



VOL. XXII.—No. 1116.]

MAY 18, 1901.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

TALK ABOUT MISS YONGE.



[Green, Winton.]

THE LATE MISS CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

who have read *Dynevor Terrace* will remember the chaos in the household of No. 5 which resulted from Isabel's writing *The Chapel in the Valley*, and leaving her husband, the head-master of the grammar-school, to nurse the sick baby in his study whilst he corrected Latin exercises by the light of a bed-room candlestick. We must be content with a short chat, so that there may be no repetition of that memorable dinner to Lord FitzJocelyn, consisting of "a chop like india-rubber, decorated with grease, and with two balls of nearly raw carrot, followed up with potatoes apparently all bruises."

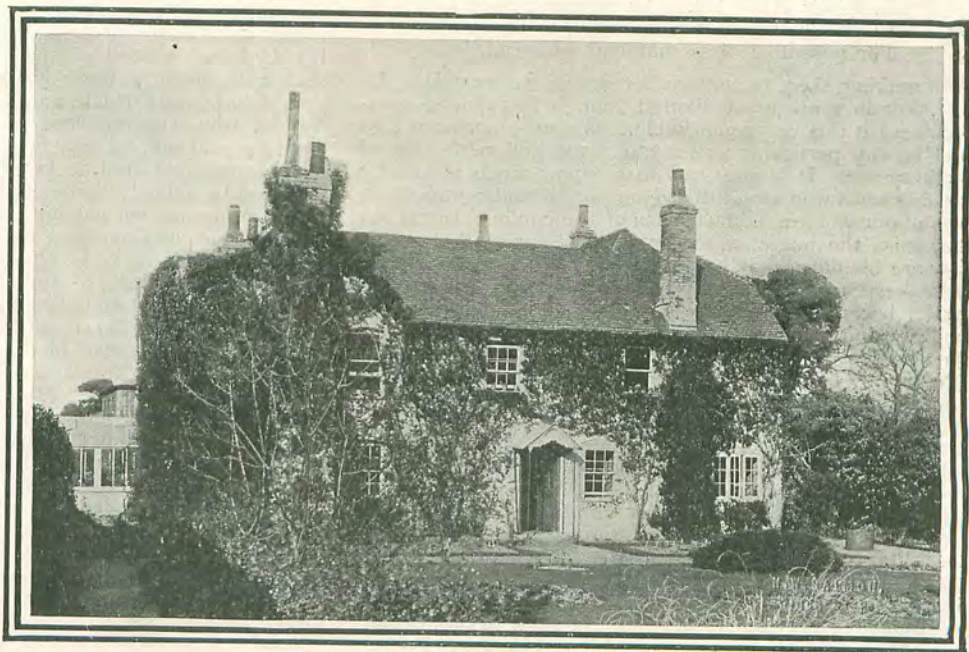
Of the facts of Miss Yonge's life there is little to say, except that she was born in 1823, at Otterbourne, near Winchester, where she died on Passion Sunday of 1901. She wrote nearly seventy books, and yet contrived to fulfil a round of parish and domestic duties which would have filled the lives of most women. It is to be hoped that an adequate biography will be written of one who had the secret of such unwearied vitality, but until such a biography appears we must be satisfied with a few outlines.

Miss Yonge was an only daughter of a Colonel Yonge, and devotedly attached to her father and mother, who gave her a very careful home education. She had also a brother, who took part in the Crimean war. The many pictures she gives us of that most delightful of friendships—the friendship between a brother and sister—may well have been drawn from her own experience. Ethel and Norman May are an example of such an intimacy, which will immediately occur to lovers of *The Daisy Chain*. From the year of her confirmation in 1838 until Mr. and Mrs. Keble died in

WHEN the sad news came to me that Miss Charlotte Yonge was dead, I thought at once how much I should like to talk about her to my girl-friends in THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER. We have had many chats together about great books, and even about dry books, but now I want to have a talk about books which are not dry, and chiefly great because they attain so perfectly the unassuming end their authoress set before herself.

Since our mutual friend the Editor allowed me to write to you about Miss Yonge, a press of domestic business has come upon me, and at first I thought that the combined duties of cook, nurse, and housemaid would prevent my writing this paper. Those of you

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MISS YONGE'S HOUSE.

