

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## THE PEVENSEYS.

By Evelyn Orchard.

It had always been a beneficent rule, and there was not one in the village or in the county who would honestly have wished it changed.

The Arundel Pevenseys could count their forebears back to the Conquest, but if they were proud of the fact they never betrayed it.

Perfect unconsciousness of self and complete simplicity of life were the outstanding traits in the family history.

It had been a troubled history, because centuries rolling by must bring drastic changes in their train. If the stone images lying with hands so meekly clasped on the grey old family tombs could have spoken, how wonderfully they might have added to the rich sum of human experience.

There was Dame Alicia, whose husband died at the wars. What wars? The delightful vagueness of the term is fragrant of the days when peace was the exception, not the rule, and when men preserved their homes as well as their kingdoms literally at the point of the sword.

The record of Dame Alicia's virtues was so long as to be wearisome, and her portrait on the great staircase was more suggestive of rigid piety and hard self-righteousness than of sweet womanly virtues.

So thought the modern Alicia Pevensey, her descendant and namesake, as she paused on the staircase one mellow autumn afternoon. She had been bidden study the pregnant record of Dame Alicia's life, and learn how she had not spared herself for the family honor and the family good.

Self-sacrifice and self-repression had doubtless given that long hard line to the mouth and the inscrutable sadness to the eyes.

But the hot Pevensey blood flowed riotously in the young Alicia's veins, and sacrifice does not come naturally to the young.

The Pevenseys had fallen on evil times. The old feudal days when they had held the greater part of a county in their grip and exercised undisputed sway over their vassals were gone for ever. The village people were still loyal in a sense, being bound to their house by ties of gratitude and devotion, but undoubtedly the times had sadly changed from the Pevensey point of view. Their people now claimed rights undreamed of by their ancestors, the right to think and act and live as seemed best in their own sight.

The causes which have contributed to the unrest of our national life had sapped the springs of the feudal system in Hope Pevensey, as elsewhere in England, and everywhere amongst the younger set there were lively signs of revolt against the Pevensey rule.

The young men grew up, and disdaining the frugal narrow country life, went forth into the great world from whence they would return from time to time laden with strange and treasonable ideas which made for discontent. Agricultural depression, foreign competition, and, it must be added, the crass wickedness and extravagance of certain cadets of Arundel, had brought the Pevenseys very near to ruin. And unless a miracle should happen, they said, the day must come, and that speedily, when they would be torn root and branch from the old place which would know them no more.

In Alicia Pevensey's fair hands rested the power to work that miracle. It had just been laid before her in family conclave, but there was high revolt in her soul. She hung upon the balustrade and studied intently the hard face of her ancestress, who had a long pointed body disappearing into the mysteries of ermine, while a great ruff rose from her bosom, ac-

centuating the slender column of her throat and rendering very pointedly fine the outline of her face.

"I wish you would speak, you old fossil," quoth the modern Alicia irreverently. "If it is true that you embodied and practised all these impossible virtues, at least, you don't look as if you had enjoyed it."

She sighed a little as she mounted the stairs to her own room, where she quickly changed into a riding habit and stole from the house.

As she passed the closed doors of the great library she imagined she heard the voices discussing and deciding her fate.

Once in the saddle the cool wind of the autumn soothed her, and the cloud swept from both heart and face. She was a true child of nature, and to the young all things are possible. She rode by devious ways through the lordly deer park, and came out upon the road by a woodman's gate close to the village of Hope Pevensey. Here her place of call was the Almshouses, designed and erected by the good Dame Alicia of pious memory, and which had been faithfully sustained and tended by all her successors.

Fasting her obedient steed loosely to a gate-post she sped up the path betwixt the tall hollyhocks and entered the first door without knocking. An old woman in a blue cotton frock, white mob cap, and fichu folded softly on her breast, looked up joyfully from her knitting at sight of her blithe young guest.

"No, don't rise, Pruey. I absolutely forbid it. And don't even speak a word. It is I who wish to speak. I am in sad trouble, Pruey, and you must comfort me."

She knelt on the spotless floor by her old nurse's side, and folded her hands on her knee.

"Great, great trouble, Pruey, for look you, they are going to marry me against my will."

"Which the Lord forbid, my lamb," said the old woman fervently.

