

Violetta Burgess by her husband, Samuel John Sawbridge Stableford



Violetta was born in "Langton's Row", the Jetty, Chapel Street, Enderby on the 15th of February, 1864.

She was a delicate child from birth. Infantile sickness of one sort or other seemed to mark her for its attacks. On two separate occasions while she was still a child, a neighbour was hurriedly summoned to "Lay her out", as it was thought her end had come, but she rallied and gained in health as the years went by.

While quite a child, at about two years old, she was sent to a "Dame's" school, kept by an old lady named Mrs. Cook while her Mother worked a stocking frame in addition to carrying out her household duties.

At this school were a number of other children of similar age, all of whom were taught the most elementary of lessons, a sort of kindergarden school, where, in addition to this rudimentary training, they were engaged in learning the arts of sewing, mending, knitting etc. The school fees for each child were 2d a week. The 'school' was a cottage situate at the junction of Gumley Square and the lane known as "Back-side".

When Violetta left this humble establishment, poor old Mrs. Cook was greatly distressed because, as she quaintly said "All my best pupils are leaving me." She left at the age of five to graduate to the village 'Church' elementary school where she made good, normal progress under the tuition of Mr. Birmingham, head master, for whom she always had great praise, his singing lessons to the children being to her a pleasurable memory to the end of her long life. She would often please her children by recalling in song, the tunes which Mr. Birmingham had taught her in girlhood days.

She left school finally at twelve or thirteen to take her place as 'winder' with her Father until she was old enough to work in a frame herself. When these became obsolete, she learned to work the newly invented Griswold machine which she continued to do till marriage.

She was, apparently, a bit of a tom-boy in her girlhood for she took great delight, in later years, in recounting some of her exploits, especially in roaming the fields, birdsnesting, stile-jumping, risking her life on a thinly-frozen pond, begging (quite unnecessarily) in company with Clara Webster, from the nearby big house, playing tricks on other girls, and the like. Our children will be able to recall amusing stories on these lines, told by herself.

She grew in health and stature as the years went by, but her early illnesses had taken their toll for she was a short, sturdy body, somewhat slow in movement, but with a ready brain, and had the best memory for events of any person I ever knew. Whenever there was an element of doubt regarding the time of any particular happening, the case in point was immediately made clear when referred to her decision, and it became usual, when in doubt, for members of the family to say, "Ask Mother".

She learned to play the piano creditably, and was, before marriage, for a long time organist at the Methodist Chapel, and, for a number of years, a member of the Choir. Her voice was contralto.

Her sister Anne inherited her father's appearance, and smooth, quiet disposition; Violetta was a mixture of both her parents, possessing her father's nose, mouth and chin but her mother's cranium. She always had her mother's dominating personality, but in a refined form. She had a "mind of her own" which, once she had come to a conclusion on any matter, she doggedly adhered to it and no amount of persuasion, or argument, could take any effect on her decision.

She was extremely cautious, undemonstrative and critical; her heart was never "carried on her sleeve", her emotions were deep-seated, silent and strong, so silent that she was rarely caught in any demonstration of affection towards those whom she loved, and she was incapable of weeping. Although there were many times in our joint experiences which might very reasonably have occasioned a flood of tears, I never remember seeing her weep; the nearest approach to this was an occasional choking sob. On the other hand, she could be extremely severe in her judgment of what she considered delinquencies in the conduct of others. She was deeply religious in a quiet way, on occasion very generous and lovable.

In appearance she was good looking without aspiring to beauty, with a wealth of almost black hair, low but broad forehead revealing the practical, silent strength of character which she possessed. She had no leanings towards Society, rarely visiting the houses of even her friends, and she rarely welcomed any into her home except the fortunate few of her nearest intimates.

Her house, and her family, were the centre and circumference of her desires and activities, and to these she devoted herself with faithful purpose and abandon. She was, in the truest sense, a good and faithful wife and devoted Mother, and being these, her heart and her life demanded little or nothing more. Home and family were sufficient, but in these things she excelled.

In late middle life she was a great sufferer from neuritis, especially in her arm and shoulder. Always nervous to a degree she later suffered from loss of hearing, eventually in deafness which became almost total in her last long drawn-out illness, making it very difficult for anyone to give to her the

consolation she greatly needed, for - more than anything else - she dreaded passing to the future life alone. If she could but have taken me (her husband) with her she would have been content, but to leave me behind was gall and bitterness indeed.

I attended her truly and faithfully as I possibly could to the last, and almost her last coherent words to me were, as she looked longingly into my face: "Faithful to the last", and again, as Grace and I bent over to catch her final message, she rallied and with a smile that illumined her face, she said very distinct]y to each of us: "God bless you", and then passed to a coma lasting some days from which she never rallied.

She passed to the Homeland on 20th July, 1945. We laid her body to rest in Enderby Non-Conformist Cemetery on the 23rd July. The Rev. Frank Holmes officiated.

