

A WREATH ON THE GRAVE OF THE LATE
ANNA JAMESON.

LIVING abroad and far away from the tumult and turmoil of London, it was only lately that I stumbled on the life of the late Anna Jameson, by her niece, Gerardine Macpherson.

It is always hard for a relative, especially one so near and dear to the subject as the author of this work, in writing a biography, to do that amount of justice which is due, and which she would so much desire to render. There must ever be a nervous shrinking from every stroke of the pen which tends to lay bare before the public those thousand and one traits of intimate feeling which give colour and motive to actions, and without the knowledge of which it is impossible for a stranger to judge the life of any one.

Besides which, to praise one's own dear one, even though she be gone, is all too much like praising oneself. Thus the proposed biography runs the risk of becoming a mere narrative of dry facts, like the water marks on some steep cliff, which serve to show where the waves had fallen and risen, and nothing more.

But with all these difficulties to contend with, Gerardine Macpherson has managed to give to her narrative all the charm and interest of a living picture. As I read the book, visions of the past rose up again and again, passing and repassing ever more vividly before my view, till it occurred to me that I might perhaps be allowed to gather up the sweet memories evoked, and twine with them a wreath to lay on the grave of one who was, in her lifetime, the centre of so much love, so much admiration and respect, as Anna Jameson.

The public pronounced her a woman of rare parts and accomplishments, a lady of exquisite taste, with a thorough knowledge of all that concerns art, and a perfect intelligence of the conception and beauties of the old masters.

But those who knew her intimately prized her for something more. We knew her for a woman perfect in her generation: a woman working, and giving the example of working, as God intended a woman should work—not from any worldly motive, but always for the welfare and happiness of others.

From her earliest childhood, the little Anna showed signs of precocious talent; and her father thought it often necessary to repress the exuberance of that uprising spirit, for ever taking the lead of her companions; a tendency not infrequent with children conscious of unusual powers. But, repressed as she might be, the little Anna's heart was full of sympathy for her parents, whose disappointments

and struggles sank deep into her heart, for she had witnessed and understood. It became the all-absorbing aim of her life to assist them.

The little genius throve in mind and intelligence; and in conformity with the high aim she had set before her, and of which she never lost sight for a moment—that of helping her parents—the heroic child went forth to earn her bread at the early age of sixteen. That all through her life she proved a good, affectionate, helpful daughter is now taken into account in Heaven's courts above. And here below, too, her filial piety still shines about her name like an aureole of radiant evidence, at once the apology for and eternal reward of her energy and goodness.

Of her marriage, which took place a few years afterwards, Gerardine Macpherson could scarcely speak with much frankness. The subject was too delicate and too intimate to venture on explanations, which, perhaps, Mrs. Jameson in her lifetime had been generously anxious to conceal. But I, who am wholly unconnected with the family, and am committing no breach of confidence if I broach the subject, may be forgiven if, in justice to my dear lost friend, I repeat here what I have heard from one who knew her in her married life, and who often assured me that the incompatibility of temper so often spoken of, and so incomprehensible in the case of so loving a woman and appreciative a man, was in fact a matter of a very different character from what was generally supposed.

Mr. Jameson, himself a man of considerable taste and talent, was narrow-minded enough to be jealous of his wife's superior accomplishments. Her presence was a continual cause of gnawing envy—a grievance he could not forgive; for she commanded that attention and adulation from others which he considered due to himself alone. He took her superiority as a standing reproach to himself; and in his desire to make her mind subservient and subordinate to his own, he cruelly pushed her behind him and repressed the warm affection she offered, with a coldness, a neglect, a tyranny, which, to a loving nature like hers, was insupportable.

Mr. Jameson was not a solitary example of the mistake men make who marry women who are by nature more highly gifted than themselves. These husbands cannot understand that a woman's mind is differently constituted from that of men; and that let the wife be ever so much more brilliantly intellectual than he, still she is, and ever must be, inferior to him in that muscular judgment which comes of stronger faculties and a greater knowledge of the world; an advantage beyond all value in his domestic relations, and which must place in his hands the sceptre of mastership and dominion, if only he have sense enough to see it, generosity of soul to admit it, and reason to thoroughly understand it.

