

**THE OLD  
GOVERNESS:  
A STORY. PP. 8-41**

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The Old Governess: A Story. pp. 8-41 by Mrs. S. C. Hall

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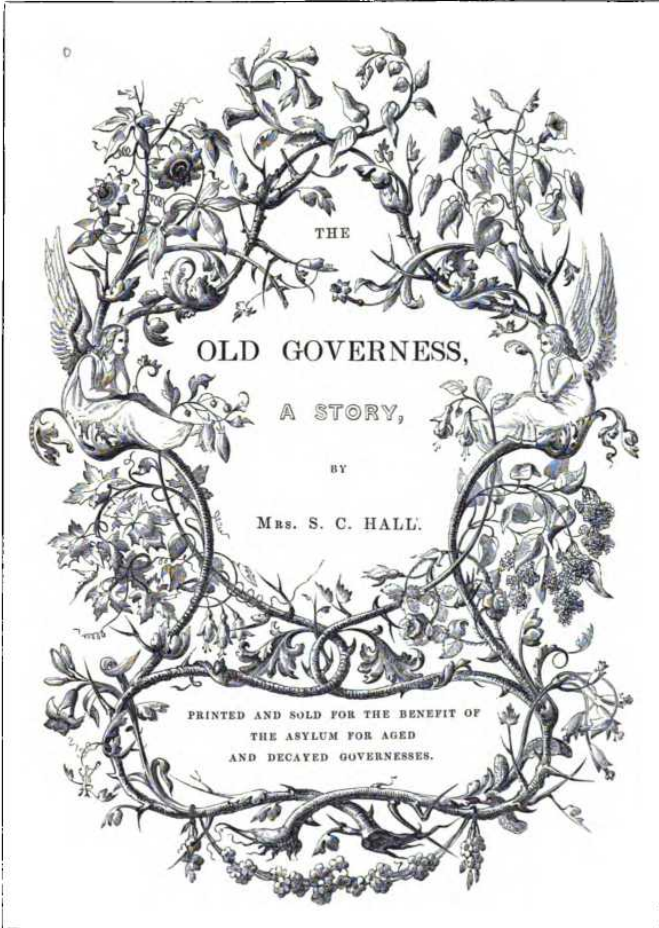
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then to another, caused the sisters to think more of their old Governess, on that particular morning, than they had done for months; the sward was embroidered by the flowers from which she had read to them, as from a book, of the beauties and wonders of creation; the old Roman Way, that skirted the hills, had been the text of many an historical reference, never tiresome; the Monuments of Antiquity which crowd the neighbouring churches, the hallowed residences of great and good persons, the peculiar formation of a stone, the beauty and perfectness of Insect Architecture, every thing around them had been rendered by Miss Maunsell a theme of delight and a source of information, conveyed without the solemn drapery of knowledge—never wearying, but always tempered by a spirit of Christian gentleness, and righteous application to the All-Wise, All-Good, All-Bountiful, All-Redeeming.

"Do you remember our gipsy party in Inchinwell Hole? And how SHE managed all the arrangements?" said Agnes, without saying who was the person alluded to, because each knew the other's thoughts.

"And how she always contrived to oblige every one, as if she was pleasing herself?" added Edith.

"And so she was; it was her greatest pleasure to oblige," sighed Agnes.

"It is strange how she has avoided us," quoth Edith.

"Stranger how we have neglected her," said Agnes; "and that at a time when her health was so precarious. Ah! she loved us better than we loved her! I greatly fear the world has been too much with us."

"My Aunt," resumed Edith after a pause, during which she had been seeking an excuse for herself and sister, "my Aunt said she must have saved money."

"I dare say she did: but not for herself; she had many claims upon her. We really must find her out, Edith. I will consider whom to write to, and write this evening and enquire. I think of her perpetually when I am in the country."

"And so do I, Sister; but in London, one thing or another always comes in the way of thought. We really give ourselves no time there to know any one, or care for anybody."

"We cannot excuse ourselves to ourselves, Edith," said Agnes solemnly. "I have every now and then the picture before me of our Old Governess, so precious to our childhood—so beloved by our Mother—STARVING!"

"Impossible!" said Edith, "quite impossible: think of her talents—her character—her exertions—her activity. Agnes, you do sometimes conjure up such awful phantoms!"

"She was so attentive to things small, as well as great," resumed Agnes, without heeding her sister's observation; "that our dear Mother used to say, that when she died we should hardly miss her; Miss Maunsell was so kind and affectionate—so wise and true. I have often felt my heart beat when overpraised for acquirements she took so much pains to teach. Nothing, as I have said, was too great, or too small for her consideration. I remember when you were ill, and longed for a new doll, her sending express to London

for one; sitting up all night to dress it, and watching you as you played with it in the porch, as if she were your Mother—not your Governess. I cannot but think she must have



written to us lately," persisted Agnes, "she would make more allowance than even we should, for the bustle and excitement in which we have lived. She knows the fascinations that beset young people! Her mind was so generous—her conclusions so just!"

"They were indeed," said Edith in reply to her sister's spoken musings, "but can you, who are so wise, tell me, Agnes, why it is that we more frequently recal to our remembrance the little kindnesses, the small-change courtesies of life, than the great *deeds* the real *sacrifices* made for our advantage? Night and day, in health and in illness, she was with us, year after year, without an hour's holiday."

"I fear, great services are heavy weights on our gratitude," replied the elder sister; "hope leads us to think we can pay back the small ones—yet we cannot; kindnesses may be *exchanged*, but cannot be *paid* for. Poor Miss Maunsell!"

