

Who once so prompt her generous aid to lend?  
 What hand more liberal, frank and free,  
 Than that she scarcely ventures to extend?—  
 Ah! give the poor one charity!

• Alas for her! for faster falls the snow,  
 And every limb grows stiff with cold;  
 That rosary once woke her smile, which now  
 Her frozen fingers hardly hold.  
 If bruised beneath so many woes, her heart  
 By pity still sustain'd may be—  
 Lest even her faith in heaven itself depart,  
 Ah! give the blind one charity!

MEMOIRS OF MRS. INCHEBALD, including her familiar Correspondence with the most distinguished persons of her time. Edited by James Boaden, Esq. 2 vols. Bentley, 1833.

This is the life of a woman of genius; and such is the interesting nature of its incidents, that even the clumsy affectation of the biographer can only blunt the effect of the narrative. Mrs. Inchbald was a beauty, a virtue, a player, and, in spite of all difficulties and obstacles, an authoress of works which will always live. Her family were numerous, distressed, and importunate; she was generous and benevolent; and yet she, by the labour of her own hands, accumulated a handsome independence. Her character is a singular compound of steadiness and impulse. She did the wildest things that girl or woman ever did; but such was the sterling purity of her mind, and, above all, the decision of her temper even in the midst of folly, that reproach never, except but momentarily, visited her fair fame. She left her home a mere girl, with a determination of seeking employment upon the stage; was for some time exposed to all the temptations and dangers which beset a beautiful and unprotected creature in London; and yet came out of the ordeal only brighter and purer than she entered it. All her life she seems to have been warmly attached to male society; her friendships, acquaintances and correspondences with men of various views and ranks, are most numerous. She answered every letter, even when it conveyed proposals of a kind which she repelled with indignation. She stood upon her independence, without exactly reflecting what it was she stood upon; but the men knew it, and were afraid. After the death of that excellent man, Inchbald, (albeit a vagabond by law,) she never married again—though not from any objection she had to the married state: several, nay many, fluttered about her for years, but never resolved on the fatal *pop*. Sir Charles Bunbury was her most noted admirer. John Kemble was another. Holcroft swells the list. Dr. Gisborne met but plunged, and would not have had the fate Holcroft met with. The famous Suett, and Dick Wilson, a noted actor, were among her rejected. Mr. Glover, a man of beeves and land—in fact, a country gentleman of fortune—offered his hand and his estate; and the biographer seems to wonder why they were not accepted. The cause is hinted at: Sir Charles Bunbury was in a more uncertain mood than ever, and seemed to be inclined to throw the weight into the legal scales, and kick the matrimonial beam. He did not: not because the lady was an actress—a farmer's daughter, whose birth-place bordered on his own extensive domains in Suffolk—but, most probably, because he saw and knew that no empress on her throne was more in the humour to have her way as regarded herself, and all connected with herself, than the fair authoress of the unequalled *Simple Story*. She laid no trap—was no hypocrite—hated the syren's arts—or this eminent member of the turf, “wide awake” as he might fancy himself, would have assuredly been conjoined with much green-room notoriety. He could not have had a fairer, a purer, a more noble-spirited creature; who was, moreover, a woman of genius, a woman of inexhaustible stores of knowledge, and who would have done honour to

the strawberry-leaves of a ducal coronet. True, Sir Charles would have been overrun with Debby, and Dolly, the Hug-ginses, the Bigsby's, the Hunts, and the Simpsons; and such a tag-rag and bob-tail of poor relations is worse than death to an aristocratic personage, who fancies he has only married a beauty and a genius. Mrs. Inchbald, as plain Mrs. Inchbald, did justice and kindness to these people, out of her hard-earned funds; she did not want their society, and had little of it; as Lady Bunbury she could have hardly done more, or been more annoyed. Sister Dolly was a bar-maid; and, alas! sister Debby (“more beautiful than me,” writes the authoress) joined the frail sisterhood, who, because they depend upon the accidental exhibition of personal charms, are said to live upon the monster Town. These were serious drawbacks in the estimation of, perhaps, a selfish man of the world; but what must they have been to poor Mrs. Inchbald herself? She was a queen among these poor relations: it is to be doubted whether the baronetcy could have raised her higher in their estimation, than the “trunkmakers” of the gallery, on the night of one of her successful comedies, when all the house were wrapt in enthusiasm, or when the king took the cue from the people, and commanded each of her new pieces, generally a few nights after its first exhibition. After every successful play or farce, she was besieged by these poor unfortunates, and always distributed a portion of her gains; the rest was inexorably deposited in the funds; and though, between her charity and her determination to secure independence, she was often reduced to second stories at 3s. 6d. per week, to scour her own floors, and wash down the stairs in turn with her own hands—hands that on the same day held the pen, and kept the country in a state of delight with the result of its markings—still she persevered, still she determined upon saving enough to secure her from hanging on the charity of others, and keeping enough to dispense among the poor relatives whom accident had thrown in part upon her bounty. Nay, she allowed her old sister a hundred a year, when she could not afford herself coals: her diary speaks of her crying for cold, and her only consolation being that she had secured her poor sister a good fire. If this is not nobility, what is? Some of her conduct bears the air of rigidity; and yet, contemporaneously with it, we find the whole laughing nature of this splendid woman breaking through the crust of custom, and indulging in—what shall we call them?—foibles—follies—imprudencies?—amusing herself with run-away knocks at night; with running over the town, and wearing the stones of Sackville and other streets into holes after Dr. Warren, for whom she had conceived a *plutonic*, in spite of his being a married man; nay, with even permitting addresses in the street, which she called “adventures;” with her visits to bachelors, like Mr. Babb, at Little Holland House, or her perpetual Sunday dinners and readings with that fine specimen of humanity, old Horace Twiss, the father of the present Horace. We call him old because we remember him as such; but at the time we speak of—when he had the supreme pleasure of being visited every Sunday by the “tenth Muse,” in the shape of a beautiful and exemplary actress—he was a young and flourishing merchant, besides being a man of property and cultivated intellect. He had an enthusiastic love of the drama—not of the green-room and the stage only—an attachment which he afterwards showed by his marriage with the beautiful sister of Mrs. Siddons. It may be stated, though hardly necessary to prove the perfect purity of Mrs. Inchbald's visits to this bachelor, that her Sunday readings were continued after his marriage.

All the peculiarities of this extraordinary character—the inconstancies, as it were, of a beautiful form, as it grew older (for she was never old, never dull, always original, and full of talent)—are to be learned by a study of the books before us. We only wish her papers had been in better hands; as it is, we trust they are not destroyed—her diary alone will be worth all that good old *riddle-me-ree* Bosden could hint,