Autobiography.

Part I. Early days.

Introduction

1. Childhood 1849–1860

(Written in 1925.)
It is not an easy thing, + possibly not a profitable thing to write an Autobiography, + yet I think that mine is worth writing. The obvious reason is a good one, because it shows the inception + traces the course of a great national movement, that which used to be called "the Higher Education of Women," that which has placed a considerable number of the professions within our reach, + doubtless has not as yet attained its full growth. Not many now alive can go back to the first struggles + the first victories of this beneficent + almost world-wide movement, + I believe these are worth preserving, even if related from the "underside," that is from the point of view of innocent ignorance, which can only see a few steps at a time, + those personal ones. I will try my best not to reach the present back into the past, but to draw as vivid a picture as I can of the experience of those early years + leave it without comment. This will not be hard, as I have, only too much material at hand. All my family are fond of writing, + my sister Gabrielle + myself have this desire.
in an almost exaggerated form, as is testified by rows upon rows of diaries. These are of two kinds: the "Week Account" or simple record of facts; the "Green-book," which was a record of hopes and aspirations, joys and sorrows, books and sermons that proved useful, in fact everything that touched the inner life of the heart and the soul. These were kept strictly private.

The fact of having these exact records leads me to the second, and far more compelling reason why I should attempt an autobiography. My life covers the whole period of the onslaughts of criticism on Religion. Germany has generally been estimated as forty years in front of England in these matters, but as far as our country is concerned, the last half of the 19th Century, and the first quarter of the 20th Century will always surely be looked upon as the great battle-ground, between Faith and Knowledge. Such knowledge has many provinces, and produces many forms of criticism, not only of the Bible, but of the whole spiritual life of Man; it may be Literary, Scientific, Historical, Ethical, Psychological or Philosophical, and these may all combine to render unreasonable and illogical the slender existence of Faith in the soul of man.
Now this conflict is an infinitely more difficult thing to portray, not only in itself, but because it is so intimately bound up with the individual life, that the record is necessarily self-centred. I will do my best to suppress the “I, me, mine,” which is so tiresome to our ears, but I fear not much can be done in this line without detracting from both interest. Let it again be remembered that I can only give the “underside” of the subject: the experiences of a young soul brought up in the full light of evangelical doctrine, happy and satisfied without it, conscious, keenly conscious, of the good work such doctrine was doing in the world in transforming the heart and character of man, and then confronted, full, with the flood of criticism I have mentioned. It was worse than a flood. It used to look to me like a long row of evil giants standing close beside the narrow path of life; one must go forward or escape was hopeless, for if by some fortunate chance one slipped past one, the claws of another were full in view. By nature I have a contented and cheerful spirit, bright and possibly superficial,
with strongly artistic tastes, with a hunger for
love, and a value put on beauty, that shows an
emotional character alive to every passing ruffle,
and this does not seem the right outfit with which
to confront masses of intellectual difficulties.
But again it must be taken into account that
our education was of the very strictest sort,
guarded and repressive to the last point of anything
fanciful, foolish, or exaggerated. It was more
than Evangelical, it was Puritan in its exclusion
of all but the eternal interest. To use the
nomenclature of Matthew Arnold, I was a
thorough "Greek" brought up in the school of
the strongest kind of Hebrew."

These things will explain themselves as I pur-
se the course of my narrative, so I turn
from reflections to bare history.
My parents lived for some ten years in the north of London, & there, on 19th Feb. 1849, I was born. Our father came of a good old English stock that can be traced far back, & our mother was of French Huguenot descent, & bore the impress of her ancestry very clearly. Four children were already there then. I came into the nursery; Josephine born 1839, a child of difficult temper; Harry born 1840, handsome but slow & not altogether a success in his young days. Then two babes who each died under two years old made a gap in the family, & then three little girls near together; Gabrielle born 1845, the beautiful, the unselfish, the happy influence on every life she touched, Dora born 1847, very delicate & rather sad in temperament; Constance born 1849, stout & healthy; & the last of all was George born 1850, a bright little boy, but not strong. Our mother had no delight in actual babies, & I cannot remember any intercourse with her until I was about four or five years old, but from that age onward she was both sun & moon to our little lives, until we were twelve or thirteen, then we
seemed again to lose touch with her. Our father was a just and good man, but stern, and also possessing a nervous temperament that could not endure the restlessness of early childhood. To us he was an awe-inspiring presence at meals, but not much else, and never once do I remember his playing a game with us, or even sitting on his knee. Later in life he not only commanded respect but affection.