"Now sister!" said Edith, "I really will find her out; our Aunt is not with us to chill

whatever right feeling we possess. Because you are so much older, and better, and wiser than I am—do not look incredulous—"

"I am older certainly," interrupted Agnes, "but in this matter, at all events, neither better, nor wiser; my being older than you is one reason why I should not have suffered three years to elapse since I wrote to Miss Maunsell."

The young ladies had descended the hill, and as they were about to enter their carriage, the footman said—

"Lady Anne, Miss, has driven past; she would not wait for you, as she has brought the Honourable Mr. St. Clair down with her from town."

Agnes Gascoigne was too steady not to be sure-footed, and too accustomed to a carriage to stumble from awkwardness, and yet stumble she did.

"Home, Ladies!" enquired the footman.

"Yes," said Edith, for the eldest sister did not answer as usual.

"The short or the long drive?" asked the persevering footman.

"The long," said Agnes, "and tell the Coachman not to hurry the horses."



"I wonder what brings Mr. St. Clair to Wavetree?" enquired Edith, in an assumed tone of carelessness, "can you tell, Agnes?"

"To shoot," said Agnes.

"I dare say—in July? it may be; but neither Hare, Pheasant, nor Partridge, it would



be contrary to act of Parliament! Can you tell what he will shoot at, or what he will shoot with? Ah, Agnes, you grave guilty one! my sober sister! who never flirts, nor polks, nor waltzes—my grave sister St. Agnes! my monitor perfection! I told you how it would be long ago, I knew you had him safe, quite safe! To shoot does he come? why your heart beats into your throat, and your cheeks! I know the lily is overpowered by the rose. What, ashamed to look your own sister in the face!"

Edith placed her arm round her sister's neck, endeavouring to turn her face towards her; as she did so, a large tear splashed upon her ungloved hand; in a moment, she flung herself at her feet, and no longer trying to gaze on the agitated features of her beloved sister, poured forth in rapid words of deep affection, her entreaties for pardon, her assurance of sympathy, speaking of her having foreseen Mr. St. Clair's love for her darling Agnes long ago; her full and entire approbation of Mr. St. Clair, though she had so often called him Sir Charles Grandison, he was so stately, so over-poweringly proper, and particular. The sisters had perfect confidence in each other, and yet during the last ten days they had never spoken of Mr. St. Clair, *the* Mr. St. Clair who was *almost every* thing even Lady Anne desired. Mr. Gascoigne would be charmed with the high feeling, character and noble fortune of his future son-in-law—and Agnes! Agnes had really been doing all she could during the last season to avoid loving him, while Edith endeavoured to convince her that she ought to do so—that it was evident he loved her; that he was always by her side; that he only praised the music she sung; only looked at the drawings she drew; never danced with any other lady, except when she was engaged.



At length after a drive, which to Edith appeared interminably long, the carriage drew

up at the entrance to the mansion—one of the venerable and ever interesting relics of a past age; of which, happily, so many yet endure in England.

Mr. St. Clair was quite the hero of Miss Gascoigne's imagination, tall and handsome. Edith said, he would be the *beau idéal* of a Bandit if he had only black hair; but he was fair haired, a noble looking, thoughtful Saxon; one whom all must respect and admire, and some few could love with all their hearts. Agnes never had an idea how much she really *did* love him, until his visit was announced, and then—

"What Love wished to be true,  
Hope bade her believe."

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### CHAPTER THE THIRD.



WHEN the sisters alighted, instead of going to the Drawing Room as usual, Agnes walked into the Library, and there, much to her astonishment, was her Aunt: Lady Anne generally read character correctly, and she knew that Agnes would not be sufficiently self-possessed to go at once to the room where Mr. St. Clair probably was.

"My own darling—my sweet child!" she said, kissing her first on the one cheek, then on the other. "I see you know who is here—it is quite a romance! I was coming down to surprise you, and met him by chance, and asked him to let Simons mount his horse, while he came into the Barouch, which he did; I assure you I put the most delicate *leading* questions; but he is a cautious fellow, very—enquired in the most pointed manner for both young ladies, then talked over the season; so I thought as he could only come to Wavotree for *one* purpose, that it was best to send your Papa to him at once."

"Oh, Aunt, how could you?" gasped Agnes.

"How could I!" repeated her Aunt, "how could I not, you mean, So I routed your

Father into the Drawing Room, and there they are! Now go and take off your bonnet and arrange your hair, and assume an air of perfect unknowingness; send Edith to me to be kept quiet, and then come to this room again. Charming! I only wish his poor dear father was not quite so stout of his age, though strong lives are by no means the longest." Agnes did not, could not, reply; if Mr. St. Clair intended following up his attentions, why had he not spoken to Lady Anne; then she remembered he did not like Lady Anne! she knew his dislike to superficial ladies. What could bring him to Wavetree, except to declare his attachment? She tried to divert her thoughts by gazing



around the library upon the old family portraits, by which it was profusely decorated. The effort was vain. She heard her Father limping across the hall; she knew the sound of the bell, when it was pulled by his hand; her fingers trembled amid her ringlets, she bathed her eyes, but the lids continued red and swollen: her maid entered:

"Would Miss Gascoigne go to the Drawing Room?" By a violent effort she regained her self-possession and descended; at the corner of a corridor she again encountered her Aunt; the sylph-like old lady flattered mid-way between anger and perplexity, now inclining to the one, now to the other.

"He has said nothing to your Father, my dear, that I can make out," she whispered, "only asked some questions about, about—"

"About what, Aunt?"

"The proportions of guano used in the Rosarium!"

Agnes lifted her lovely eyes to the sharp face of her Aunt.