



*By the courtesy of Mrs. Rudd*  
BUST OF ELIZABETH COLTMAN

**THE COLTMANS OF THE  
NEWARKE AT LEICESTER**

**BY FLORENCE E. SKILLINGTON**

**WITH AN EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT**

**BY S. H. SKILLINGTON**

#### REFERENCES IN THE FOOTNOTES

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# The Coltmans of the Newarke at Leicester

By Florence E. Skillington

IN the month of February, 1894, Miss Alicia Cooper died at Leicester in her eightieth year. She had lived in the town practically all her life, so she had a lively recollection of many persons and events of her own time, and, having grown up among people much older than herself, she had almost as vivid an impression of much that had taken place before she was born. In her old age she wrote her reminiscences in three manuscript books, which have been carefully preserved by her nieces, the daughters of the late Mr. G. B. Franklin. Mr. Franklin is well remembered in Leicester as the founder and proprietor of Stoneygate School, which is still carried on by his descendants. The informal chronicle that has thus come down to us begins with the marriage of Alicia Cooper's great-grandparents, John and Bridget Coltman, in 1752, O.S., and ends with a short account of Alicia herself, written after her death by her niece, Miss Constance Franklin.

The period under review, therefore, includes the Napoleonic, Crimean and Franco-Prussian wars, to none of which the slightest reference is to be found in any of the three books, and the Industrial Revolution. During the time noticed by Miss Cooper, the population of Leicester increased from some nine thousand to about a hundred thousand persons, for long journeys the horse was superseded by the railway-train, the clothes of the lower classes came to be made of cotton instead of wool,<sup>1</sup> and the local production of food shrank into being an almost negligible factor in the life of the town. In the eighteenth century, every Wednesday and Saturday, Leicester was thronged with people from the surrounding country, who came to the regular markets held on those days, to sell such commodities as corn, fodder, cattle, sheep, poultry, pigeons, dairy produce and fresh vegetables. Farmers could be distinguished at a glance by the speckled grey

<sup>1</sup>Gardiner, III, p. 15.

cloth, made from the wool of black sheep, which practically all of them affected,<sup>2</sup> and the gentry were as easily recognised by the greater brilliance of their apparel, the height of their heels and the elaboration of their head-dresses.<sup>3</sup>

In those early days of Leicester's industrial expansion, the well-to-do middle classes had leisure, which most of them employed in pleasant and dignified ways. They dined at each other's houses, arranged musical evenings and card parties, and, in the summer, many of them rode out into the country, perhaps to witness a sheep-shearing or to join in a harvest supper. In the town there were numerous annual feasts, the chief of them being the mayor's banquet, which had a long tradition behind it. Good concerts were organised by musical enthusiasts, notably Joseph Cradock and William Gardiner, and from time to time theatrical performances were given by professional actors in the old Assembly Rooms.<sup>4</sup> Manufacturers often visited London and other large towns on business, and as frequently entertained intelligent men whose affairs brought them to Leicester. Consequently, they were much less provincial in their outlook than might be expected, and many of them were keenly interested in the scientific developments and the new social and political theories of their time. The congregation of the Great Meeting particularly fostered advanced views on political and religious liberty, though in practice they were often censorious of the individual conduct and belief of their neighbours.

One of the trustees of the Great Meeting was Alicia Cooper's great-grandfather, John Coltman, who was a hosiery manufacturer and lived in a house in the Newarke.<sup>5</sup> This house, which

<sup>2</sup>Gardiner, III, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup>Gardiner, III, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>This theatre was built outside the East Gate of the town in 1750. "The building . . . consisted mainly of a large upper room supported on columns and facing the Humberstone Gate. The other end, looking towards High Street, was occupied by one or more shops." It was superseded in 1800 by a theatre adjoining the existing Assembly Rooms (now known as the County Rooms), which gave way, in its turn, to the Theatre Royal.—Billson, pp. 103, 109, 115.

<sup>5</sup>At this time there flourished in Leicester another John Coltman and Anne, his wife. These people, who lived in St. Nicholas Street, belonged to a firm of dyers and bleachers, and they had at least four children:—John, Samuel, Elizabeth and Mary Anne. Both families worshipped at the Great Meeting and supported the same good causes. There was a connection between them, though they did not consider themselves relations.



THE COLTMAN HOUSES FROM THE NORTH-EAST

*Photo—A. Newton & Sons*



had extensive grounds, stood to the south of the Trinity Hospital, on the site formerly occupied by the collegiate church of the Annunciation of our Lady, traces of which were discernible in the cellars. It is probable that John Coltman was born at Wigston Magna, where he owned land to the value of about two thousand, five hundred pounds. On the 28th of March, 1752, O.S., he married Bridget Litherland, who came from the neighbourhood of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and settled in the Newarke.

John Coltman prospered in business, from which he virtually retired some years before the end of his life. As he had literary tastes and possessed a fair-sized library he did not lack employment. Among his books were well-bound folio editions of the works of Josephus, Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and Matthew Henry's *Commentary*. He was himself the author of several religious pamphlets, written "in a quaint and aphoristic style", and by more practical means he promoted numerous good works. He shared with his friend, Mr. Lewis, and others the responsibility of founding the Millstone Lane chapel, the first Wesleyan place of worship in Leicester,<sup>6</sup> and, with his family, was an enthusiastic supporter, from its foundation in 1798, of the Female Asylum, which adjoined his house. In 1780 or thereabouts, he visited every householder in the town, to find out how many persons (nearly thirteen thousand was his figure) would benefit by the cutting of the projected Leicester canal. This enterprise, which connected Leicester with the Derbyshire coalfields, was opposed, not without reason, by certain landed proprietors; but in 1791 it was carried into effect.<sup>7</sup> During the years 1789 and 1790, the citizens of Leicester had a lively controversy about the Corporation and Test Acts. A strong committee of prominent non-conformists, among them John Coltman, agitated for the repeal of those sections of the Acts which precluded Protestant non-conformists from performing official duties in the town. The mayor and his brethren in Common Hall vehemently opposed any change.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Coltman appears to have lived until about the turn of the century. Alicia Cooper gives the following brief account of his end:—

<sup>6</sup>John Wesley preached in the Millstone Lane chapel, or Tabernacle, on 1st August 1770, 20th March 1772, 24th March 1774, and some time in 1790.—Thompson, pp. 141, 151, 266, 267.

<sup>7</sup>Gardiner, II, p. 820.

<sup>8</sup>Thompson, II, pp. 195, 196.



The last illness of John Coltman was short, and his faculties to the last were preserved entire. "I have come", said he, "to the Delectable Hills. Lift my hand to praise His Name! Lift my hand to praise His Name!" And in this happy frame he departed, being more than eighty years of age.

John Coltman's wife, Bridget Litherland (1716-1802), was pleasant in appearance and gentle in her ways. She was also an excellent manager, ordering her household with discretion and her charities with knowledge. She spun a large proportion of her own domestic linen; for, when she was a young wife, it was customary to have spinning wheels in the parlour. Spinning was also the constant occupation of women in humbler circumstances. On fine evenings, as an old member of our Society was told by an aged relative, the housewives of Oxford Street would regularly sit working at their front doors. One of them would start a favourite song as she plied her wheel, another would take it up; and soon the whole street would be melodious with their singing. Fine labour-work on muslin was, at the time of which we are speaking, a fashionable accomplishment for gentlewomen; and, many years after her death, one of Bridget's aprons, produced by this method, was found by her great-granddaughter. Another of Mrs. Coltman's acquirements was a useful knowledge of elementary medicine, which she practised with the help of a small stock of herbs, lotions and ointments. She was in the habit of making up simple draughts, which she gave to people who could not afford a doctor, or whose ailments were too slight to need one. No doubt most of her prescriptions were orthodox enough; but on one occasion she treated her young daughter Elizabeth, who appeared to be suffering from incipient consumption, with a very curious remedy. Early on spring mornings she would go out into her garden, with a china cup in one hand and a silver spoon in the other, and make a choice selection of white snails. These were pounded with cream, and the unfortunate child had to toss off the mixture an hour or so before breakfast. However, Elizabeth, of whom there will be more to relate, lived to tell the tale of her sufferings.

The good Bridget was not more lenient to herself in matters of healing than she was to others, and there were times when she

displayed remarkable physical courage. One winter, when she was recovering from a broken leg, her doctor recommended cold bathing to strengthen the limb. There happened to be, in an extensive shrubbery which formed part of the family's grounds in the Newarke, an old bathing-house, supplied with water from the Soar, which was known as "the Roman Bath". Thither she was wont to go, on her crutches, "as often as was proper, a man having frequently preceded her with a long pole to break the ice". On another occasion, when she was going up some steps with a china dish in her hand, she slipped and fell. The dish was broken, and one of the pieces made a deep cut in her knee. Having been helped to rise, she said to her daughter: "My dear, bring me a needle and thread"; and, before the doctor reached the house, she had herself sewed up the wound.

