

THE NOTEBOOKS OF A SPINSTER LADY

CHAPTER I

BERNADOTTES, BONAPARTES, AND MR. GLADSTONE
(1878)

King Oscar of Sweden and his Queen—The Prince Imperial dodges his Admirers—Monsieur Meurice—Luncheon with Napoleon III and his Empress—A Lesson from the Looking-glass—Queen Victoria and the Empress—The Marchese's Mongrel—Sir William Harcourt relieves his Feelings—Gladstone's Exuberance in Conversation—A Picture by Turner—Hudson the Railway King—An Encounter with a Dean.

IN a number of small notebooks, labelled "Memorabilia," the Diarist, a spinster lady, wrote down from time to time anecdotes, incidents and conversations that amused or were of interest to her. The entries cover the years 1878 to 1903. They are various in quality, from mere jokes that caught the author's fancy, often more than sufficiently circulated already, and ghost-stories of no particular authority, to discussions of serious import and curious facts and anecdotes about distinguished men that deserve to be remembered. The notebooks contain much light, good-natured gossip, like most gossip not always reliable, but the blame must fall on her informants, and not on the Diarist, if what she has recorded is at times inaccurate. Her memory was retentive; the entries were made when their matter—the incidents or conversation—was fresh in her recollection. She records faithfully what she has heard or seen.

While there are passages in the notebooks that I have summarised or abbreviated, I have not tampered with their wording. The style of their author is, like her handwriting, clear, vigorous and picturesque, a style that conveys her impressions freely and naturally to the reader.