

CHAPTER IX.

ALTHORP.

——— *Wisdom* loves
 This seat serene, and *Virtue's* self approves.
 Here come the *Griev'd* a change of thought to find,
 The *Curious* here, to feed a craving mind ;
 Here the *Devout* their peaceful temple choose,
 And here the *Poet* meets his favouring Muse.

CRABBE.—*The Library.*

IN the third volume of *The Bibliographical Decameron*, and in a note at the 388th page of that same volume, will be found the following passage :

“ It was quite at the end of the month of May, in the year 1811, that I paid my first visit to the Noble Owner of the residence under description. The day had been excessively hot, and I reached Althorp, from London, between the hours of six and seven, to a late dinner. The sun was then beginning to decline, so as to cast a breadth of shadow from the long avenues of elm and beech, and lime, with which the back front of the house is adorned*, or enfiladed. Sitting on a seat beneath one of these elms—the cawing of innumerable rooks from the adjoining avenues—the tranquillity of the approaching evening—the calm, clear,

* You approach the front of the house through avenues of oak, of which some are indisputably proved to have been growing towards the latter end of the reign of Henry VII.

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and almost cloudless sky—and (shall I dare avow it?) more than either of *these* causes, or the *whole* of them collectively, the near and immediate view of a suite of rooms in which was contained the FINEST PRIVATE COLLECTION OF BOOKS PERHAPS IN EUROPE—could not fail to produce emotions of no ordinary occurrence, to one, who, for several previous years, had vehemently sought after such a gratification. After a due time devoted to musing, I entered the aforesaid suite of rooms, and more especially rested in *that* wherein a fine *Raphael* was over the fire-place, and a French clock was ticking upon the marble mantle-piece. The cloth was laid, and the exemplification of the good old maxim (the usual theme of our school days) *nil præter ordinem* was singularly manifested to view. The sun was now sinking lower and lower, and the shadows became proportionably broad and massive. No sound was heard from without, save the nibbling of the deer, who quite peeped into the windows of the apartment. His Lordship arrived at seven. . . .

“I will conclude this ‘View of the Interior’ (as the Flemish painters designate such subjects) by adding, that that congenial visit was the prelude to the many subsequent ones which have taken place since the said ‘year 1811.’ But the mansion—the library—rejoins the impetuous reader! I must be briefer than I could wish in satisfying such impetuosity. Yet know, cultivator of bibliomanical antiquities, that the name of SPENCER or *Despencer* (formerly the same) is far from being barren in the annals of book-collecting; for in the ancient time, Hugh Despencer had a Son, Thomas, Earl of Gloucester, who, in 21 Rich. II., by petition in Parliament, obtained the revocation of the judgment of exile against his great grandfather, Hugh Le Despencer. In this petition it is stated (*inter alia*) that he, the said Hugh, had at that time, ‘*Plate, Jewels, and ready money better than 10,000*l.*, xxxvi sacks of wool, and a LIBRARY OF BOOKES.*’ Collins, in his *Baronetage*, vol. i.

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p. 309, edit. 1720, refers to Rot. Parl. 21 Ric. II. n. 35, 60, 64, 68," &c.

Now, if the reader pleases, he may contrast this somewhat quaint, but "drawn on the spot," picture of Althorp, with that which has been recently published in the pages of one of the most celebrated female writers of the day. Mrs. Jamieson's out-of-door *winter* view of Althorp shall speak for itself in the subjoined note*. Mine is a *summer*

* "It was on such a day as I have seen in Italy in the month of December, but which, in our chill climate, seemed so unseasonably, so ominously beautiful, that it was like the hectic loveliness brightening the eyes and flushing the cheek of consumption, that I found myself in the domains of ALTHORP. Autumn, dying in the lap of winter, looked out with one bright parting smile; the soft air breathed of summer; the withered leaves, heaped on the path, told a different tale. The slant, pale sun shone out, with all heaven to himself: not a cloud was there, not a breeze to stir the leafless woods—those venerable woods which Evelyn loved and commemorated. I was much struck with the inscription on a stone tablet, in a fine old wood near the house: 'this wood was planted by Sir William Spencer, Knight of the Bath, in the year of our Lord, 1624'—on the other side, 'up and bee doing, and God will prosper.' It is mentioned in Evelyn's 'Sylva.' The fine majestic old oaks, scattered over the park, tossed their huge bare arms against the blue sky; a thin hoar frost, dissolving as the sun rose higher, left the lawns and hills sparkling and glancing in its ray; and then a hare raced across the open glade—

'And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist, which, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.'

