

LITERARY WOMEN IN THEIR HOMES

* III.—MARGARET DELAND

BY MARGUERITE MERINGTON



MRS. MARGARET DELAND is descended from an old Scotch family named Campbell. Pittsburgh is her birthplace, and there among the sweetest recollections of her childhood still,

"the garden glows,
And 'gainst its walls the city's heart still beats,
And out from it each summer wind that blows
Carries some sweetness to the tired streets."

After her school days at Pelham Priory, Mrs. Deland studied art at Cooper Institute, in New York. Since her marriage she has lived in Boston, where the quickening influences of the city have stimulated her to devote to literature the keen observation, original thought and lively fancy that have always marked her conversation and made her a delightful correspondent.

Mrs. Deland is one of those people who have the faculty of impressing their individuality



MRS. DELAND

on their surroundings. Her city home is as artistic and free from the conventional as her writings. Outside, the house differs little from its red brick neighbors of the city street; within it has individual character and charm. Quaint windows that the architect never planned have been added to the walls, and let in floods of sunshine from unexpected nooks. The flowers, arranged in delicate, old-fashioned bowls, that perfume the pages of "John Ward," have evidently been copied from life. To-day a huge log fire is blazing on the hearth of the sitting-room, realizing the defiance graven above it on the high brick mantel-piece:

"Blow, blow ye winds of whirling snow:
Ye cannot quench my ruddy glow."

The hangings of the windows are of soft, dull yellow silk, and so are the panelings of the organ that stands between the windows. The organ itself is white, like the woodwork of the room. On it is an open book of volubilities, for Mrs. Deland, though not a musician, has a love for sacred music. Above it hangs a copy of the Sistine Madonna. Pictures are plentiful; books are everywhere. In the embrasures of the deep windows white and yellow Chinese lilies, with long, sword-like leaves of vivid green, are in blossom and fill the room with fragrance. In the room up-stairs the log fire is repeated, and seated by it, at her desk, with her great English mastiff, "Eric," sleeping beside her, sits Mrs. Deland at work.

Earnest and painstaking as a workman is she, following the rule that Dr. Johnson told Sir Joshua Reynolds he had laid down for himself, "to make each work the best." Heedless of the munificent offers that are continually made to her to "pad out" short stories, or write "anything, on any subject," Mrs. Deland is true to her ideals, giving only her best thought in its worthiest form. "John Ward" underwent three successive, careful writings from rough notes before being type-written for the printer. Three, sometimes four, galley-proofs of her MSS. are submitted in succession to the author before they arrive at the chrisalid stage of a page-proof reading. An hour before the "Teutonic" steamed down New York Bay in May, 1891, bearing Mrs. Deland for a summer holiday, she was giving careful correction to the proof of the chapters of "Sidney," which were to appear in the August number of the "Atlantic Monthly," and the serial "Sidney" was most critically revised before its publication in book form. The wood sketches in "Florida Days" are not reminiscences worked up in the studio; they are aquarelles from nature, full of color and atmosphere. If for the relentless purposes of fiction a hero has to be sacrificed the family doctor is called in, and though not permitted to prescribe for the recovery of the patient, he

makes as careful a diagnosis of the case as if beloved flesh and blood were in danger. John Ward's gloomy Calvinism was studied from the teachings and preachings of recognized authorities of the Presbyterian creed. Fiction, of course, steps in where husband and wife are parted, but the catastrophe is as inevitable as the destruction of Oedipus, being a logical conclusion of a rigid adherence to the letter of the belief.

The question is often asked, to what faith does Mrs. Deland belong? People who insist upon imputing to authors the views of the puppets of their imaginings have assumed her to be a Calvinist with John Ward, a pantheist with Sidney, an agnostic with Helen Ward, a rational or irrational egotist with Major Lee. In England it was asked of her, "What new religion had she founded in America?" Far be it from me to define another person's "doxy," but I know that Mrs. Deland looks to Heaven for light, to eternity for a solution of the vexed problems of life; finds in the liturgy of the Episcopal Church the best expression of worship; recognizes in Christ the "Counselor and King of Peace;" believes in prayer as the appeal of the soul seeking for truth to the "One who knows;" is a regular attendant at Trinity Church, where the great-souled teachings of the Rev. Phillips Brooks give comfort and strength to many who do profess and call themselves Christians, but whose theology defies a closer classification.

