

**MARY POWELL &
DEBORAH'S DIARY**

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Mary Powell & Deborah's diary by Anne Manning

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ANNE MANNING

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MARY POWELL AND
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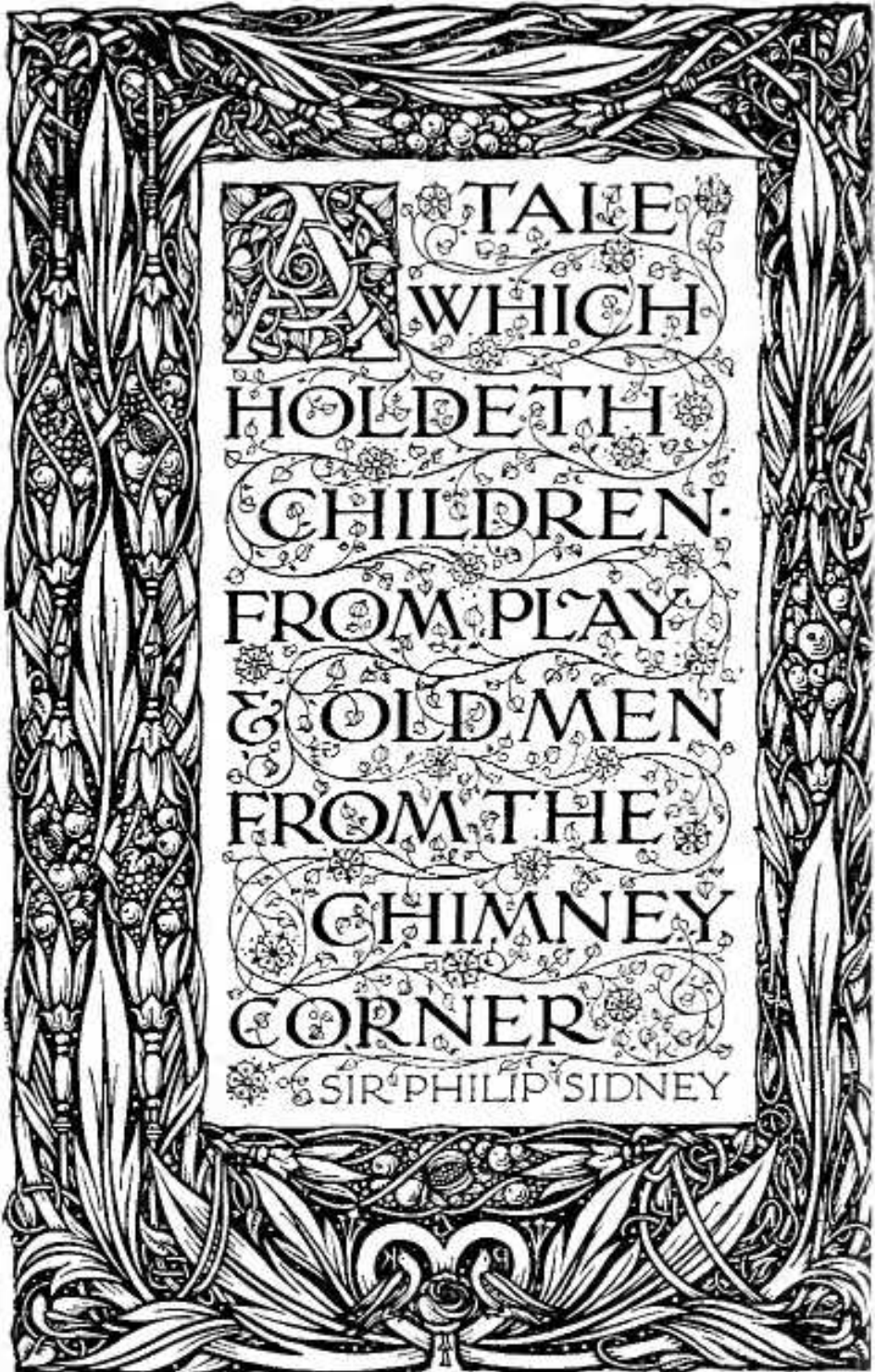
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IN TWO STYLES OF BINDING, CLOTH,
FLAT BACK, COLOURED TOP, AND
LEATHER, ROUND CORNERS, GILT TOP.

