



“DOLLY, WILL YOU COME TOO?” HE SAID.—[SEE PAGE 74.]

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A Novel.

By MISS THACKERAY,  
AUTHOR OF “THE VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF,” &c.

ILLUSTRATED.



NEW YORK:  
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,  
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## OLD KENSINGTON.



### CHAPTER I.

#### BRICKS AND IVY.

A QUARTER of a century ago the shabby tide of progress had not spread to the quiet old suburb where Lady Sarah Francis's brown house was standing, with its many windows dazzling as the sun traveled across the old-fashioned house-tops to set into a distant sea of tenements and echoing life. The roar did not reach the old house. The children could listen to the cawing of the rooks, to the echo of the hours, as they struck on from one day to another, vibrating from the old brown tower of the church. At night the strokes seemed to ring more slowly than in the day. Little Dolly Vanborough, Lady Sarah's niece, thought each special hour had its voice. The church clock is silent now, but the rooks caw on undisturbed from one spring to another in the old Kensington suburb. There are tranquil corners still, and sunny silent nooks, and ivy wreaths growing in the western sun; and jasmines and vine-trees, planted by a for-

mer generation, spreading along the old garden walls. But every year the shabby stream of progress rises and ingulfs one relic or another, carrying off many and many a landmark and memory. Last year only the old church was standing, in its iron cage, at the junction of the thoroughfares. It was the Church of England itself to Dolly and George Vanborough in those early church-going days of theirs. There was the old painting of the lion and the unicorn hanging from the gallery; the light streaming through the brown saints over the communion-table. In after-life the children may have seen other saints more glorious in crimson and in purple, nobler piles and arches, but none of them have ever seemed so near to heaven as the old Queen Anne building; and the wooden pew with its high stools, through which elbows of straw were protruding, where they used to kneel on either side of their aunt, watching with awe-stricken faces the tears as they came falling from the widow's sad eyes.

Lady Sarah could scarcely have told you the meaning of those tears as they fell—old love and life partings, sorrows and past mercies, all came returning to her with the familiar words of the prayers. The tears fell bright and awe-stricken as she thought of the present—of distances immeasurable—of life and its inconceivable mystery; and then her heart would warm with hope perhaps of what might be to come, of the overwhelming possibilities—how many of them to her lay in the warm clasp of the child's hand that came pushing into hers!—For her, as for the children, heaven's state was in the old wooden pew. Then the sing-song of the hymn would flood the old church with its homely cadence.

"Prepare your glad voices;  
Let Hisreal rejoice,"

sang the little charity children; poor little Israelites, with blue stockings, and funny woolen knobs to their fustian caps, rejoicing, though their pastures were not green as yet, nor was their land overflowing with milk and honey. However, they sang praises for others, as all people do at times, thanks be to the merciful dispensation that allows us

to weep, to work, to be comforted, and to rejoice with one another's hearts, consciously or unconsciously, as long as life exists.

Every lane and corner and archway had a childish story for Dolly and her brother—for Dolly most especially, because girls cling more to the inanimate aspects of life than boys do. For Dolly the hawthorn bleeds as it is laid low and is transformed year after year into iron railings and areas, for particulars of which you are requested to apply to the railway company, and to Mr. Taylor, the house-agent. In those days the lanes spread to Fulham, white with blossom in spring, or golden with the yellow London sunsets that blazed beyond the cabbage fields. In those days there were gardens and trees and great walls along the high-road that came from London, passing through the old white turnpike. There were high brown walls along Kensington Gardens, reaching to the Palace Gate; elms spread their shade, and birds chirruped, and children played behind them.

Dolly Vanborough and her brother had had many a game there, and knew every corner and haunt of this sylvan world of children and ducks and nurse-maids. They had knocked their noses against the old sundial many and many a time. Sometimes now, as she comes walking along the straight avenues, Dolly thinks she can hear the echo of their own childish voices whooping and calling to one another as they used to do. How often they had played with their big cousin, Robert Henley, and the little Morgans, round about the stately orange house, and made believe to be statues in the niches!

"I am Apollo," cries George Vanborough, throwing himself into an attitude.

