

A SKETCH OF ENGLISH ARISTOCRACY.*

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THE FAMILY MANSION.

The Aubreys are a Yorkshire family. Their residence, Yatton, is in the north-eastern part of the county, not above fifteen or twenty miles from the sea. The hall is one of those old structures, the sight of which throws you back nearly a couple of centuries in our English history. It stands in a park, crowded with trees, many of them of great age and size, and under which some two hundred head of deer perform their capricious and graceful gambols. You strike off the great North road into a broad by-way; after going down which for about a mile, you come to a staggling little village called Yatton, at the further extremity of which stands an aged grey church, with a very tall thin spire; an immense yew-tree, with a kind of friendly gloom, overshadowing, in the little church yard, nearly half the graves. A little behind the church is the vicarage house, snug and sheltered by a line of fir-trees. After walking on about eighty yards, you come to the high park-gates, and see a lodge just within, on the left hand side, sheltered by an elm tree. You then wend your way for about a third of a mile along a gravel walk, amongst the thickening trees, till you come to a ponderous old crumbling-looking gateway of the time of Henry VII., with one or two deeply-set stone windows in the turrets, and mouldering stone-capped battlements peeping through high-climbing ivy. There is an old escutcheon immediately over the point of the arch; and as you pass underneath, if you look up you can see the groove of the old portcullis still remaining. Having passed under this castellated remnant, you enter a kind of court, formed by a high wall completely covered with ivy, running along in a line from the right-hand turret of the gateway till it joins the house. Along its course are a number of yew-trees. In the centre of the open space is a quaintly disposed grass plot, dotted about with stunted box, and in the centre stands a weather-beaten stone sundial. The house itself is a large irregular pile of dull red brickwork, with great stacks of chimneys in the rear; the body of the building had evidently been erected at different times. Some part is evidently in the style of Queen Elizabeth's reign, another in that of Queen Anne: and it is plain that on the site of the present structure has formerly stood a castle. There are tracts of the old moat still visible round the rest of the house. One of the ancient towers, with its small deep stone windows, still remains, giving its venerable support to the right hand extremity of the building. The long frontage of the house consists of two huge masses of dusky-red brickwork, (you can hardly call them wings,) connected together by a lower building in the centre, which contains the hall. There are three or four rows of long thin deep windows, with heavy-looking wooden sashes. The high pitched roof is of slate, and has deep projecting eaves, forming, in fact, a bold wooden cornice running along the whole length of the building, which is some two or three stories high. At the left extremity stands a clump of ancient cedars of Lebanon, feathering in evergreen beauty down to the ground. The hall is large and lofty: the floor is of polished oak, almost the whole of which is covered with thick matting; it is wainscoted all round with black oak; some seven or eight full length pictures, evidently of considerable antiquity, being let into the panels. Quaint figures these are to be sure; and if they resembled the ancestors of the Aubrey family, these ancestors must have been singular and startling persons! The faces are quite white and staring—all as if in wonder; and they have such long legs, ending in sharp pointed shoes—just such as were worn in the reign of Edward III. or even Richard II. On each side of the ample fireplace stands a figure in full armour; and there are also ranged along the wall old swords and lances, the very idea of welding and handling which makes your arms ache, while you exclaim, "they must have been giants in those days!" On one side of this hall a door opens into the drawing room, beyond which is the library; on the other side a door leads you into a noble room, now called the drawing room, where stands a very fine organ. Out of both the dining room and drawing room, you pass up a staircase contained in an old square tower, two sides of each of them opening on the old quadrangle, and into which all the bedrooms open. But I need not go into further detail.

OLD MRS. AUBREY.

Altogether it is truly a fine old mansion. Its only constant occupant is Mrs. Aubrey, the mother of Mr. Aubrey, in whose library we are now seated. She is a widow, having survived her husband, who twice was one of the county members for fifteen years. Mr. Aubrey is her first-born child, Miss Aubrey her last; four intervening children she has followed to the grave,—the grief and suffering consequent upon which have shaken her constitution, and made her, both in actual health and in appearance, at least ten years older than she really is—for she has, in point of fact, not long since entered her sixtieth year. What a blessed life she leads at Yatton! Her serene and cheerful temper makes every one happy about her; and her charity is unbounded, but dispensed with a most just discrimination. One way or another, almost a fourth of the village are direct pensioners on her bounty. You have only to mention the name of Madame Aubrey, the lady of Yatton, to witness involuntary homage paid to her virtues. Her word is law; and well indeed it may be. While Mr. Aubrey, her husband, was to

