



WELL-KNOWN LADY AUTHORS.

MRS ARTHUR STANNARD ('JOHN STRANGE WINTER').



On the south side of a spacious square of handsome brick houses in Earl's Court, a ruddy gleam of fire-light through the red window-blinds marks the residence of the popular author, John Strange Winter. Passing through the outer and inner entrance doors, with mounted antlers and Swiss carvings hung between them, you reach the long, narrow hall, where the tessellated black-and-white paving is covered for the most part with heavy Wilton carpets; the rich, deep-red walls are profusely decorated with quaint old prints, whose sombreness is relieved by Nankin and Spode china. A later inspection shows these to include some choice engravings by Morland, a few miniatures, and a group of family silhouettes. ('Had we any more black relations?' Mrs Stannard, when a child, once asked her mother on being told which members of her family they portrayed.) Entering the dining-room on the right, your hostess is discovered, deeply engaged in dressing dolls for an approaching juvenile festivity, when each little guest is to receive some gift. Clouds of filmy muslin, embroidery, lace, and silk lie before her, and several of those already attired repose in a row on the sofa. She extends a firm, strong hand in cordial greeting, and as there is only one more doll to complete the set, you settle down beside her to watch the process, and notice the deft and nimble fingers, as they swiftly run up a tounce or adjust a tiny trimming. She is dressed in a black and grey tea-gown, which looks like fine tapestry, with grey satin sleeves, panels, and front.

Mrs Arthur Stannard is a tall, handsome young woman. She has fine dark brown eyes, which sparkle with intellect and humour, level eyebrows, and dark hair curling over her low forehead and well-shaped head; she has a pretty but firm little mouth, and clear-cut chin, indicative of strength of will. Her face had settled somewhat into gravity as she pursues her occupation, for she has put into this apparently trivial matter, just as she does in greater things, her very best efforts with that thoroughness which characterises her; but as she suddenly looks up, and catches you intently watching her, she smiles a sweet, bright smile, and laughs a low, rippling laugh, as she seems to guess exactly what are your thoughts. 'It is for the children,' she says softly, and in those few words she betrays at once the sympathy of her nature, that sympathy with these little ones which has caused the children of her pen to live so vividly in the hearts of her readers.

It is a large, lofty room, pale green in colour, with carved oak dado. A bright, clear fire blazing in the wide, tiled hearth makes the heavy, polished brass fender and 'dogs' glisten like gold. On the high, black, carved 'chimney shelf,' as Mrs Stannard calls it, stand three valuable old blue jars, and the low, broad overmantel is composed of genuine Dutch tiles, three hundred years in age, framed in wood. Over this is grouped a collection of ancient blue Delft; the walls are hung with a few good proof engravings; at night the room is amply lighted by the huge hanging, crimson-shaded lamp, which casts a soft, becoming glow over every corner; the floor is covered with a thick Axminster carpet of subdued colouring, and with the exception of a handsome old carved oak dower-chest and grandfather clock, with loud and sonorous strike, which both date back into the last century, the rest of the furniture is mahogany; pieces picked up here and there, restored, modernised, and chosen with an eye to effect as well as to comfort.

Mrs Stannard is the only daughter of the late Rev. Henry Vaughan Palmer, rector of St. Margaret's, York. For some time Mr Palmer had been an officer in the Royal Artillery before his convictions led him to lay down his sword and enter the church militant; he had come of several generations of soldiers, and to the last day of his life found his greatest pleasure in the society of military men; this perhaps accounts for Mrs Stannard's almost instinctive knowledge of army men and army ways. On asking her if, when a child, she loved books, and gave promise of her brilliant gift, she says, smiling, 'Well, as regards my lessons, most emphatically no! I was a restless, impatient sort of child, who tired of everything before it was half done. I think, like all very enthusiastic people, that I was never as happy as with books, that is to say, novels. I was

just eleven when I went to my first school, but I had read Thackeray, Dickens, Charles Keade, and Whyte Melville up to date, besides many others, and I was never restricted in my reading; I never remember in my life my father or mother telling me not to read any particular book, and, speaking very impressively, 'I am all the better for it. Years afterwards, when my father died—I was twenty-one then—I felt that the few stories I had written and sold up to that time were but child's play. Then I began to work in real earnest, studying certain authors that I might clearly realise the difference of their method and style.' But the thought at once arises, that the touching and simple pathos of her style is entirely original, and born of no model.