"Apollo!" cries Robert, exploding with school-boy wit; "an Apollo-guy, you mean."

Dolly does not understand why the Morgan boys laugh and George blushes up furiously. When they are tired of jumping about in the sun, the statues straggle homeward, accompanied by Dolly's French governess, who has been reading a novel on a bench close by. They pass along the front of the old Palace, that stands blinking its sleepy windows across elmy vistas, or into tranquil courts where sentries go pacing. Robert has his grandmother living in the Palace, and he strides off across the court to her apartments. The children think she is a witch, and always on the watch for them, though they do not tell Robert so. The Morgans turn up Old Street, and George and Dolly escort them so far on their way home. It is a shabby brown street, with shops at one end, and old-fashioned houses, stone-stepped, bow-windowed, at the other. Dear Old Street! where an echo still lingers of the quaint and stately music of the past, of which the voice comes to us like a song of Mozart sounding above

the dreamy flutterings of a Wagner of the present! Little Zoe Morgan would linger to peep at the parrot that lived next door in the area, with the little page-boy, who always winked at them as they went by; little Cassie would glance wistfully at a certain shop-front where various medals and crosses were exposed for sale. There were even in those days convents and Catholics established at Kensington, and this little repository had been opened for their use.

When they have seen the little Morgans safe into their old brown house—very often it is John Morgan who comes to the door to admit them (John is the eldest son, the curate, the tutor, the main-stay of the straggling establishment)—Dolly and her brother trudge home through the Square, followed by Mademoiselle, still lost in her novel. The lilacs are flowering behind the rusty rails; the children know every flag-stone and window; they turn up a little shabby passage of narrow doorways and wide-eaved roofs, and so get out into the high-road again. They look up with friendly recognition at the little boy and girl in their quaint Dutch garb standing on their pedestals above the crowd as it passes the Vestry-hall; then they turn down a sunshiny spring lane, where ivy is growing, and brown bricks are twinkling in the western sunshine; and they ring at a gateway where an iron bell is swung. The house is called Church House, and all its windows look upon gardens, along which the sunshine comes flowing. The light used to fill Dolly's slanting wooden school-room at the top of the house. When the bells were ringing, and the sun-flood came in and made shadows on the wall, it used to seem to her like a chapel full of music.

George wanted to make an altar one day, and to light Lady Sarah's toilet candles, and to burn the sandal-wood matches; but Dolly, who was a little Puritan, blew the matches out and carried the candles back to their places.

"I shall go over to the Morgans," said George, "since you are so disagreeable."

Whether Dolly was agreeable or not, this was what George was pretty sure to do.

## CHAPTER II.

### DUTCH TILES.

THERE are many disconnected pictures in Dorothea Vanborough's gallery, drifting and following each other like the images of a dissolving view. There are voices and faces changing, people whom she hardly knows to be the same appearing and disappearing. Looking back nowadays through a score or two of years, Dorothea can see many lights crossing and reflecting one another, many strange places and persons in juxtaposition.

She can hear, as we all can, a great clamor of words and of laughter, cries of pain and of sorrow and anger, through all of which sound the sacred voices that will utter to her through life—and beyond life, she humbly prays.

Dorothea's pictures are but mist and fancy-work, not made of paint and canvas, as is that one which hangs over the fire-place in the wainscot dining-room at Church House in Kensington, where my heroine passed so much of her life. It is supposed by some to be a Van der Helst. It represents a golden-brown grandmother, with a coiffe and a ruffe and a grand chain round her neck, and a ring on her forefinger, and a double-winged house in the background. This placid-faced Dutchwoman, existing two centuries ago, has some looks still living in the face of the Dorothea Vanborough of these days. Her descendants have changed their name and their dress, cast away their ruffles, forgotten the story of their early origin; but there is still a something that tells of it. In Dolly's slow quaint grace and crumpled bronze hair, in her brother George's black brows, in their aunt Lady Sarah Francis's round brown eyes and big ears, to say nothing of her store of blue Dutch china. Tall blue pots, with dragon handles, are ranged in rows upon the chimney-board under the picture. On either side of the flame below are blue tiles, that Lady Sarah's husband brought over from the Hague the year before he died. Abraham, Jonah, Noah, Balaam tumbling off his blue ass; the whole sacred history is there, lighted up by the flaring flame of the logs.

