

## A Child's Memories of Gad's Hill.

BY MARY ANGELA DICKENS.



MISS MARY ANGELA DICKENS—AGE 4.  
From a Photo. by Mason & Co., Old Bond Street.



VEN as I write the words I stop, and a little smile and a little sigh come together—as childish memories are apt to bring them! For there are two Gad's Hills in my life; two

which are yet one. The picture of the square, red-brick house, with its porch, its bell-turret, and its four bow windows, so familiar to all Dickens lovers, represents for me not only the misty region of these scattered, childish recollections; it is the picture of my home, too—though it is many years now since I have seen it—the picture of that childhood's home which holds a place in

one's life never to be filled by the dwelling-places of after years. After my grandfather's death, my father bought Gad's Hill, and

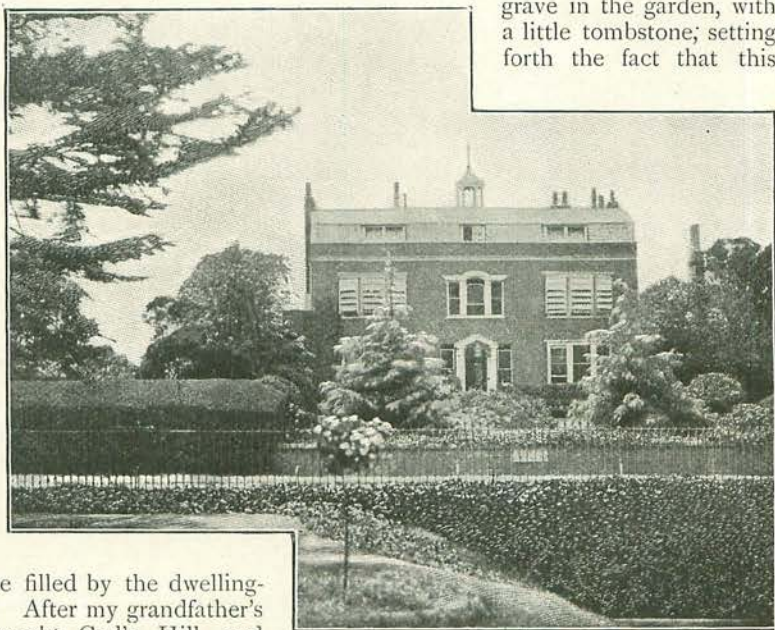
I and my brother and sisters grew up there.

My home life there was as happy as a child's life can be. I learned to love the place with the love of intimate familiarity. And yet, to the very last day of my life at Gad's Hill, there were bits about the house and garden which never seemed to me to belong to us—the ordinary, everyday family party, which had taken possession; bits which stood out vaguely for me, as having been left behind by that other life which had preceded ours; as survivals of that past which I could dimly remember.

Quaint enough are some of the details with which this atmosphere of the past was associated in my mind. There was a little grave in the garden, with a little tombstone; setting forth the fact that this



MISS MARY ANGELA DICKENS—  
PRESENT DAY.  
From a Photo. by Vandyk, Gloucester Road.



From a

GAD'S HILL.

[Photograph.]

was "The grave of Dick, the best of birds." This best of birds, I knew, had belonged to the "Auntie"—my grandfather's eldest daughter—who had been mistress of the Gad's Hill of those other days when I had been only a visitor there. I think I had a misty feeling that the grave of Dick was lonely, now that its mistress had gone away, and I was sorry for it. The connection of ideas here is, perhaps, natural enough. But why should the looking-glass



THE LIBRARY AT GAD'S HILL.  
From a Photo. by Edward Banes, Brompton.

panels of the dining-room door have given me, sometimes—even after Gad's Hill had been my home for years—quite an eerie sense of realization of the life that had been? I cannot say. I only know that I never felt anything but most respectful and a trifle deprecating towards that door.

The Gad's Hill of my very early childhood; the "Gad's" to which I used to go on visits; the "Gad's" which my home of after years was, and yet never was, to



From a

THE DINING-ROOM AT GAD'S HILL.

