

# JOYS OF LIFE

## CHAPTER I

### SOME OF LIFE'S JOYS

A happy weasel—A feast of dates and brackish water—"I want to embrace you"—Moses in the bulrushes—Moses objects—"Only funning"—Some baby frogs—Was it murder?—An inheritance—Great finds—Byron's love letters—A lady "enjoying herself upstairs"—A barricaded study—Love letters of yesterday and to-day—Castor-oil and the lady's maid—The coachman gives notice, his reason—Yellow chariots turn colour—A proposed loan—A Liberal turns Tory—A noisy meeting.

WITH so many joys in life it is hard to say which are the most joyful, being so varied.

What can compare with an early summer morning, before the world is astir, when you can steal quietly out of the house, alone, into the glorious air, laden with the sweet smell of earth, moss, and flowers; when the birds are telling one another, and the Almighty, of their happiness; when you can sit down on some fallen tree, or perhaps a bridge, and watch the wonderful purposefulness of the creepy-crawly world, perhaps witness the flirtations of the water rats by the side of a brook?

All is so entrancing that it is difficult to walk sedately; you feel you want to run, skip, jump, and sing, only it would be sad to lose for one moment the song of the birds or disturb the busy creepy-crawlies.

I once sat and watched a weasel turning somersaults and leaping in the air, purely for its own amusement and pleasure, so filled with the joy of life that it was

obliged to do circus tricks, though without any audience that it knew of.

Then there is the infinite joy of having bairns of our own, who love and look to us for their happiness; the joy of hearing our belongings say they are not happy unless we are there; the joy of sometimes being able to bring smiles and hope to faces drawn by suffering—perhaps the greatest joy of all, to be able to drive *fear* from the hearts of those about to pass through the Great White Gate. It is so sad that anyone should be afraid.

There is joy in being alone—joy in mixing with the multitude. It is all too wonderful, even in the terrible moments when those with our hearts in keep, who have made life lovely, have been taken from us, and our little world stands still, is suspended. Yes, joy even here, knowing that the pain is not theirs but ours, and we find joy in the infinite tenderness of those who love and help us to bear our pain.

Besides our mental and spiritual joys, there are the many physical joys of life: health, the joy of going to bed, the joy of getting up, and, what sounds greedy, the joy of good food. The great joy which is both mental and physical, of *home*. In our very young days food takes a very back seat in our thoughts and calculations; we regarded the hours spent over food shocking waste of time.

I remember the first time I properly appreciated a meal; it was when I was in Egypt. Mr. Melton Prior, the well-known war correspondent, and I went on a very secret journey, riding camels. I had pointed out that they were not favourite mounts of mine, but was told that none other was possible. Owing to our mistaking the route which had been mapped out for us, or owing to that route being wrong, we lost our way. Now, we had at least two days' camel riding

before us, and during that time our only sustenance was some dates well powdered with sand and some nasty water the colour of copper.

After various adventures, and feeling as if my back was broken in at least three places, we found ourselves once more in the land of plenty. I am glad to say that though our journey had been uncomfortable our object had been attained. On our return I felt as though I never wished to eat again, and began to think about suitable epitaphs for my tombstone to mark so great an occasion. However, I changed my mind when that prince of hotel managers, Mr. Luigi, sent a tray to my room laden with good things. I was for the time being at Shepherd's Hotel. I considered that food the most delicious I had ever eaten, almost forgot my broken back, and had indigestion for hours! After which I thought regular and proper food an excellent institution.

Even in strenuous moments Mr. Melton Prior was an amusing companion, one of the rare folk who enjoyed telling a good story against himself. When the perils of our ride were over he said: "I must shake hands with you; your endurance was wonderful. I feel I want to embrace you. May I?"

"Certainly," I replied. "I think it is the least that you can do after our mutual experiences," some of which I cannot well describe and over which he behaved splendidly. He was a wonderful war correspondent, with a vivid imagination, sense of humour, and gifted pencil.

This story has no business here, I know, but writing about food brought it on!

Sport is a healthful joy; it means being out in the country, in the fresh air, which drives all the cobwebs away. Some of the finest characters that I have known have been sportsmen and sportswomen—people with

clean, wholesome minds. It is seldom that we hear an unpleasant story or uncharitable remark from these people.

