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Mrs C.W. Earle (1836–1925) was born into the minor aristocracy as Maria Theresa Villiers. After training as an artist, she married Captain C.W. Earle, who inherited family wealth which enabled a comfortable lifestyle with a town house in London and a small property with a large garden in Surrey. Earle's designs for her garden were much admired by her circle, and she was encouraged to write down her gardening advice. She published three volumes of 'pot-pourri from a Surrey garden' (also reissued in this series) between 1897 and 1903, but these works were not restricted to gardening, and contained thoughts on travel and art, and also on the importance of diet to health. Published in 1911, these reminiscences are dedicated to her grandchildren, and contain her parents' history as well as her own memories of a privileged upbringing among the literary and artistic giants of mid-Victorian England.

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Memoirs and Memories

MRS C.W. EARLE



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Photograph by Hugh West, Boston

Emery Walker No. 22

Maria Theresa Earle

1908, aged 72

MEMOIRS AND MEMORIES

BY

MRS. C. W. EARLE

AUTHOR OF 'POT-POURRI FROM A SURREY GARDEN,' ETC.

WITH PORTRAITS

LONDON
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*I offer my best thanks to my friend Miss Ethel Case who
with untiring patience and zeal helped me through the
tiresome labours of compiling this book.*

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INTRODUCTION

TO MY GRANDCHILDREN

MARGARET AND EVELYN EARLE

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

MY DEAR CHILDREN,—

I have written this book with the hope that when you are older and your Granny will no longer be here, but numbered with those who have gone before, it may interest you to read about times and people and relations and forefathers you have never known. Certainly but for this hope I should never have had the courage or the energy to face the reading and sorting of the mass of old letters, and selecting those that seemed to contain interest, not only for you, but also for the general reader. I will now tell you how these papers were so long preserved and how they came into my possession. When my father was sent to the south of France in 1843, so ill that he never came back, all his letters and papers were locked up in cupboards in his library at the new house which he had lately bought in Rutland Gate. My mother never had the courage to sort or destroy these papers. The room was afterwards our schoolroom. I had been told that the papers in the mysterious closed cupboards had belonged

to my father, and I longed to know more of their contents. Once, I remember, while I was still a child, the cupboards were opened and revealed, amongst the masses of papers, mummied cats and other Egyptian fragments, brought home by my father from his travels in Egypt and his visit to the Pyramids long before his marriage. These had to be thrown away, and the cupboards dusted out, but the letters were put back and the doors were again closed and locked. After the death of our kind uncle, Lord Clarendon, in 1870, my mother had to leave our old home at Grove Mill, lent to her for so many years, as it was left as a dower-house to my aunt, Lady Clarendon. My uncle had suggested in his will that my mother should have a smaller house on the Grove estate. But as, at this time, we were all married, she thought this would be lonely, and too much out of the world. She preferred going to live in the Isle of Wight, where she had many happy associations and liked the climate, so she took a house at Ryde. The London house was sold, and the contents of the cupboards in Rutland Gate were put into boxes and sent down to her new home. I often tried to make her turn out the boxes with me, and once or twice we actually began to sort some packets of the letters. This led her to recount to me certain missing links in the family history. But the work tired and depressed her, and nothing more came of it. Twenty years after she went to Ryde my mother died, and the three unopened boxes came to me here. Life has been full and time passes with fearful rapidity in old age, and it was not till last winter (1910) that I resolved to go through these papers, tried to select the most characteristic letters and those most likely to give you some idea of your great-grandparents of the Villiers and Liddell families, from whom both your father and mother have sprung. My aim has been to correct and explain the letters as I might do if you, my grandchildren, were grown up and looking over my shoulder, asking me questions while I spread out the old packets, yellow with age, and revealed their contents, so long hid from view, tied up with that enduring official pink-tape. How far you

INTRODUCTION

ix

will think I have succeeded in doing what I proposed, it is difficult for me to know.

Before beginning my work of reading the old papers, I own I expected to find letters of interest on great public matters. Of these there were exceedingly few. The Villiers family were very clever people, but they wrote too many letters, met each other too often, were too much engrossed in each other's health and domestic affairs, to touch in their correspondence on subjects which they considered belonged to official life. That is to say, allusions are often made to official questions, but these are superficial, and without a code with which to interpret their meaning, they are mostly unintelligible.

What I did find was a series of human documents, revelations of character and of old-fashioned sentiment, and pathetic details of partings and death. I was startled to realise the great changes that have occurred even in my lifetime with regard to all the manners and customs which are the very warp and woof of our lives, such as the opinions and practice of religion, popular science as it affects accepted beliefs, the knowledge of hygiene and medicine, family expenses, not to mention travel and social manners. It is well to read and recognise through such different manners and customs the same human nature which belongs to every family and to every individual in every generation. The small things of life, even concerning people in no way out of the common, have a living interest to many. An example of this is seen in that wonderful human document 'A Week at Waterloo,' by Lady de Lancey, which so stirred the emotions and the admiration of the two great novelists, Walter Scott and Charles Dickens. Although the scenes it describes are more remote from us now, it still remains the highest example I know of how the account of an actual experience, written by a young widowed bride and told with absolute simplicity and truth, can move our hearts more deeply and more powerfully than the highest literary flights of the writer of fiction.

My mother had the same habit of hoarding her letters

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x

INTRODUCTION

as the Villiers family, and the letters I found after her death led me on, through her life, to my own. With these written records I have linked up some of my own memories, woven in some of my own experiences, and so brought this little chain of family history nearly up to date.

Your loving Granny,

MARIA THERESA EARLE.

WOODLANDS,
COBHAM,
SURREY.
March, 1911.

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 Mrs C.W. Earle
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MY FATHER'S YOUTH	1
II. MY MOTHER'S YOUTH	33
III. THE ENGAGEMENT AND MARRIAGE	68
IV. MY FATHER'S THREE FRIENDS	91
V. MARRIED LIFE	111
VI. MY FATHER'S ILLNESS AND DEATH	133
VII. MY EARLIEST MEMORIES	172
VIII. MY GIRLHOOD	195
IX. MY MARRIAGE	230
X. DEATH OF THE EARL OF CLARENDON	262
XI. MIDDLE AGE	283
XII. MY MOTHER'S DEATH AND THE END	334

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Mrs C.W. Earle
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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[More information](#)

PORTRAITS

THE AUTHOR, 1908, AGED 72	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>From a Photograph by Hugh West, Cobham.</i>	
	TO FACE PAGE
MY MOTHER, THE HON. MRS. EDWARD VILLIERS, AT THE AGE OF 41	184
<i>From a drawing by G. F. Watts, R.A.</i>	
MY TWIN SISTERS, EDITH AND ELIZABETH, AT THE AGE OF NINE. NOW THE DOWAGER COUNTESS OF LYTON AND THE DOWAGER LADY LOCH	186
<i>From a drawing by G. F. Watts, R.A.</i>	
CAPTAIN C. W. EARLE, LATE 60th RIFLES AND RIFLE BRIGADE, AGED 54	362
<i>From a painting by G. F. Watts, R.A., 1882.</i>	