

CHAPTER IV

AN EARLY VICTORIAN HOUSEHOLD

My parents had now been married for twenty years, and had faithfully kept the promise made upon their wedding-day. No year was ever suffered to elapse without seeing them at Park Place, accompanied by a contingent of sons and daughters.

At first they travelled, as was then the fashion, in their own carriage, with relays of posthorses, taking something under a week over the journey ; but by degrees this cumbersome and expensive mode of procedure was abandoned, for the age of steam had set in, and with fear and trembling, but resolved at least to try what it was like, they essayed to go by sea from Leith to London.

They never went again. One experience was enough.

But swiftly the railroad followed in the wake of the steamboat, and with marvellous expedition (only sleeping once by the way, think of that !) the hardy Northerners were transported to the metropolis, and thence to Twyford, the nearest station for Park Place at that period.

To be sure, it was five miles off ; but my father was well pleased that it should be so, for reasons of his own. It exactly suited him to despatch all who chose in carriages awaiting us at Twyford, and to invite the rest to cover the distance, as he himself elected to do, on "Shanks' nags."

After we left Blackhall we went south in May, and this journey made a special impression upon me, both because

for the first time I was allowed to attend afternoon service at York Minster, and sit up to late dinner afterwards, and because, after much pleading, I also obtained permission to accompany the walking party from Twyford to Park Place.

This last feat was looked upon somewhat dubiously by our kith and kin, and I caught asides on the subject: "Such a little girl! Such a long walk!"—with more of the kind, which added of course to the "little girl's" triumph. For, be it remembered, walking was the last thing in the world expected of the Early Victorian lady, and my English aunts were Early Victorian ladies or nothing. A stroll in their own grounds, their long dresses trailing behind, or only half caught up by ineffective fingers (how a Frenchwoman would have despised them!), their fragile steps supported by a manly arm, if such were available—and my poor uncles were sadly victimised in this way—this was all they ever ventured upon in the way of walking exercise; and had it not been that my father was a favourite son-in-law and brother-in-law, and that they were fond of visiting his own wild Highland homes, where they saw for themselves the effect of rearing children in hardihood, they would have done more than merely murmur a remonstrance, which indeed only extended to me, the youngest. And they were very kind to us, and we enjoyed ourselves much in our own way beneath our grandfather's roof.

Not that we saw much of either him or my grandmother. Mr Fuller-Maitland was in Parliament, representing, I fear, somewhat rotten boroughs; but as he sat continuously from 1807 to 1830—with the exception of six years from 1820 to 1826—and was offered a peerage by Mr Spencer Percival, which promise only fell through on the assassination of that Minister, he must have been of some use to his party, if not to the public. I may undervalue his services; but I must honestly confess that I never



PARK PLACE, HENLEY-ON-THAMES

heard of his doing, or being, or saying anything remarkable, and when he was at home we fled from his path. Ergo, he must have had a bad temper, whatever else he had or had not.

My grandmother was more approachable, and the only thing we dreaded about her was her ear-trumpet. She was very deaf, and spoke in the peculiar voice of a deaf person ; but she would occasionally carry on a conversation even with us very young ones, and this the shy and timid shrank from. Being neither myself, I was often thrust forward to bawl response down the trumpet, and partly on this account and partly because my second name of "Bethia" was her own, the old lady took kindly to me after a grandiose fashion. She would send for me to her room, to repeat poetry, mainly sacred poetry (down the trumpet), and desire that I should accompany her in her daily airing—a compliment I would fain have dispensed with, as the carriage was a close one, with only a chink of window open, and it swung in a manner to make children very uncomfortable, even if they did not actually succumb.

But to get out of going was impossible, we all thought ;—it was only once achieved, and the record of that achievement remains, thanks to the impression it made upon the old lady herself : "I asked Willy if he would like to drive with me," she narrated ; "and what do you think he said ? That he would like to drive with me in an *open* carriage ; that was truth and politeness combined" ; and at this she would whisk up her trumpet to hear what her auditor had to say to it, for she told the story many times over, as a person will who has few stories to tell—though it never seemed to occur to her that other grandchildren besides Willy might prefer an *open* carriage, though they had not the wit to say it.