It is strange, but the world seems to have little sympathy with joy, yet there is nothing healthier, physically and morally, than laughter. An excellent beginning for a friendship, and by far the best ending.

I have had a good many experiences and excitements in my life, and ought, by all the rules of cricket, to have been dead long ago; but it is not excitement and occasional roughing it that kills as much as does monotony—treading the same path every day, feeling that life is hurrying away without our having tasted all its joys.

Lovers of nature have a big parcel of joy always waiting to be opened.

The first excitement that I can remember was when I was about nine years old; I enjoyed it enormously until the day of reckoning arrived.

My brother, the only one I had at that time, was a year older than myself. He was always full of exciting ideas, and one day, when we were playing round a big pond in the grounds near the kitchen garden, he suddenly suggested our playing at Moses in the bulrushes, and that the gamekeeper's new baby at the lodge would make a first rate Moses if only we could sneak it away when nobody was looking.

To carry out this scheme a good deal of preparation was necessary. A suitable bed had to be found for Moses. After a prolonged search we came upon the very thing we wanted in the tool-house—namely, a long low basket, which I think lobsters had come in. It was full of sand and bulbs; these we tipped out behind some flower-pots and hurried away with our prize.

So far so good. The next thing to be done was to

make it nice and soft; this we did with lovely curly moss, making an engaging pillow with it. All now looked comfortable. We only had to wait for an opportunity to kidnap the baby. This part of the game was deputed to me.

My chance came one day between lessons and luncheon. Mrs. Earnshaw, the baby's mother, was busy doing some washing at the back of the lodge, while the babe slumbered in its cot in the front parlour.

Quietly I stole in and picked it up gently, for fear it should cry; had it done so I should probably have dropped it and run away. Happily, it was quite good, and made no sound. My brother was hiding behind a tree in the avenue waiting for me.

Together we raced out of sight of the lodge and placed the baby in its boat among the bulrushes at the side of the pond. My brother then gave the thing a push to send it further out to sea, and very nearly upset it; the water poured in over one side, and it was now out of our reach.

Moses began to show signs of life, and we were rather frightened. My brother ran his fastest and brought a long hook the men used for the cutting of the shrubs; with this Moses was brought nearer shore. It was, however, more good luck than management that he was not cut in two during the process. As the child was now quite safe, we thought, and was beginning to show signs of resentment, we ran away and left it, meaning to return after luncheon.

On reaching the house we found a great commotion going on—the baby from the lodge was lost! The village policeman had been sent for, and was told all the particulars of how someone must have come in while the washing was being done and run away with the baby.

We listened to all the excited accounts, feeling amused but frightened. Before long came the news that the baby had been found by one of the gardeners, who had heard cries from the direction of the pond and had gone to investigate. Moses had been found in a very damp condition, and was now in the kitchen.

My father was sent for, the parents claimed their property, and, of course, *we* were most unjustly suspected! On being interrogated, we were bound to acknowledge we were the culprits, and we did not think we were doing any harm in playing at Moses in the bulrushes; we were only funning.

Both my brother and I were punished in the old-fashioned way, after which we were sent to bed, feeling very subdued, it having been pointed out to us that if the child had died from shock or been drowned, then we would be hanged as murderers.

This was more than a joke, and it took me some time to recover my equanimity. My brother was braver, and tried to cheer me by explaining how we would escape before the last dread moment.

Poor Moses did have a bad cold, and kept us in a state of anxiety; our nurses, who looked after our younger sister, talked long and earnestly before us about the last moments of people about to be hanged. Mercifully Moses recovered, so I have lived to tell the tale instead of being hanged. A little later we learned that Moses was a girl.

Mrs. Earnshaw never allowed us inside the lodge again. That pond was an everlasting source of joy; we were then living at Shotton Hall, County Durham.

Once after some heavy showers we children discovered crowds of baby frogs hopping about all round this pond; we were delighted with the little beggars. My brother filled his cap and I my skirt with them, bringing them home in triumph. Before we had



decided what to do with them we were called to the schoolroom, so threw them all into a drawer in the front hall. This writing-table was often used by my father in connection with magistrate's work.

As bad luck would have it, we had no opportunity of going to see how the little dears were progressing for a couple of days. A housemaid, who had no business in the drawer, discovered them one morning when doing her work, and gave such piercing screams that my mother rushed out of her bedroom to see who was being murdered.

