

**THE MORGESONS;  
A NOVEL**

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The Morgesons; a novel by Elizabeth Stoddard

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**ELIZABETH STODDARD**

**THE MORGESONS;  
A NOVEL**





Portrait of Elizabeth Stoddard  
from a  
Daguerreotype.

THE  
MORGESONS

*A NOVEL*

BY  
ELIZABETH STODDARD  
AUTHOR OF "TWO MEN," "TEMPLE HOUSE," ETC.

"Time is a clever devil."--BALZAC

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REVISED EDITION

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HENRY T. COATES & CO

1901

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## PREFACE.

I suppose it was environment that caused me to write these novels ; but the mystery of it is, that when I left my native village I did not dream that imagination would lead me there again, for the simple annals of our village and domestic ways did not interest me; neither was I in the least studious. My years were passed in an attempt to have a good time, according to the desires and fancies of youth. Of literature and the literary life, I and my tribe knew nothing; we had not discovered "sermons in stones." Where then was the panorama of my stories and novels stored, that was unrolled in my new sphere? Of course, being moderately intelligent I read everything that came in my way, but merely for amusement. It had been laid up against me as a persistent fault, which was not profitable; I should peruse moral, and pious works, or take up sewing,—that interminable thing, "white seam," which filled the leisure moments of the right-minded. To the *personnel* of writers I gave little heed; it was the hero they created that charmed me, like Miss Porter's gallant Pole, Sobieski, or the ardent Ernest Maltravers, of Bulwer.

I had now come to live among those who made

books, and were interested in all their material, for all was for the glory of the whole. Prefaces, notes, indexes, were unnoticed by me,—even Walter Scott's and Lord Byron's. I began to get glimpses of a profound ignorance, and did not like the position as an outside consideration. These mental productive adversities abased me. I was well enough in my way, but nothing was expected from me in their way, and when I beheld their ardor in composition, and its fine emulation, like "a sheep before her shearers," I was dumb. The environment pressed upon me, my pride was touched; my situation, though "tolerable, was not to be endured."

Fortunate or not, we were poor. It was not strange that I should marry, said those who knew the step I had taken; but that I should follow that old idyl; and accept the destiny of a garret and a crust with a poet, was incredible! Therefore, being apart from the diversions of society, I had many idle hours. One day when my husband was sitting at the receipt of customs, for he had obtained a modest appointment, I sat by a little desk, where my portfolio lay open. A pen was near, which I took up, and it began to write, wildly like "Planchette" upon her board, or like a kitten clutching a ball of yarn fearfully. But doing it again—I could not say why—my mind began upon a festival in my childhood, which my mother arranged for several poor old people at Thanks-

giving. I finished the sketch in private, and gave it the title of "A Christmas Dinner," as one more modern. I put in occasional "fiblets" about the respectable guests, Mrs. Carver and Mrs. Chandler, and one dreadful little girl foisted upon me to entertain. It pleased the editor of *Harper's Magazine*, who accepted it, and sent me a check which would look wondrous small now. I wrote similar sketches, which were published in that magazine. Then I announced my intention of writing a "long story," and was told by him of the customs that he thought I "lacked the constructive faculty." I hope that I am writing an object lesson, either of learning how, or not learning how, to write.

I labored daily, when alone, for weeks; how many sheets of foolscap I covered, and dashed to earth, was never told. Since, by my "infinite pains and groans," I have been reminded of Barkis, in "David Copperfield," when he crawled out of his bed to get a guinea from his strong box for David's dinner. Naturally, I sent the story to *Harper's Magazine*, and it was curtly refused. My husband, moved by pity by my discouragement, sent it to Mr. Lowell, then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. In a few days I received a letter from him, which made me very happy. He accepted the story, and wrote me then, and afterwards, letters of advice and suggestion. I think he saw through my mind, its struggles, its ignorance, and its ambition. Also I got my guinea