

## IN HIDDEN WAYS

BY C. H. CRANDALL

STRANGE is it that the sweetest thing  
Forever is the shyest;  
The sweeter song, the swifter wing,  
Ere thou the singer spyeest.

The more the fragrance in the rose,  
The more it hides a-blushing;  
And when with love a maiden glows,  
The more her face is flushing.

In depths of night, in gloomy mine,  
In wildwood streams—in stories  
Of lowly lives, unsung—there shine  
The world's divinest glories.

As low arbutus blossoms rest  
In modesty unbidden,  
So man and nature hide their best,  
And God himself is hidden.

LITERARY WOMEN  
IN THEIR HOMES

## \* II—MARY ELEANOR WILKINS

BY KATE UPSON CLARK

**A**BOUT nine years ago, Miss Mary Eleanor Wilkins, then quite young, took a prize offered by a Boston weekly for the best short story. This was a fortunate thing for the public. The young girl had always longed to write stories, but had been too diffident to show her efforts in this direction outside of her own family circle. The winning of this prize encouraged her so much that she resolved to devote herself thenceforth to this work.

Her first literary attempts were almost entirely for children, but at the urgent solicitation of friends she soon began to take up a deeper kind of work, and sent her first story for older readers to Miss Mary L. Booth, then editor of "Harper's Bazar." Miss Booth thought that such cramped and unformed handwriting promised little, and that she was the victim of some ambitious but "unavailable" child. With her usual conscientiousness, however, she looked the little piece carefully over. It was Miss Booth's habit, when attracted by a story, to read it through three times, on different days, and in different moods, before accepting it. She paid this compliment to "Two Old Lovers," the contribution which Miss Wilkins had submitted to her. Two days later the "ambitious child" received a handsome check for it. From this time forth, Miss Booth befriended the young writer in every way, and Miss Wilkins, who is almost morbidly appreciative of kindness, and as true to her friends as one of her own inflexible New England characters, rewarded Miss Booth's thoughtfulness by giving to her, as long as she lived, the first choice of her stories. The career of this young woman thus disproves two favorite theories among the cynics of the present day, namely: that editors do not read the contributions of unknown writers, and that women do not help each other.

There are few writers who have been the recipients of such unreserved and spontaneous tributes of appreciation from famous men and women as the modest subject of this sketch. Dr. Phillips Brooks pronounced her "Humble Romance" "the best short story that was ever written."

Two volumes of Miss Wilkins' stories have been collected. The first, called "A Humble Romance," was brought out three years ago. It has had a large sale, and has been translated into several languages. The second, "A New England Nun," is enjoying an even wider popularity than its predecessor, while her first novel is now reaching its conclusion in "Harper's Magazine."

It must not be imagined by those who long for the skill and the fame of this fortunate writer that she has won her place without a struggle. She has toiled faithfully and incessantly, often discouraged, but never giving up. The remarkable evenness of her work is due to her "capacity for taking pains." She thinks her stories out until they are perfectly clear, before putting her pen to paper.

The difficulties against which she contends are largely physical. Though her constitution is apparently sound, she is small, being only five feet tall, and is very slight. She possesses the sensitive organization which accompanies a large intellectual development in such a

frame. Her transparent skin, her changing eyes, sometimes seeming blue, sometimes hazel, her heavy braids of golden hair, her delicately moulded features, all proclaim a singularly high-strung and nervous temperament.

Miss Wilkins has known much of sorrow. The pathos which she infuses into her stories could not be so genuine unless she herself had suffered. One after another, during the first years of her writing, her father, mother and only sister died. She lived with them in the beautiful village of Brattleboro, Vermont, but she has resided since their death in Randolph, Massachusetts, with friends, whose love and devotion could scarcely be greater if they were connected with her by ties of blood.

Her two pretty rooms in the simple white house in which she lives in Randolph are full of her own quaint personality. The first is furnished in terra cotta. The second, in which is a wide, old-fashioned hearth before an open fire, is in old blue. Near the hearth stands a desk in colonial style, with brass hinges and locks; also a couch with a Bagdad rug thrown over it. A Madagascar rug forms the portiere between the two apartments. Old decanters, candlesticks, pewter plates and other memorabilia of "ye olden time," nearly all of which have come down to Miss Wilkins by inheritance, abound on every side. In the terra cotta room stands a pretty desk of bog-oak, surrounded by Hindoo relics. There are fur rugs on the floor, and all the furniture is antique, having belonged to the owner's grandmother.

"I suppose," wrote Miss Wilkins to a friend when she was just settled in her new home, "that my blue room is one of the queerest-looking places that you ever saw. You should see the people when they come to call. They look doubtful in the front room, but say it is 'pretty'; when they get out here they say the rooms look 'just like me,' and I don't know when I shall ever find out if that is a compliment."

Miss Wilkins is thought by many to bear a striking resemblance to Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, though her features are smaller. She looks best in children's hats, and her clothes are most becoming when made after children's patterns.

She has no bump of what is called "locality," and it is a joke among her friends, in which she joins heartily, that the only route which she can follow with absolute accuracy is the straight path to the post-office in Randolph.

It has been said that Miss Wilkins draws all of her characters and incidents from life. This is not true except in the broadest sense. She has a wonderful faculty for generalizing from types, which belongs with her extraordinary imagination, and this she utilizes in the highest degree. She has recently devoted much of her time to the drama. One of her plays, a marvelously realistic production, called "Giles Corey, Yeoman," was read before the Summer School of History and Romance, at Deerfield, Massachusetts.

Miss Wilkins thinks out the details of her stories much more completely than most writers before putting pen to

paper. Like all skillful raconteurs, she appreciates the value of the opening and closing portions, and these are often the first parts of the work that she does. The last sentence she considers more important than any other. Once at her desk, with her matter well in mind, she composes easily and seldom recopies, unless an odd page here and there. She calls one thousand words per day her "stent," though she often goes a week or more without writing a line, while she sometimes writes three or four thousand words between breakfast and sunset. Evening work she seldom undertakes unless pressed for time.

Environment affects her strongly. She finds it difficult, sometimes impossible, to compose anything when away from home. In this respect she resembles many, if not most, of our great novelists, one of whom has testified, in speaking of this subject, "We are the slaves of objects around us."

Miss Wilkins is a standing reproach to the sensationalists. Nothing could be more interesting than are some of her simple sketches, and yet they are almost destitute of plot, and depend upon their absolute fidelity to life for their success, while she is incapable of a motive that is not uplifting. The "erotic school" may well sit abashed and confounded before her bewitching, yet absolutely pure, creations. She forms a force in our literature which, without being either "preachy" or didactic, makes always for righteousness, because her ideals are noble.

She is so strongly sympathetic that she has been advised not to study modern writers, but to confine her reading mostly to classic models. To this wise counsel, which she has conscientiously followed, may be largely attributed that charming originality which she has preserved intact, though occupying a field which has already been, it would have seemed, exhaustively traversed.

Miss Wilkins is wont to say that she has "no accomplishments." She does, however, write musical verse, which is worth all the strumming of wordless lyres in the world. Her poetry is finished, and is full of captivating conceits.



MISS WILKINS

\* This series of glimpses of the home life of famous literary women was commenced in the June JOURNAL with a sketch and portrait of Mrs. Augusta Evans Wilson. The object of the series is to present those literary women whose home life has escaped excessive portraiture.