[Photograph.]

me; had that about it which stamped the remembrance of it clear and distinct upon my baby senses as a thing apart. It had that about it which gave a peculiar character to the passionate attachment to the place which grew in me after it became my home; that which gives a peculiar halo to its memory. To this day, if I hear or read of that mysterious something which is known as the magnetic influence of Genius, I feel again, instinctively, the atmosphere of my grandfather's home as it penetrated the consciousness of a little child visitor.

I have no recollection of ever being told

I have said that I was never afraid of him, and this is true. I was never afraid of his presence. But I recall very clearly a vague sense of dread, only to be described as "creepy," with which his absence—under certain circumstances—inspired me. And the circumstances were these: The Swiss ch<sup>^</sup>let, given to my grandfather by Fechter, stood in the shrubbery almost hidden among the trees. The shrubbery itself was separated from the garden by the high road. It was approached by a tunnel and two flights of steep steps. It was when "Venerables" betook himself to the ch<sup>^</sup>let for long mornings—as I know now, to write—



From a]

THE DRAWING-ROOM AT GAD'S HILL.

[Photograph.

that my grandfather was a great man. There is no shadow in my memory of ever having feared him. But all my recollection is pervaded with the sense that "Venerables"—as I was taught to call him—was not as other men. If I were to reproduce pictorially the old Gad's Hill scenes, which start out for me so vividly on the dim background of the forgotten, I think I should inevitably surround the figure of "Venerables" with a coloured light, or a peculiar line of isolation, as the only possible means by which my sense of the most striking characteristic of those scenes could be expressed.

that the haze of the mysterious rose about him in my little mind, and all sorts of undefined and dreadful possibilities presented themselves to me. I can feel myself, now, creeping indoors, when I had been sent to play in the garden, because the thought of that little house among the trees, with its solitary occupant, haunted me. I remember the childish reticence which kept me silent as to the cause of my reappearance, when I had found the consoling society of my "aunties," and the touch of shame with which I met my grandfather afterwards.

But perhaps my tenderest and most

H. F. Miss Kate Miss Mamie Charles  
Chorley Dickens Dickens Dickens.



Charles Collins. Miss Hogarth.  
A FAMILY GROUP.

From a Photo. by Mason & Co., Old Bond Street.

personal recollection of my grandfather is in the capacity of doctor. Running about where I had no business to be while dinner was going on, one summer evening, I came into collision with a large saucepan of boiling water; and disastrous consequences ensued to one small foot and leg. I suppose my nurse was to blame, and a guilty conscience made her put me hastily to bed and conceal the accident until dinner was over. I can only just remember lying there, feeling very lonely and neglected, and crying for my "auntie." But I have a very vivid recollection of the subsequent appearance, not only of "auntie," but of "Venerables," and I remember how comforting he was, and what a marvel of wisdom and knowledge I thought him, as he made the poor leg feel much better. And after that I seem to see the pretty room—my aunt's—full of people! I conclude that all the people staying in the house must have come to visit the small sufferer. And out of the mist of faces I distinguish, most distinctly, that of Mr. Marcus Stone—a great friend of mine, in those days—as he stood at the foot of the bed contemplating me with the deepest sympathy! The unfortunate little leg was a long time getting well—at least I suppose it was a long time—and "Venerables" was the only person in whose treatment of it

I felt any confidence. I remember how unhappy I was when his absence for a few days left it to the care of the kindest and most loving of aunts.

I have just used the phrase, "a few days." But time has nothing to do with these childish memories of mine. How many visits I paid to this Gad's Hill of the past I do not know. My recollections, for the most part, are like instantaneous photographs on my memory. Each stands alone, unconnected with the other—except by that singularly impressive atmosphere which I have tried to describe. Sometimes it is winter, in my memory; sometimes it is summer. I can remember one arrival with my father and mother—I think it must have been a Christmas visit, for there was snow. I can see the drawing-room as it looked while we had tea, on that occasion—that wonderful drawing-room, with the fire-light and lamp-light reflected everywhere, in the looking-glasses of which my grandfather was so fond. And I can remember our departure, when I disgraced myself by weeping copiously, and declining to go home! But for the most part, as I have said, my memories are isolated pictures. Here is one which I believe to be curiously characteristic of the life of Gad's Hill.