The term of Mrs. Jameson's married home life was short. She soon returned to the parental roof, and from thenceforth devoted her

whole life and efforts to supporting her parents and rendering their declining years easy and comfortable.

I never saw Mr. Murphy, Mrs. Jameson's father. He was dead some time before I joined the family circle at Ealing: which happened shortly after Mrs. Jameson's return from Rome with her niece, Gerardine. But the mother, Mrs. Murphy, was there, occupying the arm-chair by the hearth; the sweetest picture of an old lady I ever saw.

She used to sit mostly in the little parlour down-stairs, wearing her widow's cap so becomingly to the sweet brown eyes, and a complexion fresh as a girl in her teens. There used to be a picture of her, taken in her youth, while she was still a newly-married bride, painted by Collins, the Royal Academician; and apart from the interest which must attach to the subject, it was a really good picture. It used to hang in the little sitting-room, a large sized canvas, representing a sweet, graceful girl, with a scarf twisted fantastically round her head; looking out from the dark foreground with the softest hazel eyes; the same that in her old age had lost nothing of their dovelike expression, but rather matured into a motherly look, which seemed ever to invite the young to come to her for protection and caress.

Then there was the eldest daughter, who held the keys of housewifery, and who was always doing something for some one and every one; talking now to one and then to another, with her kind, consoling voice. And there was the youngest born, Charlotte, called after the Queen Consort of George the Third; because, as I always understood, she was born at Windsor: and all beaming on their friends and visitors such warm benevolence and hearty welcome, that even now, after the lapse of so many years, the memory comes back to me with all the cheering influence of the days of their action. It is something to have lived for, to remember those faces!

These were the members of the household circle. But there were two or three more who came and went to the nest, as they called it, but who had their own homes beside. One of them, Camilla, Mrs. Sherwin, bore in her whole person and manner that peculiar grace of refinement and sensibility which often stamps the children of artists. This lady is now the venerable aunt Mrs. Macpherson speaks of as the only surviving sister of Mrs. Jameson.

Another sister again was Louisa, Mrs. Bate, mother of Gerardine Macpherson. She lived in the cottage next door; and sometimes visited the nest to complete the picture of such a family as it is seldom given to see. Mrs. Bate must have been very beautiful when young; for, even then, I could scarcely take my eyes off her face when she came in, so sweet and serene was her countenance, even though her figure and contour had already lost her symmetry.

Then there was Gerardine herself, too, flitting in and out continually, and ever coming like a sunbeam into the room, so merry, humorous, and witty her young talk. She was only eighteen, indeed

little more than a child; and in the exceeding exuberance of her spirits would sometimes forget to complete the task her aunt had set her: perhaps that of copying some drawing for the printer who was waiting to take it away. A look from that aunt, full of portentous reproach, would bring the tears into the delinquent's eyes; but never a word in rebellious reply, never a sign of ill-temper or resentment. Poor Gerardine!

Ah, those genial hours! where are they gone? The hours when we would sit in the evening twilight, gathering about Mrs. Murphy's feet to listen to her tales of by-gone times, long ago in the last century.

I think I see her now, looking at us with her sweet smile as she described the fashions of those days—when the two-pronged steel forks first came into use, though the knife was still used, polite people presenting the back, vulgar people the blade, to the lips—and a hundred little anecdotes besides, all illustrative of the customs and manners of our grandmothers.

One evening, when she was more than usually communicative, she chanced to mention her mother, who, she told us, had died when she was a little girl, and absent at school. Upon which she narrated a circumstance which made such an impression on my mind, not only for its strangeness, but for the earnest conviction of the narrator herself, that I never forgot a word of it; and therefore make no apology for reproducing it as it was told to me. It was a ghost story.

