

## AUNT MARTHA AND THE QUEEN.

For fifty years—oh, more than fifty years—I had wanted to come to England and see Queen Victoria. I fell in love with her when she was crowned. We heard of it out in Liberia, and I saw her picture, and we read how good she was to all her subjects, the black ones as well as the white ones. From that time I wished to come and see her, and now I have been. It was with this little speech, writes a lady representative of the *Pall Mall Budget*, that the Queen's Liberian visitor and I commenced our acquaintance on Monday afternoon in a bright drawing-room at Kensington. When we were ushered in, my artist colleague and I, the blinds were down, and for a moment we could not see the old lady. But then, from under the shawls on a couch in the corner peered a bright, black face, and in a moment Mrs. Ricks presented herself to us.

"She's a wonderful old lady, Aunt Martha is," Mrs. Roberts, the widow of the first Liberian President, had told me in the morning. "She is full of spirits, and you'll see how she'll hug you." The words had called up to mind a gorgeous picture in an old edition of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," where a very stout and tall negress was swinging a wooden soup-ladle in one hand, and "hugging" somebody very fervently with the other. It was not a vision where-with to conjure at the present moment. But no sooner had the small ebony-faced woman got up than it was gone. So far from being a boisterous, gigantic virago, Mrs. Ricks is a small-featured woman, with a cheery face, and an expression of such simple sweet humility that you forget, the very moment you see her, whether her skin is black or white, and see only the look of loyalty, of singleness of aim, and the expression of quiet happiness, now that the one great wish of a long lifetime has been fulfilled even beyond expectation. We told Mrs. Ricks that the artist would like to make a sketch of her while she told me of her visit to the queen last Saturday afternoon. She was a little bewildered at first; in the morning two great photographers had asked her to honor them with a sitting; she had had visitors, and she had seen a little of Great London. But gently, meekly as a child, she stood there, ready to do anything; to put on what dress of her little stock we might wish, to pose or sit just where we liked. Yes, we settled presently, we would like to see her just as she was dressed when Queen Victoria and all the Royal family received her. And off she went, after putting a great white straw bonnet over her black lace cap, to don those precious black garments, the silk skirt, the short mantilla, and the neat big bonnet. We placed her where the light fell upon her; she was no awkward sitter; there was no posing, no self-consciousness—this strange thing that was happening now was only part of the wonderful events that were happening to her in England.

## AUNT MARTHA BEGINS TO TALK.

"Now, Mrs. Ricks, we won't take any notice of the artist; he must just see how he can manage, and meanwhile you'll tell me all about Saturday, won't you? Everybody likes to hear how your great wish was fulfilled after so many years, and everybody will think still more highly than before of our good Queen for granting you your wish so graciously and kindly. Had you been long in England before you saw the Queen?"

"Oh, no, not long at all." She counted the days on her fingers, and then said, with the peculiar accent of the negro tribes, which, though somewhat indistinct, has a musical cadence pleasing to the ear, "It is just a week, only just one week, since I arrived. And I have seen her, and her house, and her country. I cannot quite believe it yet that it is all true. But it is true, and now I do not care how soon the Lord shall call me home; I am ready any day."

## THE QUEEN SHAKES HANDS WITH HER.

"How we went down? In the train, on Saturday afternoon, the Liberian Minister, Dr. Blyden and Mrs. Blyden and their daughter, and the little grand-daughter, went with us, and Mrs. Roberts and some other friends. At Windsor two carriages fetched us at the station, and at four o'clock Queen Victoria came and saw me. It was in a golden room; everything was so beautiful, and there were pictures of all the

Kings and Queens, and I did not know where to look to see it all. I never heard Queen Victoria come in, but all at once they told me she was there, and they were all coming towards us. I cannot tell you what Queen Victoria said to me; she speaks so softly, but she smiled, and her voice was sweet, and she shook hands with me, only with me. They had told me she never shook hands with people; no Queens did; she never shakes hands with Dr. Blyden, though he is the Liberian Minister; but Queen Victoria really shook hands with me." The brown velvety eyes, so meek and lowly otherwise, and just a little weary at the end of the long working day of life, shone and sparkled with delight. It is wonderful how attractive the face of even an old typical native of Africa can be, with its millions of wrinkles and its border of crisp grey hair, when lit up by the light of happiness and gratitude!

## QUEEN VICTORIA'S HOUSE.

"Who was with the Queen, Mrs. Ricks? Did I hear Mrs. Roberts say the Prince of Wales was with her?" "Who, the young man? Yes, he was there. I don't know which of the three gentlemen he was, but they all looked very pleased, and smiled.

where she sits when she goes to meeting. The chapel will last forever; it looks as if it were built to last always, always. We went right to the top of Queen Victoria's house; she allowed me to see everything, and then we were driven back to the station."

## AUNT MARTHA'S QUILT.

"And you brought the Queen a beautiful present, did you not, Mrs. Ricks?" "At home, when a poor man comes to visit us on our farm, he never comes without some little present. How could I come to Queen Victoria, and bring her no present? I made it all myself, every stitch of it. It was a quilt, nine feet square, of white satin, and on it I had embroidered a coffee tree, in green satin, with branches and leaves and with the berries, some red and some green, and there was a man gathering the coffee, and a border of passion-flowers. Yes, I cut the tree out and made everything myself, to take as a present to Queen Victoria. I took it to Windsor last Saturday, and one of the Royal Family, a gentleman, said he would deliver it. Was it much work? Not too much; and I was happy making it." Think of it for a moment, and compare it with the priceless



"AUNT MARTHA."

