

SHELLEY'S GRANDSON AND SOME OTHERS

By Elinor Wylie

ONCE upon a time I lived in a very small English village. It was the most fairy-book place in the world, and I hardly dare go back to England for fear it has changed. Of course it had Yew Cottages and Rose Cottages, and of course those cottages, unlike suburban retreats with similar pretty names, actually had roses and yew trees growing in their gardens. What is more, if they hadn't, it would have been because these things had died of old age and had pansies planted on their graves, and not because the owners of the gardens preferred a monkey's puzzle and a magenta geranium starfish. The cottages had walls of cob and roofs of thatch, and there was a grey church and a green churchyard, and a red and white inn called the Queen's Head. There were sherry glass elms with rooks in them, and a beechwood which was pink and purple in April, and bright holly bushes which were covered with scarlet berries in November. Unfortunately, by Christmas the robins had eaten all the berries, but the robins themselves, hopping about on the snow, did nearly as well. They were small and plump, and their breasts, instead of being the color of the mandarin oranges that you find in the toe of your Christmas stocking, were the color of the very reddest of the lady apples.

In this village I ate clotted cream, and smelled wallflowers, and drank mead, all for the first time, and the cream and the wallflowers were heavenly, but I am sorry to say the mead was horrible.

In this village there lived a lovely lady who was Andrew Lang's first cousin, and a large middle aged gentleman who was Arthur Hugh Clough's son, and a little old gentleman who was Shelley's grandson. Of course he looked more like Shelley's grandfather. The first two relationships interested me; the third shook the aerial heavens of my mind. Think of it — Shelley's grandson, and I have had tea with him frequently! He was an authentic eagle's feather; a somewhat small and whitish feather, but still Shelley's grandson. He was also Harriet's grandson, and I remember his looking very impish and saying gravely, "You know, in this family we don't think much of Mary." I never dared ask him just how much he thought of Shelley, nor admit the extent of my own worship, for as a grandfather dear Shelley never had much chance.

In this adorable village, Shelley's grandson was almost the only person who cared tuppence for Shelley, Andrew Lang's cousin almost the only person who cared a farthing for Andrew Lang; as for Mr. Clough, to most people he was a far more important person than his father. And as for Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis" — well, well, I'm afraid the unfortunate villagers had never heard of it at all.

But nine miles away, on the outskirts of another and comparatively Brobdingnagian village, there lived a lady of whom everyone had heard. Not only the people in her village, but even the people in ours, were proud of her. When they went over to the

other village's pony show in the spring — we had a much better pony show of our own in the summer — they used to point excitedly to her pleasant but quite commonplace villa. No, that isn't fair: it wasn't really a villa, it was "a gentleman's residence" — they call them that in England even when ladies live in them.

Andrew Lang's cousin lived in a small white house full of old silver and lacquer, and potpourri in Lowestoft china bowls. Arthur Hugh Clough's son lived in a long white house full of Morris wallpapers and daffodils and sunshine. Shelley's grandson lived in the most romantic way of all, for his large grey manor house was let to rich and tyrannical strangers, and was therefore full of wickedness and new furniture, while he himself lived in a high yellow plaster house in a dark wood full of birds. But nobody ever pointed to these houses with pride: all that was reserved for the nice red house of the famous lady who lived nine miles away. She was a very successful authoress, and there is much to be said on her side, and that of the admiring villagers. I am told that she wrote extremely well, and after all she did the writing herself and didn't depend on reflected glory, even from W. B. Maxwell. I'm sorry: I wish with all my heart I could say it was Mrs. Barclay; but it wasn't, it was Miss Braddon. I am quite sure she was a most charming person, and very likely she had silver and lacquer and Lowestoft and daffodils and sunshine in her house. She probably had birds; canaries in gilt cages, and thrushes on the shaven lawn. But she didn't live in our fairy village, where night-ingales sang in the plummy trees and larks went up from the gorse on the common. And however you look at it, she wasn't Shelley's grandson.