More interesting even than her rooms in the city is the workshop that Mrs. Deland has contrived for herself in the summer home at Kennebunkport. I wonder if my readers know how beautiful a place the hayloft of a barn may be! Climbing the ladder we find that the hay has been pushed aside to make a corner for the desk and some favorite books. An open shutter gives a view of a silver creek, fringed with birches and rustling poplars. The wider shutter in front is open, too, and one may look down upon beds of nasturtiums and sweet-peas, or beyond the garden across the road to the river. While we look one of the Kennebunk Indians, who still haunt the place, is sending his canoe up the river, standing, a dark figure at the prow, and paddling with quick, noiseless strokes. Between the flat, grass-grown bank on this side and the line of dark pine woods beyond, the river hastens to meet the sea, which lies in the distance like a sapphire on the bosom of the land. The murmur of the water comes to us on the fresh, salt breeze, and now and then an aromatic breath from the pine woods. Lying there on the sweet-smelling stacks of hay, in drowsy content with the summer season, one may well say with John Ridd, "The mooing of a calf was music, and the chuckle of a fowl was wit, and the snore of the horse was news to me."

Now, dear maidens, if such there be who think that a gift for poesy implies a neglect of the practical duties of life, learn that much of Mrs. Deland's time is passed as if, like her own rosemary, it were

"Her one employ
To fill some small, sweet needs."

As readily as she can join two lovers in a romance she can indissolubly unite butter and eggs into an omelette, and always for better, never for worse. A mayonnaise from her skillful hand is as well-seasoned as an argument against the doctrine of eternal punishment. Experiment has proven that from cream she can churn golden butter, sweet as cowslips, as truly as she can shape liquid fancies into compact verse. Her table, whether the need of the moment warrant simplicity or ceremony, is a dainty thing to behold, and her hospitality is simple and gracious as your favorite song from the "Old Garden." In the sick room she is an admirable nurse, quick of eye and light of touch, with the bright face and pleasant voice that come like sunshine to the heart of a sufferer.

Her friendships are few, but enduring. Miss Elizabeth Whitlock, the "E. W. W." of some of the poems, the valued and helpful friend of many years, stands nearest still, perhaps, as in their school days. Mrs. Deland's friendship for Miss Lucy Derby, of Boston, whose enthusiastic approbation decided her to undertake literary work, called forth the graceful dedication to the "Old Garden":

"Sweet, every rhyme here writ
Is yours, not mine:
Your heart did dictate it,
Mine wrote the line."

That the best part of her life is her home-life may be truly inferred from Mrs. Deland's stories, for the door is not shut in the face of the wedding guests in the wonted way of fiction, leaving the readers wondering, and in this skeptical age questioning, if hero and heroine lived happily ever afterward. On the contrary, the love interest of the story begins when the lovers have been made man and wife. We yet look to her for an able-bodied hero who does the world a better service than to leave it in the fullness of his manhood when his convictions are ripe, but we admire her sincerity in speaking of the universe as her soul perceives it.

Of Mr. Deland I will tell you one all-embracing fact, that through him his wife is a happy woman. What better tribute can be paid to any man!

So many shadows lie on the pages of biography that it is pleasant to linger over the sunny chapters. The solitude of her position can be read between the lines of George Eliot's jeweled utterance. Bound up with the fruitage of his gigantic intellect is Carlyle's monody of misery for his neglected wife. Charlotte Brontë's and Louise Alcott's struggles with adversity sadden our remembrance of them. Too often where we most admire our souls are fain to cry, "Alas, were they but good as they are gifted!" So that it is a good thing to know when behind intellectual achievement lies character, with strength and sweetness, for life's small daily needs as well as its mighty issues, when beyond the record of fame and success lies the unwritten history of his happy home.

* In this series of "Literary Women in their Homes," the following, each accompanied with portrait, have been published:

AUGUSTA EVANS WILSON June, 1892
MARY ELEANOR WILKINS August, "