

From Shakespeare to Corelli

STRATFORD, Nov. 24, 1899.—It is a long way from Shakespeare to Maria Corelli, from "King Lear" to the "Sorrows of Satan," but Stratford-on-Avon is just now much prouder of being the home of the popular novelist than it was 400 years ago of counting William Shakespeare among its distinguished citizens.

With her beloved stepbrother, the poet, Eric Mackay, Miss Corelli visited Stratford and remained several weeks at a queer old inn and after Mackay's death while casting about in her loneliness for some spot where she might again take up her work, she remembered the pleasant days at Stratford and hither she came early last spring and here she intends to remain indefinitely.

All this I learned from Miss Corelli's own lips during a charming visit one evening a short time ago. She was so fortunate as to secure a lease of "Ye Hall's Croft," the very home where lived and died Shakespeare's favorite daughter, Susannah, and her husband, Dr. John Hall. Both have lain for two and a half centuries in the old parish church by the side of the great poet, but their delightful home is apparently as good as when they left it. From foundation to eaves the outside is covered with masses of ivy, now a brilliant crimson, and

them, dress them up so that people will accept them."

Some one quoted Robert Louis Stevenson as having said that no one with a family to support ever ought to attempt to write unless he has an assured income from some other source. Miss Corelli blazed with indignation. "It makes me so angry to hear writers who have prominence talk in that manner," she said. "I have made a success. I have supported my family, but I don't think you can do it. You'd better not try. It is like a man who has climbed to the top of a tree, saying to those below, 'It is true I have reached the top, but it is very doubtful if you can do it and the limb might break if you did. Don't attempt it, stay down there where you are.' I have no patience with such conceit. If men and women think they have a talent for writing, let them try and keep on trying, for how else can they ever find out the truth?"

Then a thought seemed to strike her unpleasantly. "Women need never look for any encouragement from the men of England—they will not get recognition even for what they have done. If one uses the only argument that ever has any weight with them and says, 'But she has made a tremendous financial success,' they simply

by the hundreds of thousands. Tennyson complimented them in a letter written with his own hand and Lord Salisbury has expressed his appreciation. Gladstone called upon the author frequently when he was prime minister and she has been invited more than once to dine with the prince of Wales. She receives letters from all parts of the globe, but had a dread of publicity and has never had a photograph taken for fear it might get into the shop windows. Her favorite books are Plato and the bible, in which she declares she finds something new every time she opens their pages.

IDA HUSTED HARPER.

Wistful

Washington Star: "I wish I weren't near-sighted," said the man with cloth gloves and wide-toed kid shoes, as he peered through a window where some theatrical lithographs were displayed.

"I didn't know you were afflicted that way."

"Yes, just enough to be annoyed." He sighed and then resumed: "I wish I weren't getting so deaf."

"One does have to speak rather loudly to you; but that's a mere trifle."

"I don't mind missing the conversations of every-day existence. It's something of a relief. But the immunity has its compensating disadvantages." He sighed again and resumed: "I wish I weren't so fond of the theater."

"Indeed?"

"Yes." And I wish I weren't so forgetful. I always have to depend on my wife to find everything for me when I am going out of an evening." After another moment of reverie he continued: "I wish my wife weren't so solicitous about my moral welfare."

"You can't blame her for being so."

"No. She is only doing her duty. But it's a little irritating. You see, whenever we go to see a performance with a ballet she forgets to bring the opera glass and when we attend a French farce where the pungency is mostly in the lines she forgets my ear trumpet and I have scarcely any opportunities at all to get shocked."



"HALL'S CROFT"—THE HOME OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S DAUGHTER SUSANNAH AND SON-IN-LAW, DR. JOHN HALL, 250 YEARS AGO—NOW OCCUPIED BY THE NOVELIST, MARIE CORELLI.

there is a lovely garden at the back. On one side of the great square entrance hall is the large drawing room, on the other the dining room, while from the back ascends a magnificent old, oak staircase. The ceilings are low, all the mantelpieces and other woodwork are beautifully carved and there are quantities of ancient furniture and rare china, bric-a-brac and pictures. To these Miss Corelli has added many of her own belongings—on the floor immense tiger-skin rugs, sent her by an admirer from India and in a silk-lined basket by the bright open fire lay a diminutive Scotch terrier.

