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Edited by Charles Eastlake Smith

Excerpt

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MEMOIRS
OF
LADY EASTLAKE



CHAPTER I

1809–1842

ELIZABETH RIGBY, the fifth child and fourth daughter of Dr. Edward Rigby and Anne Palgrave, was born at Norwich on November 17, 1809.

Her grandfather was Mr. John Rigby, of an old Lancashire family, whose wife was the daughter of Dr. John Taylor, the eminent Hebraist, author of the 'Hebrew Concordance' and other works.

Her father was born at Chowbent, Lancashire, on December 27, 1747, and at an early age became a pupil of the celebrated Dr. Priestley. In 1762 he went to Norwich, and studied medicine under Mr. Norgate. After completing the usual course in London he settled in Norwich, where he soon acquired a large practice as a physician, and where he married his first wife,

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Miss Dyball, by whom he had two daughters; she died in 1803. He married secondly Anne, daughter of William Palgrave, of Yarmouth, a descendant of the ancient family of Palgrave or Pagrave, who took their name from a small village (*Palgrava* in Domesday Book) on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk. By her he became the father of twelve children, the last four born (August 15, 1817) at one birth, he being then seventy and his wife forty. The Corporation of Norwich, of which town he was Mayor in 1805, celebrated this event by presenting him with a piece of plate; and the 'Morning Chronicle' of August 28, 1817, thus alludes to it:—

If we believe in ancient Tales of Love,
The Cheats of Mercury, and Tricks of Jove,
Who, Swanlike, wing'd and feathered flew to Earth,
And Leda hatched four Bantlings at a Birth:
Far greater Praise, we must confess, is due,
O most prolific Rigby, then to you—
Leda's maternal Honours you supplant,
Who give us three Great-Uncles and an Aunt.

It may be added that all these infants lived some weeks.

In 1789 Dr. Rigby visited Italy, Switzerland, and France, reaching Paris just at the outbreak of the French Revolution. He was detained in that city nearly a fortnight, and was an eye-witness of the taking of the Bastille and the massacre at the Tuileries. During this tour he wrote voluminous letters home, which were published by his daughter ninety-one years afterwards.¹

¹ Dr. Rigby's *Letters from France, &c.*, in 1789. Edited by his daughter, Lady Eastlake. Longmans: 1880.

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HER PARENTS

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An intimate friend of Jenner's, and an enthusiastic advocate of vaccination, he was a good classical scholar, a naturalist, a sound administrator, and reformer of abuses. In addition to publishing several pamphlets on medical subjects, he was an expert writer on agriculture, and a prominent figure at the Holkham Sheepshearings. Indeed, it is to him that we owe one of the few written pictures of the famous gatherings at Mr. Coke's.

Dr. Rigby died on October 27, 1821, and was buried at Framingham Earl, in which parish (some six miles from Norwich) he owned an estate; the following inscription, in allusion to the extensive plantations made by him, was placed on his tombstone:—

A monument to Rigby do you seek?
On every side the whispering woodlands speak.

His sister married Dr. Parry, of Bath, and became the mother of Sir Edward Parry, the Arctic explorer, who married a daughter of the first Lord Stanley of Alderley.

Mrs. Edward Rigby was born at Coltishall, Norfolk, on July 28, 1777, and died at Slough on September 2, 1872, in her ninety-sixth year, having survived her husband fifty years. A bright, clever, energetic woman, she was a strict disciplinarian as to punctuality (a virtue which her daughter, Elizabeth, inherited),² and never allowed her children to have 'nerves.' Lady Eastlake

² An entry in Miss Rigby's notebook, 1840, bears on this point:—'Let my husband be faithful, good-tempered, and punctual, and I'll ask for little more. The wisdom of Solomon won't console you when you are waiting dinner, and feel that you may wait for all the man cares.'

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used to confess that she herself was 'a coward, in the fullest sense, about pain, but her early education had made her ashamed to show her cowardice, or to indulge in nervous feelings.'

Elizabeth's childhood was passed chiefly at Norwich, the summer months being spent at Framingham. One of her earliest recollections of the latter place may be given in her own words:—'Well do I remember the gigantic size of certain Swedish turnips and mangel-wurzel laid on the lawn at Framingham for the inspection of friends; and especially a certain monster cabbage, conveyed to Norwich, on which my feet rested, as I (a child five years old) sat between my father and the coachman in the old-fashioned gig.'

