

A VICTORIAN CHILDHOOD

Annabel Huth Jackson

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A VICTORIAN CHILDHOOD

BY
ANNABEL HUTH JACKSON
(*née* GRANT DUFF)

WITH 13 ILLUSTRATIONS



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ANNABEL JACKSON AT TWENTY

“The Ear that heareth the Reproof of
Life abideth among the wise.”

Proverbs xv. 31.

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CHAPTER I

ALL people who possess a memory should write their recollections when they reach the age of sixty. Even if their lives have been apparently uninteresting, they are of importance to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. A dull grandfather is better than no grandfather at all, and this holds good in the present century more than it did at any time before. Formerly tradition was an accepted thing; every boy and girl listened to the stories their forbears told them, and amassed most of what is known of wisdom and history in this way. There was no such thing as a generation which knew nothing of what the generation before it had thought, and felt, and learnt; and the store-house of the world's wisdom was kept supplied. Now a spirit has arisen which we can only call, because of the nation which has most carried it into

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force, Bolshevik. That spirit dislikes tradition and says that our only chance of happiness is to scrap everything that the world has learnt and begin afresh. Many people believe that this is impossible, but it is terribly true that it can be done. Nothing is so easy as to wipe out the preceding generation. There must have been an immense number of cultures in the past that have left nothing behind them, to the world's permanent loss.

This is my excuse for writing down many things which will interest nobody except my own children. If every one wrote their memoirs most would eventually be burnt, but many details would be preserved for which future generations would be grateful. For I do not believe that the present Bolshevistic point of view raging in England and on the Continent will endure; there is bound to be a reaction, and then all that can be collected to tell of the past will come into its own again.

The first thing I remember distinctly is sitting on the lawn in front of the house we lived in then, Hampden House, the seat of the Earl of Buckinghamshire. I must have been about three and a half and it was

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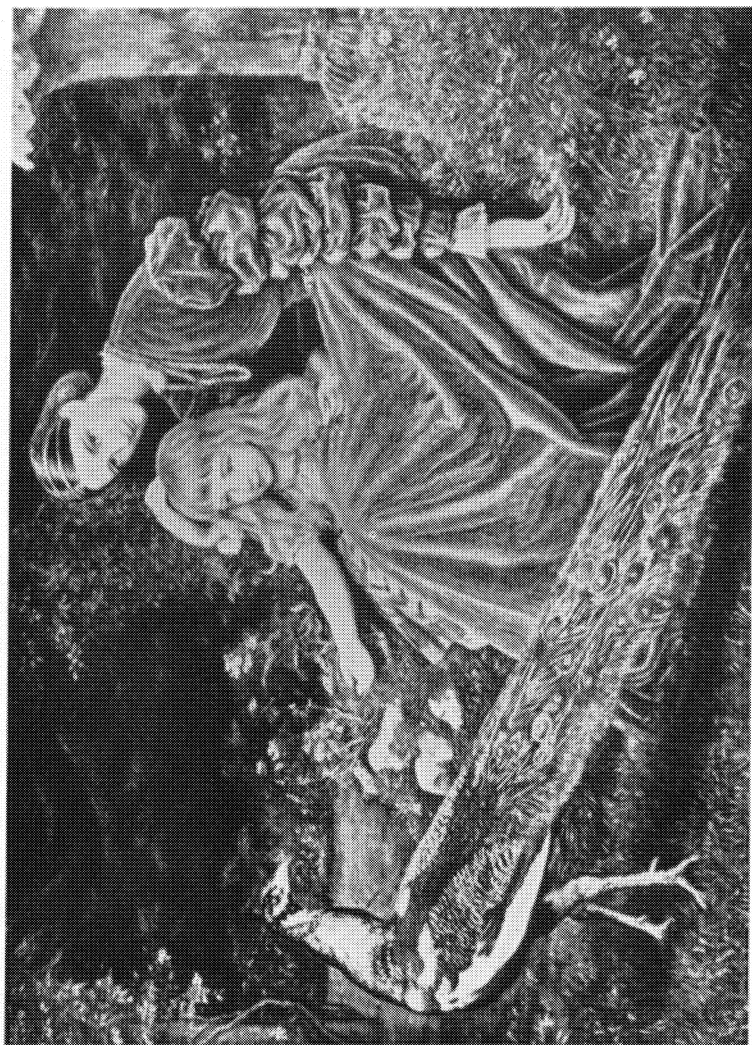
hot weather. I was so small that the daisies came up round my fat legs. There was a constant discussion between my parents on the subject of daisies—my mother preferred the lawns shorn like velvet but my father loved the daisies. On this occasion my mother was sitting near me on the grass, and I remember thinking how beautiful she was and how beautiful the sun was. I remember running into the laurels afterwards and biting one of the leaves and I can still recall the queer taste of prussic acid.

At the back of the house were cedars and all that summer I heard the call of the peacocks as they went to bed in the branches. I also remember a dreadful altercation with my nurse. We had an argument, I saying that toads did sit on toadstools, and she that they did not. I surreptitiously caught a toad and put it on a toadstool under the cedars, where it remained, too frightened to move, and then I took her to see it. She smacked me thoroughly, having seen through the ruse. There was a tame toad at Hampden, who lived in the hollow of an old apple-tree, where we used to go and see him, and my brothers gave him slugs every morning. There was a very old

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gardener with a long beard called Lily. He grew mushrooms under a copy of the Ten Commandments, which had been removed from the village church on some occasion. He produced wonderful mushrooms and years afterwards I heard my mother say that he thought it was something to do with the virtue of the Ten Commandments. There was a fountain and I remember one of my brothers trying to sail on it in a tub and falling in. My mother had it filled up after that with earth and Arthur Hughes did a charming old-fashioned picture of her sitting by the fountain with a peacock and my brother Adrian.