At eighty years of age Mrs. Coltman was still active and energetic, and was often the first of her household to be downstairs in the morning. She was averse to discord of any kind, and the phrase: "We must bear and forbear", was often on her lips. The calm religious fortitude she displayed in her short last illness is thus described by her daughter Elizabeth:—

As she was sitting with her family at tea on the Thursday, she was seized with a slight paralytic affection. Eager to dissipate the fears of those about her, she assured them, with the most perfect cheerfulness, that she did not feel ill. Finding that she could not walk with her usual agility, she was assisted in getting upstairs, and then said, without the least tremor, "I think I have had a paralytic stroke". On being asked by a near relative, shortly after, how she did, she replied, in a lively and triumphant manner, "My dear, I am not in heaven yet, but I soon shall be". Friday morning a second violent attack produced the most alarming symptoms. Though still able to speak, not a complaint escaped her—her lips seemed not formed to murmur. She said she was "in good hands", and calmly entered on the everlasting rest as the Saturday closed.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Alicia Cooper quotes this passage from an obituary notice published in the *Monthly Magazine* for November, 1802.

John and Bridget Coltman had three daughters:—Anne (1753-1788), Mary (1757-1834), and Elizabeth (1761-1838). Anne married Edward Cooper and settled in Leicester; Mary became the wife of John Grew, and, after living for a time at Birmingham, emigrated to Boston, New England; Elizabeth, who was the beauty and the wit of the family, remained a spinster all her life.

Edward Cooper (1754-1818), the husband of Anne, came of a family that had been settled at Great Glen, in the county of Leicester, since the seventeenth century. One of these Coopers, also named Edward, was in 1662 ejected from the vicarage of Great Glen, which he had held since 1657, because he found himself unable to comply with the Act of Uniformity. John Coltman, in preparation for the marriage of his daughter Anne, added a new wing to the northern side of his house in the Newarke. This wing, which included a portion of John Coltman's own residence, formed a separate dwelling, which faced the Trinity Hospital, and became the home of Edward and Anne Cooper from their marriage. Mr. Coltman also took his son-in-law into partnership, and, as the young couple were devoted to each other, their prospects appeared to be rosy. Edward Cooper, who did not lack business ability, invented the "Berlin pieces", an appliance said to have been much used in the manufacture of gloves. His disposition and manners were such as to recommend him to his wife's friends, and to make him welcome in company. Anne, who had been educated in a boarding-school at Stoke Newington, had a sweet and gentle disposition, and, in the opinion of an old servant, "she was very pleasant to look at". For all that, she possessed a mind of her own, as appears from her taking what was, for a young woman brought up as she had been, the very serious step of leaving the Great Meeting and placing herself under the spiritual guidance of the Rev. Thomas Robinson, the vicar of St. Mary's de Castro.

One of Anne Cooper's most valued friends was a certain Miss Anne Tozer, a generous supporter of the Great Meeting.<sup>10</sup> This lady died when she was quite young, and bequeathed to Mrs. Cooper a counterpane and bed-hangings, worked in crewels, and

<sup>10</sup>During her lifetime she gave half the money for enlarging the graveyard at the Great Meeting, and in her will she bequeathed the remainder and £30 for the poor.—*A History of the Great Meeting*, by Herman Thomas, pp. 84, 88.

three beautiful dresses that had been prepared for her own wedding, the celebration of which appears to have been prevented by her untimely death. These dresses were afterwards stored in a large trunk, covered with the skin of a bay pony that had been a favourite of Edward and Anne Cooper's son George. The dresses are described by Alicia as having had

laced-up bodices, sleeves to the elbows, and immensely long stomachers; these, with the very high-heeled shoes to match, were the wonder and the admiration of our childish eyes. Two of the gowns were of thick satin—rose colour and light olive green. The other was a rich cream-coloured damask silk with small clusters of rose buds. (We had a bonnet each out of this dress, at which posterity may smile if they will!)

There is still in existence a letter from Anne Cooper to her friend Miss Tozer. It is dated the 25th of June, 1781, and was written upon Mrs. Cooper's return from a visit to her married sister, Mary Grew, at Birmingham. As it contains two thousand words, it would be tedious to print it in full; but it is worth quoting, because it tells something of the writer's character and circumstances, and, besides describing the state of her health, relates the curious episode of the military officer, and the sadly unconventional behaviour of her husband when he met her in the street :—

You are very kind, my Dear Friend, to favour me with so long a Letter so soon after our separation. . . . I wrote you a hasty Line from Birming<sup>m</sup> at a time when I was very indifferent. I got better in a few days but was persuaded by Mr. Grew and my sister, whose intention was to oblige, to ride on Horseback to Leasowes,<sup>11</sup> it is not more than 7 miles, but the Horse shook me a great deal and brought the pain in my breast which has been better and worse ever since, though I thank God much easier this morning. Mr. Cooper will make himself unhappy about it, I did not mention it to him until I was obliged to it, but I am more easy about it than when I left you as the Pain is not in the same part as then, which I hope is a good Symptom (*sic*). . . . I set out

<sup>11</sup>The poet Shenstone's home.

from Birmingham<sup>m</sup> last Tuesday between 6 and 7 o'clock had 4 horses to draw only myself and Luggage. I was much pleased to enjoy my own thoughts without interruption as I was not in a trifling Chit-chat humour but my pleasing Reverie was disturbed when I had travelled about 8 miles with the entrance of an Officer, who had the most Rakish appearance I ever saw, I was rather frightened at first, but recalling that I ought not to appear so I answered his Questions about the Country, etc, with a tolerable degree of fortitude; after viewing me very attentively for some time he ventured to take hold of my hand, which I hastily withdrew from him, and though I did not speak let him know by my manner it was far from agreeable—this had a good effect . . . . After we arrived at Coventry I got rid of my Young Man who was to march through the Town with his Company who were on foot . . . .I set out from Coventry with 4 more Passengers, Strangers to me, one Lady we left at Hinckley and just as I got out of the Coach there Mr. Cooper agreeably surpris'd me and without asking my leave gave me a kiss in the St<sup>t</sup>—, should I forgive him for this, or not, as we had not seen each other for so long a time, did not think it prudent to Quarrel with him there, but if you think it necessary shall certainly call him to account for it. . . . .I left my sister but indifferent, the Child better in Health but very weak and the Apothecary thinks inclined to the Rickets; she intended to have a Strong Girl on purpose to Nurse him, . . . .

Accept the sincere and lasting affection  
of yours

A Cooper.

This journey from Birmingham to Leicester, a distance of about forty miles, was accomplished in thirteen hours.

Another long letter, describing a journey by road is transcribed in the family books. It was written (in rhymed couplets) by Elizabeth Coltman in 1799, when she was about thirty-eight. Elizabeth left Duffield in Derbyshire, where she had been visiting a friend, almost before the milkmaids were astir, and rode the

four miles to Derby, accompanied by a mounted servant, who had her trunk strapped behind him. When she reached the Bell she found that, owing to its being a race day, the coach she meant to travel by was full. However, she succeeded in persuading a gentleman to give up his seat to her; this she considered something of a triumph, as she no longer felt herself the beautiful woman she had been. The rest of the journey lacked incident; her fellow-passengers were uninteresting, and she saw nothing

But common things and common men :  
 A stupid lad with stupid pig,  
 Three, packed and smiling, in a gig,  
 Or village lads, with vacant stare,  
 Riding, full drive, to country fair.

There can be no doubt that Elizabeth Coltman, when a young woman, was extremely attractive both in appearance and manners, and it is almost certain that she received more attention from the young men of her set than was good for her. One of her admirers declared that he would sacrifice his right hand for the pleasure of looking at her for half-an-hour. For a time she was engaged to Mr. John Audley, brother of her friend Mrs. John Housman, whose husband was vicar of St. Anne's church, Lancaster; but she dismissed him, and was subsequently courted by one suitor after another "until the charms of youth and beauty had faded". As it was, she held the field for a long time; for her physical graces were enhanced by a quick and well informed mind. Her enthusiasm for music was intense, and she was endowed with "powers of conversation that enabled her to give and receive the highest gratification of intellectual intercourse". In 1802, according to Gardiner, she was "Miss Coltman, the literary lady", who shared with Miss Mary Linwood the distinction of being the subject of enquiry when certain Leicester men met in the Louvre.<sup>12</sup>

When the eighteenth century was nearing its end, John and Bridget Coltman lost their two elder daughters. Anne Cooper died of tuberculosis in 1788, leaving five little children behind her, and, in 1795, Mary emigrated. Mary Coltman had married a Mr. John Grew of Birmingham, a descendant of the Rev. Obadiah Grew, D.D. (1607-1689), sometime vicar of St.