Mrs. Murphy, mother of Anna Jameson, was an Englishwoman, as Mrs. Macpherson related. Her parents lived at St. Albans, in easy circumstances, and sent their little girl, at an early age, to Dublin for education. The step seems to us a strange one nowadays, when not only London, but every provincial town in the kingdom, is known to teem with schools and all sorts of educational opportunities for the young. But in those earlier days it was different; and the best means for acquiring accomplishments was at an establishment in Dublin, conducted by an Irish lady married to a Frenchman. I think the name was Dumoulin, but the school has long since disappeared. It was a long way to send a child, but there were many pupils who came from a still greater distance—America, the West Indies, East Indies, &c.: and when we reflect that there was neither steamboat nor railway to shorten the transit, we may consider the store set by receiving an education at a pretty high figure. But sending children, even under such difficulties as then existed, was better than sending girls to the Continent, at that time in full revolution; and Madame Dumoulin had a world-wide reputation for giving all the advantages of foreign languages and foreign accomplishments, with the more solid and sober education so much coveted by English parents for their daughters.

Our little girl from St. Albans was then about ten or eleven, as

clearly as I can remember: certainly not more. The holidays had come, and all the pupils gone: all save our little English maiden, who seemed to have been forgotten. The lady of the establishment thought it strange, the child thought it cruel, and wept many a tear in secret; but few words on the subject were spoken between them. They waited.

In these days the voyage from Holyhead to Dublin is performed in from three to six hours, rarely more. But in the days of which I speak travellers had to trust to sailing vessels only, which would sometimes take ten days to reach the port, even in fair weather. Besides this, there was the land travelling to be considered, and St. Albans was a good way from the sea. Journeying on land was, as compared with our modern conveniences, a huge undertaking. It used to be performed in coaches, which had the knack of overturning now and then, not at all infrequently. Sometimes the horses getting lame, sometimes a wheel breaking down, and other misadventures would force the passengers to get out and remain there for days together.

Taking all which chances into consideration, there was no especial alarm created by the delay. News and tidings of loved ones did not then flash along the globe-encircling telegraph wires as they do now; and letters not only took a long time to reach their destination, but were a costly luxury to the recipient, who had to pay ninepence all over England, and fifteenpence a letter to and from Ireland. Those were the days when letter correspondents were lucky who had a friend in Parliament to frank their epistles—but franking, though it saved expense, could not annihilate time. So they had to wait, and still waited for tidings which did not come.

One night the child woke suddenly to see the room full of light. The curtains of her little bed were drawn aside, and she saw her mother stoop over to look at her; then meeting the eyes wide awake with wonder and surprise, the mother smiled very lovingly and withdrew. The curtains fell together, and the light went out.

It all happened so quickly, so unexpectedly, so like a flash of lightning (said the old lady as she narrated), that she had not time to make a movement, even towards throwing her arms about her mother's neck, when the vision had fled and the room was dark and empty.

With a happy sense of the mother's arrival, come all the way from St. Albans to fetch her, the little girl soon closed her eyes and slept the happy sleep of childhood. But no sooner did the dawn appear than she awoke, dressed herself, and hurried to the breakfast-room before anyone was up, and there waited. She saw the maid come in to lay the cloth, and bring in the tea-urn; and to this maid, with lively clapping of little hands and leaping of little feet, she told the joyful tidings of her mother's arrival. She tried hard to coax the maid to take her to her mother's room, but the discreet Abigail declined. She laughed at the child and ran away.

In due time came Madame Dumoulin herself, and the English girl danced up the room to meet her, asking leave to go and see her mother. The poor lady heard the child's pleadings with alarm; she thought she must have fever. She felt her pulse, she stroked her forehead, looked at her tongue, and gravely spoke of sending for the doctor. But detecting nothing in the examination that could warrant any feeling of anxiety, she assured the child it was only a dream; that neither mother nor letter had as yet appeared, and that they must still wait until something turned up. So again they all waited and watched impatiently.

