

MERICAS, AND OTHER STORIES

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Mericas, and Other Stories by Clementina Black

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CLEMENTINA BLACK

**MERICAS, AND
OTHER STORIES**

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AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

CLEMENTINA BLACK,
AUTHOR OF "A SUSSEX IDYL," "ORLANDO."



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NOTICE.

Two of the stories contained in this volume have already been published, one in the *University*, and one in the *New Quarterly Magazine*. The others are printed now for the first time.

C. B.

Brighton, September, 1886.

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Mercus.

[The true circumstances on which this story is based may be found in the fifth volume of Nichol's "Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century."]

I WAS born at Lisbon in the year 1729, being the seventh and youngest daughter of Miguel Armento, a merchant of that city. My mother died when I was but a few months old. My father was by no means wealthy ; the cares of his business absorbed him almost wholly ; my elder sisters were so much older than myself that they were rather my teachers than my companions, and those who were nearer to my own age were pursuing their education in convents. I eagerly looked forward to the day when I also should be placed in a convent to learn the beautiful embroidery stitches of Erminia, and, perhaps, if I had a good voice, to sing like Isabella. But fate had other designs for me. One day, when I was about eight years old, I was sitting in my father's counting-house which adjoined our

house, and whither I often strayed for want of companionship, when two gentlemen came in. One was a little, yellow, good-humoured looking man, whom I knew and who seemed to me very old—far older, indeed, than at the present time I take him to be now. The other was a stranger, tall, and of a fair complexion. I remember that I noticed the excessive whiteness of his hands, as compared with my own little brown ones. I remember, too, that he wore a black ribbon, tied at his throat, instead of a lace cravat, and that this was the first instance which I had seen of that mode. His dress was of a dark plum-colour and his light-brown hair unpowdered. Children cannot judge of age. Mr. Godstone's appeared to me considerable enough to inspire awe. I know now that he must have been a few years over twenty.

My father was absent, and in his place sat I, like some elvish creature, watching the strangers out of my dark eyes. The young man looked at me with a kindly air, and leaning his arms upon the table which divided us, asked me my name. He spoke slowly and with a strange accent. I answered him "Mericas," and he began to tell me that he had a little niece of about my age—how old was I, six?

I explained with dignity that I was already eight years old, and, my father coming in, bade me run to my sisters. Mr. Godstone, with a bow and smile, opened the counting-house door for me, and I went upstairs to tell Erminia and Isabella that I had

seen a man in the counting-house who had light hair and spoke strangely, like St. George in the story book.

I soon heard that Mr. Godstone had asked my father's permission for me to visit his little niece, who was as much in need of a playfellow as myself. My father gladly consented, for Mr. Godstone belonged to a firm of English merchants equally wealthy and honourable, and Madame Rolandi, his sister, was accounted one of the most distinguished and beautiful women in Lisbon. She was the widow of a Swedish gentleman, who had been resident in the city, and who had left her but ill-provided for. The generosity of her brother, however, prevented her from experiencing the least inconvenience. She resided in his house and ruled it and him with absolute sway. A sister-in-law, the widow of his elder brother, with her orphan son and daughter, were also dependent upon Mr. Godstone, who, by the death of his father and brother, was left to face the world unaided, and to bear the burdens of all the family. Madame Rolandi was a few years his senior, and at the time when I first beheld her was certainly a most beautiful woman. She was, like her brother, tall and fair, and of a most majestic carriage. The cast of their features had also much resemblance, but nature seemed to have erred in the allotment of their dispositions, for while Madame Rolandi was of a masculine temper, imperious and commanding,