[Salmon, Winton.]

1866, the life of Hursley Vicarage was the moulding power of Charlotte Yonge's character. The sincere and restrained religion of *The Christian Year* is the religion which stays and inspires the people in her books, and John Keble's scholarly culture no doubt gave its wide sweep to her life-long advance in historical and literary knowledge. But John Keble was a laborious visitor and parish-worker, as well as a scholar and a poet. No doubt this fact developed Miss Yonge's natural gift of method and energy, so that hers was a practical as well as a literary life, and besides editing the *Monthly Packet* and writing seventy books, she taught three generations of Sunday-scholars, and engaged in every variety of parish work. It is this mixture of practical and mental activity, of high ideal and romance with the love that speaks in actions, which gives its peculiar charm to Miss Yonge's character. No doubt she inherited from her military father and her clerical grandparents a disciplined and strenuous nature, but it was her religious fire and love which made that nature bear fruit a thousand-fold. I never saw Miss Yonge, but ever since the happy day when, as a girl of about ten, I found an old copy of *The Daisy Chain* on a dusty shelf, she has been such a strong friend to me in many ways that I should like to express the secret of her power to my readers.

To what, then, does Miss Yonge owe her great popularity? Before trying to answer that question I must admit that many up-to-date people love to laugh at Miss Yonge as a goody-goody writer, and fail to see any charm in her writing. These people have usually not read her books, for it is curious what a variety of wholly different classes of people are her admirers simply because their interest has been arrested. The day her death became known I reminded a grey-haired man how he used to tease his sisters for their tears and enthusiasm over *The Heir of Redclyffe*. "I took care never to read it," was his answer, "for fear I should cry over it myself." To William Morris and Tennyson, to Henry Sidgwick and Lewis Carroll, her books were so interesting that the candle could not be put out until the hero or heroine had got safely past their crisis, and scientific men, whom the "goody-goody" would repel at once, have rejoiced in her books because the people you meet in them are both nice and real.

But I am not concerned with these great ones of the earth. I want to spend my few minutes in trying to gauge why it is that to you and me—average struggling girls in the crowd—Miss Yonge will live again not only in the next world, to which she and we look in hope and faith, but also

"In minds made better by her presence; live
In pulses stirred to generosity, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self."

In seeking, then, to analyse her power, we must face the fact that in scope it was limited, though in rounded completeness it was very remarkable. We must not expect to find in any particular writer the scope and perfection of Shakespeare. It is very sad to see how much is lost by carping souls who spend their energies in finding the flaws in authors who are the favourites of the public. In Milton they miss the music of the spheres, because all the time they are blaming him that his women are not the women of Shakespeare. In Tennyson they miss the Virgilian word-music, because his heroes have a touch of priggishness. In Browning they miss the dramatic force, the lyric note, because his roughness and mannerisms claim all their attention. Take my advice, girls, and try to find the beauties of literature, after the manner of good old Dodd, and take the incident defects as a piquant sauce. Matthew Arnold said that poetry was great in so far as it was a criticism of life, and I think that fiction has this function as well as its primary function of giving amusement. How eagerly you watch for your weekly number or monthly part, girls! And this is because the stories chosen for you by the Editor treat of lives and struggles like your own. They help you as much as sermons and lessons. I think we shall find that the great novelists are chiefly great in proportion as they bring some kind of grist to the difficult mill of life. If we take George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, Thackeray, Scott, and Dickens, we shall

see how curiously they contribute each a wholly different ingredient for the pudding of life. To my mind, George Eliot is the greatest of all, because she teaches the profoundly difficult task of governing the steam-power of life—the task of making passion a blessed instead of a devouring force. If you have a difficult eager self to manage, read and re-read *The Mill on the Floss*.

Charlotte Brontë again shows always in her books the struggles of eager, passionate hearts, and paints the relentless victory of duty in an individual way that is full of the rugged character of her native hills. The force of Thackeray lies in the mirror he holds up to the weaknesses of nature, of Dickens in his insight into the fun and stage properties of existence. The genius of their insight into life fills our minds with wholesome pictures which sweep out the rubbish. Jane Austen again brings an exquisite sense of humour which makes us laugh at our own foibles as we follow the perfectly commonplace lives of simple people like ourselves. Scott has this same vivid power of characterisation, but he differs from Jane Austen in his choice of quaint and eccentric characters, while she preferred to take snap-shots of nobody in particular.

