

## *Ladies.*

LOVERS of the novel *Cranford* will doubtless be delighted to hear that the play is to be produced by some of the most talented members of the Levana Society, on Tuesday of next week, and the following short sketch of the inimitable story and of its author, Elizabeth Stevenson Gaskell, the centenary of whose birth was recently celebrated at Kneetsford, Cheshire, England, will be of interest to those of us who are not so familiar with it.

Critics agree in placing novels of Mrs. Gaskell on a level with works of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. It is more than probable that future generations will turn to her for pictures of simple, every-day life that must fail in succession of years. She has been compared to the naturalist who knows intimately the flora and fauna of his native heath. Elizabeth Stevenson was born in Chelsea, England, Sept. 29th, 1810, daughter of William Stevenson, a literary man, who was keeper of the treasury. She lived with her aunt at Kneetsford, was sent to a private school in Stratford-on-Avon, and visited London and Edinburgh, where her beauty was much admired. In 1832 she married Rev. William Gaskell, minister of a Unitarian chapel in Manchester. Mrs. Gaskell did not begin to write until she reached middle age and then chiefly to distract her thoughts after the death of their only son.

*Cranford*, "the City of the Amazons," the home of Miss Pole and Miss Mattie and Miss Jenkyns—the place where economy was always elegant, where "though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic," is identified as the town of Kneetsford. Its population consists of widows and maiden ladies, in bonds to their ancient gentility. With deft touch, Mrs. Gaskell brings out the humour and pathos of these quaint characters, characters which, however, may be found everywhere, where people have individuality and kindliness, where oddities are loved for the sake of the individuals who possess them. The story of the quaint old ladies there, who scorned the "vulgarity of wealth" and practised "elegant economy" is told by Mary Smith, a sympathetic and discerning young person from the neighboring town of Drumble. During her first visits to the village Miss Deborah Jenkyns is alive but afterwards she dies, leaving her gentle sister, Miss Mattie, to battle with life and its problems alone. Miss Mattie lives comfortably and is able to entertain her friends in a gentle way, until the bank fails and then she is obliged to keep a little shop and sell tea. In the end her long lost brother, Peter, comes home from India with money enough to enable her to live as becomes a rector's daughter. The other characters are great hearted Captain Brown, who is killed by a train while saving a child's life; Mr. Holbrook, Miss Mattie's old lover; the Honorable Mrs. Jamieson and her sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, who afterwards marries Mr. Hoggins the doctor; Miss Betty Barber and her cow, famous for its suit of grey flannel; Miss Pole, Mrs. Forrester and Martha, Miss Mattie's devoted servant.

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The faithful ones—and they are not a few—who tear themselves away from the rink or from primping for socials or dances enjoy many good things