This is rather a loveless picture for the crucial years of infancy, but the compensations were beautiful. First, there was a nurse called Susy, who somehow fancied that I was overlooked, and made a special pet of me from my birth till I was four years old, and this was all good, even though I can barely remember her. And then, all through there was Gabrielle, just four years older than I, who loved me with a sort of affection not often seen among children. She was head of the nursery, head of the schoolroom, a bright, inventive, trustworthy, loving child, who swept all things before her; the story-teller, the comedian, the lover, the centre of life in all its departments. It was she who drove the carousel, the carousel, and yet it was I who was the most like her; and the care she took of me was wonderful. At four or five years old I had a short spell of being very pretty, my hair being that real golden-brown that is seldom seen after childhood, my complexion faultless, and my eyes luminous, and Gary (as we always called her) would set
me in a deep arm-chair with my bare legs sticking out in front of me, + kneel down before me + call me by many endearing names. It did not arouse vanity, it simply made me feel I was valuable, precious, + this surely was all good. I do not know what life would have been without my Gazy, my beloved Gazy, + indeed I will thank her again + again when we meet in the future life. Before I was seven my colours were gone, for my teeth had come out, my golden curls were cut short into a little cropped head, + a tendency to bilious head aches gave a slight tan of yellow to my cheeks, but I need not say her love was unalterable. Josephine was harsh + to, served her with fear, for she had a talent for mockery + somehow make one feel somewhat small + contemptible; the power she exerted over George was much to be deplored, for he had no one to admire him as I had. I think I was a good friend to him, for we played endlessly together + hardly ever quarrelled or even disputed, but his was not a happy childhood, on the whole, I fear me, the core the maries all his life.

In 1853 the family removed from London to Southborough, near Tunbridge Wells, + in 1854 to our permanent home, Oakfield, Hauklwurst, which we lived in for some forty years, + which belonged to
us for some twenty five years more. It is at Caldyfield that real high-spirited childhood begins for me, with climbing trees, dabbling in the ponds, making gardens, and all the delights of the country. The field in front was a golden surface of butter cups, and later there were hay-cocks and tall lime-trees humming with bees, and a lovely hot lawn with scarlet geraniums in beds, and gigantic clam shells on each side of the drawing-room steps. There was also a pony called Dainty, on which at all in wint learned to ride in short, and there were carriages in which we were taken on expeditions to Cranbrooke and other places; all life expanded externally, even though it remained for long years closely restricted, as to companionship and the interests of society. Gazy was nine and I was five then. This life began, and for some five years it continued, in full force. Mother loved intelligent and happy childhood, although she never petted us and seldom even caressed us, she guided our steps and inspired us to learn and to do, to make all kinds of little manufactures, to print, to draw, to be accurate in all things. She was a stringent but kindly critic of all our work, and most truly she admired and loved her, and treated her as our standard in all things.

But it was not Mother, it was Gazy who gave me those
first vague drawings of the feeling of Religion that are
the precursor of all good. Her mind was essentially reverent, 
that is the best beginning. When I was between six and seven 
we slept together for a while, and I looked with deep respect 
at a little table on which she kept her little desk-books. 
There was "Prayers & Promises," she used to read me one 
every day, and there was a hymn for every letter of the Alph-
abet. We always seemed to have more of the Old Testament 
than of the New, and I learned the curious little "Thumb Bible" 
pretty well all through. I only remember Genesis, 
"Jehovah here of Nothing all things makes, 
And man the chief of all, his God forsalvs."

The first story I remember being interested in was that 
of Joseph; his dreams, his prison, and all the rest made him 
a hero. Our elders taught us outlines of the history, 
our Lord's parables, but I do not remember the least 
emotion being awaked for His life or His death. One day 
when I was alone at the Shaw I thought I would pray, so 
I went in between the hazel-bushes and knelt down on last 
years dead leaves. When I got up I thought, "How that 
was real prayer." Looking down at my bare knees I saw some 
of the leaves were holly, and that they clung on, and I thought, 
"Holly pricks if I did not feel it, oh it was real, real prayer." 
But I must not linger any longer here. Our father
believed in "the total depravity of human nature," our Mother's religion might be summed up in William Law's magnificent words, "The Soul rising out of the Vanity of Time into the Riches of Eternity," nothing simple & attractive was put before us. It seems a pity, for we were so ready, so very ready to receive it. (10A,B)

In 1857 we were all, except George, taken for a long summer to Switzerland. We must have travelled somewhat "in prince," for Harry had his tutor, Mr. Conrad Miller, & Mr. three had our horse, who was Jem, though at that time he was called "Pig." Railways were scarce in those days, & once landed at Basle or Lausanne, all the rest was done in a travelling carriage with a pair of horses. I do not think it made very much mark on me. I enjoyed the dark forests, the brilliant flowers, & the leaping grass-hoppers, but I did not look much at the mountains or at any distant view, if we walked I soon got dazed, it was always too hot, & then it was discovered I was really ill. At Meyringen the room used to swim round me. When I ran in, & sometimes there seemed to be a nasty smell, & after a hot bath I could not even stand. So Dora & I were packed off home with Jem, & she carried me in her arms to explain about the luggage, & at one station, Dijon, I think, she gave us strong coffee, & kept us awake all.
night, making up nonsense verses, while he waited for
the train for Paris. We soon transformed in time, & were sent to
Hastings to recruit till the others returned.