Though very good pals, we children were rather quarrelsome. Shortly before the Moses episode a set of garden tools were given to us; before long a dispute arose as to whose turn it was to use the rake. It ended in a scuffle, and my brother bashed me over the head with it, driving the prongs into my cranium. I carry marks of the tool to-day. In spite of these little differences my brother and I were close companions, and when he thought I was going to be punished for some misdeed he used to hide me and bring carrots from the stables to eat and keep me quiet, so that I should not be found until the storm had blown over.

Then came the horrible day when my brother was sent to school, and I was miserable.

A few years after this my grandfather on the paternal side died and we went to live in Yorkshire, to the place my father now inherited. My sister, nearly three years younger than myself, was a very good child, and would take no part in any of my schemes of surprise. But we were very happy together, all the same.

Those were the days when children were regarded as nuisances, and we were kept in another part of the house, as far as possible away from our parents,

though father used to creep away to us at times, when mother was not looking. We were never allowed in the drawing-room unless we were sent for, and never allowed to use the front staircase, for fear we should leave dirty finger-marks on the paint and marble. The latter, I remember, was washed in milk every morning, as this was considered good for its complexion.

Although my father was a comparatively rich man and lived in considerable state, we children were not allowed anything for breakfast except porridge or bread-and-milk. On Sundays as a treat we had a boiled egg, and this while the servants in the house-keeper's room enjoyed all the delicacies of the season.

On entering our new inheritance, our mother spent weeks in sorting out cupboards and drawers, throwing away what she called rubbish; truly one man's meat is another man's poison. How often we see this! What one generation spends its life collecting the next throws away.

Look, for instance, at the beautiful objects of art, pictures, and furniture collected by Lord Leverhulme, now scattered all over the globe. The same with Mr. Christie-Miller's valuable library, which had taken him a lifetime to collect.

It is the death duties, unfortunately, that are often responsible for this.

While our mother was busy throwing things away, we, being for the time without a governess, amused ourselves wandering about where we had no business to be, making discoveries and rummaging on our own account, finding interesting and enlightening things.

In the cupboard that stood in our late grandmother's dressing-room we came across a large assortment of toilet preparations and accessories—pots of rouge marked "morning" and "evening," varying in



depth of colour, powder puffs, and all sorts of mysterious things.

In our pristine innocence we were excited and shocked, having had no idea that our beautiful, much admired, and talented grandmother had been so wicked and deceiving, which proves that she understood the art better than many practising it to-day, for they would not deceive a baby.

By the way, this grandmother had a very poor time during her life, owing to her husband's jealousy and selfishness. She was practically a prisoner in a big country house—only allowed to receive visitors when her husband chose, at times not even allowed to see her children, though one was an invalid. Presumably he feared that she might love them better than himself.

In her early married days she had presented her partner with twins; my father was one of them, and the invalid already mentioned was the other. While our grandmother was what her husband called "enjoying herself upstairs," he shut himself into his study, happy amongst his account books. Every penny spent upon house, property, or private family needs were recorded in these books. We found cupboards full of them.

When his wife's old lady's maid ran downstairs to tell him a son had been born, he presented her with the usual *pour boire* expected on these occasions; she then retired, feeling as proud as though she had accomplished the feat herself.

Before long she again ran down the stairs to tell the squire that he was the father of twins; this time she was greeted with frowns and no *pour boire*. The maid retired somewhat crestfallen, and now glad that she had not performed the feat herself.

About an hour later our grandparent again heard hastening footsteps on the stairs. This was too much,

probably the woman was coming to announce a third arrival. So he rushed to the door, barricaded it with tables and chairs, retiring to the farthest corner of the room, so that he could not hear a word that was said to him.

It so happened that the third journey downstairs was to tell him that his wife was in danger of her life, and would he like to come to her? However, she recovered, and we are told that "all is well that ends well"—a *mot* that I do not entirely agree with.

Yet when this bully of a husband died, his wife refused to live without him, and starved herself to death in fourteen days. I supposed being bullied had become part of her life, so that she felt lost without it; his curious ways may have been regarded as marks of affection.

Among other interesting things found belonging to our grandmother were some love letters written to her by Lord Byron, the poet. He had evidently at one time been much in love with her. I still have some of the letters. His language was florid, likewise his calligraphy. He wrote on large sheets of paper, with about two words to the line. When folded the letters made large envelopes, and they had been stuck down with little red paper seals, like pieces of plaster.