And then, as oft-times happens when two women are sitting together in friendly converse, a word is dropped about her married life. Ah! here, though much could be said, in deference to your hostess's wishes the pen must be stayed. All who know Mr and Mrs Stannard know how complete and perfect is their union. Mr Stannard is a civil engineer, and at one time served under the late General Gordon. He is very pardonably proud of his clever wife, and efficiently transacts all her business arrangements, the two—so perfect in one—working, as it were, hand in hand.

Her *non de guerre*, 'John Strange Winter,' was adopted by the advice of the publishers of her first books, because they thought it wiser that works so military as 'Cavalry Life' and 'Regimental Legends' should be assumed by the world to be written by a man, and that they would stand a better chance of mercy at the hands of the critics than if they went forth as the acknowledged work of a woman, and for a time it was so assumed, but when 'Bootles' Baby' made such a success, and people wanted to know who the author was, and where he lived, it soon became known that 'he' was a woman, although, as she did not add her name to the title-page, it was a good while before it was generally believed. It may here be remarked that Mrs Stannard holds very strongly the opinion that there should be 'no sex in art,' and whilst never desiring to conceal her identity, deprecates the idea of receiving indulgence or blame on the ground of her work being that of a woman as both unjust and absurd. In private life she carries out her ideas on this point so effectually that few acquaintances would gather from her conversation (unless it were necessary to 'talk shop') that she was a literary woman at all, as except to a fellow-worker she would rather talk on any subject under the sun than literature.

The author to whom, according to Kuekin, 'we owe the most finished and faithful rendering ever yet given of the character of the British soldier' can portray, too, in a wonderful degree the beauty of child-life. Of modern creations there can be none better known to the public, or which have excited more sympathy, than 'Mignon' and 'Hoop-ii.'

Correct in detail, as those can prove who were in India at the time of the terrible mutiny of 1857, she might have written 'A Siege Baby' on the spot, had it not been that she was only born on January 13th in the previous year, and at that time was an infant in arms. Fertile in imagination, acute in observation, sprightly and wholesome in style, there is a freshness and life in her books which charm alike old and young, rich and poor, at home and abroad, and that her popularity is fully maintained is testified by the gratifying fact that a late story, 'He went for a Soldier,' one of the slightest of her efforts, had a larger sale during the first month after publication than any previous work from her pen in the same period. One practical result of this book must be mentioned. The scene is laid at Dovercourt, a few miles from Mr and Mrs Stannard's pretty summer house at Wix. She had been greatly distressed, when visiting that seaside place, by the sight of the over-loaded hackney-carriages, with their poor broken-down horses. Immediately after her indignant comments on this fact in her story, by-laws were passed, bringing these vehicles under effective police supervision.

Besides those already named, amongst some two or three and twenty novels, which are all so well known as not to need description—for are they not to be found in every library and on every railway bookstall in the United Kingdom?—'Beautiful Jim,' 'Harvest,' 'Diana Forget,' and a most pathetic story called 'My Poor Dick,' remain fixed on the memory. This last is, perhaps, the author's own favourite. 'Bootles' Baby,' as all the play-going world knows, was dramatised and brought out three years ago at the Globe Theatre in London. It has been on tour ever since, and there seems no intention of terminating its long run, dates having been booked far into the year. Her latest story, entitled 'The Other Man's Wife,' has been running in a serial in various newspapers, and is now issued by F. V. White and Co. in two-volume form. One great element of the author's success and world-wide literary reputation is undoubtedly to be found in her creations of the children of her military heroes, alike among the officers' quarters and those 'on the strength.' She has the happy knack of depicting them at once simple, natural, and lovable.

'I never begin a novel,' says Mrs Stannard, 'until I have got a certain scene in my mind. I cannot write any kind of story without having one dramatic scene clearly before me; when I have got it, I work up to that; then the story arranges itself. But this is only the germ, the first conception of the tale. As I write one thread after another spins itself out, to be taken up afterwards to form a consecutive, concise whole. Sometimes I find my original story altogether, but never any dramatic situation afterwards which I am working, and the end is often quite different to what I had intended. When this happens I very seldom try to fight against fate. I think that all stories ought more or less to write themselves, and it seems to me that this must make a tale more like real life than if it were all carefully

mapped out beforehand, and then simply padded up to some requisite length.'