At last a letter did come. A letter with a black seal, announcing the death of the mother on the very night she had appeared through the curtains bending over her sleeping child.

My readers will ask, did I really believe this ghost story? Certainly I did. I believed Mrs. Murphy implicitly. She was too deeply in earnest, and too secure in her own conviction, to admit the slightest doubt of what she said. And as to self-deception, illusions, dreams, &c., can all the scientific explanations which Faraday and Brewster have left us teach one true lesson as to where matter ends and spirit begins? Bishop Berkeley tells us that all things and everything in creation is but idea. In that case, matter is only matter when it comes into contact with our senses, and the ghost was a fact.

I was surprised to miss that incident in Mrs. Macpherson's book; for that she believed it as truly as I did, I know. It was she who asked Mrs. Murphy to tell it one evening as we sat at her feet listening.

I considered Gerardine as a girl of great and promising talent. She showed a decided aptitude for art; and was, as I before hinted, of great use to her aunt in copying prints, tracing diagrams, and drawing on wood for the Sacred and Legendary Art then in progress. Gerardine was draughtswoman, and the writer of this had the honour of helping as occasional amanuensis and translator when time pressed. Gerardine had an especial talent for illustrating any conceit that crossed her mind, quite wonderful to me, who lacked it completely.

One day she brought in a half sheet of note paper, covered over with figures in various and expressive attitudes of conversation round a long table, at the head of which sat the unmistakable author of the "*Divina Commedia*." She called it "*La Societa di Dante*."

I know Mrs. Jameson thought it good by the bright approving smile with which she looked at it, but she said nothing till by-and-by, when we were alone and I made some admiring remark, Miss Jameson answered: "If she would only work—if she would only keep steady to it! But she does not."

Another time she brought in a new conceit, this time set in verse, which I transcribe here. Not for its especial value as a rhythmic production, perhaps, but to show that Gerardine, though only eighteen,

already gave tokens of ability in lyric composition; which, alas! in the absorbing cares of a young family, and latterly in the sore need of bread winning, was suffered to die out for want of use. Poor Gerardine!

Here are the verses as she wrote them out in my book, and which I have preserved for so many, many years:—

THE RED ROSE: THE CAUSE THEREOF.

At first the rose which grew in lady's bower
 Was white as snow,
 And every morn a maiden culled a flower
 To deck her brow.
 One day, while stooping low to choose her treasure,
 There came her lover:
 He kissed the white neck arching in its measure,
 It crimsoned over.
 But, as the lady rose to chide that lover,
 The flush it faded;
 Passed into the rose, which, ever from that hour,
 With blush is shaded.

How little did I dream, when at my particular request she wrote out those lines in my book, that I should be publishing them to the world so many years after, and when she was dead!

We both married from Mrs. Jameson's house, though not at the same time. She went her way, I went mine; and so we never met or corresponded. Not that I thought less of Gerardine or that she thought less of me; but a heavy curtain had fallen between us, and our lives became effectually separated from that time. I now return to Mrs. Jameson, the main subject of these pages.

She used to persist in sitting upstairs writing until three or four o'clock in the morning—a habit which must have materially weakened the vital energy, and rendered it powerless when the time came for doing battle with invading disease. She tried her eyes too much, as her mother and sisters would often warn her; but she, as often, would reply that she worked best when no sound was in the house, not a footfall to interrupt her thoughts; and she assured her anxious dear ones that she never felt the worse for it.

I have introduced this remark not wholly without design. I wished to show in some degree how earnestly and unsparingly that dear lady strove to win for her family some certain means of existence when she was gone. But even then she could not always conceal that her eyes began to fail her; and although she had a lamp made especially to serve her night work—a lamp consisting of two low sockets, with supports for green shades over short sperm candles—still there were times when she could hardly see.