But I saw the whole Royal family; seven, I think, there were. The Queen Victoria and the whole Royal family; every one of them." Who would have the heart to destroy the happy illusion of the loyal soul and enlighten her on this point? As a matter of fact there were present, besides the Queen, the Prince and Princess of Wales, Princess Beatrice, and the Princesses Victoria and Maud. "And Queen Victoria looked just as I had always thought she would look, only a little older. She stoops, and I don't stoop, though I am older than she. I am seventy-six. But she has had troubles, great troubles; no wonder her shoulders are bent. She did not stay long in the golden room; when I could think again they had all gone, and I forget what she said, but I shall never forget how she smiled, and how she shook hands with me. After that we were taken all over Queen Victoria's house. Oh, the beautiful, beautiful things of which it was full! And we had dinner in a lovely room, and we saw her chapel, and the place

"bought" presents that are laid almost daily at the feet of Her Majesty. There, in the wilds of West Africa, on her lonely coffee plantation, the old negro woman of three-score-years-and-ten sits year after year and stitches, with hands horny with the honest toil of many a long day, a white satin quilt with a green coffee tree, as a humble thank-offering on the day for which she has waited half a century, when she shall have crossed the great water and seen with her own eyes the "mussu," the "head-woman" of the land.

## HOME AGAIN: HOME AGAIN!

"And had you really all these years meant to come to England for the purpose of seeing our Queen?" "Yes, all these years. I had heard it often from the time when I was a child, how good the Queen and the English kings, their relations, had been to my people, to slaves and blacks; how they wanted us to be free, as white people are, and how they worked for us and tried to free us. I was born a slave

in America, but my father bought himself and my mother and his seven children off, and we went all back to Africa when I was a child; therefore I have never felt the hardships of slavery. But I have known others who have, and I know what it means. My husband, who has been dead six or seven years, often laughed and said 'Well, when are you off to England to see the Queen Victoria?' and others said the same and laughed at me. I could not afford it then; but I was saving all the time, and at last I had enough. They would not believe it, that I really was going all alone, and said, 'Aunt Martha, surely you are not going to England?' But I did mean to go, and started off alone. It happened that some friends were going, but I did not know that when I went. We came straight to England, but my friends got off in another town—France, I think, they called it—and I came on to England alone by the steamer. I meant to stay till October, but it will be too cold. It is not very cold now, as long as the wind does not blow. But when the wind blows it is as if I were being shot with a ball, so I must go home sooner. And why should I not go? What I looked forward to almost all my life has now come true; now I am ready. I shall work on my farm as long as I can, and when the call comes to go, then there is nothing to keep me. The sooner it comes, the better. All my friends are gone, I have only two stepsons, and those help me on the farm, and I have seen the Queen Victoria."

## FINIS.

Again the soft eyes light up, a peaceful look comes into the good black face, the hands lie quietly folded before her as she looks up into the grey English sky. There is a touching poem of Chamisso's describing an old washerwoman of nearly eighty years. She lives alone in her garret; all the week she is at work, and on Sunday morning she takes out her Bible, wraps her white shroud around her, the precious garment she herself has sewn, and in which "soon she will rest in dreamless slumber," and gratefully lifts up her heart to the Giver of life. "Aunt Martha," as she is called by all her friends, is the exact prototype of Chamisso's "Waschfrau," if ever you have read the poem, or seen one of the many pictures that have been painted in illustration of it, you cannot help comparing the two, and quoting, as you look at her, the poet's last lines:—

And I, when evening shades are falling,  
Would happily go to my rest.  
Had I, like her, fulfilled my calling,  
And stood, like her, life's hardest test.

## THE UNWELCOME SCHOLAR.

One of the sore trials of some scholars is the sense that they are not welcome among their classmates. Something about their appearance, or lot in life, excites in their associates the feeling that they are not wanted, and the dissatisfied members have many expressive ways of making it known. They may not tell the unfortunate ones that their company is not desired; but the look, or shrug of the shoulder, or the standing aloof from them, or the curl of the lip, or a haughty manner, are sufficient to convey the felt intimation that they are in the wrong place. All this has an unhappy effect upon all concerned, and should, if possible, be avoided. Another has thus described the situation: "Alas for the unwelcome scholar! In many a class there is one who is not wanted by the other members. A working-girl is placed by the superintendent in a class. Up noses go in the air, and the skirts of dresses are gathered up as the poor girl takes her seat. How she feels the iciness that is thrown into manner and speech when they have to do with her! How much these young ladies could do for her if they would! How they could make her heart warm with the assurance that in this Christian place all class distinctions are ignored! But they send her back home with the rankling thought that here, if any thing, she is more despised than elsewhere. Such treatment is likely to send her to the bad, if anything can do so. And how many have upon them the responsibility of the consequences of such snobbish acting none can tell. Alas for the unwelcome scholar! Alas for those who show that she is unwelcome!"—*Presbyterian Observer*.