My grandmother had a chaplain, Mr Young, at the time

I write of, and Mr Young's reading prayers—no, I should say reading of the Bible at prayers—and finally praying into the ear-trumpet, was a sight. He had to kneel in the middle of the floor facing the extended line of servants—but mercifully their backs were turned—and, holding in his hand the tube, the other end of which was in my grandmother's ear as she lay upon her sofa, he raised the cup to his lips, and the effect was exactly as though he was about to quaff “a full stirrup-cup.” His meek, unconscious face during the ordeal was its final touch.

Park Place in the fifties was not the elaborate structure it has since become. It was a plain, pillared house in the Italian style of architecture, as can be seen from the accompanying photograph; but if the building itself was not so large, the grounds were larger then than now. A considerable portion of these has been curtailed to form another domain, “Temple Court,” so named from a Druids' temple—(a circle of stones which had been brought from somewhere or other and placed in this chosen spot)—and the acres where my grandmother grew lavender for her own specially distilled lavender-water are now used for other purposes. There were also grottos, summer-houses, and a subterranean passage in the beautifully wooded slopes overhanging the river, which may or may not be still extant.

One of our favourite resorts was an ornamental cottage, yclept the “Chinese Cottage,” nestling in a hollow below the Henley avenue, where dwelt a certain Mrs Irvine, much petted and pampered as a kind of “show” woman by the ladies of the house. This wily cottager, it afterwards came out, had taken the measure of their feet to half an inch; but at the time she was all pious professions and honeyed words for the dear little masters and misses who honoured her by a visit; she allowed us to hold in our own hands the curly, china lambs and horned cows on her

mantelpiece ; she accepted our little offerings of fruit or flowers with humble gratitude ; and she flattered—well, no matter. There was one person who had neither sweet looks nor dulcet tones from Dame Irvine. She had a brother whom she led so sorry a life (this also transpired later, *via* a tell-tale who overheard the scene) that one day in desperation, albeit a patient man, he threatened to throw himself down the well. The well, it must be explained, was built over a little bubbling fountain by the side of the cot, and was indeed the *raison d'être* of the latter's being there.

“Down the well !” shrieked the dame, now turned to a virago ; “you throw yourself down the well ! And my young ladies comin' here to me for a drink of nice spring water, and *you* lyin' stinkin' there at the bottom !”

And apparently the enormity of his presumption did so strike the poor wretch that he continued to live and be miserable.

In our days, however, Mrs Irvine throve, and was specially favoured by my grandmother a little later on, because of her abstaining from *crinoline* at that lady's desire. In vain did the autocratic old lady try to impose like abstinence under her own roof. Not a maid would stay with her, if the command were enforced.

Then she tried bribery. A handsome donation was proffered to any woman-servant who would do as her mistress did.

The mistress did not take into consideration the fact that whereas she was herself comfortably puffed out by quilted eider-down petticoats, poor Molly must needs be as flat as a pancake. Moreover, Molly went into society, while her mistress abode at home ; and Molly had sweethearts to consider, or, at any rate, her reputation among her cronies. Molly's “No” was prompt and decided. With a solitary exception the bribe was spurned.

With one exception, I repeat, and that one was a certain aged and delightful creature, the head of the housemaids, who thankfully accepted her lady's reward for doing what she would have done at any rate. No shame to her; "Great Jane," as she was called among us, was a simple soul who disliked innovations as much as her mistress did, and not being troubled by too much thinking, pocketed her *douceur* with an untroubled mind.

One other word about "Great Jane." There came to her a day some years after, when she was called upon to show the house to strangers, (this was after the death of both my grandparents, when Park Place was to be sold), and the old woman chanced to be in charge, in the absence of a higher authority. Upstairs and downstairs she stumped, opening doors and displaying cupboards—till the party had seen all they wished, and prepared to depart.

