



NOTABLE LADY AUTHORS.

MISS FLORENCE MARRYAT.

ATTILING with a fierce snowstorm, and a keen east wind, which drives the flakes straight into your face like repeated stings of a small sharp whip, you experience a sense of relief on turning into Miss Florence Marryat's pretty, picturesque little house in St. Andrew's Road, West Kensington. Two bright red pots filled with evergreens mark the house, which is built in the Elizabethan style of architecture, with a covered verandah running along the upper part. By a strange coincidence, the famous authoress has settled down within a stone's throw of the place where her distinguished father—the late Captain Marryat, R.N.—once lived. Until three months ago, there stood in the Fulham Palace Road, a large handsome building enclosed in ten acres of ground, which was first called 'Braudenburg Villa,' and was inhabited by the celebrated singer Madame Sontag. It next fell into the hands of the Duke of Sussex, who changed its name to Sussex House, and finally sold it to his equerry Captain Marryat, who exchanged it with Mrs Alexander Copeland for the Manor of Langham, in Norfolk, where he died. For some years past Sussex House has been in Chancery, but now it is pulled down; the land is sold out in building plots and the pleasure grounds will be turned into the usual streets and rows of houses for the needs of the ever-increasing population. The study, or as Florence Marryat calls it, her 'literary workshop'—is very small, but so well arranged that it seems a sort of *mutuum in parvo*, everything a writer can want being at hand. It has an indescribable look of snugness and comfort. The large writing table is well-filled, and on it lies a heap of MSS., and your eye first catches the figures 536 on the top page, betokening the fact that yet another new novel is under weigh. A massive brass inkstand, bright as gold, is flanked on each side by a fierce-looking dragon. Two of the walls are lined with bookshelves from floor to ceiling, filled with books which must number many hundreds of volumes. Over the fireplace hangs an old-fashioned round mirror set in a dull yellow frame, mounted on plush, around whose broad margin is displayed a variety of china plates, picked up in the many foreign countries which Miss Marryat has visited, and the effect is particularly good. The room is lighted at the further corner by glass doors opening into an aviary and conservatory, which is bright with many red-berried winter plants; this little glass-house opens on to the big kennels where Miss Marryat's canine pets are made so comfortable.

But the door opens. Enter your hostess with two ring-doves perched familiarly on her shoulder. She is tall in stature, erect in carriage, fair in complexion; she has large blue eyes—set well apart—straight, well-formed eyebrows, and an abundance of soft fair fluffy hair. She is dressed very simply in a long black tea gown with Watteau pleat, very plainly made, but perfect in cut and fit, and looking quite unstudied in its becoming graceful simplicity.

Florence Marryat is the youngest of the eleven children of the late well-known author, Captain Marryat, R.N., C.B., F.R.S. Her mother, who died at the good old age of ninety—in full possession of all her faculties—was a daughter of Sir Stephen Thairp, of Houston, Linlithgow, who was for many years H.B.M. Consul-General and *Chargé d'Affaires* at the Court of Russia. One side of the little study is dedicated to the relics of her father, and in the centre is his portrait, surrounded by his trophies and memories. The picture is painted by the sculptor Behnes, in water-colours, and represents a tall, fair, slight, though muscular-looking man leaning against the mast of his ship, Ariadne, dressed in the full uniform of those days, a long-tailed coat, white duck trousers, and cocked hat held under his arm. Two smaller pictures of him are pen-and-ink drawings by Count D'Orsay and Sir Edward Belcher respectively.

Born of such a gifted father, it is small wonder that the child should have inherited brilliant talents. She was never sent to school, but was taught under a succession of governesses, and 'on looking back,' she says with compunction, 'I regret to remember that I treated them all very badly, for I was a downright troublesome child. I was an omnivorous reader, and as no restriction was placed on my choice of books, I read everything I could find, lying for hours full length on the rug, face downwards, arms propping up my head, with fingers in ears to shut out every disturbing sound, the while perpetually summoned to come to my lessons. I may be said to have educated myself, and probably I got more real learning out of this mode of pro-

cedure than if I had gone through the regular routine of the schoolroom, with the cut-and-dried conventional system of the education of that day.'

Florence Marryat has been twice married; first at the age of sixteen to Captain Ross Church, of the Madras Staff Corps, and secondly to Colonel Francis Lean, of the Royal Marines. By the first marriage she had eight children, of whom six survive.

