

**WASTE NOT, WANT
NOT STORIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649731381

Waste Not, Want Not Stories by Clifton Johnson

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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CLIFTON JOHNSON

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WASTE NOT, WANT NOT
STORIES

Maria Edgeworth.

RETOLD BY
CLIFTON JOHNSON



NEW YORK • CINCINNATI • CHICAGO
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

INTRODUCTION

THE stories in this volume are from Miss Edgeworth's *The Parents' Assistant*, one of the most famous as well as most charming of old-time children's books. But though *The Parents' Assistant* is recognized as a childhood classic, it is comparatively little read now,—and no wonder with such a title. Judging by that, a person who did not know the book would get the impression that it contained good advice for fathers and mothers in a series of dull essays. You would not suspect it to be the volume of bright, entertaining stories which it really is.

Hence it seems well worth while to make this collection of the best of the stories and put them in a form to attract the youthful reader. The title I have chosen indicates their character. They are all stories with a purpose. They teach thrift and honesty, industry and manliness. We see in them that people feel cheerful and happy when they are employed, and we find in them antidotes for pride, for ill humor, and hastiness of temper, and for the tendency to admire and imitate the fashions of the time being. The stories are dramatic, and arouse hope, fear, and curiosity; there is always brisk conversation and the sentiment is admirable.

Probably nothing better of the sort has ever been written. However, the modern child in dipping into *The Parents' Assistant* would doubtless be somewhat deterred by the superabundance of moralizing which it was the

habit of the period when the book was written to include in children's stories. This preachiness has largely been cut out in editing; for it hurts the interest, and the incidents of the tales point their own morals and do not need any reënforcement. I have also cut out or changed local references and English words and expressions not easily understood by American children. Otherwise I have retained as nearly as possible the original text.

The author of these stories was born January 1, 1767, near Oxford in England. At the age of eight she was sent to a boarding school in Derby, and later she attended a more fashionable school in London, where she went through the course of tortures customary at this period to improve the figure and carriage. The treatment included the wearing of backboards and iron collars; and the attempt was made to increase her height by swinging her by the neck. The swinging was supposed to draw out the muscles, but it failed to be effective, and she continued very small all her life.

She was remembered by her companions at both schools for her entertaining stories. These were told at bedtime, and she learned to know what tale was most successful by the wakefulness it caused. Some of her narrations were taken from memory; for while her friends played she was reading books; but many were original.

Mr. Edgeworth had an estate in Ireland, and when Maria was fifteen he removed thither with his family. There he had determined to dwell permanently, improving his estate, educating his children, and helping the people to better their condition. He had a very large family, and a good deal of the care of the younger Edgeworths fell to Maria; but children were never a burden

to her. Rather, they furnished entertainment and stimulus, and she was always happy in their companionship. She often wrote stories for the amusement of the little ones of the household, and after reading a story aloud to them, if the reception was favorable, she copied it.

The stories were begun with no idea of publication, but in 1796 they were gathered into a printed volume. This was *The Parents' Assistant*, and, in spite of the formidable title, the charm of the stories won for the book an immediate success. The narratives are such genuine bits of life that they have permanent interest. To be sure, the little heroes and heroines are very, very good, and few real children would be able to exercise such self-control and cheerful generosity. Then, too, there is always some benevolent person who appears in the nick of time to distribute rewards or point a moral. But these things do not spoil the stories, and one even feels a certain satisfaction in seeing poetic justice done so unerringly to all concerned.

Miss Edgeworth was a lover of order. She was fastidiously neat in dress, methodical in her habits, and had rare powers of concentration and an uncommonly retentive memory. Her desk was in the large sitting room, where the family, which numbered fifteen or twenty, and the guests, who were often many, were accustomed to gather. The room was also the library and the meeting place of business visitors. But here she wrote her books in the midst of conversation and the noise of her young brothers and sisters; and yet she was noted for her perfect manuscripts.

She was an early riser, and in summer usually came into the breakfast room from a walk in the open air with

her hands full of flowers. After breakfast she wrote till luncheon time, and later occupied herself with her needle, went for a ride, and attended to social and other duties. Warmth of heart and tenderness were notable among her attributes, and tales of distress or of mirth found a quick response in tears and smiles. She was plain of countenance and unpretending in her whole appearance; but those who conversed with her forgot these things by reason of the sweetness of spirit and genius which lighted and gave expression to her features. Her movements were active and alert, and she was always ready to take steps for others. She enjoyed little adventures heartily, and an indomitable youthfulness was characteristic of her even to the age of fourscore.

Miss Edgeworth was loved and respected in all the relations of life, and when she died, May 21, 1849, her death was mourned as a public loss on both sides of the Atlantic.

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