"Great Jane" was standing at the door seeing them off, when an elderly gentleman, after a moment's confab with an elderly lady now seated within the carriage, re-ascended the steps. "Here is a sovereign for you, my good woman," said he; then added with a chuckle, "and *Her Majesty* desires me to tell you that *you have walked before the Queen to-day!*" "And," added the narrator, telling the tale afterwards, "it was the Queen herself, God bless her, that looked up, and laughed, and nodded to me, as he said it!"

It was, I have heard, with a view to a possible purchase of Park Place as a residence for the Princess Helena on her marriage that this visit took place; but if so, nothing ever came of it, and the property passed into the hands of Mr and Mrs Noble, whose family still reside there, and have done much to deserve the esteem and goodwill of their neighbours, rich and poor.

At Park Place, then, we younger children were deposited for some length of time in the summer of 1855, while our

elders disported themselves in London, where the season was in full swing. For three whole months we were free of tutor and governesses, and this absence of supervision and education no doubt greatly enhanced the charms of our surroundings, and caused us ever after to regard that summer as memorable. For if our cousins—and we had a large party of delightful cousins within hail—hearkened eagerly to our description of a life in every way different from theirs, and regarded us (as we have since learned they did) as beings to be envied, dwelling in a sort of romantic Paradise, we on our part had many new and exquisite sensations.

A long spell of settled fine weather accustomed us to the glorious singing of the nightingales beneath our open windows as we lay awake at nights; we tracked the glow-worms on the chalky banks where the wild thyme grew, scenting the air; we wondered at the big bats flitting across our path in the twilight,—and even the tinkle of the sheep-bells coming up the slope, and the smock frock of the shepherd-boy husbanding his little flock, was something new, something poetic after a different fashion from the poetry of our native Caledonia.

There was the river too. The Thames is very beautiful at Henley; and just below Park Place there were the willow “eyots,” where the kingfishers rustle blue amidst the green, and the shy, brown rats creep in and out, carefully avoided by the mother dabchick piloting her brood among the waterlilies further out stream.

We were allowed free use of our grandmother’s boats, and, having been taught to handle oars on Highland lochs, we soon grew accustomed to the different style of rowing, and covered with ease the three miles to Wargrave, where my uncle, Mr Thomas Fuller-Maitland, resided with his family, the aforementioned cousins. With them we would

further explore the teeming islets and blossoming backwaters, where grew lovely snowflakes, irises, forget-me-nots, and other delights.

The river to-day is, alas! *the* river to countless thousands; every nook and crannie has its boat-load on a summer afternoon, and no vista of green but shows a red or white parasol at the other end. One ought not perchance to grudge the fretted Londoner this quiet outlet; and yet for those who can remember the exquisite peace of the gently flowing water in the old days, the hushed atmosphere, through which came only the rumble of a distant cart, or an occasional shout from haymakers resting in the shade for their noonday meal—for them the contrast is a sad one.

Everywhere there is, of course, something of the same transformation: villages grown into towns, towns into cities, cities into the centres of gigantic suburbs; but nowhere to the view of a lover of “quiet resting-places” is this spoliation by the influx of humanity more apparent—I would almost say more pitiable—than in the crowded surface of the Thames between Cookham and Maidenhead (though indeed one might instance a dozen other favourite reaches), when one looks back to what were the same beauteous landscapes some fifty years ago.

Henley Regatta was indeed in existence, but there were no house-boats, no special trains, no tents of London clubs. Country neighbours brought their house-parties, and (though I am not quite sure when this began) encamped for luncheon in the shady grounds of Phyllis Court, permitted to do so by its genial owner,—and year after year resorted each to the shade of his selected tree.

Then there was the walk along the front—very different from the jostling promenade of to-day. Boats easily drew in to the bank at any point, to embark or discharge their several freights; the water itself, though presenting a gay

and brilliant spectacle, was not one vast pack of human beings, playing the fool under the guise of merry-making—the whole scene, in short, was not a close imitation of the worst features of a race-course ; and as night fell, there was not the frantically crammed lock to be got through at the peril of one's life !