When first George and Dolly came to live in the old house, then it was the pictures came to life. The ass began to call out Balaam! Balaam! the animals to walk two by two (all blue) into the ark. Jonah's whale swallowed and disgorged him night after night, as George and Dolly sat at their aunt's knee listening to her stories in the dusk of the "children's hour;" and the vivid life that childhood strikes even into inanimate things awakened the widow's dull heart and the silent house in the old by-lane in Kensington.

The lady over the fire-place had married in King Charles's reign: she was Dorothea Vanborough and the first Countess of Churchtown. Other countesses followed in due course, of whom one or two were engraved in the passage overhead; the last was a miniature in Lady Sarah's own room, her mother and my heroine's grandmother—a beautiful and willful person, who had grievously offended by taking a second husband soon after her lord's demise in 1806. This second husband was himself a member of the Vanborough family, a certain Colonel Stanham Vanborough, a descendant of the lady over the chimney-piece. He was afterward killed in the Peninsula. Lady Sarah

bitterly resented her mother's marriage, and once said she would never forgive it. It was herself that she never forgave for her own unforgiveness. She was a generous-hearted woman, fantastic, impressionable, reserved. When her mother died soon after Colonel Vanborough, it was to her own home that Lady Sarah brought her little half-brother, now left friendless, and justly ignored by the peerage, where the elder sister's own life was concisely detailed as "dan. John Vanborough, last Earl of Churchtown, b. 1790, m. 1807, to Darby Francis, Esq., of Church House, Kensington."

Young Stanham Vanborough found but a cold welcome from Mr. Francis, but much faithful care and affection, lavished, not without remorse, by the sister who had been so long estranged. The boy grew up in time, and went out into the world, and became a soldier as his father had been. He was a simple, straightforward youth, very fond of his sister, and loath to leave her, but very glad to be his own master at last. He married in India the daughter of a Yorkshire baronet, a pretty young lady, who had come out to keep her brother's house. Her name was Philippa Henley, and her fortune consisted chiefly in golden hair and two pearly rows of teeth. The marriage was not so happy as it might have been: trouble came, children died; the poor parents, in fear and trembling, sent their one little boy home to Lady Sarah to save his life. And then, some three years later, their little daughter Dolly was making her way, a young traveler by land and by sea coming from the distant Indian station where she had been born, to the shelter of the old house in the old by-lane in Kensington. The children found the door open wide, and the lonely woman on her threshold looking out for them. Mr. Francis was dead, and it was an empty house by this time, out of which a whole home had passed away. Lady Sarah's troubles were over, leaving little behind; the silence of mid-life had succeeded to the loving turmoils and jealousies and anxieties of earlier days, only some memories remained of which the very tears and words seemed wanting now and then, although other people may have thought that if words failed the widow, the silent deeds were there that should belong to all past affection.

One of the first things Dolly remembers is a landing-place one bitter east-winded morning, with the white blast blowing dry and fierce from the land, and swirling out to sea through the leafless forest of shipping; the squalid houses fast closed and double-locked upon their sleeping inmates; the sudden storms of dust and wind; the distant clanking of some awakening peal; and the bewildered ayah, in her rings and bangles, squatting on the ground and veiling her face in white muslin.

By the side of the ayah stands my heroine, a little puppy-like girl, staring as Indian children stare, at the strange dismal shores upon which they are cast; staring at the lady in the gray cloak, who had come on board with her papa's face, and caught her in her arms, and who is her aunt Sarah; at the big boy of seven in the red mittens, whose photograph her papa had shown her in the veranda, and who is her brother George; at the luggage as it comes bumping and stumbling off the big ship; at the passengers departing. The stout little gentleman, who used to take her to see the chickens, pats Dolly on the head, and says he shall come and see her; the friendly sailor who carried her on shore shakes hands, and then the clouds close in, and the sounds and the faces disappear.....