"The Lord? Do you think He cares? He has forgotten Arundel and all the Pevenseys long since," she said wistfully. "It has come to this, Pruey, that either I have to marry where the hateful money is, or we go out of Arundel."

"Which the good Lord forbid," repeated the old dame, and a tear started in her eye.

"It's between the devil and the deep sea I am, Pruey," pursued the sweet young creature ruefully. "And, please, what is it I am to do?"

She laid her hot cheek on the old woman's cool, soft palm and heaved an exceeding bitter sigh.

"There ain't any hurry, be there, honey? Wait and see. It's wonderful what 'appens time and again, and what the Lord kin do when we waits an' keeps quiet. That's what to do."

"Wait and keep quiet," repeated Alicia as she rose to her feet with a pondering look on her face.

"Pevenseys go out of Arundel! Never, never! Why, the place would go right down. And who is the gentleman anyone in these parts?" Prue asked eagerly.

"No, no, if it were I'd swallow him whole whatever the consequences," she cried in her exaggerated way. "I've never even seen him. He has nothing in the wide world I am sure, by the way they speak, except the hateful money."

"But if he has never seen you how can he wish to marry you, honey?"

"Ask me another," cried the girl, and tossed her pretty head. "It's what is called an arrangement between business men, and I happen to be the chief item in the bill of sale, that's all. Well, I will wait and keep quiet. I never thought of that. After all, I needn't see him till Christmas. It seems he's out of the country at present, probably, I should say, for the country's good. Good-bye."

She rode hard for another hour, and when she returned to Arundel some expected visitors had arrived. She had heard their names only casually mentioned, and understood that they were political friends of her father's, to whom it was not necessary that she should pay much attention.

They were still lingering by the tea-table in the great hall, when she entered it, and she was immediately struck by the look of the younger man—by his strikingly clever face and his quiet, assured manner. The older man's short, squat figure, with a prosperous air, looked like a successful business man. They were introduced to her as Mr. Lydgate and Mr. Francis Lydgate, and though the father seemed deeply interested at the introduction, she was piqued by the cool air of the son, who played his part in the greeting as formally as might be without actual rudeness.

"Who are these people, mummy?" she asked, in her high, imperious voice, as she ran into her mother's dressing-room a little later.

"I can hardly answer you, darling. They are friends of your father, or, at least, people in whom he is interested. They come from the Midlands, and your father says the young man is going to be the chief hope of the party some day. I daresay you could hear that he could speak for himself."

"No, mummy, I didn't. I thought him very stupid; but he has certainly an interesting face. Shall I sit next him at dinner?"

She did; and amused herself with attempting the complete subjugation of Francis Lydgate—no very difficult task, in spite of the hard, straight line of that budding politician's mouth. There was a great deal of hard, dry parliamentary talk, and Alicia, keenly on the alert, feeling herself oddly interested in the young man, was quick to note the quiet brilliance of his replies, his evident mastery of most of the subjects touched upon. But above and beyond that, she noticed his deference and respect to his father, who was a plain man, expressing himself bluntly, yet with a certain rugged power. It is certain that that trait in Francis Lydgate's character impressed her most favorably of all, and predisposed her to be very kind to him. After dinner she walked with him on the terrace for a little while, showing herself to him at her best and sweetest, and sighing once or twice inwardly, thinking how easy her part of the contract for the salvation of Arundel would have been had Francis Lydgate been dining at the contracting parties. It was very bad for Alicia's peace of mind, as well as detrimental to the cause her parents had in view to give Francis Lydgate the run of Arundel as they did. There were few week-ends when he did not present himself, and at last the inevitable happened. Alicia had gone down — by the merest chance, was it?—from the Almshouses to the station on a certain Friday, about the time when Lydgate usually came out from town. She made no attempt to hide her pleasure at sight of him, and as for his eyes, they were eloquent of the passion of his soul. She knew that he would speak, and longed for him to do so, though such speech must be at once the beginning and the end of all things.

"Why did papa not come down with you to-day — we expected him?" she asked.

"He will come by the next train; but he hoped you would meet me."

"Did papa say so, Mr. Lydgate?" she asked with heightened color.

"He did. Is there anything wonderful about that?"

"To me it is very wonderful," was all she answered; then a silence fell upon them till they passed within the Woodman's Gate and the trees hid them from any chance or curious gaze.

"Do you know why I am here tonight? and do you remember what I said the last time we walked this way?"