The first three-volume novel she ever published was called 'Love's Conflict.' It was written under sad circumstances. Her children were ill of scarlet fever; most of the servants, terror-stricken, had deserted her, and it was in the intervals of nursing these little ones that, to divert her sad thoughts, she took to her pen. From that time she wrote steadily and rapidly, and up to the present date she has actually turned out fifty-seven novels, besides an enormous quantity of journalistic work, about one hundred short stories, and numerous essays, poems and recitations. She says of herself, that from earliest youth she had always determined on being a novelist, and at the age of ten, she wrote a story for the amusement of her playfellows, and illustrated it with her own pen-and-ink sketches, (for, be it known, the accomplished authoress has likewise inherited this talent from her father, and to this day she will decorate many a letter to her favourite friends with funny and clever little illustrations and caricatures). But she wisely formed the determination that she would never publish anything until her judgment was more matured, so as to ensure success; that she would study people, nature, nature's ways, and character, and then she would let the world know what she thought, and in this piece of self-denial she has shown extreme wisdom, and reaped her reward in the long record of successes that she has scored, and the large fortune she has made, but which, alas! she no longer possesses. 'Others have spent it for me,' she says, plaintively; but she adds, generously, 'and I do not grudge it to them.' Part of it enabled her, at any rate, to give each and all of her children a thoroughly good education, and she is proud to think that they owe it all to her own hard work. Miss Marryat is always especially flattered to hear that her novels are favourites with women, and she had a gratifying proof of this when visiting Canada in 1885. She was waited on by a deputation of ladies, armed with bouquets and presents, to thank her for having written that charming story called 'My Own Child.'

'Gup,' which had an extensive sale, is entirely an Anglo-Indian book, not so much of a novel as a collection of character sketches and tales, which her powers of observation enabled her to form out of the life in Indian stations. For the benefit of the uninitiated, the word 'Gup' shall be translated from Hindustanee into English: 'Gossip,' 'Woman Against Woman,' 'Veronique,' 'Petronel,' 'Nelly Brook,' and 'Fighting the Air,' were amongst the earliest of the eighteen novels that she brought out in the first eleven years of her literary career. These, together with her 'Girls of Feversham,' have been republished in Germany and America, and translated into Russian, German, Swedish, and French. Miss Marryat says: 'I never sit down deliberately to compose or think out a plot. The most ordinary remark or anecdote may supply the motive, and the rest comes by itself. Sometimes I have as many as a dozen plots, in different stages of completion, floating in my brain. They appear to me like a set of houses, the first of which is fully furnished; the second finished, but empty; the third in course of building; till the furthest in the distance is nothing but an outline. As soon as one is complete, I feel I must write it down; but I never think of the one I am writing; always of the next one that is to be, and sometimes of three or four at a time, till I drive them forcibly away. I never feel at home with a plot till I have settled the names of the characters to my satisfaction. As soon as I have done that they become sentient beings in my eyes, and seem to dictate what I shall write. I lose myself so completely whilst writing, that I have no idea, till I take it up to correct, what I have written.' Judging by the great heap of MSS. alluded to on the writing-table, there seems but little for the writer to correct. At your request she hands you half-a-dozen pages, and you notice but three alterations in the lot; she facile pen, the medium of her thoughts, seems to have known exactly what it had to write. The novel is called 'The Risen Dead,' and is being written by request of the *Oracle*, and is to be in three volumes. Her four latest novels, ('On Circumstantial Evidence,' 'Mount Eden,' 'Blindfold,' and 'Brave Heart and True,' were written in eighteen months. 'Tom Tiddler's Ground' is the history of her own adventures while in America. Many of her books have been dramatised, and at one time nine of these plays were running simultaneously in the provinces. She says, 'The most successful of my works are transcripts of my own experience. I have been accused of caricaturing my acquaintances, but it is untrue. The majority of them are not worth the trouble, and it is far easier for me to draw a picture from my own imagination, than to endure the society of a disagreeable person for the sake of copying him or her.'

But Miss Marryat's talents are versatile. After a long illness, when her physicians recommended rest from literature, believing an entire change of occupation would be the best tonic for her, she went upon the stage—a pursuit which she had always dearly loved—and possessing a fine voice and great musical gifts, with considerable dramatic power, she has been successful both as an actress and an entertainer. She wrote a play called 'Her World Against an Lie' (from her own novel), which was produced at the Prince of Wales Theatre, and in which she played the chief comedy part, Mrs Hepzibah Horton, with so much skill and aplomb, that the *Era*, *Figaro*, *Morning Post* and other papers, criticised her performances most favourably. She also wrote 'Miss Chester' and 'Charmyon' in conjunction with Sir Charles

Young. She was engaged for the opening of the Prince of Wales' (then the Princess') Theatre, when she played 'Queen Altemire' in *The Palace of Truth*. She has toured with D'Oyly Carte's *Potteries* companies, with George Grossmith in *Entr' Nous*, and finally with her own company in *The Golden Goblet* (written by her son Frank). Altogether Miss Marryat has pursued her dramatic life for fifteen years, and has given hundreds of recitations and musical entertainments which she has written for herself. One of these last, called 'Love Letters,' she has taken through the provinces three times, and once through America. It lasts two hours; she accompanies herself on the piano, and the music was written by George Grossmith. Another is a comic lecture entitled, 'Women of the future (1991); or, what shall we do with our men?' and she has made many tours throughout the United Kingdom, giving recitals and readings from her father's works, and other pieces by Albery and Grossmith. For the last seven years Miss Marryat has never looked at a criticism on her books. She says her publishers are her best friends, and their purses are her assessors, and she is quite satisfied with the result. She has an intense love of animals, and asks if you would object to the presence of her dogs, as this is the hour for their admittance. On the contrary, it is what you have been longing for, and two magnificent bulldogs of long pedigree, are let in. Fervacious as is their appearance, their manners are perfect, and their great brown eyes seem human in their intelligence as each comes up to make your acquaintance. Meantime the doves have gone peacefully to sleep, each perched on a brass dragon, and the dogs eye them respectfully, as if they were all members of 'a happy family.'

