

**ALDERBROOK: A COLLECTION
OF FANNY FORESTER'S
VILLAGE SKETCHES, POEMS,
ETC. IN TWO VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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Alderbrook: A Collection of Fanny Forester's Village Sketches, Poems, Etc. In Two Volumes,
Vol. II by Miss Emily Chubbuck

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MISS EMILY CHUBBUCK

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FANNY FORESTER'S

VILLAGE SKETCHES, POEMS, ETC.

BY

~~MISS~~ EMILY CHUBBUCK.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A L D E R B R O O K .

VOL. II.

THE UNUSEFUL.

MAN is a born equestrian; and from the time when mother Eve fixed her anxious heart on improving her condition, and crushed a world at a single bound, to this present writing, he has never lacked a hobby whereon to exercise to his heart's content. And it is no tame, gentle exercise; for, whatever the hobby may be, and whether well-mounted or otherwise, he not only rides tantivy, but hesitates not to "run through a troop and leap over a wall." We have innumerable hobbies now-a-days; and many of them (to our credit be it said) are of an excellent character. But, poor things! they are ridden down most savagely.

You may have seen, among these poor, jaded, spavined, wind-galled, would-be-racers of beasts of burden, a huge mammoth, with a back like a continent, and legs like those of Mark Antony in Cleopatra's dream. This is a *universal hobby* that men have named USEFULNESS; and such strong claims has it to the suffrages of all but the butterflies, that whoever eschews the wing of the idler, must needs accept a seat. There is no medium, no spot of *terra firma* on which we may stand and labor in quiet, sober earnest; one must either flutter in the air a giddy thing, or gallop away almost as madly on the back of this irresistible hobby. But we do, verily, constitute a goodly array; and so uncompromisingly do we ride down everything that is elegant and beautiful, and indolently lovely, that

we are even in danger of doubting the wisdom of the Deity in placing those soft, sun-draped, luxuriously lazy clouds in the summer heavens; in scattering the idle, balm-breathing flowers so profusely by the way-side; and in sending out the play-loving zephyrs to dally through the live-long day with every bud that has a lip to kiss, and every light-poised leaf that palpitates at its sly whispers, like a lady's boddice at the first word that takes its course from the tip of a lover's tongue into her heart. Yet, our hobby is a most noble beast originally. What a great pity that it should be made so stupidly ungainly by its mad riders! A finer animal never lost its attractiveness by man's re-moulding; and while most of us jolt along upon the back of our spoiled hobby, we leave its *spirit* to the quiet, unassuming ones who close one hand to the labors of the other. What can be more beautiful than USEFULNESS — the great object of our present existence? What more repulsive than the deformed images to which each, according to his particular fancy, gives the name? So many a person, giving up the world to the *ultraists*, who are sent to occupy one of the "human extremes," preserves the *spirit* in its purity, and is most *unusefully useful*.

Of a character somewhat resembling this, was my friend Nora Maylie; though I think that in its formation nature had more to do than principle. To estimate things properly and reasonably requires both maturity of judgment and independence of thought.

Nora Maylie must have been born under an unpromising star, for in infancy she was fair, fat, and good-natured; without any of that unwelcome vivacity, so illustrative of perpetual motion; but with a very knowing look upon her baby features, that told you, at once, the repose of her manner sprang not from a lack of good sense; at least enough of it to place her on a par with other babies. This sensible look was Nora's curse, for it gave her a preëminence over her sisters; and, in proportion to her height was the number of stones cast at her. It was at once decided that she was born to a high destiny; and so she waddled off to school as soon

as her chubby little feet would bear her weight. But physiological promises are deceitful. Nora was not a particularly playful child, and very far from being mischievous; but yet, all through two golden summers of her school-life, she took her daily course from *a* to *zed*, without once dreaming but her whole duty consisted in echoing back, with her own pretty lisp, each letter as it was pronounced for her.

Nora Maylie was the youngest of five daughters, all *professional women*, and notably, eminently *useful*. I will not say that Rachel, the eldest, could make a nice dish of tea, or prepare a delicious jelly for a fevered lip; but she *could* make dresses superbly. She was perfect in her art. Not that she was *obliged* to make dresses—by no means! Old farmer Maylie had enough in scip and granary for his family, with now and then a bit to keep the poor around him from a surfeit of want; but that made no difference. Mrs. Maylie hated, not idleness merely, but a tendency to dwell on the minutiae of life, in preference to taking that decided stand indicative of a *woman of character*. She was herself a notable housewife; and she had always privately regretted that she could boast no higher excellence. She would have liked well to figure more largely than was now in her power—for, on account of the exclusively domestic character of her education, the office of directress in a sewing society was the highest that she had ever been able to assume. She was a sensible woman, however, and not only wisely kept her chagrin to herself, but when she saw that Matilda, her second daughter, evinced a fondness for such vain pursuits as dressing dolls, and painting paper flowers with sorrel-leaves and Indian strawberries, she at once decided that the child had a great genius in the millinery line. Susan and Mary had a predilection for intellectuality, and took to books as readily and naturally as ducks take to the genial pool while yet in pen-feathers; and so, of course, they must be teachers—school-teachers—the most useful of all the multitudes of useful people the world contains. But little Nora, (Mrs. Maylie's diminutive for Eleanora,) as I have said, was an

anomaly. At four, she took patch-work to school; but poor Nora! she could n't see into the philosophy of over-and-over seams. She would rather spread the pretty calicoes on her knee, and admire their bright coloring, or twist them up into dolls with paper heads, and closely-pinned drapery. Then she was particularly given to losing thimbles, and knotting thread; and her needle, however clumsy, was always bent or broken at the point,—the legitimate result of her devotion to badly cracked hickory nuts. And then such stitches! Why the little girls laughed till the tears came into their eyes from very merriment at the sight; but when they saw the big drops standing in hers, they all patted her velvet cheeks lovingly, and smoothed her hanging hair; and if they found her inconsolable, made a chair with their crossed hands and bore her away in triumph to the play-ground. In their wise, confidential talks, they used to say that Nora Maylie was just the dearest little creature in the world, but it was a great pity she could not sew. As some compensation for my little friend's deficiencies, I should like to be able to say that she was a good scholar; but no assertion could have less truth in it,—she was just no scholar at all. And yet I am not certain but a careful observer of human nature, even though less shrewd than the worldly-minded mother, might have detected, in this very backwardness, this refusal to trammel the mind with that which seemed in no wise calculated to enrich it, the germ of a higher order of intellect than common minds appreciate. As it was, however, there was no one near to raise the one fold of ignorance from the beauffying soul beneath; and so Nora was judged by her non-attainments. How heartily she hated the monotonous a, b, c, and the smart, flippant a b ab, e b eb, i b ib, that made her companions' tongues resemble so many mill-clappers. When, by dint of constant dinging, she could make out the words of a few easy sentences, such as "no—man—may—put—off—the—law—of—God," she still evinced the same dead level of intellect, and hated her books, and hated (as poor Mrs. Maylie often despairingly observed) everything that was useful. But Nora