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Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
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Nature and Art

Mrs. Inchbald

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NATURE AND ART

by
MRS. INCHBALD.

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INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Simpson was born on the 15th of October, 1753, one of the eight children of a poor farmer, at Standingfield, near Bury St. Edmunds. Five of the children were girls, who were all gifted with personal beauty. The family was Roman Catholic. The mother had a delight in visits to the Bury Theatre, and took, when she could, her children to the play. One of her sons became an actor, and her daughter Elizabeth offered herself at eighteen—her father then being dead—for engagement as an actress at the Norwich Theatre. She had an impediment of speech, and she was not engaged; but in the following year, leaving behind an affectionate letter to her mother, she stole away from Standingfield, and made a bold plunge into the unknown world of London, where she had friends, upon whose help she relied. Her friends happened to be in Wales, and she had some troubles to go through before she found a home in the house of a sister, who had married a poor tailor. About two months after she had left Standingfield she married, in London, Mr. Inchbald, an actor, who had paid his addresses to her when she was at home, and who was also a Roman Catholic. On the evening of the wedding day the bride, who had not yet succeeded in obtaining an engagement, went to the play, and saw the bridegroom play the part of Mr. Oakley in the "Jealous Wife." Mr. Inchbald was thirty-seven years old, and had sons by a former marriage. In September, 1772, Mrs. Inchbald tried her fortune on the stage by playing Cordelia to her husband's Lear. Beauty alone could not assure success. The impediment in speech made it impossible for Mrs. Inchbald to succeed greatly as an actress. She was unable to realise her own conceptions. At times she and her husband prospered so little that on one day their dinner was of turnips, pulled and eaten in a field, and sometimes there was no dinner at all. But better days presently followed; first acquaintance of Mrs. Inchbald with Mrs. Siddons grew to a strong friendship, and this extended to the other members of the Kemble family.

After seven years of happy but childless marriage, Mrs. Inchbald was left a widow at the age of twenty-six. In after years, when devoting herself to the baby of one of her landladies, she wrote to a friend,—“I shall never again have patience with a mother who

complains of anything but the loss of her children; so no complaints when you see me again. Remember, you have had two children, and I never had one." After her husband's death, Mrs. Inchbald's beauty surrounded her with admirers, some of them rich, but she did not marry again. To one of those who offered marriage, she replied that her temper was so uncertain that nothing but blind affection in a husband could bear with it. Yet she was patiently living and fighting the world on a weekly salary of about thirty shillings, out of which she helped her poorer sisters. When acting at Edinburgh she spent on herself only eight shillings a week in board and lodging. It was after her husband's death that Mrs. Inchbald finished a little novel, called "A Simple Story," but it was not until twelve years afterwards that she could get it published. She came to London again, and wrote farces, which she could not get accepted; but she obtained an increase of salary to three pounds a week by unwillingly consenting not only to act in plays, but also to walk in pantomime. At last, in July, 1784, her first farce, "The Mogul Tale," was acted. It brought her a hundred guineas. Three years later her success as a writer had risen so far that she obtained nine hundred pounds by a little piece called "Such Things Are." She still lived sparingly, invested savings, and was liberal only to the poor, and chiefly to her sisters and the poor members of her family. She finished a sketch of her life in 1786, for which a publisher, without seeing it, offered a thousand pounds. But there was more satirical comment in it than she liked, and she resolved to do at once what she would wish done at the point of death. She destroyed the record.

In 1791 Mrs. Inchbald published her "Simple Story." Her other tale, "Nature and Art," followed in 1794, when Mrs. Inchbald's age was forty-one. She had retired from the stage five years before, with an income of fifty-eight pounds a year, all she called her own out of the independence secured by her savings. She lived in cheap lodgings, and had sometimes to wait altogether on herself; at one lodging "fetching up her own water three pair of stairs, and dropping a few tears into the heedless stream, as any other wounded deer might do." Later in life, she wrote to a friend from a room in which she cooked, and ate, and also her saucepans were cleaned:—"Thank God, I can say No. I say No to all the vanities of the world, and per-

haps soon shall have to say that I allow my poor infirm sister a hundred a year. I have raised my allowance to eighty; but in the rapid stride of her wants, and my obligation as a Christian to make no selfish refusal to the poor, a few months, I foresee, must make the sum a hundred." In 1816, when that sister died, and Mrs. Inchbald buried the last of her immediate home relations—though she had still nephews to find money for—she said it had been a consolation to her when sometimes she cried with cold to think that her sister, who was less able to bear privation, had her fire lighted for her before she rose, and her food brought to her ready cooked.