Nothing disturbed the serene stillness, except a pheasant whirring from a neighbouring thicket, or at intervals the belling of the deer, a sound so peculiar, and so fitted to the scene, that I sympathized in the taste of one of the noble progenitors of the Spencers, who had built a hunting lodge in a sequestered spot, that he might hear 'the harte bell.' This was a day, an hour, a scene, with all its associations, its quietness, and

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view. It is pleasing to tread the same ground, and to gaze upon many of the same objects, with a writer of the charm and power of Mrs. Jamieson's pen ; but at the expense of having my principles of chivalry questioned, I must be permitted to break a tiny lance with that "fair Ladye," in commenting upon a few defects of omission and commission which seem to me to be involved in her description. In the first place, it is to be regretted that Mrs. Jamieson suffered her agility of limbs, or buoyancy of spirits, to carry her up the "great staircase" before she had made the Tour "of all the rooms below ;" and most marvellous, or at least incomprehensible, to me, it is, that of a mansion, in which the FINEST PRIVATE LIBRARY IN EUROPE is contained—and which library may be said to be nearer *three* than *two* hundred feet in length—NO mention whatever is made!

beauty, 'felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.' All worldly cares and pains were laid asleep ; while memory, fancy, and feeling waked. Althorp does not frown upon us in the gloom of remote antiquity ; it has not the warlike glories of some of the baronial residences of our old nobility ; it is not built, like a watch tower, on a hill, to lord it over feudal vassals ; it is not bristled with battlements and turrets. It stands in a valley, with the gradual hills undulating round it, clothed with rich woods. It has altogether a look of compactness and comfort, without pretension, which, with the pastoral beauty of the landscape, and low situation, recall the ancient vocation of the family, whose grandeur was first founded, like that of the patriarchs of old, on the multitude of their flocks and herds."—*Visits at Home and Abroad*.

A beautiful copper-plate vignette of this "UP AND BE DOING" Wood may be seen in the *Ædes Althorpianae*, vol. i. p. 18, which had doubtless escaped the recollection of Mrs. Jamieson.

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It is doubtless very possible that Mrs. Jamieson's love of pictures and of portraits may be so much "the ruling passion," as to "swallow up" every particle of interest or curiosity in the matter of BOOKS; and yet SHE, who has added to all our Libraries by the production of one of the cleverest and most interesting "bokes" of its kind*, ought, methinks, to have dropped more than one passing courtesy as she glided by the interminable and glorious volumes of science, art, philosophy, belles-lettres, and Divinity, with which the shelves of Althorp are at once loaded and adorned. But let us keep to PICTURES. Let us suppose that, for an object not apparently developed, it was Mrs. Jamieson's exclusive wish to notice only the productions of the *pencil* at Althorp. By not "gliding" through the library—and by not beginning "at the beginning" in the Dining Room—she has in fact lost the opportunity of exercising her ready and eloquent pen upon the *best pictures* in the House†. Nor when she has reached the

* *Characteristics of Women*, 3 vols. 8vo.

† To the above *assertion* I here add the *proof*.—In the *Dining-room* will be found the Elder and Younger Cornaro, by TITIAN; Madonna and Child, by CARAVAGGIO; a Boy's Head, an antique caustic painting; Descent from the Cross, by SEBASTIAN BOURDON; Fragment of a Cartoon, by RAFFAELLE; Death of the Stag, by SNYDERS; St. Charles Borromeo celebrating High Mass, by DOMENICHINO. In the *Drawing-room*, a Head of a Blind Harper, by LELY; Dædalus and Icarus, by VANDYKE—so particularly noticed by Walpole; a sketch, by RUBENS—admirable. Two Venetian Ladies, by TITIAN; Cleopatra and Lucretia, each by GUIDO. In the *Long library*, a cluster of beautiful