And Henley itself, as yet unspoilt, was as pleasantly rural a little town as one could wish to see.

The shopkeepers came out to attend their customers, whose carriages stood before their doors. The market-day was a great day, when the farmers dined at the Red Lion, and we from Park Place were desired to avoid the roads along which cattle and sheep were being driven in. The school-children, sauntering leisurely homewards as the afternoon waned, thought no shame to drop their curtseys, or pull their forelocks to any gentry they recognised ; whilst their parents bobbed at the cottage-doors.

The church ?—well, the church services may be much as they were ; but to us youthful Presbyterians they seemed well-nigh perfect then ; and indeed they were so beautiful and so unlike anything we had ever conceived in the way of church-going, that they excited mingled terror and indignation in the breast of one of our Scotch handmaidens : “ There was the twa o' them,” cried she, relapsing into the broadest vernacular, “ thae twa men, dressed oot like folk at a fair ; booin' to each ither, an' answerin' each ither across the table, and the rest cryin' ower an' ower, ‘ The Lord hae maircy upon us ! ’ and a' the time there was the organ bummin' awa' owerheid ! Me ! I thocht it was the theatre ! ”

I am bound to own that we flew with this recital to our Puritan grandmother, whom we were shrewd enough to guess it would amuse ; and it did—thoroughly. She did not, however, discountenance our attending Henley Church, being conscientiously desirous of fulfilling our parents'

wishes while *in loco parentis*, and we never heard a word against the Church of England, dissenter though she was, at which I have since marvelled, religious feeling running strong at the time.

And that Mrs Fuller-Maitland held fast to her tenets the following will show. Among other visitors to Park Place, came from time to time the silver-tongued Samuel Wilberforce, then Bishop of Oxford. He had a purpose in coming. It seemed to him an incongruity that my grandmother, a Nonconformist, should be the patron of several livings in the Church of England, and he much desired to have these in his own gift.

I have heard that he used every argument in vain, and retired from the field worsted by an old woman upon whom his silvery tongue made no impression. It was even added that he professed himself afraid of her! We in the upper regions of the house, hearkened to the rumour with pride; we mentally backed our winner, and thought it fine and gallant of her to stick to her guns; but somehow, somehow in after years we were not quite so sure—however, all of that is an old, old story now.

Although the wild young things from the North must have been a somewhat disturbing element in the dull and prim household, which was so entirely a world within itself in my grandmother's latter days, the only days of which I am able to speak,—we had that vague sensation of being *in favour* which goes for much and compensates for much in a child's life. We did with impunity what many of our cousins never dared to risk doing. We abducted books from the library, fearlessly bearing them off to devour within our own stronghold—a far-away room on the ground floor, where none of our elders ever intruded; we pillaged the garden, and romped among the curious old carriages in the stable, (of which we counted forty odd, their collection

being a whim of my grandfather's), and we harried the beneficent and long-suffering housekeeper for jams and jellies from her storeroom.

She was a kind soul, and freely gave them—of a second-rate quality. But when, encouraged by her indulgence, we pointed to certain well-stocked shelves from which we noticed she never abstracted anything, she shook her head. "No, my dears ; no. Those," she continued impressively, and swept her hand round the rows of jars and gallipots, "those are not for *you*. They are all *for your Grandma's own eatin'*"—and so solemn was her air, and so convincing her tones, that it never occurred to us to reflect upon what must be our grandmother's own appetite !

In truth, the appetites of that generation were extraordinary when it is considered how little was done to deserve them—at any rate at Park Place.

Middle-aged women, even old women, career all over the world nowadays ; climb mountains, play golf, toboggan down Swiss slopes, penetrate the desert on camel-back—in short, as we all know, there is nothing the hardy dame of sixty and seventy does not throw herself into with the zest of a school-girl ; but half a century ago they were few and far between who indulged in any kind of vigorous exercise even when young, and even when full of animal spirits.