But her courage never failed her, nor did her large, motherly heart deny the claims of sister women all round. Thus, though at one time she was pressed hard with family cares and responsibilities, and though she possessed no competent income to serve, she nevertheless

managed to lend a helping, generous hand to the needy. She would intuitively guess the hour of necessity, and devise some delicate pretext for inclosing a five-pound note, with that feeling and thoughtfulness which formed the characteristic of all her actions. She possessed a considerable amount of influence in society, and she never omitted an opportunity of using it to help and encourage a struggling talent. She it was who first started the idea of the *English-woman's Journal*, with a view to open new avenues for woman's work. She said to me one day, in speaking of it: "There are 800,000 women over and above the number of men in the country; and how are they all to find husbands, or find work and honest maintenance? The market for governesses is glutted."

She had gathered around her quite a little coterie of aspiring young souls, whom she called her adopted nieces, and whose various talents, in whatever way they gave token, she nurtured with counsel and assistance; and she would often send us, her little troupe, for a holiday excursion at her own expense, while she herself remained at home working. I, among the rest, have to thank her for one of the pleasantest and most interesting days I ever spent. It was at Sion House.

In all my varied experience, at home and abroad, I never came across one so free from jealousy, so utterly void of envy or vanity in whatever shape, or any of the small vices which afflict our sex. She had none. Her soul was as large, as noble, as sympathetic as her heart. She loved her German friends, as it was natural she should love them: they made much of her, they gave her sympathy and affection, which her nature demanded, for she was a thorough woman. She loved her English friends, who as surely, and in as great measure, loved her in return. And there is not one living soul among all those who knew her, who will not warmly echo these poor, faint memories of that richly gifted creature.

I was delighted to recognise, in the frontispiece of Mrs. Macpherson's book, the little sketch I had so often admired in Charlotte Murphy's hand, in those by-gone days of youth and hope—alas, slipped away for ever! It had been taken by her father, one morning when he caught sight of his girl looking up wistfully at his well-filled bookshelves. Seeing it again was like bringing back a flash of one's youth.

Mrs. Jameson, as I knew her, was no longer slim. She had already gained those proportions and that portliness of contour which, with many, gives the stamp of middle age. She had a beautiful hand, and a beautiful neck and shoulders. Her features, as shown in the frontispiece, were hers still. The expression of her eyes are there true to the life, as I knew her; and the firm but delicate mouth also. These were very characteristic.

But what distinguished Mrs. Jameson above every one I ever knew was one especial charm which no picture could ever give or perpetuate.

It was her voice. Gentle, low, and sweet like Cordelia's, whose beautiful spirit lived again in her, it was even something more; it was musical. It swept the air like the notes of an Æolian harp, whose dying tones still lingered on the ear. And when I add that her choice of words in speaking was so singularly elegant and graceful that English on her lips was sweet as the Italian, it will excite little surprise that, whenever she spoke, every word was hushed in the circle in which she stood, and every ear was bent to listen.

Even the style of her caligraphy bears the stamp of elegance in the smooth, sweeping lines of its character; as, indeed, everything she touched and worked at.

I feel it wisest now to draw my notice to a close, lest I say too much; and I beg in these few words to fasten up my wreath of sweet memories to lay softly on the grave of one who lived the centre subject of so much love, so much honour, so much respect and admiration.

As for me, my best claim to be heard consists in this: that I was able to understand and appreciate her who was not only one of the most accomplished women of her day, but the most unselfish and lovable among God's chosen ones; and certainly was in the rank of those who are justly named the celebrities of the Empire.



GRATITUDE.

(After the Persian.)

I.

YOUNG love has red, red flowers,
With never a ripening fruit;
Fame has a mounting fire,
That suddenly falls and dies;
Pleasure has singing hours,
But soon the music is mute;
Hope, the child of desire,
Ever evades and flies.

II.

Only where gratitude grows
In the earth, like a desert palm,
Odours and spices rain,
And men are fain to rest.
As the sunbeams smite the snows,
So yield our hearts to its balm:
And he that wins the gain,
And he that gives, is blest!

G. B. STUART.