Miss Yonge is quite different from all these masters of the Italian and Dutch schools. She knew, I think, little of the difficulties of very restless natures, though Guy Morville, in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, did have to bite his lip to restrain his passion. But if she knew but little of the storms that tossed Caterina Sarti, she could show how religion can transform the driest duty. I think it was chiefly because her religious life was so deep and strong, and her habit of obedience to the heavenly message so confirmed, that her heroines and heroes show little of the struggle on the surface. Perhaps it is because every one of her books tells of this gradual but victorious struggle over self that they are such a support. The people are always so natural and real that long after the book has been read the struggles of Ethel May to learn to be tidy as well as to be learned recur to one's mind. There is a racy grasp of detail in Miss Yonge's stories which prevents her deep, reserved sentiment from becoming sentimental. It is difficult to choose examples out of seventy books of her fine eye for shades of character, but one occurs to me from two books—her first great success, and the last she ever wrote. If we had only read *Modern Broods*, we should know how in the character of Vera, the ungrateful high-school girl, who despises the governess step-sister to whom she owes everything, Miss Yonge can paint a vulgar mind. If we turn to *The Daisy Chain* we shall see how, in our old acquaintance Flora, she could reveal exactly the same vulgar mind under all the beautiful refinement of the Mays. It is by her own habit of obedience that she can draw with such truth the slow, hard struggle against love of self and love of happiness which we read of in the story of *Grisly Grisel*, who wins the love of a cold husband in spite of having a scarred and ugly face. How often, dear girls, we feel discontented, and declare that if our life were different we could be noble! Some of us are quite tormented by this rebellion against our own lot. To such I would recommend the struggles of Guy when he was judged unjustly by Mr. Edmonstone, of Mary in *Dynevor Terrace*, when she was separated from Louis, of Isabel Frost when she decided to try to manage the two babies and the twins on £150 a year, and set aside *The Chapel in the Valley*. To Miss Yonge's high standard no detail of duty is unworthy of notice, and like the angels of the Resurrection, she can always find time to fold the napkin. Miss Yonge will take you into the kitchen and the scullery, and show you the dust in the drawing-room on the Dresden shepherdess. She will not miss out any of the details that are making our lazy, discontented lives so squalid. But she will bring with her her dear spirit of hope and energy and order—above all, for her, in every part of life.

To turn to another point, what a delight it is that though she has such an eye to expose and to weed out petty meanesses, her books are always filled with sweet, refined, merry people, so that anyone who was really among hateful companions could always get a whiff of wholesome atmosphere from her books.

We have seen, I think, that as far as we are concerned, the reproach of being "goody," when investigated, brings out Miss Yonge's chief source of popularity. The *Spectator* has pointed out in an article the deep interest taken by the English world in religion well handled in fiction, and we contend that in Miss Yonge's books it is well handled.

We cannot feel, however, that the two great merits of truth to life as it is, and knowledge of the springs which make life what it ought to be, exhaust Miss Yonge's claims to a permanent niche in English literature.

Her third claim is that she is a first-rate historical novelist—a rare product indeed. Hear what Bishop Stubbs, our first living historian, says of her in his *Lectures on Mediæval and Modern History*—"Miss Yonge's *Chaplet of Pearls* and *Dove in the Eagle's Nest* are beautiful, and I think perfect pictures of manners and reflections of ideas." This is indeed high praise from a great master. Those who have read *The Prince and the Page* have gained a true impression of the age of Edward I., and a desire to learn more. In *Two Penniless Princesses* we get a touching picture of the saintly Henry VI., and an idea of mediæval London, full of details deftly gleaned from Miss Yonge's wide reading. *The Caged Lion* puts Henry V. among living pictures, and *The Armourer's Apprentices* shows us Dean Colet, Henry VIII., and Wolsey, so that we cannot but save up our pocket-money to buy Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* in the "Temple Classics," and learn some more details of so wonderful a period.