<sup>12</sup>Gardiner, I, p. 247.

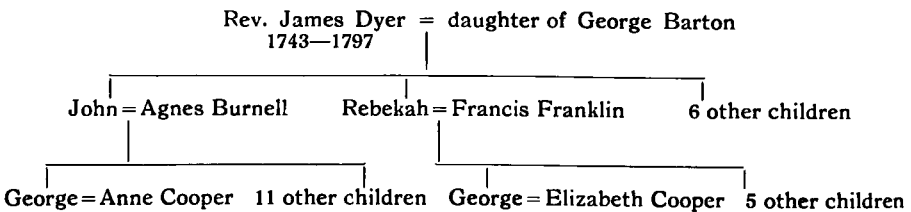
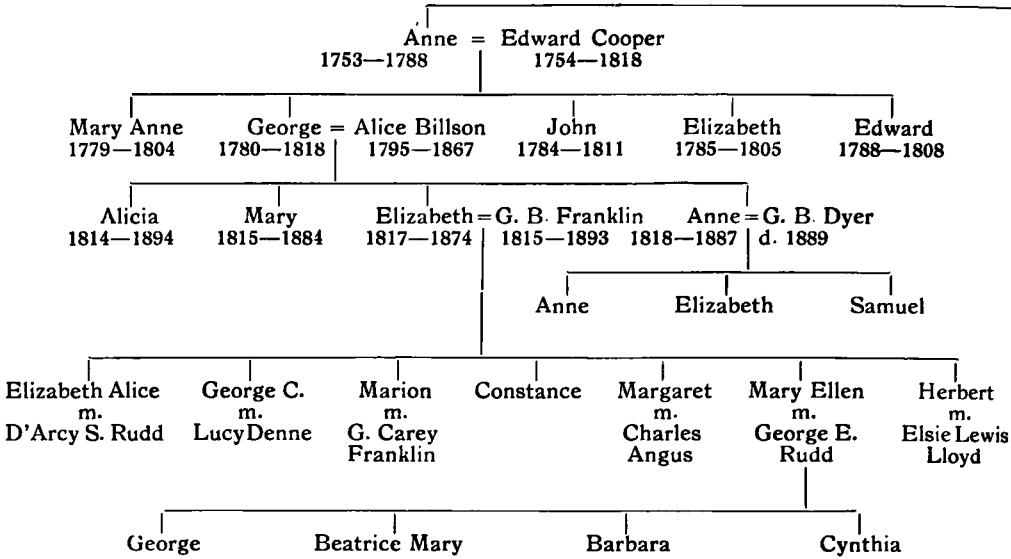
Michael's, Coventry. The Rev. Obadiah was another of those divines who would not subscribe to the Act of Uniformity; he afterwards became a founder of the Presbyterian congregation at Coventry.<sup>13</sup> John and Mary Grew began their married life in Birmingham, but, for reasons not stated, they decided to go to America. They settled in Boston, which struck them as being a very curious place. In her first letters to her family, Mary described it as a small town, composed chiefly of painted wooden houses; the milkman kept a chaise, and there were no inhabitants poor enough to accept her cast-off clothing. In 1800 John Grew returned to England on a visit, but he had scarcely landed at Liverpool when he was taken seriously ill. As soon as this calamitous news reached Leicester, Elizabeth Coltman set out for the north to do what she could to help; but when she reached Liverpool John Grew was already dead and buried. His wife survived him for more than thirty years.

In the meantime, things were not going at all well at Leicester. Edward Cooper, his home life deprived of much of its zest by the death of his wife, had become so fond of company that the hosiery business, of which he was in virtual control, was seriously neglected. The firm consequently suffered a gradual decline, and finally became bankrupt. This misfortune cast a deep shadow on the family; for they felt the disgrace as much as the financial loss. Then sorrow of another kind came upon the Coopers. The children of Edward and Anne, one after another, developed tuberculosis of the lungs, and, one by one, they died of it. The eldest, Mary Anne (1779-1804), was the first to succumb, after a long, weary illness that necessitated the employment of night-nurses for twelve months. In the next year, when the family fortunes were at their lowest ebb, her sister Elizabeth (1785-1805) was stricken. Miss Elizabeth Coltman, the youngest

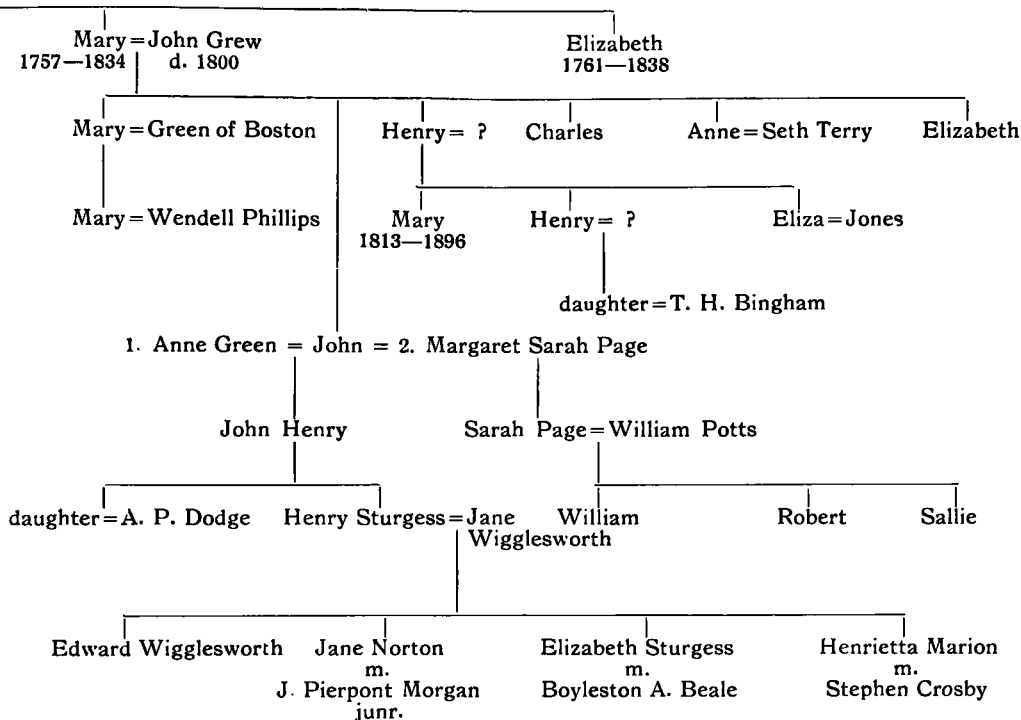
<sup>13</sup>The Rev. Obadiah Grew, particulars of whose stormy career may be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, had a son, Nehemiah Grew (1641-1712), who became an eminent vegetable physiologist. He was a B.A. of Cambridge University, an M.D. of Leyden and a Fellow of the Royal Society, of which body he was secretary from 1677 to 1679. He published his *Anatomy of Plants* in four volumes in 1682, and he was probably the first person to observe sex in plants.







= BRIDGET LITHERLAND  
1716—1802





daughter of John and Bridget, who had been living in the Spa,<sup>14</sup> Humberstone Gate, gave up her home and took her niece to a house on the London Road, where, in spite of all that could be done for her, the poor girl sank rapidly. She must have been very unhappy; for, in addition to her other troubles, she was afflicted with deafness, which made serious conversation almost impossible. This was all the more distressing because her friends, who attached great importance to the niceties of religious belief, were unable to satisfy themselves that she was "in a state of grace" It appears that she had come under the influence of "a sceptical teacher", and though she was able to convey to them that she "had a little hope", their fears for her eternal welfare were by no means wholly allayed. Her aunt Elizabeth was especially troubled and, after the patient's death, became racked with anxiety. Day by day her misery increased, until she could find no relief except in "the most urgent importunities for some ray of light to dispel the sadness". She had suffered this torment for several weeks, when, one night as she lay awake, she saw the form of her mother, the serene and gentle Bridget, standing near the bed and smiling down upon her. The vision spoke.

Its tones were stately, deliberate and distinct, yet sweet and low: "I am sent to tell you that she [Elizabeth Cooper] is *safe*—not so happy as some are, but *saved*". Noiselessly it then glided away into the spirit world, which it had inhabited about three years, and left behind it a subduing sense of the supernatural redolent of purity and peace.

So far as Elizabeth Coltman was concerned, this manifestation, which she emphatically regarded as an external reality, settled the vexed question once and for all. The episode, at any rate, proves the depth and sincerity of her affection for her niece, and the reverence in which she held her mother's memory.