LONDON: J. M. DENT & CO.
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.



A TALE
WHICH
HOLDETH
CHILDREN
FROM PLAY
& OLD MEN
FROM THE
CHIMNEY
CORNER
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY



MARY
POWELL &
DEBORAH'S
DIARY *by*
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INTRODUCTION

IN the Valhalla of English literature Anne Manning is sure of a little and safe place. Her studies of great men, in which her imagination fills in the hiatus which history has left, are not only literature in themselves, but they are a service to literature: it is quite conceivable that the ordinary reader with no very keen *flair* for poetry will realise John Milton and appraise him more highly, having read *Mary Powell* and its sequel, *Deborah's Diary*, than having read *Paradise Lost*. In *The Household of Sir Thomas More* she had for hero one of the most charming, whimsical, lovable, heroical men God ever created, by the creation of whose like He puts to shame all that men may accomplish in their literature. In John Milton, whose first wife Mary Powell was, Miss Manning has a hero who, though a supreme poet, was "gey ill to live with," and it is a triumph of her art that she makes us compunctious for the great poet even while we appreciate the difficulties that fell to the lot of his women-kind. John Milton, a Parliament man and a Puritan, married at the age of thirty-four, Mary Powell, a seventeen-year-old girl, the daughter of an Oxfordshire squire, who, with his family, was devoted to the King. It was at one of the bitterest moments of the conflict between King and Parliament, and it was a complication in the affair of the marriage that Mary Powell's father was in debt five hundred pounds to Milton. The marriage took place. Milton and his young wife set up

housekeeping in lodgings in Aldersgate Street over against St. Bride's Churchyard, a very different place indeed from Forest Hill, Shotover, by Oxford, Mary Powell's dear country home. They were together barely a month when Mary Powell, on report of her father's illness, had leave to revisit him, being given permission to absent herself from her husband's side from mid-August till Michaelmas. She did not return at Michaelmas; nor for some two years was there a reconciliation between the bride and groom of a month. During those two years Milton published his pamphlet, *On the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, begun while his few-weeks-old bride was still with him. In this pamphlet he states with violence his opinion that a husband should be permitted to put away his wife "for lack of a fit and matchable conversation," which would point to very slender agreement between the girl of seventeen and the poet of thirty-four. This was that Mary Powell, who afterwards bore him four children, who died in childbirth with the youngest, Deborah (of the *Diary*), and who is consecrated in one of the loveliest and most poignant of English sonnets.

Methought I saw my late-espoused Saint
 Brought to me like Alkestis from the grave,
 Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
 Rescued from death by force, though pale and faint.
 Mine, as whom washed from spot of child-bed taint
 Purification in the Old Law did save;
 And such, as yet once more, I trust to have
 Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
 Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:
 Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight
 Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
 So clear, as in no face with more delight.
 But oh! as to embrace me she inclined,
 I waked; she fled; and Day brought back my Night.

It is a far cry from the woman so enshrined to the child of seventeen years who was without "fit and matchable conversation" for her irritable, intolerant poet-husband.

A good many serious writers have conjectured and wondered over this little tragedy of Milton's young married life: but since all must needs be conjecture one is obliged to say that Miss Manning, with her gift of delicate imagination and exquisite writing, has conjectured more excellently than the historians. She does not "play the sedulous ape" to Milton or Mary Powell: but if one could imagine a gentle and tender Boswell to these two, then Miss Manning has well proved her aptitude for the place. Of Mary Powell she has made a charming creature. The diary of Mary Powell is full of sweet country smells and sights and sounds. Mary Powell herself is as sweet as her flowers, frank, honest, loving and tender. Her diary catches for us all the enchantment of an old garden; we hear Mary Powell's bees buzz in the mignonette and lavender; we see her pleached garden alleys; we loiter with her on the bowling-green, by the fish ponds, in the still-room, the dairy and the pantry. The smell of aromatic box on a hot summer of long ago is in our nostrils. We realise all the personages—the impulsive, hot-headed father; the domineering, indiscreet mother; the cousin, Rose Agnew, and her parson husband; little Kate and Robin of the Royalist household—as well as John Milton and his father, and the two nephews to whom the poet was tutor—and a hard tutor. Miss Manning's delightful humour comes out in the two pragmatistical little boys. But Mary herself dominates the picture. She is so much a thing of the country, of gardens and fields, that