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PICTURE GALLERY above stairs—a spot which Walpole has designated as “one of those enchanted scenes, which a thousand circumstances of history and art endear to a pensive spectator”—has she selected objects so much on the score of *art*, as of furnishing matter for historical or personal anecdote. But a copy, as well as an original, will furnish materials for reflections of this nature. It should seem as if she came and went away full of the *Grammont Mania*—and for fear of its abatement, had left the place (undoubtedly well calculated to produce it) without even visiting another room. Now, although I readily admit that the *Grammont Annals* furnish instances of as terrible domestic tragedies as can be adduced—furnished by means of poison, pistol-bullets,

enamel portraits, of the time of Louis XIV., over the mantel-piece, surrounded by a number of pleasing little Flemish pictures, several of them by Teniers. The *Raffaelle library*, so called from a picture of the Holy Family, by that great master, over the fire-place; and alluded to in my description of Althorp in the text. The *Billiard library* contains two beautiful SIR JOSHUAS—the one of the present Earl Spencer, when four years of age; the other, of the late Marchioness Camden: both these portraits were admirably engraved for my work. The *Marlborough library* contains a most extraordinary portrait of John, Duke of Marlborough, also engraved for the work in question. I mention a few of the principal pictures in these rooms, of which a glimpse only might have rewarded the toil of a little extra locomotion. Mrs. Jamieson has well and warmly noticed the REMBRANDT'S MOTHER, painted by the son; but might she not have also just dropt the fact of the splendid engraving of that matchless portrait to be found in the work which is briefly mentioned by her as if it had been an eighteen-penny Guide to a Watering Place? And the *Sophonisba Angosciola*, upon which she descants with her usual cleverness, will be found not only beautifully represented by the burin, but particularly and largely noticed in certain Althorpien pages.

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daggers, and broadswords—or arising from profligacy the most reckless, and a want of public and private principle the most notorious—yet, if Mrs. Jamieson had only gone a little onward, into one or two rooms, she would have found some of the most prominent ladies and gentlemen, who were especial *figurantes* in the courts of that “*par nobile*” of French Monarchs, Louis XIV. and Louis XV. I should like to have had her opinion of the splendid portrait by Mignard (in the room immediately following, or in that ensuing it) of the famous *Duchesse de Montausier**, encircled by flowers, which, in tint and lustre, seem to yield only to the cheeks and eyes of the Lady.

But in the Gallery itself, we desiderate yet further notices; and may gently inquire how it comes to pass that Anne of Austria (by Mignard), and Philip II.—undoubted originals—are overlooked? Then, common courtesy might have led to the mention of the large whole length portrait of the Noble Owner of the Mansion, in his robes of the Garter, by Copley, at the top of the room! How came the second Lady Spencer, by Vandyke—(“a Spencer

* This picture was purchased for a comparative trifle at the sale of Quintin Craufurd’s collection at Paris, and is particularly described in my Tour. Mr. Wright, the engraver, was so struck with it, that he desired (and readily obtained) permission to copy it in water-colours; and for this copy, exquisitely and perfectly finished in every particular, he asked the sum of twenty guineas. I know not its present destination; but I do know that a more extraordinary performance can rarely be witnessed.

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by Vandyke is a treasure")—to be overlooked? And of the *Henry VIII.*, and several of the *Lely* and *Vandyke* portraits, together with the *Lady Jane Grey*, and *Diane de Poitiers*, it might as well have been observed, that all these interesting objects have been engraved, in the very best manner, chiefly in a work exclusively devoted to an account of the Mansion in which the originals are placed*. I was well pleased to read Mrs. Jamieson's spirited notice of the portrait of the third *Duc de Guise*, by Porbus—not so much because I was instrumental to its acquisition†—as to its being matter of astonishment how such a magnificent portrait of such a magnificent Persecutor of the Huguenots should have been

* Let me not be misunderstood. I desire nothing in the shape of offensive obtrusiveness; but it should seem to have been obvious, as a matter of useful information, for such as have little chance of seeing the originals, to mention, that they have a very good chance of seeing faithful *representations* of them, most admirably engraved. This does not apply so much to the *DIANE DE POITIERS*, because there was only a very limited number (75 impressions) taken off, and the plate was afterwards destroyed. I learn that 3*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.* has been given for a single impression of this most original and fascinating portrait.