Six years after the death of Elizabeth Cooper, it fell to Miss Coltman's lot to nurse her nephew, John Cooper (1784-1811),

<sup>14</sup>So called "from a chalybeate spring found there which, though furnished by the proprietor with neat marble baths and every convenient appendage for bathing, has not been found sufficiently impregnated with mineral properties to bring it into use".—*A Walk through Leicester* (1804), p. 5.

through his last illness. As he had come under the same influence as his sister, Miss Coltman was painfully anxious about his spiritual welfare. Her prayers for him were earnest and incessant, and at last she had the satisfaction—nay, the triumph—of hearing him confess the Faith as she herself had received it. Edward Cooper (1788-1808), Anne's third son, died at Boston, New England, where he was tenderly nursed by his aunt, Mary Grew, to whose daughter he was betrothed. George (1780-1818), the eldest of the three sons, died only a few years after his marriage. Edward Cooper, the father, also died in 1818, at the age of about sixty-four. Of his last years nothing is recorded.

In these sorrows and bereavements, Miss Coltman received great comfort and support from the ministrations of the Rev. Robert Hall,<sup>15</sup> who came to Leicester in 1807 as pastor of the Harvey Lane chapel. The eloquence and wide human sympathy of this famous preacher drew many people to his ministry, especially those who had been unsettled by the changes at the Great Meeting in Bond Street. This congregation was originally Presbyterian; but the teaching had gradually become Unitarian, greatly to the dissatisfaction of the more conservative worshippers, some of whom found in Harvey Lane, under Robert Hall, a haven of refuge.

At an unrecorded date in this middle period of her life, Elizabeth Coltman opened a school at one of the Stepped Houses, which used to stand just below Campbell Street, on the east side of the London Road. This rather exclusive seminary was designed for the daughters of professional men and manufacturers, and among those who attended it were Sarah and Anne, the sisters of John Biggs.<sup>16</sup> Another pupil, Mary Kirby, whose home was in Friar Lane, describes how she and her sister Sarah used to be taken there every day by one James Beale, a young man employed by their father. When the streets were dirty, their escort used to carry little Mary, who much preferred this mode of transit to walking on the rough granite sets with which the roads were paved. Sarah

<sup>15</sup>Robert Hall was born at Arnesby, in the county of Leicester, in 1764.

<sup>16</sup>John Biggs was one of three brothers who carried on a hosiery business in Belvoir Street. He was three times mayor of Leicester, and three times represented the borough in Parliament. It is to his forethought and generosity that we owe the Victoria Park. A statue is erected to his memory in Welford Place.—Mary Kirby, p. 15; Fielding Johnson, p. 427.

had, at this time, just been promoted from socks to stockings; but her little knees were so plump that the stockings were frequently slipping down, and she would lag behind to give them a pull. This understandable behaviour shocked James Beale, and he told Mrs. Kirby that he was ashamed to be seen with a young lady who "did up her garters in the street". Mary Kirby also says that:—

Miss Coltman had a lady to assist her in the school, a Miss Palmer, and a most good-natured lady she was. We used to say our multiplication table to her, and stand in the stocks, and hold the backboard while. The constrained position always made the tears run down my face, when Miss Palmer would take her handkerchief and wipe them away, and I can fancy I hear her now, saying in a cheerful voice, "twice three are six, and twice four are eight, if we get on as well as that we shall soon have done". . . . Miss Coltman was rather a melancholy lady, so she soon grew discouraged and gave the school up, or rather transferred it to a cousin of hers, a Miss Lydia Coltman, who took a house more in the centre of the town, in what was then called the "Swines Market" [*i.e.* the modern High Street].

Miss Lydia was of a more lively temperament than her kinswoman, and under her direction the school became so cheerful as to be almost frivolous. She even encouraged the girls to give theatrical performances and kindred exhibitions of talent.<sup>17</sup>

After 1811, when his brother died, George Cooper, the eldest son of Edward and Anne, was the only near relative left to Elizabeth Coltman in Leicester, and on him she appears to have concentrated her interests. He was a rather serious young man with a delicate constitution. He became a regular worshipper at the Harvey Lane chapel, and was on terms of personal friendship with Robert Hall. About 1812 he married, at St. Margaret's church, Leicester, Alice (1795-1867), daughter of Thomas Billson, who occupied a farm at Twyford, a remote village on the Melton Mowbray side of the county. Alice is said to have been an extremely good-looking girl, and George Cooper was determined to marry her in spite of opposition. His aunt disapproved of

<sup>17</sup>Mary Kirby, p. 16.

the match and was never on cordial terms with his wife, though she proved to have sterling qualities as well as a pretty face. She was an industrious needlewoman, a good housewife and a devoted mother. She certainly transmitted to her children strong constitutions that lasted them from sixty to eighty years, and her sensible ideas about diet and play enabled them to grow up naturally into cheerful, useful women. George and his young wife lived in the White Houses, in Oxford Street, where their four daughters, Alicia (1814-1894), Mary (1815-1884), Elizabeth (1817-1874) and Anne (1818-1887) were born. Alicia, in her old age, wrote the family chronicles from which the main facts of this paper are drawn. Anne was an infant in arms when her father was stricken with the family complaint, to which he rapidly succumbed. Robert Hall ministered to him and afterwards visited the widow and her fatherless family.

He would take the children, one after another, on his knee and stroke them in the most tender manner and say, " Poor little girl, poor little girl ".

When George Cooper died, his wife was only twenty-three, and she was none too well provided for. Poor Alice does not seem to have kept in close touch with her own family, and, on her husband's side, the only near connection she had was Miss Coltman, who had never quite approved of her. Elizabeth Coltman, however, was determined to do her duty to her little great-nieces, and she insisted upon supervising their education. Nobody else could be trusted to inculcate those principles of religion, morality and decorum that she deemed essential in persons descended from the Coopers and the Coltmans. Her régime was so severe that little Alicia and her sisters found it difficult to show her all the respect she demanded, especially as they recognised her helplessness in those domestic concerns in which their mother was so proficient. The children were sent to a day school in Spa Place; but Miss Coltman gave them a special Sunday lesson every week. At this lesson they had first to repeat portions of Scripture and of the two long catechisms that were approved at Harvey Lane, and then to listen to their great-aunt's irksome expositions. These sessions always ended with a long and earnest extemporary prayer. Miss Coltman also superintended their readings from the standard poets, Locke's *Undersanding*, and the obsolete *Essays* of John Foster, who wrote upon such subjects as the danger of

popular ignorance. It is no wonder that these stodgy exercises and the old lady's ungenial attitude towards themselves blinded the little Coopers to "her elegant movements and refined manners". Many years afterwards Alicia Cooper wrote:—

I have said that my aunt was beautiful. She was also intellectual, fastidious, proud, mean, fond of the great and very severe. In her intercourse with us, the great disparity of the years between us was doubtless much more trying to her than we were aware of. She had seen the intervening generation, on whom she had bestowed much anxiety and care, pass away without an exception, and the fountain of her kindness was well-nigh exhausted. How well we remember the nip on the arm for mistakes in reading, and the thrust down the dark steps of the cellar for a little misbehaviour. She had a leading desire for our moral and intellectual proficiency, and was continually preaching to us on the subjugation of self, and exhorting us to "conquer ourselves and master French", the former especially. But she seemed to perceive no medium between being so bad as to be on the "highway to perdition" and so good as to be "ripening for glory".

Miss Coltman was very particular about the people she allowed her little nieces to visit, and it is probable that they saw more of her elderly friends than they did of children of their own age. One evening, during a Christmas holiday, the three eldest girls went with their mother and great-aunt to visit Dr. Noble and his wife at Danet's Hall. Each of them was primed with a recitation from the *Lyrics* of Isaac Watts. Alicia's piece was *True Monarchy*, Mary's *True Wisdom*, and Elizabeth's *True Courage*. They came through the ordeal with flying colours; but they would have preferred Gray's *Elegy* or "the sweet, if inferior, measures of Felicia Hemans". Whatever else may be said for the poem selected for Elizabeth, its title was apposite; for she was a singularly brave little girl, who was never afraid of the dark or of going some distance from home on an errand. Once, we read, the household suffered from

a shocking plague of rats, which no ferrets seemed able to cure. An old fellow was sitting one day in the



garden; she quietly stole up to him, and seized him by the tail; of course he sprang round and gave her a severe bite on the hand, and she carried the marks for many a day.

Another trait in Elizabeth's character was her feeling for things that were beautiful, especially flowers, which she sometimes showed in original ways. One summer day, when she was taken to call on Mrs. Noble, as she was standing on the doorstep, a fine plant in full bloom caught her eye. She immediately let go her aunt's hand, and, "hastening forward, made before it a grave and very profound curtsy".