The year that I was nine was a happier one. I have
not said enough about Mr. Müller, to whom I became
attached. I do not remember seeing him at first, & he
appeared at quite irregular intervals. The truth was
poor Harry could not learn at school under the bad
old-fashioned method, & was in such continual disgrace,
& lived under "impositions" accompanied by such floods
of tears, that at barely sixteen he was taken away & re-
trusted to Mr. Müller's care, who took him for one year to
Paris, & one to Hamburg. In between, they would come to
Hastings for holidays & for Christmas, & Mr. Müller
would take George & me, one on each knee, & tell us
fairy-tales. It was the only glimpse we had into that
enchanting world, & so enjoyed it greatly. There was the
story of the boy who was shut up in the Pfanneneckeng.,
& how he had to eat his way out. "Grad' där, sagt Klas
Arentshagen!" was this motto. "Man muss sich durchschlagen,
was the gist of another tale, where a boy had to encounter
all sorts of difficulties & work through. Well, this good man
during his stay in Hamburg became engaged to a very
charming girl called Jetty Kroeger, & sent her over to us.
We had had two governesses previously, Miss Armstrong
from whom we called "Grandam," & Miss Richardson from Ireland.
thorn or called "Ditchie," but this one thorn or called "Krogie" was altogether the favourite. She was only with us from May till October, and the amount of German she got into our heads was wonderful. We read "Roland and Elizabeth" quite easily, or learned German poetry, or also the multiplication table, with little trouble, because we loved her so dearly. In October or November Mr. Müller fetched her away, and they were married.

Another very good thing was the change of nurse. Poor "Pug" married a handsome, strong-nerved Scotch woman. She was a faithful nurse, and we did not see her for a while, about three years later she returned to us, with a sturdy, pretty little girl or called "Puglet," and stayed with us as housekeeper for a good twenty years more. But in the meantime we had a tall, bony, grim-looking Scots woman, Maggie Heggie, who proved a treasure. She was a sincere Christian, and her reciting Bonar's hymns, her deep respect for Sunday, and her amusing Scotchisms, her loyal affection keen our hearts, as "Pug" had never done.

Another interesting thing was purely individual to myself. Although novels were utterly forbidden, and stories were boring, poetry was open to us. Mother had read to us some of Salla Rooke's, and I was so enchanted with "Paradise and the Peri," that I asked leave to learn it. The book was lent me on condition that I would not read the other tales in it, and loyally I kept to my word, never turning
a leaf. But the "Peri" I learnt satisfactorily, no one hearing or correcting me, or even asking how I got on, & I can say it by heart to this day.

It was about this time, I think, that my real love of Nature began. Always I had loved to be out in solitude, but now I would look up at the summer clouds lost in wonder, or study the inimitable velvet of the pansy's face, feel myself a poor clumsy creature beside its beauty, & when the great bumble bees were busy burrowing in the heliotrope, I would kiss their velvety backs & feel as though I sent them away with a blessing. There was a large Portuguese laurel on the slope of the lawn with many stems & easy to climb, & often I have sat in the top of this & pondered.

This Christmas we all went to the one, & only children's Party of our lives. We knew the Howshells of Collierswood, well enough to call them by their names, & sometimes we went to their garden or they came to ours, but the idea of a "party" was repugnant to our dear parents, as leading to worldliness & frivolity, & every thing, near & far, high & low, was definitely refused, for us. But this once we went. It was a Christmas tree, & the crowd of neighbouring children, whom we only knew by sight in church, the lights, the smiling faces, the bright faces, dresses, all gave me a new set of thoughts. I fancied such things were past & gone like Cinderella & her glass...
slipper, & here it was as if a door were suddenly opened a few inches & I peeped through & saw that such things were actually going on still. It seemed a pleasant world too where no one was cross or even silent. The only incident I remember is connected with my friend of later days, Lady Lubbock, then about four years old. She had on a light blue frock & a muslin pinafore & was hopping very slowly about. “Come, Connie, come & dance with me,” I said; she looked at me doubtfully under her rather straggling fair hair, & said decisively, “I wish to dance alone,” tucked her little hands under her arms, & resumed, her rather ponderous progress round the floor. I think it might have been better if we had had a little more of this kind of outlet, but I do not remember begging for more, or in any way chafing under the close restrictions.