The *Anne of Austria* and the *Ninon de l'Enclos* were offerings at my hands as gifts. Of the latter, a beautiful engraving, in stippling, on sale, is the property of Mr. Pickering, the bookseller.

† It was obtained, as well as two small and very curious heads of *Francis II.* and *Marie Stuart*, of Mr. Jarman, from the Quentin Craufurd collection. I think that seventy guineas were given for the *Duc de Guise*; and not above sixteen for the two small heads—which I believe to be thoroughly, if not *EXCLUSIVELY*, genuine. I refer the reader, with confidence, to a short, but interesting account, of the bold and extraordinary character of the *Duc de Guise*, which appears in the *Ædes Althorpianae*, vol. i. p. 251-2.

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allowed to leave the Kingdom which had been the scene of his too successful persecutions.

I take leave of Mrs. Jamieson, and of her “*Visits at Home and Abroad*,” with perfect complacency and good humour; and had desired nothing better than to have been “a fellow visitor” with her at Albert Durer’s House “abroad,” and at Hardwicke*, as

* Her sketch of *Hardwicke* is more elaborated than that of Althorp. She says, to enjoy the former thoroughly, you “ought to sleep there one night.” It has been my lot to sleep there *two* nights: in the depth of the winter of 1818, when on a visit to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth. I have made mention of this visit at Hardwicke in the *Library Companion*, p. 596-7, second edit. His Grace drove me over from Chatsworth, and left me, at my particular request, to soliloquise two days within the spacious and deserted walls of this, his most ancient ancestral residence. In my bed-room were the old silver-topped dogs; and a huge fire was blazing upon the hearth when I retired to rest. (The particulars *preceding* this retirement may be sought for in the work just mentioned). Opposite the foot of the bed, over the entrance door of the room, were some small leaden casements, which caught the flickering light of the expiring flame. The walls of the room were covered with tapestry of some century and a half standing. The window was a large bay one, of the early time of James I. On retiring to rest I locked my door; and, after my first short slumber, I started up, thinking I heard a noise. The fire was yet burning, and through the casements, just mentioned, I thought I discerned human faces, looking at me—some in anger, some in sorrow, and some in laughter. I fixed my eyes upon the tapestry. I fancied I heard the huntsman’s halloo, the dogs yelling: and the very trees, like those of “*Birnam Wood*,” seemed to be moving towards me. I leaped from my bed, and sprung to the door: unlocked and opened it. The whole delusion was dissipated in an instant. There were no human faces; the trees, and the huntsmen and the dogs were fast fixed in their worsted trammels; and on drawing the window curtain aside, to look abroad, I gazed only upon the leads of the building, bristled with a hoar-frost, upon which the cold clear moonbeam seemed to love to be sleeping.

I had been rummaging among some old black-letter books, before retiring to rest, which may account for this “*fantasia*.” I preserve a

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well as at Althorp, at home. Her work is full of point and vivacity. Perhaps it is too sparkling and abounding in quotation; but it is the work of a well cultivated understanding, and of a practised hand. “*Retournons à nos moutons.*”

In the exact chronological order to be observed, an account of the publication of the *Bibliographical Decameron* should have preceded that of the *Ædes Althorpiæ*: but to keep those works in connection which have an exclusive reference to the name and property of my late Patron, I deem it best to speak of the latter in the *present* place. I took up my ground quickly and boldly. The “Decameron” was scarcely sold, and beginning to be very generally circulated, when I issued proposals for the “*Ædes* ;” and at this very moment, too, I meditated my *Bibliographical Tour* upon the Continent. The beginning, therefore, of the year 1818, was full of excitement and occupation. Within the first three months of it, I had satisfactorily ascertained that my projected work of the “*Ædes*” would succeed; and that I had only to make the necessary arrangements with Artists—under favour of the Noble

drawing (now much injured), made by me, of this identical bedroom; not forgetting the key of the door, which is silver, and of the pretty workmanship of the seventeenth century. But of HARDWICKE let the reader regale himself with Mr. Shaw’s magnificent engravings, recently published in a folio volume, as the second number of the *History of our National Domestic Architecture*—that of HATFIELD being the first. This publication is beyond all praise.