Elizabeth Coltman had several friends living away from Leicester, and occasionally she would take one of the young Coopers with her when she went to visit them. Alicia tells of a curious jaunt in which she accompanied her aunt to Stoke Newington. Miss Coltman, on this day, did not pay a single call upon any one she knew; but walked through the town, stopping to gaze, first at her old school, and then at houses that had once sheltered friends of hers. When Alicia was thirteen, she went to stay for the first time at Raithby Hall, in Lincolnshire. The Brackenburys, who lived there, had been closely associated with John Wesley and his circle, and the house contained various relics of them. There was also a bust of Elizabeth Coltman that had been specially executed for Mrs. Brackenbury, from a cast of Elizabeth's features taken for the purpose when she was thirty-four.

It was placed upon a marble slab, was crowned with a wreath of honeysuckle, and the evening sun slanted its golden rays across it. As I skipped past it again and again, I was asked if I knew it, to which I always replied, (for I had been assured many times, by her whom it represented, that curls were sinful) "No, ma'am, not at all". I never dreamed that she could ever have worn them.

Besides supervising her great-nieces' minds and morals, Miss Coltman kept a strict eye on their wardrobes. In her own attire she had become eccentric in the extreme, and, though on very special occasions she wore a silk velvet gown and a white Canton crape figured shawl, in the ordinary way she dressed in a very

severe style, eschewing the simplest ornament. The vanity and wickedness of adorning the person was her constant theme; but she spoke with such lack of moderation that her remarks had little effect. One lady of her acquaintance was heard to say: "I always go to see Miss Coltman in my oldest things". The Cooper children suspected that their aunt had, in her day, affected pretty clothes, as they sometimes did themselves; but, whenever they were wearing a curl or a lace or a ribbon, they took great care not to meet her. Once, when Elizabeth Cooper was on her way to a children's party, she had to call at the old lady's house, and, before going in, she hid her little worked muslin kerchief in the thick ivy that grew about the front door. At that time, it was practically universal for little gentlewomen to wear frills on their long pantelets; but Miss Coltman set her face against this fashion, and, greatly to the mortification of her great-nieces, insisted upon their wearing plain ones, on the ground that they were Coopers and ought to be above such vagaries. The girls bore the deprivation with as good a grace as they could muster until they were bidden to some special festivity. This broke down their resolution, and they set to work to cut out for themselves, in soft white paper, the best substitutes their ingenuity could devise.

At the school in Spa Place, the four girls received a sound foundation of learning, and, when they left, they were really familiar with the chief books of the Bible, knew a great deal of poetry and standard verse by heart, and had translated a considerable part of Boileau's *Satires* from the French. The three older ones, and probably Anne as well, then went to a boarding school at Coventry, kept by the Misses Mary and Rebecca Franklin, whose father was for many years Baptist minister in that town. The most distinguished pupil of the Misses Franklin was Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot, the novelist), who was always grateful to them for the excellence of their teaching.<sup>18</sup> The Coopers were happy at this school, where they made good progress with their studies, and were encouraged to think for themselves. Elizabeth afterwards spent a short time at Brixton Hill, near London, as a pupil-teacher in a "select finishing school" kept by a Mrs. James, a lady whose charges show that high school fees are not the innovation we sometimes think them.

<sup>18</sup>Leslie Stephen, *George Eliot* (E.M.L. series), p. 12.

Soon after completing their education, Alicia and Elizabeth Cooper were baptised, by immersion, in the Harvey Lane chapel. On each occasion the rite was performed by the Rev. J. P. Mursell, who had succeeded Robert Hall in the pastorate in 1825. Mr. Mursell was a friend of the family, and had a special regard for Elizabeth. He used to ask the pretty little girl to his house, take her for long walks, and talk to her for hours together. It had formerly been necessary for people who wished to be baptised to appear before the members of the church and satisfy them that they thought aright on the step they proposed to take. By 1831 and 1833, when Alicia and Elizabeth made their respective professions, the rule was beginning to be relaxed, and they were allowed to write to the meeting. This is what Alicia has to say about the way in which the ceremony was performed:—

How singularly unattractive was the baptistry at Harvey Lane! Debarred the privilege of entering an ever-flowing stream, beneath a canopy of blue sky, why should we not have an ornate, or, at least, an inviting substitute? This was a pit, sunk in front of the pulpit and lined with red bricks; the steps into it were scarcely discernible; and the bottom was felt, not seen. During Mr. Hall's ministry baptisms took place at the close of the morning sermon and it was customary for all the pedo-baptists to rise and quit the place. The persons to be immersed sat round the water until the time arrived for the ordinance to be administered. While they retired to arrange their dress a hymn was sung. Mr. Hall remained in the pulpit; he was very portly in figure and frequently in terrible pain, and the Rev. J. Bromwich, of Archdeacon Lane, usually officiated for him. Some little time after the settlement of Mr. Mursell at Harvey Lane, the baptism was relegated to the week-night services, rather to the scandal of a few old members, who looked upon it as the "hiding of a candle under a bushel".

In this connection it may be well to quote part of a letter written in 1813 by Mrs. Heyrick,<sup>19</sup> of Leicester, a famous mem-

<sup>19</sup>Mrs. Heyrick was Elizabeth, daughter of John and Anne Coltman of St. Nicholas Street. The romantic story of her unhappy marriage is told in a veiled way by Gardiner (III, pp. 128-130). See also Thompson, p. 218.





*By the courtesy of Mrs. J. E. Ellis*

JOHN COLTMAN'S HOUSE—EAST FRONT



*By the courtesy of Mrs. J. E. Ellis*  
JOHN COLTMAN'S HOUSE—ENTRANCE HALL



*By the courtesy of Mrs. J. E. Ellis*  
JOHN COLTMAN'S HOUSE—FIRST FLOOR LANDING



ber of the Society of Friends. Mrs. Heyrick is describing to her sister, Mary Anne Coltman, the Sunday evening service at Harvey Lane chapel when Robert Hall, who had been very ill, preached a funeral sermon upon the Rev. Thomas Robinson, vicar of St. Mary's de Castro, Leicester.

The audience appeared to be pretty much of the same class and disposition as would have been collected to hear Madame Catalini sing. The meeting house was nearly filled by six o'clock, and from that time till seven there were such appearances of levity and prattling as made me feel very uncomfortable amongst them. Mrs. Foster on the one side of me, and on the other Miss Linwood and her train. Behind me Mrs. Hawksley, Markland, Jeffent, Caldicott, Bullen, etc. Behind them the Ruddinses, Pares, Macaulay and his wife, and a High Church Clergyman. But when the Prophet took his seat the sublime dignity of his countenance and manner appeared to diffuse a seriousness over the whole audience. . . . But for a quarter of an hour after he had begun his sermon he was more embarrassed, hobbling and feeble than I had ever known him—so much so that I was extremely in pain for him, I quite expected that he would be unable to proceed,—but towards the appearance of the close of his address he broke out with greater effulgence than I ever before witnessed. He placed the uncertainty of time, the shadows of life and the realities of eternity in such bold language, and by such exquisitely beautiful and appropriate illustrations, as seemed, at once, to dispel all the illusions of sense, and so to open the mental eye as to astonish and appal every individual with the danger and uncertainty of his own situation.

It should be remembered that, at this period, there was no state registration of births, marriages and deaths. For legal purposes, entries in family Bibles were sufficient authority, and for members of the Established Church the parish register provided a record. Baptists were enrolled as members of their church at the time of their immersion; but in their earlier years no official record of them seems to have been kept. In London, there was Dr. Williams's Red Cross Street Library, where non-



conformists could register their children; but many of them did not know about this, and the cost of a stage-coach journey to London made it prohibitive to many who did.

The sound education the Cooper girls had received qualified them for teaching, and three of them, if not all four, followed that profession. Elizabeth obtained two successive posts in good families; but while she was in the second, she became seriously ill, and her great-aunt fetched her home. It was some days before it could be discovered what was the matter with her; but Dr. Noble, then the chief consultant in Leicestershire, diagnosed her complaint as inflammation of the dorsal vertebræ. When she had sufficiently recovered, she accompanied the family of her friend, Mrs. H. F. Coleman of Evington Hall, on a visit to Scarborough. At that time (1836 or 1837) it was impossible to make the journey to Scarborough in a single day; so the party broke it at Hull, where they spent the night. This holiday completely restored Elizabeth's health, except that until her marriage she was subject to severe attacks of neuralgia, or, as it was then called, "tic".

Upon Elizabeth's return to Leicester, Dr. Noble, whose wife had died two years before, offered her the post of resident governess to his daughters. Though he had been very kind to the family, and Mrs. Noble had been an intimate friend, Miss Coltman insisted that the offer must be refused. Apparently, she did not wish to appear to be moving in the matter; so she prevailed upon her nephew's executors, Richard Mitchell and Onesiphorus Raworth,<sup>20</sup> to assume responsibility for the decision, though they were not the guardians of the four girls' persons. It is difficult to see what prompted this action; for Dr. Noble was an able and cultivated man, greatly esteemed in the town for his integrity and his courageous independence of spirit. When he heard how the matter had been settled, he exclaimed: "Ah, they're red-hot Tories, and I am a Liberal, and so they've shown their spite".