Yet when Miss Yonge began to write her books, works like Miss Porter's unreadable *Scottish Chiefs* and Grace Aguilar's impossible *Days of Bruce* were all that studious ladies could offer the public in the way of historical novels.

These ladies had no power of describing people with all their different shades of character. To be a good historical novelist it is first necessary to be a good novelist. Miss Porter puts into the mouth of Wallace long addresses that would do for a mother's meeting, and the people in her books are so many clothes-props. Miss Yonge, on the other hand, performs the difficult task of uniting truth of historical feeling to truth of personal idiosyncrasy. She may perhaps be justly blamed for making her heroes a trifle too high-minded. She hardly recognised that Homer sometimes nods, and that no doubt General Gordon and Sir Philip Sidney himself had their detestable moments.

But when we admit this we only admit that she was not Shakespearian as George Eliot was, but that she painted truthfully on a small canvas.

I have dwelt but little on Miss Yonge's particular phase of creed, because it seems to me so essentially a detail in any estimate of her. Her deep devotion to our Lord was the mainspring of her life, and it is in the reality of this devotion that her helpfulness consists. No religion which was not strenuous and full of self-sacrifice would have seemed real to her, and so in the beautiful services of the Church, penetrated with the struggles after holiness of countless generations, she found the natural food of her soul. But all deep goodness appealed to her, and those of every creed may go to her for support.

Perhaps the message which she loves best to deliver is the old message—

Seek not for others to love you,
But seek yourself to love them best,
And you shall find the secret true
Of joy, and peace, and rest.

One of Miss Yonge's limitations was that she did not enter into the difficulties of those who have religious doubts. It was part of her great wisdom that she never attempted to deal with problems she did not understand. But what is really a greater help to doubting souls than to catch glimpses of another's heavenly vision? In her reserved way Miss Yonge gave us these visions, so that the enthusiasm which prompted her to spend £2000 of the profits of *The Daisy Chain* on missionary effort comes as no surprise to us who know her. Where her heart was there should her treasure be.

She did not know much of doubt—

Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny:
Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

Through all her dear and beautiful books these lines are the steady under-current—

Oh, could I tell ye surely would believe it
Oh, could I only say what I have seen!
How should I tell or how can ye receive it,
How till He bringeth you where I have been?

CLOTILDA MARSON.

THE SICILIAN ORIGINAL OF MY ROOF-GARDEN.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOS SPECIALLY TAKEN BY GIOVANNI MARZIANI OF TAORMINA FOR THIS ARTICLE.

BY DOUGLAS SLADEN.



ALL Italy, from Genoa to Sicily, loves roof-gardens. It has reason, as the French say. Italian cities are generally packed within walls as close as a Chinese puzzle, for purposes of defence. In storming an Italian town, from the days when Motya, the oldest Carthaginian settlement in Sicily, fell to the tyrant Dionysius I., nearly four hundred years before Christ, the taking of the city walls was generally a mild affair compared to the gradual capture of the city, street by street and house by house. In Genoa and Venice in the north, and Sicily in the south, there are plenty of streets only half-a-dozen feet wide, so they had to go upwards for their gardens. What gardens they had in their cities they made on their roofs. Roof-gardens differ a good deal in the north and south. In Genoa, which is our jumping-off place—when we take our

annual Italian holiday, we go by train to Genoa in one spell, and take ship there to sail lazily down the Mediterranean to our destined haven—the roof-garden does not always bear close inspection, for it may spring from flower-pots, kerosene-tins with the sides cut off, and rough boxes, such as the cases in which the kerosene-tins arrived from America. Such, however, is the brilliant sunshine on the Riviera di Ponente, that admirable results are achieved from the humblest cradles. The balustrade which prevents the inhabitant from falling out of his garden eight or ten storeys into the street, may be of handsome Renaissance masonry or a meagre iron railing; but from the accumulation of pots and cases behind spring palms and aloes and towering geraniums and showering roses. The Genoese are particularly ingenious in contriving roof-arbours with a few francs' worth of wire, which early in the summer become bowers of green.

The idea of the roof-garden was developed into the colonnaded belvedere when Genoa came to have the finest Renaissance palaces in Europe. In Rome, too, you need