Presently into Dolly's gallery come pleasanter visions of the old house at Kensington, to which Lady Sarah took her straight away, with its brick wall and ivy creepers and many-paned windows, and the stone balls at either side of the door—on one of which a little dark-eyed girl is sitting, expecting them.

"Who is dat?" says little three-year-old Dolly, running up, and pulling the child's pinafore, to make sure that she is *real*.

Children believe in many things, in fairies, and sudden disappearances; they would not think it very strange if they were to see people turn to fountains and dragons in the course of conversation.

"That is a nice little girl like you," said Lady Sarah, kindly.

"A nice little girl like me?" said Dolly.

"Go away," says the little strange girl, hiding her face in her hands.

"Have you come to play wiss me? My name is Dollicianable," continues Dolly, who is not shy, and quite used to the world, having traveled so far.

"Is that your name? What a funny name!" says the little girl, looking up. "My name is Rhoda, but they call me Dody at our house. I's four years old."

Dolly was three years old, but she could not speak quite plain; she took the little girl's hand and stood by the ayah, watching the people passing and repassing, the carriage being unpacked, Lady Sarah directing and giving people money, George stumping about in every body's way, and then, somehow, every thing and every body seem going up and down stairs, and in confusion; she is very tired and sleepy, and forgets all the rest.

Next day Dolly wakes up crying for her mamma. It is not the ship any more. Every thing is quite still, and her crib does not rock up and down. "I sought she would be here," said poor little Dolly, in a croaking, waking voice, sitting up with crumpled curls and bright warm cheeks. It is not

her mamma, but Aunt Sarah, who takes her up and kisses her, and tries to comfort her, while the ayah, Nun Comee, who has been lying on the floor, jumps up and dances in her flowing white garment, and snaps her black fingers, and George brings three tops to spin all at once. Dolly is interested, and ceases crying, and begins to smile and to show all her little white teeth.

Lady Sarah rarely smiled. She used to frown so as not to show what she felt. But Dolly from the first day had seemed to understand her; she was never afraid of her, and she used to jump on her knee and make her welcome to the nursery.

"Is you very pretty?" said little Dolly one day, looking at the grim face with the long nose and pinched lips. "I think you is a very ugly aunt." And she smiled up in the ugly aunt's face.

"Oh, Dolly! how naughty!" said Rhoda, who happened to be in Dolly's nursery.

Rhoda was a little waif *protégée* of Lady Sarah's. She came from the curate's home close by, and was often sent in to play with Dolly, who would be lonely, her aunt thought, without a companion of her own age; Rhoda was Mr. Morgan's niece, and a timid little thing; she was very much afraid at first of Dolly; so she was of the ayah, with her brown face and ear-rings and monkey hands; but soon the ayah went back to India with silver pins in her ears, taking back many messages to the poor child-bereft parents, and a pair of Dolly's shoes as a remembrance, and a couple of dolls for herself, as a token of good-will from her young mistress. They were for her brothers, Nun Comee said, but it was supposed that she intended to worship them on her return to her native land.

The ayah being gone, little Rhoda soon ceased to be afraid of Dolly, the kind, merry, helpful little playmate, who remained behind, frisking along the passages and up and down the landing-places of Church House. She was much nicer, Rhoda thought, than her own real cousins the Morgans in Old Street.

As days go by, Dolly's pictures warm and brighten from early spring into summertime. By degrees they reach above the table and over and beyond the garden-roller. They are chiefly of the old garden, whose brick walls seem to inclose sunshine and gaudy flowers all the summer through; of the great Kensington parks, where in due season chestnuts are to be found shining among the leaves and dry grasses; of the pond, where the ducks are flapping and diving; of the house which was little Rhoda's home. This was the great bare house in Old Street, with plenty of noise, dried herbs, content, children without end, and thick bread-and-butter. There was also cold stalled ox on Sundays at one.

In those days life was a simple matter to the children; their days and their legs lengthened together; they loved, they learned, and they looked for a time that was never to be—when their father and mother should come home and live with them again, and every body was to be happy. As yet the children thought they were only expecting happiness.