the last stern in his temper, and reserved in his habits, bearing with a spotless and lofty character, she was always what she still is, meek, gentle, accessible, charitable, and pious. On his death she withdrew from the world, and has ever since resided in Yatton—never having quitted it for a single day. There are in the vicinity one or two stately families, with ancient name, sounding title, and great possessions; but for ten miles round Yatton, Madame Aubrey, the Squire's mother, is the name that is enshrined in people's kindest and most grateful feelings, and receives their readiest homage. 'Tis perhaps a very small matter to mention, but there is at the hall a great white old mare, Peggy, that for these twenty years, in all weathers, hath been the bearer of Madame's bounty. A thousand times hath she carried Jacob Jones, (now a pensioned servant, whose hair is as white as Peggy's) all over the estate, and also beyond it, with comfortable matters for the sick and poor. Most commonly there are a couple of stone bottles, filled with cow-slip, currant, ginger, or elderberry wine, slung before old Jones over the well-worn saddle—to the carrying of which Peggy has got so accustomed, that she does not go comfortably without them. She has so fallen into the habits of old Jones, who is an inveterate gossip, (Madame having helped to make him such by the numerous enquiries she makes of him every morning as to every one in the village, and on the estate, and which enquiries he must have the means of answering,) that slow as she jogs along, if ever she meets or is overtaken by any one, she stops of her own accord, as if to hear what they and her rider have to say to one another. She is a great favourite with all, and gets a mouthful of grass or hay at every place she stops, either from the children or the old people. When old Peggy comes to die, she will be missed by all the folk round Yatton. Madam Aubrey, growing, I am sorry to say, very feeble, cannot go about as much as she used, and betakes herself oftener and oftener to the old family coach; and when she is going to drive about the neighbourhood, you may always see it stop at the vicarage for old Dr. Tatham, who generally accompanies her. On these occasions she always has a bag containing Testaments and prayer-books, which are distributed as rewards to those whom the parson can recommend as deserving them. For these five-and-twenty years she has never missed giving a copy of each to every child in the village and on the estate, on its being confirmed; and the old lady looks round very keenly every Sunday from her pew, to see that these Bibles and prayer-books are reverently used. In manner she is very calm, and quiet, and dignified. She looks all that you could expect from what I have told you. The briskness of youth, the sedate firmness of middle age, have years since given place, as you will see with some pain, to the feebleness produced by ill health and mental suffering—for she mourned after her children with a fond and bereaved mother's love. Oh! how she doats upon her surviving son and daughter! And are they not worthy of such a mother? Mr. Aubrey is in his thirty-sixth year; and inherits the mental qualities of both his parents—the demeanour and person of his father. He has a reserve that is not cynical, but only diffident, yet it gives him, at least at first sight, an air of hauteur, if not austerity, which is very far from his real nature, for within is, indeed, the rich "milk of human kindness." He has the soft heart and benignant temper of his mother, joined with the masculine firmness of character which belonged to his father. Sensitive he is, perhaps to a fault. There is a tone of melancholy or pensiveness in his composition, which has increased upon him from his severe studies, ever since his youth. He is a man of superior intellect, though not perhaps of the highest or most brilliant order; and is a most capital scholar. At Oxford he plucked the prize from a host of strong competitors, and has since justified the expectations which were entertained of him. He has made some really valuable contributions to historic literature—indeed, I think he is even now engaged upon some researches calculated to throw light upon the obscure origin of several of our political institutions. He has entered upon politics with uncommon ardour—perhaps with an excessive ardour. I think he is likely to make a considerable figure in Parliament; for he is a man of very clear head, very patient, of business-like habits, and, moreover, has a very impressive delivery as a public speaker. He is generous and charitable as his admirable mother, and careless, even to a fault, of his pecuniary interests. He is a man of perfect simplicity and purity of character. Above all, his virtues are the virtues which have been sublimed by Christianity—the cold embers of morality warmed into religion. He has looked for light from above, and has heard a voice saying—"This is the way, walk thou in it." His happiness is the real source of that happy consistent dignity, and firmness, which have earned him the respect of all who knew him, and will bear him through whatever may befall him. He who standeth upon this rock cannot be moved, perhaps not even touched, by the surges of worldly circumstances of difficulty and distress. In manner Mr. Aubrey is calm and gentlemanlike; in person he is rather above the middle height, and of slight make—too slight, perhaps, to be elegant. His countenance, though not to be called handsome, has a serene manliness about it when in repose, and an acuteness and vivacity when animated, which are delightful to behold: it often beams with energy and intellect. His hair is black as jet, and his forehead ample and marked.

(To be continued.)

He who thinks his place below him should prove that he is above his place.

FEMALE COURAGE.

AN EXCITING INCIDENT.

