

LITERARY WOMEN IN THEIR HOMES

EDNA LYALL AT HOME

BY FREDERICK DOLMAN



HE young authoress of "Donovan" and "We Two" is one of the veiled personalities of literary England. She lives at one of the smaller south-coast pleasure towns, seldom comes to London, and is

never seen in that world of fashion and pleasure where most Americans pass the time of their visits to the mother country. During the last few years there have been few books more discussed in the drawing-room and at the dinner table than those published in the name of Edna Lyall, and very interesting, and sometimes very amusing, has it been to hear the different ideas that some of their readers have formed of her personal characteristics. It need hardly be said that in most cases the imaginary Edna Lyall was in sharp contrast to the real Edna Lyall.

In thinking of Edna Lyall, the imagination of one of her London friends takes him sixty miles from London to an old-fashioned house in the pretty town of Eastbourne. The house seems old-fashioned, yet like most of the residences in Eastbourne it must have been built within the last twenty or thirty years. It is built of dark red brick in the Gothic style, and is ivy-covered; and having a

The authoress herself is now pale and worn with an illness that has quite suspended any literary work since the publication of "A Hardy Norseman." The eyes have lost a little of their luster and the cheeks the color they once possessed. The slight form is somewhat thinner, and the hand that clasps yours instinctively tells of much suffering. But a bright smile is coupled with the assurance of convalescence, and the voice, at first weak and low, gathers intonation and quiet force when the talk is on some stirring topic. Like Charlotte Brontë's heroine, Ada Ellen Bayley (the pseudonym, you see, is only a transposition of some of the letters in her baptismal name) has no beauty beyond that intellectual beauty to which Shelley wrote his well-known hymn. The face is small and of uneven formation, the broad forehead having a suggestion of the masculine that is scouted by the sweet and sympathetic expression of the eyes. The brown hair would be beautiful were it not cut short and arranged with an almost severe simplicity. She usually dresses in a close-fitting garment of some plain material. Edna Lyall owes really all her charm to her sympathetic presence, if I may be pardoned the expression, her spiritual earnestness and tender feeling. Pity is one of her predominant qualities; there always seems to be an undercurrent of sadness in her character at the misery and woe in the world around her.

Edna Lyall has written her works mostly in the light and sunshine, of which Eastbourne obtains a very liberal share. She always writes in the morning, plying the type-writer for about two hours at a time, having previously shaped and formed each chapter in her own mind. Her first thought is of the chief character, the hero or heroine, of her story. Next comes the plot, the circumstances and incidents necessary to bring out the individuality of this character. She then makes some slight sketches of the minor members of the dramatis personæ, and she is ready to begin the novel. The time she spends upon it greatly varies. Having great fondness for travel, the progress of the work may be interrupted by a visit to the Continent. A good part of "Donovan," however, was actually written while traveling in Italy. Although Edna Lyall has only just entered the thirties, not one of her eight works has been written in a hurry, or even in response to the commands of her publishers. Before writing "In the Golden Days" she made an exhaustive study of the period in which its story was placed, reading Welwood's "Memoirs," Luttrell's "Diary," "Macaulay's History," and other less-known authorities.

Rarely joining the gay throng on Eastbourne's esplanade or pier during its summer season, Edna Lyall is fond of rambling or driving through the pretty scenery by which the town is surrounded. At many houses in the town she is a welcome visitor, although as a rule she shuns even the literary and artistic society that is to be found in Eastbourne. When her natural timidity has been overcome she has sometimes greatly pleased a small circle of friends by some recitations from the poets. For the drama in fact, she has the whole-hearted admiration that so many members of her church cannot give, and in her opinion no recreation is so good as a good play well acted. On the other hand no unprofessional musician could exhibit keener delight in listening to Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" and Mendelssohn's symphony in "The Hymn of Praise." And this reminds me of an anecdote which was told to me a short time ago by Mary Davies, the renowned Welsh singer. She was spending a holiday in Norway, and at the hotel had made the acquaintance of a young lady with whom she took long walks. Among the many things of which they conversed was music and the life of the musician. Her companion took the higher view of the subject, and made use of words which forcibly recalled to Mary Davies' mind a novel she had read a short time before, which was none other than "Knight Errant." Up to that moment the singer had been known to the novelist as Miss Davies, and the novelist to the singer as Miss Bayley, but the next moment the truth flashed across their minds.

Every reader of "Knight Errant," and "A Hardy Norseman" must have noticed how these novels are permeated with the spirit of the time. This is not surprising, seeing that Edna Lyall is a diligent reader of the newspapers. But although keenly interested in the questions and events of the hour, Edna Lyall takes no active part in politics. She thinks women can do more lasting service to their country in the education of children, in infusing their minds with the best sentiments in regard to public affairs than by speaking on platforms or canvassing for votes. This feeling is in unison with the deep affection that she has for the home and for family life.



MISS BAYLEY

quaint porch with an oval-shaped door has a venerable aspect that age has not earned. The roadway is studded with mountain-ash trees. Eastbourne is famous for its umbrageous thoroughfares, and the house is half hidden by foliage from its neighbors, as well as from passers-by.

The house is that of a clergyman, as its semi-eclesiastical appearance might well suggest, who married Edna Lyall's elder sister. The Rev. Mr. Jameson is curate of St. Saviour's Church, the principal edifice of the Established Church in Eastbourne, to which the authoress presented a peal of bells which were purchased with the revenue from the publication of "Donovan." From the windows of her room on the upper story of the house Edna Lyall can almost see the church, and the music of the bells sometimes gives its message to her ears as she writes. In this room were written "In the Golden Days," "Knight Errant," "A Hardy Norseman," and "The Autobiography of a Slanderer."

The room is furnished in accordance with the gospel of "plain living and high thinking;" there is taste and refinement, but nothing lavish or luxurious. Of half a dozen pictures on the wall I remember best the oil painting of the Battle of Trafalgar and the Taking of the "Téméraire," and an engraved portrait of Mr. Gladstone, who has no warmer adherent than the authoress of "Donovan." In one corner there is a type-writer, which is not yet a familiar object in the homes of English literateurs. Edna Lyall's small library occupies the greater part of one side of the room. Glancing at the titles of volumes one finds ample evidence of eclectic spirit and catholic tastes. Books on religion and theology are present in greatest force, but there is poetry, and philosophy, and history, and politics in pretty just proportions. Kingsley, Frederick Maurice, Tennyson, and Whittier bear the signs of most use.



Edna Lyall's Study and Workshop at Eastbourne, England.