The mistress of the house looks just as you would have her. About five feet high, her figure is well rounded and showed to advantage in a gown of cream satin very long and ruffled with lace, decollete and sleeveless, showing extremely handsome arms and neck. She is a blonde with sparkling blue eyes and her fair face framed by a big, fluffy pompadour of light brown hair, twisted into a pert little loop on the crown. Neither in appearance nor speech is she at all like an English woman. She has a musical voice, is full of vivacity and satire and gestures often with her graceful hands. Her friend, Miss Vyver, large, dark, in every way her opposite, relieves her of all the practical details of life and they address each other affectionately as "Bertha" and "Marie."

How Her Works Are Written.

"I love to write," said Miss Corelli. "I couldn't help it if I tried."

"Do you wait for the mood or are you systematic?"

"Oh, I'm always in the mood, but I'm systematic as well. I have a late breakfast and work steadily from 10 o'clock till 2."

"Do you dictate at all?"

"Not on my own stories. I write every word of them twice with my own hand; first a rapid draft in pencil, then a revised copy with a pen; after that I hand it to my secretary to be typewritten."

"Is it true that you never have seen the 'land of the midnight sun,' which you describe so vividly in 'Thelma'?"

"Quite true. I hate to travel and would rather believe that the countries I describe are like my visions of them. There are so many discomforts and vexations in traveling as to destroy illusions and often put one in such a state of mind making it impossible to enjoy what is actually there. I notice in the papers that Kipling has gone up into Scotland to find material for new stories. The idea of anybody's trying to write of Scotch life after Sir Walter Scott."

"Your books have a very large sale in the United States, do they not?"

"I never pay any attention to that. I can't imagine anybody's writing a book with the idea in mind that it will sell well. In such books I write I have certain theories which I want to get before the world and my only thought is how I can sugar-coat

lift up their eyebrows and say, 'Really! Ha! ha!'

I wish I could depict the entire in her voice and gesture, as she threw out her hand and tossed back her head. It was delicious. She can afford to be scornful toward her critics, for while they have either contemptuously ignored or viciously attacked her work, there is no male novelist today whose books have a wider sale than her own.

For the Hunt Ball.

"You really like it here and don't get lonely?" I asked.

"Yes and no," she answered. "I have had my house full of guests all summer and there is constant entertaining at the country seats all about here. I have been planning my gown today for a hunt ball."

"What is it to be?"

"Pink satin. The house has a great deal of dark old wainscoting and I think it will make a beautiful background for pink. I care but little for society in general. The men all say exactly the same thing, mere empty compliments. I always look them straight in the eyes and laugh and ask: 'How long since you said that to the last woman?'"

Where She Came From.

Of Miss Corelli's origin it is impossible to obtain the slightest information. She guards well the secret of her life—she has a right to do so, it is hers—but it is singular in this day, when the searchlight of the public press leaves almost no spot unexplored, that one should be able to hide even one's own personal history. To find matter for a little biographical sketch I searched three public libraries, including that of London, and finally resorted to the British museum. In this largest collection of printed material in the world I could glean nothing whatever, except that she was adopted when an infant by Charles Mackay, the song writer and litterateur. When was she an infant? Less than forty years ago, one must decide from her appearance, possibly less than thirty-five. "Had she a father? Had she a mother?" Somebody certainly endowed her with a wonderful talent. Tradition says her father was Highland Scotch, her mother Italian and that Minnie Mackay took her mother's name to make famous. She was educated in a French convent and, having great musical ability, was intended for the career of a musician and began to write an elaborate opera at 14. But she was always filled with a dreamy mysticism and longed to write out her visions. She finally did so in the "Romance of Two Worlds." Although scarcely noticed by the press it sprung at once into popularity and reached a sale of 70,000 copies in a short time.

This was in 1886 and she has written a novel every year since. They have been translated into every language, including Russian, Greek and Hindoostani, and sell



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