<sup>20</sup>Richard Mitchell took up his freedom on 5th May, 1807. He was the son of Richard Mitchell, farmer, of Smeeton in the county of Leicester, and had been apprenticed to Thomas Leach, hosier, of the Newarke, Leicester. Onesiphorus Raworth, the fourth son of Thomas Raworth, a dyer, became a freeman on 22nd September, 1803. Thomas took up his freedom in October, 1755; he was the eldest son of another Thomas Raworth (free July 1727), who had been apprenticed to William Sutton, hosier.—Henry Hartopp, *Register of the Free-men of Leicester, 1196-1933*.

During the last years of her life, Miss Coltman lived quietly, within ~~site~~ of her birthplace, in a house in the Newarke, where she was attended by one Anne Bradfield, a devoted servant who had been trained by Bridget Coltman. Alicia Cooper tells us that her great-aunt "was by no means a practical character", and that the gravity of the young people was often most painfully strained by "her ludicrous attempts at domestic work". Moreover, she had "very limited ideas of home comfort, both for herself and others". She spent much of her time in study and writing, reading 'the best English and French authors and a little Latin. She made occasional contributions to the *Monthly Magazine* and to the local newspapers, and she published several moral tales for children and a number of tracts. One of these, entitled *Jenny Hickling*, found its way to India and was translated into the Tamil dialect, in the pious hope that it would have an edifying effect upon such natives as might chance to comprehend it. There was no doubt that Miss Coltman's conversation and letters were much esteemed in a select circle of educated and thoughtful women, among whom were Susannah Watts,<sup>21</sup> Mary Steele (niece of "Theodosia"),<sup>22</sup> and Mrs. Elizabeth Heyrick (*née* Coltman) and her sister, Mary Ann Coltman. These ladies were enthusiastic supporters of the movement for the abolition of slavery, and they showed their sincerity by using nothing but East Indian sugar for several years. Mrs. Heyrick visited all the grocers in Leicester, to persuade them to refrain from stocking any goods that were produced by slave labour, and she wrote several vigorous anti-slavery pamphlets, which had a wide circulation both in England and America. In her description of this coterie, Alicia Cooper says:—

The ladies' best work-bags were of black silk-velvet or of white satin, adorned with an elegant engraving representing a West Indian palm, with a negro slave on one knee raising his fettered hands, in an attitude of entreaty, to a driver, standing over him with a whip in

<sup>21</sup>Authoress of *A Walk through Leicester*.—Fielding Johnson, p. 365.

<sup>22</sup>"Theodosia" published *Poems and Hymns* in three volumes. She wrote the verses beginning:—

Father of mercies, in Thy Word  
What endless glory shines! . . . .

and,

Father, whate'er of earthly bliss  
Thy sovereign will denies, . . . .

his hand. Underneath were the words, "Am not I a man and a brother?"

Miss Mary Anne Coltman, who was younger than the other members of this circle, survived them all for many years. As a young woman her sight was so keen that she was able to see, without the aid of any sort of glass, "the legs of a mite". As she grew older, her eyes failed, and she had to undergo six operations upon them, all of which were performed without an anæsthetic. For the last thirty years of her life she was quite blind. She bore this affliction with great fortitude, and used to occupy herself by unravelling tangled skeins of silk and by tearing paper into small pieces, with which her friends stuffed pillows and cushions for poor, sick people. She seldom spoke of Elizabeth Coltman without adding the remark:—"She was *beautiful*".

As the nineteenth century progressed, and Leicester became busier every year, Miss Elizabeth Coltman, who found the noise and bustle trying, retired from time to time to a cottage at Newtown Linford. When staying there in 1828, she commemorated the beauties of the place in a long set of verses, the concluding lines of which are:—

There is a language in all Nature's forms  
 In all her mystic sounds, which sweetly tells  
 What ear hath never heard, nor reason known.  
 The echoes of the wood, the hoary tree  
 For ages waving its luxurious shade;  
 Myriads of beings sporting in brief life  
 Unseen, unknown to man, all tell of Him  
 Who forms for immortality and bliss;  
 And to the listening spirit seems to say  
 "Come thou up hither!" Thither let me climb  
 And in high converse with the bright Unseen  
 Mid these vast volumes of His power and love  
 Learn what Redemption's happy sons shall share.

In the following year, the whole town was shocked by the demise of the Rev. E. T. Vaughan, the greatly respected vicar of St. Martin's. Miss Coltman, in a long letter to a certain Mrs. Adams, thus describes the circumstances of his death and burial:

## Saturday Eve.

I have just read your letter to Mrs. Simpson; Miss B. is gone, and therefore I gladly take up my pen to give you a few particulars. What an event! How sudden! How striking! Mr. Vaughan had dined at Sir H. Halford's,<sup>23</sup> and I believe took red wine. In the evening he felt indisposed and proposed returning sooner than was intended. He got out of the carriage to open gates; he had thin shoes and the ground was very wet. In the night he was extremely ill. Sir H. Halford was sent for. Inflammation followed spasms, and alarm was excited—but in some days there was a mitigation and hopes were entertained of his recovery. The church was supplied one Sabbath. On the Friday they had hopes. Early on the Sabbath following the tidings were announced. The bell tolled at intervals the whole of the forenoon, but no service on that day. Mrs. V.<sup>24</sup> has been most graciously supported; she attended him with unwearied assiduity—had not her clothes off, I think, for nine nights. She has exemplified the noblest Christian fortitude and strong faith. Even the last mournful offices were performed by herself and a servant. She gave orders for the funeral, chose the hymns, followed the body at night from Foxton, where he died, and on Saturday eve<sup>5</sup> she and the children attended the funeral. On the Sabbath she was at church and stayed the Sacrament. She went through all this with calm dignity, "Strong in the Lord and in the power of His might". She saw no one whom she could help, not even her father's family, and on Monday returned with her beloved children, 13,<sup>25</sup> to Foxton. She has now, I hear, resumed her duties of tuition, but sleep seems almost to have forsaken her.

<sup>23</sup>Sir Henry Halford and the Rev. E. T. Vaughan were brothers. Sir Henry, who was physician to George III, George IV, William IV, and Queen Victoria, changed his name from Vaughan to Halford when he inherited the Wistow estates from a relative of his mother.—Billson, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup>Mrs. Vaughan, the second wife of Edward Thomas Vaughan, was a daughter of John Pares, of the Newarke, Leicester, and Hopwell Hall, Derbyshire.—Billson, p. 70.

<sup>25</sup>The second Mrs. Vaughan had five daughters and six sons; by his first wife, E. T. Vaughan had three daughters.—Billson, p. 70.

The saint may sustain it, but the woman must suffer,  
and I fear for her health.

Before her death, which occurred in the spring of 1838, Miss Elizabeth Coltman had the satisfaction of knowing that a cause very dear to her heart had been brought to a successful issue. On the 1st of August, 1834, slavery was abolished in all the British dominions, and a great public breakfast was held in Leicester to celebrate the event. Mary, Elizabeth and Anne Cooper attended this festivity but Alicia was ill in bed with a fever. In her last years, Miss Coltman mellowed considerably; she became kinder and more tolerant, and cared less and less for any kind of notice. She even regretted that she had been so strict with her great-nieces "in little things". They appreciated the change, and came naturally to speak of her as their "dear aunt". Alicia and old Anne Bradfield nursed her through the short illness that ended her life. On the Shrove Tuesday before her death, she asked her niece to write "a note—a nice kind of note" to Dr. Noble, with whom she at last wished to be reconciled, begging him to come and see her, for she was very ill. Alicia was afraid that the "Whipping Toms" would prevent him from coming. On this day, by right of prehistoric sanction, the Newarke was invaded by a crowd of roughs, who subjected to horse-play all those who would not buy off their attentions. The Whipping Toms was really a traditional Shrovetide game, which began when the Pancake Bell rang and was played according to certain ancient rules; it was essentially a rough game and had degenerated into a vulgar riot. The scene is described thus by a lady<sup>26</sup> who, as a child, was held up on her father's shoulder, near the main gateway, so that she could see over the heads of the crowd:—

The Whipping Toms had arranged themselves in two lines, face to face, leaving a space between like a lane. The fun was to get some unfortunate persons between the lines,—and they were not very scrupulous about pushing them in,—and then to whip them up and down to their hearts' content. The screaming was, of course, deafening, and we soon had enough.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Mary Kirby, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup>Mary Kirby, pp. 11, 12.

