

Pig, Old China, Poor Relations, South Sea House, Imperfect sympathies, A Chapter on Ears, Mockery End, Dream Children, Grace before Meat and Praise of Chimney sweepers etc.

Prescribed Essays

(1) DREAM CHILDREN

Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditional great-uncle, or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grand-mother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene— so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country— of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad or the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Red-breasts; till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining country; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if someone were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, 'that would be foolish indeed' And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psalter by heart, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-