It was not "the thing." "The thing" was to be musical, poetic, delicate, ethereal. Now and then, it is true, horsewomen might be found among families of position, who, clad in the flowing habits depicted by Leech, penetrated country lanes, and put in an appearance at fashionable meets—and one of my Fuller-Maitland aunts did so far break loose from the traditions of her house as to keep her own horses for this purpose ; but when not riding, she was as fond of the sofa and the carriage as her sisters.

Yet they ate—yes, I must say it, they ate enormously.

Dinner, albeit at the unearthly hour of five, was a prolonged and stately function. We children, often perched upon the stairs above (to whom a friendly John Footman would surreptitiously pass a tempting remnant), found it amusing enough, even whilst feeling as though it would never end ; but when we arrived at an age to join the party inside the dining-room, we soon grew bored with the multiplicity of courses, and secretly marvelled at our elders who partook of them all.

They also drank varieties of wine to suit. I once read the warning of a medical authority of that period. He implored lady patients to be on their guard against taking more wine than was wholesome and beneficial—"taking wine in excess," he termed it, adding that anything over four or five glasses at a meal *was* in excess.

What my grandmother and aunts took I am not prepared to say, but I expect they only just kept within the above limits, and always topped up with port at dessert.

At last the doctor intervened. A word about Dr Cowan, beloved of all the family, who attended my grandmother throughout the latter years of her life. He came from Reading, driving over in the quaintest little vehicle, resembling a slice off an omnibus—it was indeed termed a "Minibus." There was only one seat on each side, and whether the inventor found his design did not answer, or had any other reason for not promulgating more, I cannot tell ; but I have never seen another like it.

Once a week the worthy doctor appeared, and, after a confab in my grandmother's apartments, joined the dinner-party, where he was hailed with effusion. He had a bald, peaked head, high forehead, mild, blue eyes, and an oracular manner which must have been pounds in his pocket to him. When he had prescribed gin, in place of wine, for his aged patient—she always called it "Hollands"—it was universally felt that such a revolution in the habits of decorous Park

Place could only have been effected by the master mind of Dr Cowan.

He played the flute. I can see him now putting it together ; twisting and turning the component parts ; essaying little trills and warbles—finally tooting away in excellent style, the while one fair lady accompanied him on the harp and another on the piano.

My aunts were all harpists. It was then considered a most elegant instrument, and, in addition to its musical value, it showed off a feminine figure, and the “ large, round, white arm,” beloved of Thomas Day.

This worthy, let me mention for the benefit of the ignorant, was the author of *Sandford and Merton* ; and in his memoirs we read that when desirous of marrying, he besought a friend to look out for him a lady of piety and culture, adding that, though he had no need to seek a fortune and would forego beauty, he must own he should like his proposed bride to have large, round, white arms.

To return to the evening concert in the Park Place drawing-room. Somehow I always think of it as happening on a summer evening, and see the figures of the musicians silhouetted against a sunset sky. No doubt it also took place at other seasons of the year, and the good Dr Cowan had many a dark and dreary drive over the nine miles between Reading and Henley ; but with all drawbacks, there must have been a glow of satisfaction when the day came for the weekly visit, and he could look forward to an excellent dinner, an agreeable evening, and a fresh—and valuable—entry in his notebook. . . .

Before leaving the south in 1855, we younger children were permitted to stay at the pleasant Berkshire house of our uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Valpy, of which visit, delightful as it was, I have only one trifling incident to record, and only record it because it is characteristic.

We young Colquhouns never forgot that we were *Scotch*—that “*Scots wha hae*” was in our blood, as it were ; and that however fond we might be of our English relations, they were not to suppose we did not look down upon them as belonging to an inferior race.

Had they never heard of *Bannockburn* ? Had not the very bows of the archers been cut from the yew trees on our own Loch Lomond islet, Inch Lonaig ? Had we not actually given them *our* King Jamie ? This was a great point, much and often enlarged upon ; and as it met with its due retort, and as we were all equally warlike and ignorant, battles-royal on the subject were the result.

These culminated one day in our assembling the entire Enborne household within doors and without, and marshalling them upon the lawn. Our uncle and aunt were away from home, and the good-natured creatures, from coachman to kitchenmaid, were highly diverted by the proceeding, wondering what the little misses would be at ?