Hampden was very haunted and though the servants were strictly forbidden to speak to the children about such things, we knew that there was something odd about it. One day Adrian took me down the passage and we peeped into the haunted room. Sir Louis Mallet, the father of the present Sir Louis, was badly frightened in that room by a sense of terror and by hearing a woman in a silk dress swish past his bed. He was so scared that he left his dressing-room and spent the night in another room. When I was older I have often heard my mother



LADY GRANT DUFF WITH HER SON ADRIAN

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relate her experiences there. She was, I think, a medium, for she had a very curious psychic sense. Her boudoir lay right at the end of a long series of sitting-rooms, next a staircase which led to the haunted room. Every night at ten o'clock she would hear a girl's light footsteps run along the passage and down the staircase. If the door was unlocked, it would burst open, if locked some one would fumble with the handle. My father was in London for the session and she was an extraordinarily brave woman. She bore it for three months and then changed her sitting-room.

On another occasion her Blenheim spaniel ran down the passage to the great hall very late one winter night. She called, but as he did not come back, she followed him. To her astonishment the whole place, which was generally lit from a big sconce of candles in the middle of the hall, was brilliantly lighted. Her first thought was, 'The servants have left the lights on and we shall be burned in our beds.'

Then looking up she saw the sconce was unlighted, and the dog came shivering and crouched near her skirt as if it were scared.

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She admitted that she had not the courage to go on down the passage to the hall but went back and locked her door.

As a girl she was a friend of the branch of the Hobart Hampden family who did not then hold the title. She often stayed with Lady Hobart and Mrs. Bacon, then Miss Carrs. George Cameron Hampden, the heir to the title, lived abroad, and was a distant cousin, so my mother's friends had no thought of inheriting. One night when staying with them she had a very strange dream. She dreamt that she married and went to live at Hampden House, which she did not know then, but had often heard talked about. Whilst she was there a son was born to her, and shortly after, the property returned to her branch of the Hobart Hampdens, through a box which stood in the front hall. She went down to breakfast full of her dream and they all chaffed her very much. 'But what was the box like?' asked Lady Hobart. 'Were there papers in it?'—'I do not know,' said my mother, 'I know it was very heavy, it had to be put on trestles.' . . . 'But what was the shape?'—'I cannot remember,' said my mother, 'I only know that the property came

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back to your branch through a box which stood in the front hall.'

Years after she married, Hampden House came into the market and my father took it for five years. Whilst he was there a brother was born. Cameron Hampden died abroad, his body was brought back and laid in the front hall on trestles and the other branch of the family came in for the title. I have heard both Lady Hobart and my mother tell this story and they agreed in every particular. It seems to me that I vaguely remember the hall at Hampden, hung with black, and being very frightened. But I expect that this was told me later.

I cannot have been more than four and a half when my nurse Mrs. Cave, of whom I was very fond, fell ill and went to the seaside, and I was left in the charge of Nurse Maunder, who was a Baptist and a typical Calvinist, cruel, rigid, but with the virtues of her defects, clean, absolutely honest, hard working, and conscientious. I had been very grubby and was taken to my mother for punishment, and she thrashed me with a small rhinoceros-hide whip with a gold top, which she used when riding. I do not suppose she hurt me very much,

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though I thought she did. But far worse were the agonies of shame I suffered, both at the time and for weeks afterwards. I scarcely dared walk round the garden because I felt all the gardeners knew, and when Mrs. Cave came back and I told her about the episode, I sobbed and sobbed till she cried too. Shortly after, she went away and I heard later that she was supposed not to be quite normal. But I adored her and I was broken-hearted. Nurse Maunder reigned in her stead.

At three and a half I was put on a pony, Peri, a Shetland, and went for delightful rides with a groom called Harry, and a dog called Spot. I still have a little old photograph of myself at this period in the long dangerous riding-habit that was considered essential. When Peri and Pixie first came to Eden, my father's house in Scotland, from the Shetland Isles, they would not touch hay, and seaweed had to be procured for them. They gradually learnt to eat hay.

I remember on my fourth birthday being made to read to my grandfather, Edward Webster, out of a book called *My Mother* which contained a story called 'The Dog's Dinner Party' and one called 'The Peacock's



ANNABEL JACKSON AT FOUR YEARS OLD

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At Home' and the aforesaid 'My Mother', a poem no one remembers now except for the delightful parody about Gladstone and Huxley in which occurs the much-quoted verse:

'Who filled his soul with carnal pride?
Who made him say that Moses lied
About the little hare's inside?
The Devil.'

It must have been a few months after this that I was taken down to Ealing to see my grandfather Webster when he was dying and I remember being lifted up to kiss him. He was beautiful even as an old man. He and his brother were so handsome that old men in Derbyshire used to say that when the Websters walked into church people would stand up to look at them. He lived in a little house called North Lodge, on Ealing Green, with my grandmother who was a Miss Ainsworth, of Smithills Hall, Bolton-le-Moors, a house that later played such a big part in my life.

A few months after his death Adrian and I and the baby Hampden were sent to Ealing whilst my mother went to Rome. We liked being there, but I remember my winter was poisoned by a dreadful horror