That the youths who took part in this rowdyism were no respecters of persons is shown by the fact that the Rev. Thomas Robinson, vicar of St. Mary's, was once whipped vigorously from the main entrance in Southgate Street to his own gate at the far end of the enclosure. He was (perhaps consequently) the first to agitate for the abolition of the custom, which was suppressed, after Mr. Robinson's death, by act of Parliament in 1846.<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Noble came down from Danet's Hall about two, and was obliged to confront this mob, and he did it, not by consulting their predilections for cash, but, as a man of mark, by defying them to touch him. A few gentle, earnest words were said by my aunt, and they shook hands and parted in peace.

In her will, Miss Coltman bequeathed a fifth part of her estate to each of her great-nieces, the daughters of George Cooper, and the remaining fifth to her nephew, John Grew, of Philadelphia. She left instructions for a "walking funeral"; so her great-nieces, accompanied by Mr. John Coltman, followed her coffin on foot all the way from the Newarke to the Great Meeting.

After Miss Coltman's death, there were many changes in the lives of the Coopers, and, in the course of them, Alicia became the family's centre of gravity. It was she who kept in touch with her great-aunt's friends, corresponded regularly with the relations in America, and developed into being the loved friend and teacher of her sisters' children. During the next twenty years, from 1840 to 1860, Leicester grew very rapidly; the residential area extended further and further southwards, and, with the houses, there sprang up new churches and chapels. The Belvoir Street and Dover Street chapels housed the most influential Baptist congregations in the mid-nineteenth century; but by the end of it the Victoria Road chapel held the leading position. However, Belvoir Street, familiarly known as "the Pork Pie chapel", which was designed by the inventor of the Hansom cab, still retained the loyalty of many respected families. In 1841, Mrs. Cooper (*née* Alice Billson) and her daughters were living in the Newarke, in the House originally built by John Coltman for Edward and Anne Cooper in 1777; but later they had houses in

<sup>28</sup>S. H. Skillington, *Leicester*, p. 16.

the Crescent, King Street, and in Princess Road. Elizabeth, several years after her marriage to Mr. Franklin, finally settled at Stoneygate School, which is still the home of her descendants.

George Barton Franklin (1815-1893), who was to become one of Leicester's most respected citizens, was the third son and fifth child of the Rev. James Franklin, Baptist minister at Coventry. He met Elizabeth Cooper when she was a boarder at his sisters' school, and the two were first in each other's company during an excursion to Kenilworth. In 1835 Mr. Franklin wrote to Elizabeth, who was two years his junior, suggesting that they should enter into a correspondence "with a view to further intimacy"; but Miss Coltman, who was at that time very much alive, insisted upon Elizabeth's declining the invitation. Alicia Cooper says that

she was vehement in her opposition, and a course of lectures was begun, setting forth on every occasion the impropriety, folly, rashness, and even wickedness, of young people thinking about one another, or even of anything at all but their work and their daily duty!

During the next four years, Elizabeth, who was a most attractive girl, received a good deal of attention from other young men; and John Biggs, who was a friend of the family, used to call her the Lady Blessington of Leicester. This compliment did not altogether please; for Lady Blessington, though beautiful and much admired for her social attainments, was regarded as a frivolous writer and a person of dubious reputation. In 1839, the year after Miss Coltman's death, Mr. Franklin renewed his proposal, and Elizabeth, free to make her own choice, sent him a friendly answer. Before long they were engaged to be married, and actively employed in looking for a place in which to set up a school for boys. The Misses Mary and Rebecca Franklin threw themselves heart and soul into this project, and eventually a house in Leam Terrace, Leamington, was decided upon. The school was opened with five day-boys and three boarders, and, at the end of the second half-year, the results were encouraging enough for the young couple to marry. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. J. P. Mursell in the Harvey Lane chapel on the 22nd of June, 1841, when Mrs. Cooper and her daughters were living in the Newarke. The school for boys continued to prosper,

and in a short time became too large for the house in Leam Terrace; so a move was made to the Manor House, on the Old Warwick Road, where the Franklin's first child, Elizabeth Alice, was born. Anne Cooper lived with her sister and helped in the domestic duties, while Mr. Franklin had the assistance of his cousin, Henry Dyer, in the schoolroom. This arrangement continued until 1844, when Anne Cooper married George Barton Dyer, a brother of Henry.

At the end of 1845, Mr. and Mrs. Franklin left Leamington and transferred their school to one of the Stepped Houses on the London Road, Leicester. A few months later, however, Mr. Franklin accepted the position of second master at the Proprietary School, which had been started eight or nine years previously, in a specially erected building, on the New Walk.<sup>29</sup> There he had a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and a large house, adjacent to the school, which had been made suitable for boarders, free of rent and rates.<sup>30</sup> The young and accomplished headmaster, Mr. J. F. Hollings, who came from Totteridge, was a personal friend of Mr. Franklin and had been best man at his wedding. For eighteen months these two fought a rear-guard action against the financial difficulties that had always beset the school, which had to close its doors at Christmas, 1847. The Proprietary School had been set up by nonconformists, although the excellent Anglican Collegiate School in College Street, provided the same kind of education. Unfortunately, Leicester was not a large enough town to maintain two establishments of this class, and eventually both schools failed for lack of adequate support.

As soon as the Proprietary School had come to its end, Mr. Franklin returned to the London Road, where his school so prospered that in a comparatively short time three of the Stepped Houses were required to meet its expansion. For several years Mary Cooper helped her sister with the housekeeping; but she was not robust enough to continue beyond a certain point, and was succeeded by Miss Baker, who devoted herself to the family for fourteen years. Marion, the Franklin's second daughter, recalls some incidents that occurred at this period. The drawing-room overlooked the London Road, which was then, as now, a

<sup>29</sup>It is now the City Museum.

<sup>30</sup>Billson, p. 90.



promenade for "happy families and gay couples" on Sunday afternoons, and Mrs. Franklin, when she was giving her children instruction from *Peep of Day* and *Line upon Line*, used to pull down the blind, so that their attention should not be distracted. From the nursery the annual cheese fair was plainly visible. Waggon's stood by the footpath in a long row stretching from the Market Place to the Barley Mow, a little inn situated opposite the Stepped Houses. The horses were taken out, but the young Franklins could see the "noble cheeses"<sup>31</sup> lying on clean straw on the floors of the carts.

A young woman tramp once rang the front door bell at the Stepped Houses, and would not go until she had seen mamma. When my mother went to speak to her, she disclosed a naked baby in her shawl. My dear mother, full of compassion, found clothes out of the nursery drawers, wrapped up the poor infant warmly, and received many thanks. Next morning a policeman appeared with the clothes, which he said had been handed to him by a pawnbroker! They were marked.

In 1859 the Franklins moved their school to spacious premises, specially built for it, about a mile away, in the fashionable southern part of the town called Stoneysgate. They had six children when they went to Stoneysgate School, and a seventh was born to them soon after they were settled there.

Alicia Cooper was constantly with her sister and brother-in-law in those early days of their married life, ready to help them in any emergency. Twice, when one of the children was ill, she took the others away, to Anne Dyer's home at Kegworth and to Woodhouse Eaves. Under her escort, the children went for delightful country walks, and were shown wild flowers and animals, and, in the evenings, the chief constellations in the sky. One of the nieces earliest recollection is of their Aunt Ala, as they called her, raising the echo in some meadows near Kegworth—"The cry was 'Go to bed, Tom'; and I can see her now, with her curls hanging down the side of her face". The children were also very fond of visiting Dr. Noble and his daughters at Danet's Hall. The estrangement that had been brought about by Miss

<sup>31</sup>A Leicestershire cheese weighs about thirty pounds, and a Stilton from twelve to sixteen pounds.

Elizabeth Coltman did not long survive her, and Mr. and Mrs. Franklin soon became such close friends of the Nobles that they sometimes accompanied them in their travels on the continent. When the youngest Miss Noble followed Mr. Anderton, vicar of St. Margaret's, to the church of Rome, Mrs. Cooper and her daughters felt her defection from Protestantism almost as acutely as they would have done if she had been a member of their own family.

In the period we are now considering, Alicia Cooper, with a little help from her sister Mary, conducted a school for morning pupils in Princess Street, and thither the five daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin went in turn. They were devoted to their aunt, and, as she possessed a fine mind, and the rare gift of being able to interest children, they learned much that was valuable from her. Though the text-books then available were dry enough, Alicia had read so widely that she could enliven the dullest subjects, and her pupils were always glad when she brought out her manuscript books, which were filled with notes on the early martyrs, travels in the Holy Land, the burning of Pompeii, and other stimulating themes.

