

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS; OR,
HINTS TO
THOSE WHO WOULD
MAKE HOME HAPPY**

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First Impressions; Or, Hints to Those Who Would Make Home Happy by Mrs. Ellis

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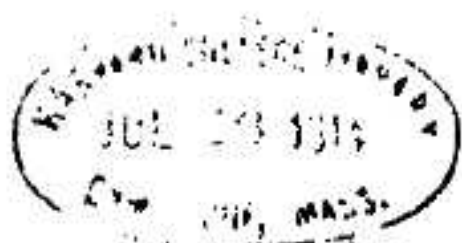
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BY MRS. ELLIS,

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Lindsay Swift,
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FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

CHAPTER I.



HOW much the poetic character of all external objects depends upon the manner in which they are presented to our observation! A wandering artist, or even a poet in search of the picturesque, would probably have paused at the nearest stile, and fixed his enraptured gaze upon the village church of Heatherstone, as a subject scarcely to be rivalled for a sketch, or a poem. The old trees which skirted the churchyard, the high gray tower, and the gravestones, new and old, were real objects in the scene; and his imagination could easily supply the ivy for the ancient porch, the white marble or the green

turf for the venerated tombs, and the silent mourner stealing from the public gaze to shed her tears unseen.

Far different were the associations of Owen Meredith, curate of Heatherstone, as he looked toward that desecrated scene. To him the gray walls of the old church were bleak and bare, and the unclothed porch the reverse of poetical; for there sat the beggars who were not in want, and there, too, the sturdy laborer would sometimes smoke his pipe on week-day evenings, while his children played about among the graves—graves so dry and dusty, and so worn with the trampling of reckless feet, that the curate hastened past them with a feeling of disgust, to think the dead should be thus dishonored.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, Owen was a poet, and would have been a painter too, had his fingers ever been practised in that magic art. Perhaps it was his misfortune that he was so, for many plain and common things, which the rest of the world was not only satisfied, but pleased with, failed to gratify his taste, and therefore failed to give him pleasure. Nor was this all: they too often inflicted upon him positive annoyance, from which he shrunk back into himself, like one who smarts under some real

and intended injury. Thus the sufferings of Owen Meredith were without end, and yet to have seen him in those rare moments when he was made happy, his buoyant step, the easy movements of his slight and agile figure, his animated but delicate complexion, and the flash of his bright blue eyes, set off by clustering curls of soft brown hair, one would have supposed him a personification of youth and life, with all its natural powers of thought and feeling in lively and healthy exercise. And so in fact he might have been, had not his mind been warped in early youth, either by some adverse circumstances which attended his first entrance upon life, or from association with other minds whose healthy tone was gone.

The worst perversion of all, was one which may as well be told in plain words; and though no one would have denied the fact more indignantly than Owen himself, it was not less true that he would have liked to be a hero—yes, a hero of the Corsair character, the true “sallow sublime,” with pale brow, raven hair, and curling lip, to make the many quail before him. We grant that this particular style of hero is a little out of fashion now, but it must be remembered that twenty years at least have elapsed since Owen Meredith was curate of Heatherstone.

Having specified the kind of hero which Owen, in the secret of his bosom, wished to be, or rather regretted he could not be, it is scarcely necessary to describe what was his chagrin each time he contemplated his person in the glass, or compared his figure with that of other men, to see that he was not only fair, but absolutely rosy—not only slender, but absolutely below—yes, the twentieth part of an inch below the full stature of a man.

There are few words in our vocabularies either less understood, or less frequently applied to their right use, than humility, and vanity. Persons are called humble when they think too meanly of themselves, and vain when they think too highly. Would it not be more correct to say, that humility consists in not thinking of one's self at all, and that nothing proves so much the absence of vanity, as a right estimate of our merits as well as our defects? That there is an intense and absorbing vanity perpetually occupied in thinking meanly of its possessor, it would not be difficult to prove; and though the character we have already described had too much good sense and good feeling to go to this extreme, he was as much pained and mortified at not being what he wished to

be, as he would have been gratified and elated had the object of his ambition been attained.

With such an estimate of himself, or rather with a fixed opinion that he was the exact opposite of all he most admired in others, there was no wonder that he should shrink from society whenever it came within his reach, and the more attractive it was the more he shunned it, firmly believing that he was more diminutive and more insignificant than any one he met. It is true the village belles considered him a perfect model of beauty, but that only piqued his vanity the more, for few things are more irritating than to be admired for the thing we most despise in ourselves.

Lest our clergyman should be reflected upon for having nothing better to do than fill his head with these trifles, we will turn to other scenes in his life, for Owen was a character which deserves to occupy a nobler page of human history than that in which he has already figured.

Let us then follow him home after his public services in the sanctuary on a Sunday afternoon in summer. Home, did we say? It was a mere lodging in one of a row of small brick houses, separated from the public road by a strip of garden-ground, a paling, and a little gate, beside which grew a tall red hollyhock.