



This series has thus far contained sketches of Countesses of Aberdeen, Mrs. George Kirkpatrick, Mrs. J. C. Patterson, Lady Chapleau, Madam Laurier, Mrs. Mackintosh, Lady Galt, Lady Tupper, and Mrs. George Foster.

EVERY home worthy of the name possesses its own peculiar atmosphere, an undefinable envelopment, of which the guest of ordinary sensibility becomes instantly aware upon crossing its threshold.

And this atmosphere—this home breath—varies as the individual. Indeed, it is the outcome of the spiritual aspiration; the theosophical *aura* of the inmates of the home. They, themselves, are unconscious of it; it is their natural environment. But the quality of it is as perceptible to the guest as is that of any new physical atmosphere.

In one home we breathe instantly the frank worldliness of good-natured wealth; in another the wholesome air of kindly domesticity. We choke with the gassy uncertainties of a home of shams; or grow torpid in the sluggish atmosphere of intellectual inertia.

But where the spiritual is supreme, where mind and soul are alive; where the inmates of a home realise that 'the kingdom' is truly within, and, consciously or unconsciously, live from this heart centre; then, indeed, the atmosphere becomes pregnant with high thought and a quick sympathy, which stirs whatever there may be of noble purpose, in even the passing guest.

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Such a home rises in vision before me as I look at the portrait of Mrs. George Foster, mistress of 'Maplecroft,' Ottawa, and wife of Canada's clever Minister of Finance.

'Maplecroft,' is a cool, old-fashioned stone mansion, situated in Ottawa's older—and, possibly, less fashionable—portion. Concerning the latter fact, I do not know. But memory recalls it just now, as I saw it on a recent June evening,—standing back a little from the street, with glorious old trees in front of it; tempting, lazily be-cushioned hammocks swinging beneath the large, old-fashioned porch; soft green lawn, and a hospitable open door, revealing a depth of cool summer quiet.

Even in giving this slight impression of the exterior of 'Maplecroft,' I have unconsciously revealed the salient points of the inner life,—simplicity, quietness, hospitality.

Here the wayfaring guest—of whatever rank—is sure to find welcome, sincere; hospitality, generous; the repose that bespeaks culture;—and enveloping all, an unassuming simpleness that is very charming.

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The mistress of 'Maplecroft' is a little lady of distinguished appearance;—the refined, nervous face, accentuated by the soft, short curls of

silvery-grey; the gentle tones; the thoughtful speech; the retiring manner,—all unite to make her attractive to strangers; who, if they be of keen perception, may guess something of the intense nervous temperament, and the intellectual gifts that lie beneath the modest, almost shy bearing.

Yet Mrs. Foster is best loved by those who



MRS. GEORGE FOSTER.

know her most intimately,—the poor, who receive her many charities; and the small inner circle of friends.

During the session, and, indeed, throughout the year, 'Maplecroft' contributes its full share to the social amenities that grace official life. And none of Ottawa's social leaders entertain with more of kindness and grace; no receptions and dinners are more enjoyable than those given by the wife of the Minister of Finance.

In the brilliant official functions of the Capital, Mrs. Foster moves with manner so unassuming, that strangers rarely suspect either her high social position or yet her exceptional personality.

As hostess among many guests, she is still the same, moving among them so quietly that they are almost unconscious of her presence.

Yet not one goes away without feeling that he or she has received the courtesy of a special welcome,—and a personal sympathy.

But it is rather with the two or three,—in the closer intimacies of friendships, and the thoughtful talk of the twilight hour,—that the mistress of 'Maplecroft' is at her best.

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An incorrect impression prevails that Mrs. Foster is an American. She is a Canadian by birth, and by many years of living; although, as a young girl, she received part of her education in New York State.

She is naturally very talented, and her several gifts were thoroughly cultivated. She is a good musician; and her marked literary ability is well known. Many of her writings are very beautiful,—the pathetic strain that pervades them, the isolated 'inner vision,' suggesting the style of Father Ryan, whose tender musical poem, "The Valley of Silence," is familiar to us all.

She is fond of reading, and her favourite poets are Longfellow and Mrs. Browning.

Looking into the nervous face, and understanding something of the strong imaginative temperament it reveals, it is easy to conceive a resemblance between the clear-visioned prophetess-poet and the lady of our sketch, whose keen sympathy and intuitive powers make her almost clairvoyant.

Besides these artistic gifts, she is an accomplished linguist in French and German, and it is a common pastime for Mr. and Mrs. Foster to spend a spare hour conversing in these languages.

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Both are fond of flowers. At the back of the house extends a large garden, and here, when wearied of statistics, the Minister of Finance finds relaxation, by taking spade, hoe and rake, throwing off his coat, and with it the cares of his onerous office, and turning up the fresh brown earth, planting or pruning.

The flowers are not the only pets; certain dear little foreign birds, the tiniest of winged songsters, chirp cheerily in the window sunshine; while one or two favourite dogs find a happy life at 'Maplecroft.'

It is almost an ideal home; for its mistress, with all these gifts of heart and intellect, is also an excellent house-keeper, who plans with a kindly unselfishness for the comfort of those about her. And her magnetism of sympathy and clear intuition places her instantly *en rapport* with those whom she desires to serve.

Her silence and reserve arises often from excess of sympathy. She literally 'feels together,' and suffers with and for her friends.

The Minister of Finance shares many of the qualities belonging to his wife, albeit he adds thereto the stronger masculine nature and attributes.

Mr. and Mrs. Foster are distinctly in close sympathy with each other, and in all aims and purposes; and it is from a simple, yet always uplifting home living, that this important Cabinet official goes forth into the larger and more turbulent life of the Canadian political arena.

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This is 'Maplecroft' and the mistress thereof, in as far as the pen of an impressionist may outline. And this is the home of one of Canada's most clever politicians—the present Minister of Finance.

FAITH FENTON.