We soon enlightened them : my sister and I, the generals in command, went solemnly down the lines, demanding of each in turn, whether he or she were “for” England, or “for” Scotland ? What was to be the outcome of their declaration of faith I am at a loss to conjecture ; but am positive that in every case the answer very naturally came, “For England,” till we reached a certain young groom who, possibly scenting a snug berth if he played his cards well, stoutly asserted that for his part he had no objection to go to Scotland, not he ; and, still further courting our favour, added that he had “*’eard there was uncommon good grub there.*”

As this material view of things did not, however, by any means please us—indeed, in our enthusiasm, we were repelled and disgusted—the base deserter got nothing for his pains but the black looks of his fellows, and if he ever had

a chance of eventually judging of the Scotch "good grub," it was not through our instrumentality.

I cannot but think it strange that the Fuller-Maitlands, who as a family had considerable intellectual ability, and possessed appreciative and critical faculties in a marked degree, should have left so little trace on the world's tablets of bygone generations. Of that which flourished in the middle of last century, there would seem to be no trace whatever.

They were readers; they were thinkers; they were charming and often witty conversationalists; and there were many of them, for the most part highly cultivated, and having leisure and opportunities at command; yet something clogged the footsteps that surely ought to have made some "footprints on the sands of time," and I am inclined to think the creative power was absent. There was a lack of physical and mental energy; there were quick apprehension and receptiveness; but there was no inner force which must needs have vent. They were content to receive, and had no desire to give back any contributions to intellectual, scientific, or artistic life.

That they left to their descendants, of whom I will only say here that while many are gifted in various directions, one at least is well and widely known. I allude, as may be divined, to my cousin, Mr J. A. Fuller-Maitland, who holds so high a place in the world of music.

Those who take pleasure in the graceful and original work of a certain writer, may wonder that I omit to add a further testimony to it; but to this I would reply that Mrs "Ella" Fuller-Maitland only bears the name by virtue of her marriage, and accordingly cannot count.

To return. The month of August saw us, the Northern

contingent, once more homeward bound, and this time a fresh departure was made by our travelling the whole distance from London to Edinburgh without a break. Such a formidable achievement was considered feasible only by the acquisition of a private saloon-car with three compartments—one for the elder members of the family, one for the children and servants, and one for the luggage,—and we took sixteen hours over the journey, starting at eight one evening, and arriving at twelve the next day.

This was considered something to talk about and boast of, and I may add that we never afterwards travelled in any other way.

It was not always successful, however. On one occasion we had a disaster which might have been a very serious one. Our saloon was shunted in Preston Station to wait for the London Express (we having come from the South-west coast), and there was a fog, and the Express missed some signals and ran into us.

Perhaps I ought not to say “ran,” for had it run, I had not been here to tell the tale—but its gentle touch was like the pat of a lion’s paw. It was sufficient to pitch us all from our seats, while the man and maid in the next compartment were badly cut and bruised, and some windows were broken. The sensation was, as far as I was concerned, as though a dark blue wall suddenly rushed at me, and hit me a violent blow on the side of the head: then I found myself lying full length on the floor, without any idea of how I got there. We had been eating our luncheon at the moment the accident took place, and there was now a fine *débris* of broken plates and victuals; but when voices from without shouted anxiously to know if anyone were hurt, we could cheerfully answer, “No,” till our poor maid popped her bleeding face round the door and we learned that she and her companion had suffered more than we had—prob-

ably because their compartment was not so well stuffed and cushioned.

As we approached the Border on these returns from southern raids, my father would be on the watch for the first glimmer of the Tweed.

Then, "Now, children; cheer; cheer for your native land!" he would cry; "and you," turning to my mother, "groan for yours."

To humour him she would laughingly comply, only bargaining that as *we* were to cheer when our faces were set to the North, *she* should do the same when they were set to the South. Nevertheless, in her heart of hearts, I believe that after a while she really loved the land of her adoption more than that of her birth.