Fashions and style change in love letters as in everything else. When Pope, the poet, wrote to his lady-love, he began "Madam," which must have been chilling. But I doubt if he ever cared much for any woman; he certainly had a much warmer corner in his heart for Swift than for his lady Mary Montagu. This vindictive poet's works are to me as cold as sculpture. His was a curious life—the son of a linen draper, who later found himself the companion and associate of lords, ladies, and big-wigs of sorts.

Once when someone was vulgar enough to be

sarcastic to him about his humble birth, he proved himself equal to the occasion by replying: "I think it enough that my parents, such as they were, never cost me a blush, and their son, such as he is, never cost them a tear." So in spite of his coldness of style he had some affection in his heart.

Fame and love affairs do not appear to run happily together—Byron, Swift, and Pope, for example.

When first I was launched from the dry dock of the schoolroom upon the waters of the world, it was the fashion to write very amorous love letters full of poetry to our eyebrows, and containing references to guiding stars—angels and so forth. Somewhere in an old deed-box I have hidden away some wonderful relics, with beautiful sketches of misshapen, bleeding hearts, very realistic, owing to the drops from the heart being in red ink. There was also some astonishing poetry! I remember something about my dewy lips, which does not sound very nice.

Love letters and love-making are to-day on quite a different footing. It is no longer "My beautiful Darling," "My Angel," etc., but more in this line: "Dear old Dutch," "Pal o' Mine," "Old Thing," and so on. The sighing and the poetry business has gone.

It does not answer to take love letters too literally or seriously; allowances must be made for the emotions of the moment, remembering Hamlet's advice to Ophelia: "Trust none of us." And was it not Condorcet, the revolutionary aristocrat, who when dying in prison said, among other words of wisdom: "Poetry and love letters penned under mental emotion are simply products of the physical organics," and that "Virtue is a gas and poetry a secretion"?

Where do we stand after all that? Exaggerated statements and expressions of lifelong devotion sound

very thrilling and nice at the time they are made, but the devotion does not always last, while disillusion and bitterness often does.

I have strayed away from my grandmother and her household before she died, and I still have things to tell you which gives the atmosphere of that time. My father seems to have been mischievous in his young days; perhaps remembering them was what made a twinkle come into his eyes at times when reproving me for my transgressions.

The old lady's maid who had announced the birth of the twins and had the door barricaded against her had ended in being a sort of glorified housekeeper and maid combined. I remember her telling me that "Master Robert," (my father) was a "very naughty boy." That once when his mother was working in the garden amongst her flowers and stooping over them, her crinoline tilted up a little, showing her legs, which in those days were considered indecent things, he seized the water-can with a rose on it that was standing near, and freely watered his mother's legs. This was recounted as an enormity, and not an amusing incident.

Mary Heaton, the maid in question, was a wonderful old body, small and dainty, with a milk-and-white skin, and grey curls fastened down with combs on each side of her face. On her head reposed a black lace cap with dangling bits at each side; these she called lapets. She walked about the house with jingling keys, the tail of her long black dress hanging over her arm, and *always* sniffing. I fear we children were a trial to her; she had been living a sleepy, undisturbed life until our advent.

One day my mother sent me to tell Mary Heaton, who was now in our service, that she wished to speak to her. By way of teasing, I said: "Mary, mother-

wants you; she is going to give you some castor-oil." This was a pure invention of my own. I was promptly pushed outside the work-room door, which was hastily bolted, and she refused to obey the summons.

Indeed, she refused to open the door when my mother went in person, and the latter was somewhat mystified at hearing references to castor-oil from inside the room. She had to be assured there was no such thing awaiting her. We got upon the poor old thing's nerves to such an extent that she shortly retired into what she called "private life" on a pension and a cottage for life, in recognition of her long and faithful services in the family.

As time went on, I became my father's constant companion. Looking back now, I fear I was often selfish and thoughtless, for he was not a horsey man, and used to worry himself almost ill if I were late coming home from hunting; he always pictured my being brought home on a shutter or some such thing. My mother did not trouble about me except to scold when I was late. She still considered children were a nuisance, and she had done her duty, and all that was required of her, when she had impressed upon us that marriage was woman's destiny, whether they liked it or not; it had to be put up with. I started life with views of that kind.