Even at fifty Mrs. Inchbald's beauty of face inspired admiration. The beauty of the inner life increased with years. Lively and quick of temper, impulsive, sensitive, she took into her heart all that was best in the sentiments associated with the teaching of Rousseau and the dreams of the French Revolution. Mrs. Inchbald spoke her mind most fully in this little story, which is told with a dramatic sense of construction that swiftly carries on the action to its close. She was no weak sentimentalist, who hung out her feelings to view as an idle form of self-indulgence. Most unselfishly she wrought her own life to the pattern in her mind; even the little faults she could not conquer, she well knew.

Mrs. Inchbald died at the age of sixty-eight, on the 1st of August, 1821, a devout Roman Catholic, her thoughts in her last years looking habitually through all disguises of convention up to Nature's God.

H. M.

CHAPTER I.

At a time when the nobility of Britain were said, by the poet laureate, to be the admirers and protectors of the arts, and were acknowledged by the whole nation to be the patrons of music—William and Henry, youths under twenty years of age, brothers, and the sons of a country shopkeeper who had lately died insolvent, set out on foot for London, in the hope of procuring by their industry a scanty subsistence.

As they walked out of their native town, each with a small bundle at his back, each observed the other drop several tears: but, upon the sudden meeting of their eyes, they both smiled with a degree of disdain at the weakness in which they had been caught.

“I am sure,” said William (the elder), “I don’t know what makes me cry.”

“Nor I neither,” said Henry; “for though we may never see this town again, yet we leave nothing behind us to give us reason to lament.”

“No,” replied William, “nor anybody who cares what becomes of us.”

“But I was thinking,” said Henry, now weeping bitterly, “that, if my poor father were alive, *he* would care what was to become of us: he would not have suffered us to begin this long journey without a few more shillings in our pockets.”

At the end of this sentence, William, who had with some effort suppressed his tears while his brother spoke, now uttered, with a voice almost inarticulate,—“Don’t say any more; don’t talk any more about it. My father used to tell us, that when he was gone we must take care of ourselves: and so we must. I only wish,” continued he, giving way to his grief, “that I had never done anything to offend him while he was living.”

“That is what I wish too,” cried Henry. “If I had always been dutiful to him while he was alive, I would not shed one tear for him now that he is gone—but I would thank Heaven that he has escaped from his creditors.”

In conversation such as this, wherein their sorrow for their deceased parent seemed less for his death than because he had not been so happy when living as they ought to have made him; and wherein their own outcast fortune was less the subject of their grief, than the reflection what their father would have endured could he have beheld them in their present situation;—in conversation such as this, they pursued their journey till they arrived at that metropolis, which has received for centuries past, from the provincial towns, the bold adventurer of every denomination; has stamped his character with experience and example; and, while it has bestowed on some coronets and mitres—on some the lasting fame of genius—to others has dealt beggary, infamy, and untimely death.

CHAPTER II.

After three weeks passed in London, a year followed, during which William and Henry never sat down to a dinner, or went into a bed, without hearts glowing with thankfulness to that Providence who had bestowed on them such unexpected blessings; for they no longer presumed to expect (what still they hoped they deserved) a secure pittance in this world of plenty. Their experience, since they came to town, had informed them that to obtain a permanent livelihood is the good fortune but of a part of those who are in want of it: and the precarious earning of half-a-crown, or a shilling, in the neighbourhood where they lodged, by an errand, or some such accidental means, was the sole support which they at present enjoyed.