CHARLES DICKENS—AGE 45.  
From a Photograph.



THE CHALET—GAD'S HILL.  
From a Photo. by the London Stereoscopic Company.

that "Venerables" does not like people to be late. But "Venerables" himself seems to be wholly unconcerned. He is laughing and talking at a great rate, there, by the stand of flowers. One of the men he is talking to is "Mr. Layard"—afterwards Sir Henry Layard. I see him, now, as distinctly as I see my grandfather; I suppose, because he made a great pet of me, and I was very fond of him. Another is "Mr. Chorley"—H. F. Chorley, the musical critic. He was very kind to me, too, but I fear I was a little ungrateful for his attentions. The others I cannot see; but I know they all laughed very much, and I wondered whether I should have to be very old before I could understand what grown-up people talked about.

The picture fades as I call up another. The dining-room this time, and Christmas morning. The room is decorated with holly and ivy, and the red berries glisten cheerily. It is a long room, with that looking-glass panelled door, before mentioned, at one end. The other end I cannot see. Later on a conservatory was built out there, and subsequent impressions have blurred the older memory, I suppose. One long wall is covered

The scene is the drawing-room, and it is full summer time and early evening. The great bow window is wide open, and the beds of scarlet geraniums, with the waving trees of the shrubbery beyond, make a brilliant background. There is a tall stand of flowers, too, in the corner between the window and the door, and close to it a group of men in evening dress. There are other people in the room. Somebody is late for dinner, and, I think, even the small observer in the muslin pinafore has a notion



From a

THE WRITING-ROOM IN THE CHALET,

[Photograph.]

with pictures, and against it stands a long side-board. In the wall facing this are the windows, through which I see snow-covered lawns, and between them the fireplace, with a peculiarly high mantel-piece. Breakfast things are on the table—whether it is before or after breakfast, I do not know; and in front of the fire stands "Venerables," looking down at me. He and I are alone together, and he is giving me a Christmas present, a book called the "Child's Prize." I knew enough, by that time, to be aware that it was somehow highly appropriate that his present should be a book. Indeed, I suspect myself of having believed that he had written the "Child's Prize" from end to end himself, especially for my edification! But his last present to me had been a very magnificent doll's house, and the small recipient of the "Child's Prize" experienced, I blush to own, a keen pang of disappointment.

My last memory of my grandfather has no connection with Gad's Hill, but it is the most vivid of all to me. I was taken—I suppose that I might be able to say in after years that I had heard him—to one of my grandfather's last readings, and the awe and excitement of the occasion make my heart beat a little faster even now as I recall it. "The Christmas Carol" was the reading chosen for me—probably because Tiny Tim was considered to be within my comprehension; but I regret to say that the reading itself went completely over my head, and I only recollect being very



THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE, WITH HER PETS.  
From a Photo. by Mason & Co., Old Bond Street.

frightened and uncomfortable.

The "Venerables" on the platform was quite a stranger to me, and his proceedings were so eccentric as to be most alarming. He took no notice of me, or of my mother; and yet it seemed to me that he never took his eyes off me. And to Tiny Tim himself I owe my one intensely painful and distressing memory of my grandfather, for the climax of my discomfort was reached at last when it dawned upon my poor little faculties that "Venerables" was "crying." I never read the little scene in the carol where Bob Cratchit breaks down—the moment, I suppose, of this tragedy—without remembering the horror and dismay which seized upon me then. I knew nothing whatever about acting; any ideas I had about "pretending" were associated with Christmas pantomime, and did not assimilate at all with the solitary appearance of my grandfather on a dull-looking platform. To me his distress was absolutely real. I had never before seen a grown-up person cry. I had not known that they ever did or ever could do so. And that

"Venerables," of all people in the world, should cry with all those people looking on, and that no one should dare—as it seemed to me—to express sympathy, or offer consolation, was nothing short of an upheaval of my universe.

I went to Gad's Hill once again, as a visitor. But the house had lost its master then. And even a little child could feel something of the blank which that loss involved,



ONE OF THE GUARDIANS OF GAD'S HILL.  
From a Photo. by the London Stereoscopic Company.