

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF AN ELDERLY
WOMAN; PP. 4-270**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649069033

Autobiography of an Elderly Woman; pp. 4-270 by Mary Heaton Vorse

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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*"As soon as you feel too old to do a thing,
do it." — Margaret Deland.*



**BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY**

1911

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

and fathers will always sit up late nights, as we did, discussing the "futures" of their little two-year-old sons.

We tried so hard to do right ; we thought back through the years and said:—

"I felt this and this when I was little. I thought this way and this—such and such things frightened me. My father seemed unjust when he punished me for this offense; my mother made such and such mistakes. I will not make these mistakes with my children."

And so, thinking to avoid all the mistakes of our own parents, we made, all unknowing, fresh mistakes of our own.

When I was little, for instance, I was very much afraid of the dark; so much so that the fears of my childhood

AN ELDERLY WOMAN

haunted my whole life, — an unlighted staircase has terrors for me even to this day. And I made up my mind that no child of mine should suffer from fear of darkness as I did. So my first child had a light in his room. He was always naughty about going to bed, and he grew to be a big boy before I found out that this was because the gray twilight of the room was horrible to him, and that he was very much afraid of the uncertain shapes of the furniture he saw in the dim light of the lamp, though not at all afraid of the dark. It is with such well-intentioned blunders that one brings up one's children.

Grandmothers know that this is so, and for that reason all the various "systems" seem like foolish words to

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

them. They have learned that there will be mistakes made where there are parents and children, — yes, and that there will be cruelties and injustices, and that the only way to deal with very little children is to love them very much and let them feel this love.

The time my children took in growing up seems to me phenomenally short; one day they were babies and the next they were young people to be reckoned with, having wills and personalities of their own. Other mothers tell me that their children grew up as quickly, but this I have hard work to believe.

When my oldest son was nearly a man and the others crowding on his heels, my dear husband died, and my son grew up overnight, and in the next few years — years that were very full ones,

AN ELDERLY WOMAN

for all their sadness — my other children stole a march on me and grew up too; almost, I might say, behind my back. While I was taking on myself the new responsibilities of my so altered life, and while the world seemed yet very empty of companionship, I found that my children were becoming my comrades, and so I entered on the third quarter of my life.

My boys and girls all at once belonged to my generation; we had common interests, common tastes and amusements — for all practical purposes we were the same age. It was at this time that the warning voice sounded in my ear, but I seemed to myself almost as young as my children, so no wonder I did n't recognize it as the voice of age calling to me. It is a very pleasant time

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

when one is still on the great stage of life, playing one's small part shoulder to shoulder with one's children ; shoulder to shoulder, too, with people a score of years one's senior. This is the golden moment when time holds its breath for a while and one imagines that, however old one may get, one will forever stay in spirit at the same smiling "middle way." Age, considered at that time, seems rather the result of some accident or some weakness of will than the result of living a great number of years in the world. So for many years my children and I did our work side by side, I helping and advising them, they aiding and advising me in the common partnership of our lives.

The fourth part of my life, my present life about which I am going to