They had sought for constant employment of various kinds, and even for servants' places; but obstacles had always occurred to prevent their success. If they applied for the situation of a clerk to a man of extensive concerns, their qualifications were admitted; but there must be security given for their fidelity;—they had friends, who would give them a character, but who would give them nothing else.

If they applied for the place even of a menial servant, they were too clownish and awkward for the presence of the lady of the house;—and once, when William (who had been educated at the free grammar-school of the town in which he was born, and was an excellent scholar), hoping to obtain the good opinion of a young clergyman whom he solicited for the favour of waiting upon him, said submissively, “that he understood Greek and Latin,” he was rejected by the divine, “because he could not dress hair.”

Weary of repeating their mean accomplishments of “honesty, sobriety, humility,” and on the precipice of reprobating such qualities,—which, however beneficial to the soul, gave no hope of preservation to the body,—they were prevented from this profanation by the fortunate remembrance of one qualification, which Henry, the possessor, in all his distress, had never till then called to his recollection; but which, as soon as remembered and made known,

changed the whole prospect of wretchedness placed before the two brothers; and they never knew want more.

Reader — Henry could play upon the fiddle.

CHAPTER III.

No sooner was it publicly known that Henry could play most enchantingly upon the violin, than he was invited into many companies where no other accomplishment could have introduced him. His performance was so much admired, that he had the honour of being admitted to several tavern feasts, of which he had also the honour to partake without partaking of the expense. He was soon addressed by persons of the very first rank and fashion, and was once seen walking side by side with a peer.

But yet, in the midst of this powerful occasion for rejoicing, Henry, whose heart was particularly affectionate, had one grief which eclipsed all the happiness of his new life;—his brother William could *not* play on the fiddle! consequently, his brother William, with whom he had shared so much ill, could not share in his good fortune.

One evening, Henry, coming home from a dinner and concert at the Crown and Anchor found William, in a very gloomy and peevish humour, poring over the orations of Cicero. Henry asked him several times “how he did,” and similar questions, marks of his kind disposition towards his beloved brother: but all his endeavours, he perceived, could not soothe or soften the sullen mind of William. At length, taking from his pocket a handful of almonds, and some delicious fruit (which he had purloined from the plentiful table, where his brother’s wants had never been absent from his thoughts), and laying them down before him, he exclaimed, with a benevolent smile, “Do, William, let me teach you to play upon the violin.”

William, full of the great orator whom he was then studying, and still more alive to the impossibility that *his* ear, attuned only to sense, could ever descend from that elevation, to learn mere sounds—William caught up the tempting presents which Henry had ventured his reputation to obtain for him, and threw them all indignantly at the donor’s head.

Henry felt too powerfully his own superiority of fortune to resent this ingratitude: he patiently picked up the repast, and laying it

again upon the table, placed by its side a bottle of claret, which he held fast by the neck, while he assured his brother that, "although he had taken it while the waiter's back was turned, yet it might be drank with a safe conscience by them; for he had not himself tasted one drop at the feast, on purpose that he might enjoy a glass with his brother at home, and without wronging the company who had invited him."

The affection Henry expressed as he said this, or the force of a bumper of wine, which William had not seen since he left his father's house, had such an effect in calming the displeasure he was cherishing, that, on his brother offering him the glass, he took it; and he deigned even to eat of his present.

Henry, to convince him that he had stinted himself to obtain for him this collation, sat down and partook of it.

After a few glasses, he again ventured to say, "Do, brother William, let me teach you to play on the violin."

Again his offer was refused, though with less vehemence: at length they both agreed that the attempt could not prosper.

"Then," said Henry, "William, go down to Oxford or to Cambridge. There, no doubt, they are as fond of learning as in this gay town they are of music. You know you have as much talent for the one as I for the other: do go to one of our universities, and see what dinners, what suppers, and what friends you will find there."

CHAPTER IV.

William *did* go to one of those seats of learning, and would have starved there, but for the affectionate remittances of Henry, who shortly became so great a proficient in the art of music, as to have it in his power not only to live in a very reputable manner himself, but to send such supplies to his brother, as enabled him to pursue his studies.