In those days my parents had a much valued coachman, in whose charge I was when out hunting. He was growing rather plentiful about the waistcoat, and it was much against his inclinations that he had to pound along after me, often frightened, imploring me to be careful, saying we were hunting and not steeplechasing.

One morning, when my mother went to give the orders for the day in the old-fashioned way, she was electrified by Metcalfe giving notice to leave that day



month. This was a bomb-shell, for how could anything go on properly without him? On being asked his reason for wishing to leave, he replied that he could not afford to stay in England any longer, as he had so many children to keep, and more were coming, so he must escape before it was too late.

He was not a married man, but at that time his reason for leaving did not appear to me strange. Not so with my mother. Her eyes nearly fell out of her head; she became speechless and rigid. He had pleased her by his constant churchgoing, and how could the two go together?

Up to then two old yellow chariots still stood in the coach-house, looking like Lord Mayor's coaches. With the departure of Metcalfe the stable arrangements were entirely overhauled; the yellow coaches were sold and turned into mourning coaches, to be hired for funerals. I felt sad to see them go; they were very gorgeous, but hung on springs that made them sway about in a manner reminding one of being on board ship. It was a great blow to the postilions, for of course they had to go also, which was just as well, for owing to too many good things to eat and too little to do their figures no longer looked as they should for their profession.

Father never liked parting with old servants, and it undoubtedly gave him pangs when they departed.

By the time I was thirteen my father used to talk very confidentially to me, and called me his "Sunshine." I used to sit with him in the smoking-room whenever I could escape from my governess, sit with him in the garden and by his favourite fish-ponds, watching the trout-leap as he threw wasp grubs and other dainties for them to enjoy.

He talked to me of his speculations, which as a rule were successful. One day a neighbour who owned



some important ironworks and a shipping business came to stay the night to try and induce my father to lend him £15,000 to save his business, which he said must otherwise be derelict.

Having already a good many shares in the concern, my father was anxious to keep the business on its feet if possible, and seemed inclined to lend the money. I sat quietly in the smoking-room, listening to the pros and against the proposal. The ironmaster, probably regarding me as a piece of furniture, or too worried to care who was there, talked freely.

After everyone had gone to bed, father came to my room in his dressing-gown and sat on my bed, going into all the details of the money-lending question, saying it would be to his advantage if he could save the business and firm from going into liquidation.

I begged him not to advance the money, for after all I had heard I was firmly convinced in my own mind that twice £15,000 would not save the situation, though probably the optimistic owner hoped and believed it would.

In the end it was decided not to lend the money; later it was clearly proved that twice the sum asked for would not have been a much use; it would simply have been throwing good money after bad. The dear old dad used to say that I saved him from that disaster, but I think he would have acted wisely without his youthful daughter's advice. He just liked talking about things to me. My mother was not interested in such mundane things as money.

It was a curious feature in my father's character that while he would fuss and fume about small matters like butcher's bills and things of that sort, he could lose £10,000 in one unfortunate speculation and remain perfectly calm—a little silent for a day or two, nothing more.

Sometimes when speculating vigorously the telegraph boys and special messengers crossed one another in the avenue, so thick and fast did they come. Buying in the morning, selling in the afternoon, and withal making a wonderful turnover.

For many years my father, like several others of the family, was a Liberal and a great admirer of Mr. Gladstone—until his Midlothian tour, and that was too much for my parent; he turned Tory. I was with him once when he was speaking at Middlesbrough for some candidate during election times. I forget who the individual was whose cause he was pleading. Perhaps it was Sir Frederick Milbanke; I remember he worked hard for him, but it is so long ago.

The meeting, however, is firmly fixed in my mind, for Middlesbrough is a very Radical stronghold, and some of my father's sentiments were not approved. As we stood on a trolley in the market-place dead cats and rotten eggs were hurled at us in such quick succession that it took my breath away. I wanted to hurl some of the cats, which had not been kept on ice, back again, but I was suppressed.

It ended in my father having to beat a hasty retreat with a policeman into one of the refuges in the middle of a street reserved for gentlemen, while I was thrown into a chemist's shop hard by.

When the row had quieted down, we returned home in a cab, as it was not thought wise that the carriage should appear; that followed late at night. When all was over, we thought it a great joke, but we were never able to wear the same clothes again. Even after they had been burnt I fancied I could smell them.