

"COLONIAL CONSERVATIVE."

NW0002

THE OLD MAID'S ROMANCE

In every life—in even the quietest, even the most disturbed and eventful—there must surmount a little vein of romance, some golden truth, or, if we might be permitted to try to sum it up, the sunshine. I do not like to think that the throbbing, hoping, fearing hearts I find in all are clay, all indurated selfishness; the worst, most unpromising people, for aught we know, may have acted long romances in their proper place and have grown cold and passive after the degree that would lead me to believe the worst.

There was Miss Fernley of the Bankside residence, a maiden lady of immense antediluvian vintage, to whom we used to visit when I was a little girl. She lived in a large, genteel, red brick house, enclosed in a still garden, with a great iron

seduced by grime-khote dolls on either side, and the cat perched on the top of the head. The cat at her parlor was intolerantly dull and glum; moreover, it was infatuated with three of the cats I ever knew, and a parrot, the most beautiful of its race. I remember with awe the solemn parities, to which all the children of her acquaintance were annually invited. Depression of my spirits as the gate changed behind me, the time my bonnet was doffed, the falconer's hand, when I was at last drawn down to a considerable distance from the fire, and in reach of the cat, I was petrified into stillness for the rest of the night. Miss Fernley deeded me accordingly; she was accustomed to say to my mother, that "I was such a quiet, proper, sweet child; and in consequence she often loved me to spend the afternoon on Saturdays at her house, giving as a kind of ceremonial gift, no doubt, the kind of greenish ash-chip, or, as she sometimes termed it, a chip-

When I went there, she gave me an old brochure bag filled with ends of worsted and silk for my work; these she bade me to sort out into piles according to colour; and when she said that, she let me alone until tea time. I was absorbed from its shelf an illustrated copy of Bunyan's *Major's Progress*, in which a soldier, standing on a prostrate Christian, admires Apollyon, he was so grand, and he wings; but a subtle remark to that effect made me be immediately deprived of the book in all subsequent visits at this period. My room was divided between the end bag and the corner. Miss Fesley's parlor never underwent change. If one of her pets died it was replaced by another. There were always two or three wing cats, and gray — and they did speak. The wall-coat was painted dark on the back, slender-legged chairs always stood

up by the walls; the heavy sofa prescinded by the fire as if it was fastened to it; and the discordant old piano was forever used to perform upon it a line and a half of Carey's, the only tune I knew without music. The music of the *Woodspecker* and the *Battle of Hagar* and the *Battle of Prague* were Fernley's delight; I remember her once to me, with the remains of a very awe "The woodpecker tapping," and little *Sparrows*. There were two circular portraits in the room of Miss Fernley's brothers, both in uniform had been drowned at sea, and the other killed at the battle of Talavera. She loved to tell me the story of the *Woodspecker*, and began to be confidential, and would quote a deal of poetry in her narrative of their life; because she grew to love me for the interest which I always listened to the soft told that probably never occurred to me until some

never to think whether she was pretty, stiff, ugly old lady; she was tall, thin, strictly dressed in silks of a uniform cold color, lacy crowned cap with a good many wavy curls, and a pair of gloves, white and ruffled at her wrists when nobody was, and had a particularly precise and almost air-I-should say she was proud; and on ceremony always observed by me to the her death was, never to sit in her presence invited to do so. She made many remarkable manners of her young friends, and always that familiarity was vulgar.

The way this became acquainted with me was, this good-looking old lady at last she invited me to take up my abode at it for a week when I was about sixteen, to company for three madcap girls, her new daughter of the youngest brother whose decorated the dismal parlor. Their

spilts were very trying to Miss Fernie, who outraged the cats by dressing them up in caps and pocket-handkerchiefs; they leaped at her, and, while the strident old piano, whistled as they went up the stairs, and danced threesome reels in the great scandal of the primmy old servant and serving woman.

One long wet day their party went bounding; they wanted to act a play in the living room, and to bribe them from their Miss Fernie gave them the key of a green room, and bade them go and raise a row in the theatre, and to be back at five. Up we all accordingly went. Out upon the floor, with screams of laughter, the wild set of awful of garments of all degree of mess and antiquity; startled sometimes by fluttering out from the heaps, and arrested by the sight of some article of attire

—It upon a saccage of crimson silk, and
cried out that she would dress in
tortois, and Jeanne: Her gown, she
rather lacquerous; but a quality
against the wall showed her a very pe-
tastic figure, draped in the crimson sa-
amber satin petticoat, and a black shawl
with a plume shading down over her
head. Little Fernley was a bright complexion,
lassie; and as she walked a stately
the lass you might have thought her
beauty of fifty years ago stepped down
picture-frame.

Meantime the oldest sister had been
her investigations into the depths of a
trunk, and she took a packet of letters
with a faded rose color ribbon. "What
have I cried: such a mystery, a romantic