In Feb. + March 1859, we all had the Whooping-cough, & had it rather badly too. We were shut up in one room like birds in a cage, & employed ourselves with reading & “manufactures” all day long. We really were remarkably good children, for I remember no friction at all. Then our good Maggie shone; attentive, faithful, kindly, compassionate; she waited on us with
unfailing patience, sent constantly to the village for perforated card, gold paper, everything we needed for our elaborate bookmarks. Mother was constantly in and out, read us the whole of Mrs. Elephant's charming story, the "Diary of Mrs. Margaret Maitland," of which certain expressions have remained with me through life, and also parts of "The Soul of Quality," and "Roxabel," ancient books from her own childhood. Also Josephine, whom she always called Tussy, comes forward for the first time as a genial presence, and read us the whole of "The Lady of the Lake." This I greatly enjoyed, got hold of the book, and learned the whole story of the hunt, but ended with the death of "Gallant Grey," got no further.

That summer we were sent for some two months to Brighton, to stay with "Ditchie," who had married a Parisian of some literary merit, a Monsieur Merile de Colville. I can see him now, a short strong man, with his head nearly bald, with only one eye, and generally bursting with some joke. It was not a suitable or a happy marriage, I fear, but his children did not see that, and liked him well enough. Of course, we had
lessons, but they were mostly with Ditchie, and I only
recollect his teaching us, "Ton thé, t’as il été ta tete?"
and other ridiculous sentences. He would lead us to sing,
"Au claire de la lune, la lune, mon ami Pierrot, Pierrot,
Prête-moi ta plume, ta plume, pour écrire un mot, un mot,
Ma chandelle est morte, est morte, je n’ai plus de feu, de feu,
Ouvrez-moi ta porte, ta porte, pour entrer ce lieu, ce lieu."
Or he would tease us with,
"J’ai de bon tabas, en ma tabatière,
J’ai de bon tabas, mais tu n’en auras pas," &c.
Evidently he admired our French accent, and found us
worth teaching his nonsense. Very little else remains
with me of that time, except that my love for going
to church arose for the first time. At Hashhurst
it had been nothing but a form, but here Mr. Vaughan’s
brought something that appealed to one’s heart, &
that one could carry away. It was not the sermon
only, but the responses of a crowded hearty Evangelical
congregation that I heard for the first time, & gave
me a sort of thrill, & the dull Prayer-book suddenly
became interesting. At the beginning of the Litany I
used to watch for the solemn words, “O holy blessed
& glorious Trinity, three Persons one God,” & sit bolt
right down in the high old pew, say them slowly to
myself out of a full heart, as though I were committing my whole being to a stupendous and merciful power far above me. Oh, but we were glad to get home! We saw and we shouted on the long, hilly drive up from Etchingham, and no sound was sweeter than the crunch of the ground as the carriage turned in at the gates and wound up the short drive. It was still sufficiently summer to find tea spread for us out on the lawn under the walnut tree, and everything looked perfectly lovely.

The hop-picking ought to be mentioned which was a welcome time every autumn. We had no "frolicers" then at Hawkhurst, i.e. slum-dwellers from London, as there were enough village people to do the immediately surrounding work, so we were free to go round the gardens and pick for our friends. I loved the bitter-sweet smell, the kind people with their oldest clothes on, their babies packed up in baskets, and counted it fine when the "bushel-men" came round, and we had added to the store.

But I must move on. For a few months or had a governess, but mother did not like her, and she went away. But she taught us the names of the farms of our district, and it was under her that I drew the head of Joan of Arc, only from a picture which to my pride was considered good enough to be framed, and to hang in Mother's bedroom, there it hung for a good thirty years.
Of the year 1860 not very much trace is left in my memory. From April to the close of July Dora and I were sent again to the Meride de Colville, who had taken a house at Sea View, Mr. Hyde, Isle of Wight. I was growing fast, my ankles had become weak, and the long walks were rather a pain. Only two things stand out of any value. One was the sight of a boat with sides newly varnished which caught the light of a glorious sunset, and was transformed into a boat of gold. It scarcely moved on the blue waving water, but the prow was luminous. I thought a boat straight from heaven could not be more luminous beautiful.

The other thing was again, going to church. There was a good man, Mr. Dearsley, who excelled on, "Thou, O God, sendest a gracious rain upon thine inheritance, and refreshest when it was weary." I loved his gentle voice and manner, and his sympathy with the dry, weary little plants, and thought that I was like these little plants. Then the church was pretty. The lancet windows were edged with brick, and they had plain glass, and I thought I had never seen such an intensely blue sky as looked in on me there, and it seemed like a welcome from God Himself. Then also for the first time I heard Jackson's Te Deum, and I felt as though I had never known before that there.