With some, the progress of fortune is rapid. Such is the case when, either on merit or demerit, great patronage is bestowed. Henry's violin had often charmed, to a welcome forgetfulness of his insignificance, an effeminate lord; or warmed with ideas of honour the head of a duke, whose heart could never be taught to feel its manly glow. Princes had flown to the arms of their favourite fair ones with more rapturous delight, softened by the masterly touches of his art: and these elevated personages, ever grateful to those from whom they receive benefits, were competitors in the desire of heaping favours upon him. But he, in all his advantages, never once lost for a moment the hope of some advantage for his brother William: and when at any time he was pressed by a patron to demand a "token of his regard," he would constantly reply—"I have a brother, a very learned man, if your lordship (your grace, or your royal highness) would confer some small favour on him!"

His lordship would reply, "He was so teased and harassed in his youth by learned men, that he had ever since detested the whole fraternity."

His grace would inquire, "if the learned man could play upon any instrument."

And his highness would ask "if he could sing."

Rebuffs such as these poor Henry met with in all his applications for William, till one fortunate evening, at the conclusion of a concert, a great man shook him by the hand, and promised a living of five hundred a year (the incumbent of which was upon his death-bed) to his brother, in return for the entertainment that Henry had just afforded him.

Henry wrote in haste to William, and began his letter thus: "My dear brother, I am not sorry you did not learn to play upon the fiddle."

CHAPTER V.

The incumbent of this living died—William underwent the customary examinations, obtained successively the orders of deacon and priest; then as early as possible came to town to take possession of the gift which his brother's skill had acquired for him.

William had a steady countenance, a stern brow, and a majestic walk; all of which this new accession, this holy calling to religious vows, rather increased than diminished. In the early part of his life, the violin of his brother had rather irritated than soothed the morose disposition of his nature: and though, since their departure from their native habitation, it had frequently calmed the violent ragings of his hunger, it had never been successful in appeasing the disturbed passions of a proud and disdainful mind.

As the painter views with delight and wonder the finished picture, expressive testimony of his taste and genius; as the physician beholds with pride and gladness the recovering invalid, whom his art has snatched from the jaws of death; as the father gazes with rapture on his first child, the creature to whom he has given life; so did Henry survey, with transporting glory, his brother, dressed for the first time in canonicals, to preach at his parish church. He viewed him from head to foot—smiled—viewed again—pulled one side of his gown a little this way, one end of his band a little that way; then stole behind him, pretending to place the curls of his hair, but in reality to indulge and to conceal tears of fraternal pride and joy.

William was not without joy, neither was he wanting in love or gratitude to his brother; but his pride was not completely satisfied.

"I am the elder," thought he to himself, "and a man of literature, and yet am I obliged to my younger brother, an illiterate man." Here he suppressed every thought which could be a reproach to that brother. But there remained an object of his former contempt, now become even detestable to him; ungrateful man. The very agent of his elevation was now so odious to him, that he could not cast his eyes upon the friendly violin without instant emotions of disgust.

In vain would Henry, at times, endeavour to subdue his haughtiness by a tune on this wonderful machine. "You know I have no ear," William would sternly say, in recompense for one of Henry's best solos. Yet was William enraged at Henry's answer, when, after taking him to hear him preach, he asked him, "how he liked his sermon," and Henry modestly replied (in the technical phrase of his profession), "You know, brother, I have no ear."

Henry's renown in his profession daily increased; and, with his fame, his friends. Possessing the virtues of humility and charity far above William, who was the professed teacher of those virtues, his reverend brother's disrespect for his vocation never once made him relax for a moment in his anxiety to gain him advancement in the Church. In the course of a few years, and in consequence of many fortuitous circumstances, he had the gratification of procuring for him the appointment to a deanery; and thus at once placed between them an insurmountable barrier to all friendship, that was not the effect of condescension on the part of the dean.

William would now begin seriously to remonstrate with his brother "upon his useless occupation," and would intimate "the degradation it was to him to hear his frivolous talent spoken of in all companies." Henry believed his brother to be much wiser than himself, and suffered shame that he was not more worthy of such a relation. To console himself for the familiar friend, whom he now perceived he had entirely lost, he searched for one of a softer nature—he married.