however flattering, her independence of excitement, her relish for quietness and seclusion, her devotion to home and its ministries, her supreme indifference to the rights and privileges of man, her immovable conviction that he remained, as she would say herself, the "top-sawyer," her entire content that he should be so.

It was an essential part of this singularity that she never attempted to force upon others her peculiar sentiments and views, but spoke of them always humbly as the possible symptom of inferior, rather than of superior, intelligence. So, without offence, she pursued her own simple, self-denying way, avoiding alike the follies and the

[114]

pitfalls of the hour, and escaping altogether, by some miracle of adroitness, the pen and the trumpet of the interviewer. Certainly for the bead-roll of accomplishments into which the word-portraits of fashionable feminine Crichtons now chiefly resolve themselves, she would have afforded but scant material, scant indeed as would have done Lady Jane Grey, with whom she had much in common; whilst for the wit and wisdom of either the vernacular of the Society paper is hardly provided with appropriate terms.

"Everybody is clever," said a great London editor, "but Lady Ann has a mind." It was a mind, too, strengthened and enriched by that patient, loving, lifelong study of the best that has been written, which is surely what is meant by culture.

The Salamanca Corpus: Hampshire Vignettes (1907)

Perhaps this was why she saw so much where others see so little, found in the familiar what others only discover in the remote, and served the Lazarus at her gates as many only serve him in the slums.

This was a very dainty critic! Gentle as well as true must be the touch in sketches

[115]

of those who were in a double sense her neighbours. Strong was her affection for these humble and simple friends, deep was her appreciation of all that was pathetic in their fate, her reverence for all that was honourable in themselves; and if she smiled, as she often did, over their quaint doings and sayings, it was with mirth as free from touch of scorn as that of a mother over the antics of her babes.

To a generation that every day seems to know less, and to heed less, the things that time, and time only, can produce, one despairs of making either comprehensible or credible the feelings of Lady Ann for her poorer neighbours. It was much more than ordinary kindness and compassion. In this attachment, whose roots reached far into the past, there was something of the deep-laid devotion of kinship. As one of its sweetest embodiments in the country-side she loved so well, Lady Ann will always be remembered; but it glowed in many hearts besides her own, and, with the answering kindness that it awakened, might be felt through all divisions of class and of fortune, conciliating, uniting, a healing and beneficent influence,

[116]

precious as the dew of Hermon, through the whole atmosphere of the valley. Like the lawns that the American would have copied with millions, it requires nothing less than centuries for its growth, centuries of neighbourhood, centuries of mutual service, of protection on one side, of fidelity on the other, of loyalty on both.

The Salamanca Corpus: *Hampshire Vignettes* (1907)

This was the legacy of the old order that even now, fading in the distance, draws after it some regretful glances. Misused, it may have ended in revolution, but, fairly fulfilled, it could produce this semi-Eden in which the valley had its nook, this other Paradise, this England which Shakespere called “blessed.”

FINIS

Glasgow: Printed at the University Press by Robert MacLehose & Co. Ltd.