She showed early signs of her intense love of art—a love which she never lost—by beginning to draw when she was eight years old. Even at that age she was described by her mother as 'very ambitious.' She drew and sketched on every occasion for nearly sixty years, wherever she went—at home and abroad, and has left some 2,000 specimens of her remarkable industry and talent. Not that dolls, a still earlier love, were neglected—for 'one of her favourite amusements (when six or seven years old) was helping her sisters to make all the necessary doll-clothing, as well as the complete furniture of a miniature four-poster, mattress, feather bed, and hangings—to say nothing of a proper supply of sheets and blankets.'

Dr. Rigby took care that his daughters should have every educational advantage at Norwich, providing them with good masters for French, Italian, arithmetic, and geography; but it is

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CHILDHOOD

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doubtful whether Elizabeth was old enough to derive much benefit from such tuition. He encouraged his children to read, and kept them well supplied with books ; but he also insisted on their having plenty of relaxation and exercise. While at Framingham for the summer they enjoyed complete holiday, dancing lessons being the only exception : they were always out of doors there, 'playing at every sort of game, climbing trees and haystacks, making fires in a dry ditch, and roasting potatoes.'

Men of note in literature, agriculture, natural history, science, and other branches of learning, frequently came to Dr. Rigby's house with introductions, and his children had the privilege (which, doubtless, enhanced their educational advantages) of mixing freely with such visitors.

After her husband's death, in 1821, Mrs. Rigby left Norwich, and retired to Framingham. There her daughters do not appear to have had much further assistance in education, beyond a French governess, to whom, Lady Eastlake used to say, she owed her early proficiency in that language.

Elizabeth was then eleven years old ; as a child she had always been full of fun, and was much laughed at and with for her odd ideas. In a great measure she was now permitted to educate herself (a permission which, unmindful of its good results in her case, she often deplored in after years), with some little help in music from an elder sister, who still survives, and who admits that these music lessons were not a satisfactory arrangement.

In May 1827 Elizabeth was prostrated by a

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severe attack of typhoid fever, which left her so weak that her mother decided to take her and her sisters abroad. They settled in Heidelberg, where, in spite of the weakness of a slow convalescence, Elizabeth at once resumed her drawing—seldom missing a day.

We have no letters written by her at that time (the first letters, which have been preserved, are dated ten years later), but she kept up a correspondence with an old and kind friend of the family, Mr. Thomas Hudson, the Norwich banker, who took the greatest interest in all their doings, and especially singled out Elizabeth as 'very clever and amusing.'

They remained at Heidelberg two and a half years, and after travelling for a few months in Switzerland returned to Framingham.

One result of her stay at Heidelberg was her thorough knowledge of German which she proved by translating in 1830 (shortly after her return to England) a German work by Passavant upon the Art Collections of England.³ She then wrote a short tale for 'Fraser's Magazine,' called 'My Aunt in a Salt Mine,' founded on a visit she had paid to the Salzburg salt mine. This, so far as can be traced, is her first appearance as an authoress.

Nor was literature her only pursuit: the encouragement given her by the Rev. E. T. Daniell, the well-known artist, in the following letter shows that she was not allowing her artistic powers to rust:—

Norwich: January 2, 1831.

My dear Elizabeth,—Your drawings go far beyond what I expected, particularly those of

³ The publisher of this is not known.

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VISIT TO LONDON

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your mother and yourself. I hardly know which to like the most (I mean as a work of art); I should esteem either worthy of a frame and plate-glass. And I must say that, although there are many London performers who would do the head with greater facility, I know of no one capable of giving such a chaste simplicity of character. If you go on avoiding Sir Joshua Reynolds and Lawrence as great originals, but (excuse me) the very devil as models, and confine your reminiscences to such works as the 'Head of a Lady' by Bronzino in the National Gallery, and that of 'Julius II.' by Raffaele, you may depend on arriving at no second-rate excellence. Send your portrait to some exhibition, marked in the catalogue 'Portrait of a Lady by Herself,' and if several extra places are not taken in the day coaches the following week, say Daniel was, or Daniell is, no prophet. You go on at such a rate that we poor tree and house sketchers fall quite into the background: otherwise I would have sent you one or two more attempts than those enclosed; but really before I venture into your august presence with my productions for criticism, I must make myself more secure against being cut up.—Ever yours sincerely,