By this time the last doll is finished and added to the row on the sofa. They all look as if they had been turned out of a first class milliner's establishment. Mrs Stannard suggests a move to her study, and leads the way up the wide staircase, the hand-rail of which is surmounted by a broad and heavy brass guard, put there for the sake of the little children of the house. A broad settee on the wide conservatory landing invites you to rest awhile and look at all the odds and ends which your hostess says are so precious to her. Here are two handsome Chippendale chairs picked up in Essex, many photographs of the house at Wix, a dozen pieces of Lane Delft porcelain, made specially as a wedding present for Mrs Stannard's grandmother in 1810, some Staffordshire hunting jugs, and some quaint little figures, 'all rubbish,' she says, smiling, 'but precious to me.' There is, however, a Spode dinner service in blue which is emphatically not rubbish, and a set of Oriental dishes, blue and red, which are very effective. The landing is richly carpeted; the windows and the doors of the conservatory are all of stained glass, while above hangs an old Empire lamp of beautiful design, filled in with cathedral glass. The first door on the left leads you into the author's study. It is a charming room, small but lofty, with pale blue walls hung with many little pictures, plates, old looking-glasses, and chenille curtains of terra cotta and pale blue softly blended. A pretty inlaid bookcase filled with a few well selected books stands opposite the window. The horseshoe hanging yonder was cast in the Lalaklava charge. She has indeed a goodly collection of these, and owns to a weakness for them, declaring that her first great success was achieved on the day that she picked one up at Harrogate. There must be many hundreds of photographs scattered about in this room, and it would be a day's occupation to look through them all; but each has its own interest for her, and most of them are of people well-known in the literary, scientific, artistic, and fashionable world. 'I never sit here,' she says, 'it is my work-room, pure and simple. Sometimes my husband comes up, and then I read to him all my newly-written stuff, but this I do every day.'

The next door opens into the drawing-room, where there is a rich harmony in the details of the decoration and furniture, which suggests the presence of good and cultivated taste, combined with a general sense of luxury and comfort. The entire colouring is blended, from old gold to terra-cotta, from Indian red to golden brown. On the left stands a cabinet crowded with choicest bits of china, in the middle of which is placed the bouquet, carefully preserved, presented to the author by Mr Kuskin on her birthday. A lovely Dutch marqueterie table contains a goodly collection of antique silver, and among the pictures on the walls are a painting by Lawrence Phillips, Batley's etching of Irving and Ellen Terry, also one of Mrs Stannard, and a series of all the original and clever pen-and-ink sketches in 'Bootles' Children,' by Bernard Partridge, drawn as illustrations to the story in the *Lady's Pictorial*.

Mrs Stannard is, above all things, a thoroughly domestic woman. Popular in society, constantly entertaining with great hospitality, she yet contrives to attend to every detail of her large household, which consequently goes like clockwork. She writes for about two hours every morning, and keeps a neat record book, in which she duly enters the number of pages written each day.

Presently Mr Stannard comes in, and soon suggests an adjournment to his study downstairs, a snug, business-like room, half filled with despatch-boxes, books, and MSS. On a table stands a large folio-like volume, which is Mrs Stannard's visiting book, containing many hundreds of names. She looks ruefully at a clip containing some sixty unanswered letters, and candidly confesses that she finds considerable difficulty with her private correspondence and her calls, both of which accumulate faster than she can respond to them; though, as she says, her many friends are very indulgent to her on those scores, and are 'quite willing to make allowance for a poor woman who has the bulk of her literary work cut out for a year or two in advance, three little children, and a houseful of servants to manage; but, happily,' she adds, 'good servants. I have been so lucky in that way.'

Just now, indeed, she claims especial indulgence with respect to social observances, for, as though so busy a life were not enough to exhaust her energies, she has added to her burden the anxieties of owning and editing a new weekly penny magazine, which under the euphonious title of *Golden Tales*, has just begun its career. The success of the first numbers has been sufficient to surprise and delight the venturesome novelist, and has caused her to determine upon an early enlargement of its modest dimensions, that it may justify and retain the great favour with which it has been received.

But with all this accumulation of business, these domestic cares, and social claims, somehow Mrs Stannard never seems in a hurry. The kind and hospitable couple are always ready to do an act of kindness, and to welcome with help and counsel a new aspirant to fame in the thorny paths of literature. Small wonder that they are so much sought after in society, and so heartily welcomed wherever they go—and one is seldom seen without the other.—*Ladies' Pictorial*.

A CURE FOR NEURALGIA AND TOOTHACHE.

TAKE three wine glasses of pure gin and put in a bottle; then take a piece of garlic about the size of a walnut, cut up fine, and put in the bottle with the gin; cork and seal perfectly air-tight, and put by for three days. Dose: two teaspoonful three times a day. Also cut up a small quantity of garlic very fine and mix into a stiff paste, which put behind the ears will afford immediate relief.

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