A striking trait of courage in a lady forms the subject of conversation at present of the French metropolis. Madame Aubry lives in a solitary chateau, not far from the town of —. The family consisted only of M. Aubry, his wife, a child about a year old, and one maid servant. In the little town, every light is out by ten o'clock, and of course the most perfect solitude reigns at that hour in their houses, which lies off the road, and is completely hidden by trees. One night last winter, Madame Aubry was sitting alone, reading. Her husband had left her in the morning to visit a friend some six or eight miles off, and, as he expected to bring home a considerable sum of money, he had taken the usual precaution of arming himself with a pair of pistols. About six o'clock the lady went up to her room to put her child to bed. Her apartment was a large room on the first floor, filled up on one side by an old-fashioned chimney, and on the other by a deep and spacious alcove, near which stood her infant's cradle. The night was a gloomy one, cold and dark, and every now and then a dash of rain beat against the gothic windows. The trees in the garden bowed to the wind, and their branches came sweeping against the casement; in short, it was a night in which the solitude of the mansion was more complete and melancholy than usual. Madame Aubry sat down on a low chair near the fire, which by its sudden flashes, cast an uncertain light over the vast apartment, throwing its antique mouldings and carvings into brighter relief or deeper shade. She had her child on her lap, and had just finished preparing it for the cradle. She cast her eyes towards the alcove, to see if the cradle was ready to receive its little occupant, whose eyes were already closed. Just then, the fire flashed up brightly, and threw a strong light on the alcove, by which the lady distinguished a pair of feet, cased in heavy nailed shoes, peeping out under the curtain in front of the bed. A thousand thoughts passed through her mind in an instant. The person hidden there was a thief, perhaps an assassin—that was clear. She had no protection, no aid at hand. Her husband was not to return till eight at soonest, and it was now only half past six. What was to be done? She did not utter a single cry, nor even start on her seat. The servant girl probably would not have had such presence of mind. The robber probably meant to remain quiet where he was till midnight, and then seize the money her husband was to bring with him; but if he should find he was discovered, and that there was no one in the house but two women, he would not fail to leave his hiding place, and secure their silence by murdering them. Besides, might not the girl be the robber's accomplice? Several slight causes of suspicion occurred to her at once, and all these reflections passed through her mind in less time than we take to write them. She decided at once what she would do, which was, to send the girl out of the room:

"You know that dish my husband likes," said she, without betraying her alarm by the least change in the tones of her voice, "I ought to have remembered to have got it ready for his supper. Go down stairs, and see about it at once."

"Does not madame require my help here, as she generally does?"

"No, no, I will attend to every thing myself. I know my husband would not be pleased, if he was to come home after his ride, in such bad weather, and not find a good supper ready."

After some delays, which increased in the lady's mind, that suspicion she was forced to conceal, the girl left the room. The noise of her steps on the stairs, died away gradually, and Madame Aubrey was left alone with her child, with those two feet motionless at their post, still peeping out under the curtain. She kept by the fire, with her child on her lap, continuing to caress it and sing to it almost mechanically. The child cried: it wanted to be put to bed, but its cradle was near the alcove—near those dreadful feet, how could she find courage to go near them! At last, she made a violent effort. "Come, my child," said she, and got up. Hardly able to stand erect, she walked towards the alcove, close to the robber. She put the child in the cradle, singing it to sleep as usual. We may imagine how much inclination she had to sing. When the child fell asleep, she left it, and resumed her seat by the fire. She did not dare to leave the room; it would arouse the suspicions of the robber, and of the girl, probably his accomplice. Besides, she could not bear the thought of leaving her child, even if it was to purchase her own safety. The clock pointed to seven. An hour yet, a whole hour, before her husband would come! Her eyes were fixed on those feet, which threatened her with death at any moment with a sort of fascination. The deepest silence reigned in the room. The infant slept quietly. We do not know whether even an Amazon, in her place, would have been bold enough to try a struggle with the robber. Madame d'Aubry had no arms; besides, she made no claims to valour, but only to that passive courage, founded on reflection, which is far the rarer of the two. Every few minutes she would hear a noise in the garden. In that noise, a ray of hope shone on her for an instant—it was her husband, it was deliverance! But no—it was only the wind and rain, or the shutters cracking. What an age every minute seemed to be. Oh, heavens! the feet moved! Does the thief mean to leave his hiding place? No. It was only a slight, probably involuntary movement, to ease himself by changing his position. The clock strikes—only once, it is the half hour only—and the clock is too fast, besides! How much anguish, how many silent prayers, in these trying minutes! She took up a book of devotion and tried to read, but her eyes would wander