George went to school at Frant, near Tunbridge Wells, and came home for the holidays. Dolly had a governess too, and she used to do her lessons with little Rhoda in the slanting school-room at the top of Church House. The little girls did a great many sums, and learned some French, and read little Arthur's "History of England" to every body's satisfaction.

Kind Lady Sarah wrote careful records of the children's progress to her brother, who had sent them to the faithful old sister at home. He heard of the two growing up with good care and much love in the sunshine that streamed upon the old garden; playing together on the terrace that he remembered so well; pulling up the crocuses and the violets that grew in the shade of the white holly-tree. George was a quaint, clever boy, Sarah wrote; Dolly was not so quick, but happy and obedient, and growing up like a little spring flower among the silent old bricks.

Lady Sarah also kept up a desultory correspondence with Philippa, her sister-in-law. Mrs. Vanborough sent many minute directions about the children; Dolly was to dine off cold meat for her complexion's sake, and she wished her to have her hair crimped; and George was to wear kid gloves and write a better hand; and she hoped they were very good, and that they sometimes saw their cousin Robert, and wrote to their uncle, Sir Thomas Henley, Henley Court, Smokethwaite, Yorkshire; and she and dear papa often and often longed for their darlings. Then came presents—a spangled dress for Lady Sarah, and silver ornaments for Dolly, and an Indian sword for George, with which he nearly cut off Rhoda's head.

### CHAPTER III.

#### TO OLD STREET BY THE LANES.

IN those days, as I have said, the hawthorn spread across the fields and market-gardens that lay between Kensington and the river. Lanes ran to Chelsea, to Fulham, to North End, where Richardson once lived and wrote in his garden-house. The mist of the great city hid the horizon and dulled the sound of the advancing multitudes; but close at hand, all round about the old house, were country corners untouched—blossoms instead of bricks in spring-time, summer

shade in summer. There were strawberry beds, green, white, and crimson in turn. The children used to get many a handful of strawberries from Mr. Penfold, the market-gardener at the end of the lane, and bunches of radish when strawberries were scarce. They gathered them for themselves on a bank where paving-stones and coal-holes are now, and a fine growth of respectable modern villas. I believe that in those days there were sheep grazing in Kensington Gore. It is certain that Mr. Penfold kept Alderneys in the field beyond his orchard, and that they used to come and drink in a pond near his cottage. He lived with his wife and his daughter, under an old tiled roof, and with a rose-tree growing on the wall. In the window of the cottage a little card was put up, announcing that "Curds-and-whey were to be had within," and the children sometimes went there to drink the compound out of Emma Penfold's doll's tea-things. The old pond was at the garden gate; there was a hedge round about it, and alder-trees starting up against the sunset, and the lanes and orchards beyond. The water reflected the sunset in the sky and the birds flying home to the sound of the evening bells. Sometimes Emma would come out of the cottage, and stand watching the children play. She was a pretty girl, with rosy cheeks and dark soft eyes. It was a quaint old corner, lonely enough in the daytime; but of evenings people would be passing—laborers from their work, strollers in the fields, neighbors enjoying the air. The cottage must have been as old as Church House itself. It was chiefly remarkable for its beautiful damask rose-trees, of which the red leaves sprinkled the threshold, across which pretty Emma Penfold would step. I think it was for the sake of the rose-tree that people sometimes stopped and asked for curds-and-whey. Emma would dispense the horrible mixture, blushing beneath her basket-work plaits.

Mr. Penfold was a well-to-do man. At the end of his garden a wicket gate led into the orchard, where Dolly and Rhoda went sometimes to play in the long grass beneath the fruit trees, while overhead was a Raphael-like trellis of blue sky and twisted branches and singing birds, beneath which the children disported, while their attendant, Marker, stood gossiping with Mrs. Penfold over the gate. Only the other day I saw the last of the old apple-trees peacefully flowering with the blossom of never-to-be apples, while an engine was at work upon the roots, and draining the land for a new terrace and a macadamized road.

Sometimes in May mornings the children would gather hawthorn branches out of the lanes, and make what they liked to call garlands for themselves. The white blossoms looked pretty in Rhoda's dark hair; and