E. T. DANIELL.

In July 1832 Miss Rigby went to London, where she spent a year studying literature, and especially art, in the British Museum and National Gallery. Nor did she neglect music, her deep and intelligent love for which had been increased by her residence at Heidelberg; indeed, she had now become, like her sisters, an accomplished

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musician. Soon after her arrival in London, she writes to a relative: 'I am leading a life of fascination here, and nothing could induce me to withdraw myself from the happy opportunities which surround me.' She became a pupil of Mr. Sass, the artist (who held classes for ladies in Bloomsbury), and progressed rapidly under his tuition. She also copied several pictures in the National Gallery, but the only record of her efforts in this direction is a charming copy of Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of the youthful King of Rome, son of Napoleon I.⁴

Leaving London in July 1833, she went with her mother and sisters to Yarmouth, where a house on the beach had been lent them by Mr. Thomas Hudson. This was a year of great enjoyment to them, as many of their relations—Turners, Palgraves, and Taylors—and friends were living at or near Yarmouth. Elizabeth employed herself principally in drawing the likenesses of quite a gallery of young ladies, who seem to have been as remarkably pretty as they were numerous. She continued the pursuit on returning to the Framingham house, which had been let for two years: as her surviving sister says: 'She could not bear to be idle a single day, her energy and ambition worked together.'

In 1835 she paid a long visit to Germany, after which she wrote an article on Goethe for the 'Foreign Quarterly Review.' On this subject Mrs. Blakiston, of Old Thorpe Hall, Norwich (a daughter of Colonel Harvey, the Norwich banker), writes to her, July 19, 1836:

⁴ This copy was sold at Christie's, June 1894.

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'THE BALTIC LETTERS'

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'I must beg to congratulate you on your position in the "Foreign Quarterly." I hope this Review will become a frequent channel for your thoughts while they are turned to German subjects. We look to you for much future entertainment and instruction, and rejoice at your present success.'

In October 1838 Miss Rigby went to Russia, where she passed two years, making a married sister's house at Reval, in the Baltic Provinces, her headquarters, and paying occasional visits to St. Petersburg and other places. During this stay abroad she constantly wrote very long and interesting letters to her mother; these were published by Mr. Murray, to whom she was introduced by her cousin, Mr. Henry Reeve, and form a striking picture of Russian manners and customs.⁵ After accepting this manuscript, Mr. Murray writes to her on August 10, 1841: 'Since I had the gratification of seeing you I sent your manuscript to Mr. Lockhart, who says, "I have been reading the manuscript with great admiration for the most part. I wish the lady would score out a few fine words, but beyond these trifles she is unassailable. I have no doubt she is the cleverest female writer now in England, the most original in thought and expression too; and she seems *good* besides, which after all has its charms even for old sinners like you and me. She is really quite first-rate in her pictures and in her little disquisitions too.'"

Miss Rigby replies: 'The favourable remarks on my manuscript with which you have

⁵ *A Residence on the Shores Series of Letters*. London: John Murray, 1841.

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favoured me cannot be otherwise than deeply gratifying to me, although my poor judgment cannot be induced to concur with that of Mr. Lockhart in the matter of approbation. But at all events the good opinion of such a writer has made me very happy, especially as proving that the confidence and liberality you showed in accepting a work, of which you had only seen a small portion, may not have been misplaced. It is rather strange that Mr. Lockhart's "Life of Sir W. Scott" was the only work of importance I perused during the progress of my writing, and I was often made aware of its useful influence. Certain it is that I concluded his work with a profound veneration for Sir Walter, and a somewhat lively desire to become acquainted with his biographer.'

The book proved a success (a second edition being published in a few months), and was the starting-point of her literary career. Mr. Lockhart, the then editor of the 'Quarterly Review,' justified his favourable opinion of the writer by asking her to undertake an article in that review. Some of her Russian sketches had been submitted to him, but, though expressing much admiration for them, he urges her to continue writing, and sends her, through Mr. Murray, the following message: 'Pen against pencil; 1,000*l.* to an orange, say I.' It will be seen that Miss Rigby took his advice, for from this time, until within two years of her death, she was a regular contributor to the 'Quarterly Review'; at the same time admitting that 'my pen has never been a favourite implement with me; the pencil is the child of my heart.'