A neat little maid comes in with a tea-tray, but ere she is permitted to lay the prettily embroidered cloth, your hostess asks you to look at the table, which is a curiosity. It is a small round table, made from the oak planks of the quarter deck of H.M.S. Ariadne. It was sent to her by a gentleman who never saw her, with a letter saying that she would prize the wood over which her father's feet had so often trod. It bears in the centre a brass inscription, as follows:—'Made from the timbers of H.M.S. Ariadne, commanded by Captain Marryat, R.N., C.B., 1828.'

Miss Marryat, probably wishing to pay you a peculiar honour, pushes her own special revolving writing chair to you, but you had surreptitiously tried it whilst waiting for her, and unhesitatingly pronounce it to be the most uncomfortable piece of furniture ever made. It is constructed of wood, is highly polished, and has a hard seat, hard elbow rests, and a hard unyielding back. She laughs heartily, and declares she will bear no word against her 'old arm-chair'; she says she has got used to it, it has been like herself a great traveller, she has written in it for twenty years, and it is a particular favourite. Miss Marryat wears a diamond ring, which she tells you has a history and is very old. During the first Burmese war in which her father was engaged, the natives were in the habit of making little bits in their skin, and inserting therein any particular stone of value they wished to conceal. One of these men was taken prisoner, and on being searched, or felt over—for there was not much clothing to search—a small hard lump was found on his leg, which at once revealed the presence of some valuable. A slight incision produced a diamond, which was confiscated, set, and presented by Captain Marryat to his sister-in-law, Mrs Horace Marryat, whose only son, Colonel Fitzroy Marryat, gave it to his cousin, the authoress.

She takes you into the adjoining room to see two oil-paintings of wrecks, *ch' d'écroues* of the great Flemish seascape painter, Louis Bockhausen, and valued at a high figure. There is a story attached to these also. They belonged originally to the Marryat collection at Wimbledon House, and were given to her brother Frederick by his grandmother on his being promoted to be first lieutenant of the *Sphinx*, and were hanging in his cabin when that ship was wrecked off the Needles, Isle of Wight. They remained fourteen days under water, and when rescued were sent to a Plymouth dealer to be cleaned. Lieutenant Marryat, for his bravery on that occasion, was immediately appointed to the *Sphinx's* twin vessel, the ill-fated *Avenger*, who went down with 380 souls on the Sorrell rocks.

After this catastrophe, the dealer sent the paintings to the young officer's mother, saying it was by his instructions, and that he had refused to take them to sea again, as he declared that they were 'much too good to go aboard.' Miss Marryat also possesses a painting by Cawno, from 'Japhet in Search of a Father,' which was left to her by the will of the late Mr Richard Bentley, the publisher, and this she prizes highly. She has several presentation pens, one of porcupine quill and silver, with which her father wrote his last five novels, another of ivory, coral, and gold, inscribed with her name and presented by Messrs Macniven and Cameron; a third of silver, and a fourth of gold and ivory, given by admirers of her writings; fifthly, and the one she values most and chiefly wears, a penholder of solid gold with amethysts, which belonged to an American ancestress of the family, for Miss Marryat's paternal grandmother was a Boston belle. This was a tribute from her American relations when she crossed the Atlantic, with the words that she was 'the most worthy member to retain it.' As she leaves the room with you, she is surrounded by a noisy group of tiny black rough terriers, one of whom, 'Jane,' is a special favourite. When you look surprised at the number of her doggy friends, you make her laugh. 'They are not all kept entirely for amusement,' she tells you. 'I sell the puppies, and they fetch large prices. It is quite the fashion to be in trade nowadays, you know. One lady runs a boarding-house, another, her emporium for furniture, a third, her bonnet shop, a fourth, her dressmaking establishment, so why not I, my kennels? I love dogs better than bonnets, or chairs, or people, and so I derive pleasure as well as profit from my particular fancy, and I should be lonely without these pets.'

But, as though talking of old reminiscences, had changed her mood from gay to grave, she asks you to look at a few very special treasures in her writing room. 'I call this my room of home memories,' she says with exceeding softness and pathos. 'There are my children's pictures; those, pointing to a small shelf, 'are my best friend's books. Here are portraits of all whom I love best, my living, and my dead!'—*Lady's Pictorial*.

LOCAL INDUSTRY V. IMPORTATIONS.—Competent judges aware that the Lozongos, Jubbas and Sweeta manufactured by A. LEBRONK & Co. are unequalled.—(ADVT.)