

The Naming of the Lane.

I was in despair when I was turned off from the garden on which I had built my Studio. To get such another site to hire a room large enough in a place like Cambridge seemed well nigh impossible. Just about that time Helen and I were invited by Edward and his wife to visit them for six months in Brazil. Florence, who managed Harston House, said that she would shut it up and go on visits and Graham said that he would remain in London and give up his week-ends at home. I had already moved my iron Studio to Harston and I had hired for my classes a couple of rooms in Cambridge. They were very unsuitable but they were all I could get. I secured an artist friend - Miss Edmonds - to help my partner in the work of the studio so I was free to go.

When I came back to Cambridge after my trip abroad I found that my classes had gone down and I could not wonder at it. The two poor little rooms were so unattractive. My partner had married while I was away. Miss Edmonds carried on until I returned but could not continue to help me as she had made other arrangements.

One day, while I was still at my wits' end, I was in a room with a number of friends some of whom were playing in

a corner with a planchette. They called me and complained that the thing would write nothing but "Never mind" and begged me to try it. I am not much interested in spiritualism but I had not seen a planchette before so of course I put my fingers on it at once. The pencil raced over the paper and I found this below the instrument when I took off my hand - "Never mind. Go on and build and - and - and -". The last "and" ran off the edge of the paper. I was certainly startled and then laughed at the idea because of the impossibility of being able to build in Cambridge. I was amused too that I had evidently influenced the spirit-writing merely by being in the room. I thought nothing about it but only a few days afterwards I saw in a newspaper that a well built cottage, stable and coach-house was for sale. I bought the property with my savings and with help from Graham.

A clever architect designed for me a large and lofty Studio by raising the roof of the little loft and by taking in with it the two large bedrooms of the cottage. The small bedroom I kept in case I wished to spend a night in Cambridge. From the time when I purchased the place until now I have, every year, improved, pulled down and built on to it, continuing the "and" "and" of the advice of the planchette. I made my front door open into the wide untidy road. Mine was the first and is still the only door opening on to it. The road was bordered on each side by backs of gardens and it had no name. I named it Garden Alley and told the Post Office people

that that would be my address, and I described the position of the lane carefully to them. All went well. I received my letters. However not very long afterwards an official letter came to me telling me that I had committed a misdemeanor and must appear before Mr. Alderman Kett, at the Town Hall.

I felt decidedly nervous that day. I was shown into the mayor's parlour. Mr. Kett was standing up before his fire. He did not then ask me to sit down nor did he sit. He addressed me, perhaps with more solemnity than he felt, on the very serious nature of my fault. I, a private person, had presumed to name a road ! Only the Surveyor and his Committee might do that. It was indeed an unheard-of act. I should have waited until the proper authorities had met for such a purpose and I then should have been informed of the name they had decided upon. "I am sorry" I said. "It would have been difficult for me to wait for such a meeting as it was necessary to receive correspondence. I have already informed the post office of the name and have already received letters". "That must be altered. The name you have chosen must on no account be used". "But I have nailed up a board on the wall at the beginning of the road" I said. "The name 'Garden Alley' is on it". Whether it was the mingled guilt and innocence of my action or the way of confessing it I do not know but Mr. Kett first stared at me, then he gasped and then he sat down and laughed. Having laughed he could do no more. He motioned me to sit down and

we talked. I was told to take away the board. He would see that the Post Office should be informed and he promised me that when another name was given to the road I should be told. I tried to take the board down but I could'nt do it. It was Saturday afternoon and my helpers were not available. When I got back on Monday that board had gone. But all the same, ever since, letters addressed to Garden Alley have reached the Studio house and although no name-board has been put up the road is known as Garden Alley to this day.

One day I went to call on Lady (George) Darwin. We sat on the window seat looking over the half-wild beautiful Coe-Fen. Lady George asked me if I had been to Christ's Piece lately. I said that I had been and that I found it immensely improved. I had heard that it was Mr. Kett who had influenced the Council to turn it from a rubbish place into a pleasant garden with flower beds, shrubs and gravel walks. "He would like to do the same by Coe Fen" said Lady George grimly. I exclaimed with horror at such an idea. "You must go and tell him what an artist thinks of that," she continued. The memory of my last interview was strong on me and I demurred. In the end however I promised that I would go to him and see if I could change his mind. It would indeed be a misfortune for the town to lose such a treasure as a piece of natural fen land and that situated so near the heart of Cambridge. It was not only a treasure but almost a unique treasure.

I had a great admiration for Mr. Kett ever since I had

heard of his saving his scaffolding poles at almost the risk of his life. Mr. Kett, I ought to say, was the largest builder of Cambridge. He was then erecting the University buildings in Downing Street. This was the story I was told. It happened on one of those nights when the undergraduates went mad. They caught up, tore down and carried off every stick of wood that they could get hold of to make bonfires. The Museums that were being built were connected with the Market Place by a narrow passage close to the Guildhall. The bonfires were already lit in the Market Place. The undergraduates made an ugly rush down the passage to get to the scaffold poles to feed their fires. Mr. Kett had guessed what they might do and was on the spot to guard his property. His firm figure nearly filled up that narrow way. The flames of the bonfires glared behind an impatient, uproarious crowd of would-be robbers, but only over the stout builder's body should they pass. They shouted to him to give way and there was a movement to prepare to rush over him. Then Mr. Kett called out a few words. They could hardly have been heard except by the few front men but whatever he said seems to have been enough. The mood of those few changed. They shouted "Hurrah for Kett!" They turned on their followers and after a struggle they all swept out shouting "Kett! Kett!" and tore off for posts and palings from other and more helpless owners of such properties.

I decided, owing to my love of the Fen, that I would go and see Mr. Kett. He gave me an interview and he seemed to have

forgiven the naming of the Lane. We talked about the Fen. There was no doubt that he hankered to have it made into a town garden but he must have known the difficulties. I begged for the planting of only willows and poplars, the two trees that Lady (George) Darwin and I had talked over and he at last was quite converted. I was hopeful for I knew that his influence was great. The first poplars were given and planted by Lady George and her family and by Mr. Durnford of Kings. I like to think that I have had a little to do with the present beauty of the Fen. I feel a sort of godmotherly interest in it rightly or wrongly.

After I had settled in my new brick Studio fate smiled on me. I sold more pictures and my classes grew. I had two friend assistants. I started a weaving school in connection with the Studio in an old house in Botolph Lane and kept two Swedish ladies to work it. I painted, taught and designed for my weavers. I worked hard, sometimes too hard, but on the whole my new Studio in the Lane suited me well in mind and body.