Sometimes her pupils were invited to a long country walk to gather wild flowers, and we would go down to Saffron Lane and into St. Mary's meadows (now covered with houses on the Aylestone Park) or to the Abbey meadows by the river, where now you would find the Abbey Park.

For the next ten years or so there was no great change in the lives of the Coopers and the Franklins; girls and boys passed through their respective schools, and the Miss Franklins began to take their parts in the teaching at Stoneygate School. Kind grandmamma Cooper, the farmer's daughter from Twyford, slipped out of life in 1867, at the age of seventy-two, and in 1869 Marion Franklin married her cousin, G. Carey Franklin. The ceremony was performed in the new Victoria Road chapel by Dr. Haycroft and old Mr. J. P. Mursell. It was a lively affair, with seven bridesmaids, two pages and numerous carriages. The bride wore a "moderate crinoline", and her hair was dressed high with a "chignon and also a flowing mane". The two principal carriages were drawn by pairs of greys and were accompanied by out-riders in canary-coloured jackets.

Alicia Cooper says very little about her youngest sister, Anne Dyer; but we can gather that she was less happy than the rest of the family. Her husband, though brilliant and versatile, was temperamentally erratic. He constantly changed his occupation and moved his house; he made money and lost it; he went off to the ends of the earth to restore his fortunes, and was often far too busy to keep in touch with his family. He died in 1889, two years after Anne, and was survived by three children.

The ninth decade of the last century brings our record to its final stage. About 1872, Elizabeth Franklin was overtaken by illness, and, after two weary years, she died. Hers had been an active and useful life, and she was singularly happy in her marriage. Her high principles and many practical qualities were of great assistance to her husband in the management of his school, and her beauty and personal charm were such that she was loved and admired by everyone who knew her. After her death Mr. Franklin continued the school with the help of his daughters, Alice, Constance and Ellen, to whom he transferred it in 1883, when he retired. In the previous year Alicia Cooper had given up her school in Princess Street, and had taken her sister, Mary, to a private house in Evington Road. Mary, who seems always to have been delicate, had become a chronic invalid, and in 1884 she passed away, leaving Alicia alone. But the Franklins begged their aunt to make her home with them, and she spent her last years happily at Stoneygate School.

Alicia Cooper had devoted a great deal of her time to mission work among the poor of Leicester, and for thirty-four years she directed the activities of the Bible and Domestic Mission. The object of this Society was to make the Scriptures known to the humblest classes, and certain "Bible women", whose numbers increased as time went on, were employed to visit systematically the more squalid parts of the town.<sup>32</sup> In 1880, when Alicia had completed twenty years as secretary to the Mission, the subscribers and visitors made her a complimentary presentation, and

<sup>32</sup>The Bible women were encouraged to do anything to help the people they visited; they would nurse the baby, go an errand, or help with the mangling, but they never left the house without reading a passage from the Bible and offering up prayer. If they found a family in very desperate straits they were allowed to spend a little of the Society's money on them, but not more than sixpence at a time.

after her death one of the visitors said : “ Ah, we don't work so well now Miss Cooper is gone. We miss her kind heart and her sharp tongue, and her looking after us the way she did ”.

Though this missionary enterprise entailed a vast amount of correspondence, Alicia found time and energy to keep in touch with her relations and friends, among whom were the American cousins, descendants of John and Bridget Coltman through their second daughter, Mary Grew. These cousins helped to form in America, a stratum of society which was the counterpart of that to which the Coltmans belonged in England. They adhered strictly to the morals and manners of a close Protestant corporation, and devoted themselves to evangelical and liberal causes, such as foreign missions, the abolition of slavery, and the emancipation of women. John and Mary Grew had a family of six children :— Mary, John, Henry, Charles, Anne and Elizabeth. Charles and Elizabeth do not appear to have married; all the others did. Mary became Mrs. Green of Boston, and her daughter, Mary, married Wendell Phillips, a young man prominent in the agitation against negro slavery. John had a son, John Henry Grew, by his first wife, Anne Greene, and a daughter, Sarah Page Grew, by his second wife, Margaret Sarah Page. This daughter married William Potts and had three children :—William, Robert and Sallie. The son, John Henry Grew, had a daughter who married Anson Phelps Dodge, and a son, Henry Sturgis Grew, who married Jane Wigglesworth, by whom he had four children :— Edward Wigglesworth Grew, Jane Norton Grew (who became Mrs. J. Pierpont Morgan, junior), Elizabeth Sturgis Grew (afterwards Mrs. Boyleston A. Beal), and Henrietta Marian Grew (who married a Mr. Stephen Crosby). Henry Grew was a minister who worked chiefly in Philadelphia. He had two daughters :—Eliza, who married a Mr. Jones and went as a missionary to Siam, and Mary, the elder, who remained a spinster. He also had a son, Henry, whose daughter married the Rev. T. H. Bingham. Anne Grew, who had been engaged to her cousin, Edward Cooper, of Leicester, became (after Edward's premature death in 1808) the wife of a gentleman called Seth Terry.

Three times in the nineteenth century did members of this American branch of the family visit their relations in England. In 1840, Henry Grew and his daughter came as delegates to the

Anti-Slavery Convention in London, and, before returning to their home, spent three weeks with the Coopers at their house in the Newarke. Henry Grew, and his young connection, Wendell Phillips, made a great impression upon the delegates to the convention, as well as upon those members of the public who flocked to the Freemasons' Tavern as hearers and spectators only. Alicia Cooper quotes from the published journal of one of these visitors, Mrs. John Opie, widow of the painter :—

To Henry Grew my attention had been particularly drawn on the first day of the meeting, even before he had addressed it, because the arrangement of his hair and the expression of his countenance realised my idea of the Covenanters of old, and his speech did not weaken this impression. Therefore I was not surprised when a countryman of his assured me that he not only resembled in appearance one of those pious men, but that under similar circumstances he would probably have acted and died as they did. But until this second morning I did not know that in Wendell Phillips, the young secretary, with the pale golden hair parted on his open forehead, I beheld the "very young speaker" mentioned in *The Martyr Age of America*, on whose lips hung for three minutes the fate of the Abolitionists of Boston.

Mary Grew, the daughter of Henry, did not cease from working for Abolition until the question was finally settled in the United States, when she devoted her considerable talents to the crusade for obtaining equal rights for women. She died, greatly respected, in 1896, at the age of eighty-three.

John Grew's daughter, Sarah Page Potts, brought her children, William, Robert, and Sallie to England twice, in 1866 and in 1882. Alicia Cooper had a very warm regard for the Potts family, and it was through them that the Leicester branch learned so much about their New England kinsfolk. Alicia gave to William Potts the journals and letters that his great-grandmother, Mary Grew (*née* Coltman), had sent to her own people.

The two houses in the Newarke, in which so many of the events related by Alicia Cooper took place, were demolished in 1931, and it is not now possible to give a complete list of their

owners and tenants. It is clear, however, that John Coltman obtained his title from a certain John Goude, and that his own son-in-law, Edward Cooper, held it after him. The property was then divided, but later it was made one again. The Town Clerk of Leicester (Mr. H. A. Pritchard), who was good enough to examine the deeds for us, thinks that the whole property became vested in the Burgess family, who sold it to Mr. Edward Shipley Ellis in 1853. Mr. Ellis, a very notable resident in Leicester, was chairman of the Midland Railway Company and the friend and patron of Thomas Cook, the excursionist, whose world-famous agency had its modest beginnings in Leicester. Mr. Ellis's widow, who was born a Burgess, lived in the southern house until her death in 1890; and his executors sold the whole property, as it stood, to the Corporation of Leicester in 1893. Upon this ground and the adjoining site, which until a few years ago was occupied by the Female Orphan Asylum, was built, in successive stages, the Municipal Art and Technical School. For many years the senior caretaker of this institution lived in the house originally provided for Edward and Anne Cooper by John Coltman, while the southern house was used as an annex of the School of Art. Though there were sewing-machines in the parlour, hand-loom in the library, and jewellers' appliances in all the best bed-rooms, the old house retained an air of distinction to the very last.

## Editorial Postscript

By S. H. Skillington

THE Town Clerk of Leicester, having specially examined the deeds in his official keeping, very kindly placed at our disposal a considerable amount of information concerning the various owners and occupants of the two old houses in the Newarke. As some of the additional facts could not be neatly fitted into a paper devoted almost exclusively to the Coltmans and their immediate connections, my wife has handed the whole of the new material to me, that I may present it, without diminution, in this separate postscript. In attempting to carry out her behest, I shall follow, as nearly as possible, the order and wording of Mr. Pritchard's note, which is headed: "Messuages formerly situate in the Newarke, Leicester". It appears that the property described in the deeds had been divided thus:—

1. Two messuages or dwelling houses situate in the Newarke. Mr. Edward Shipley Ellis purchased these two messuages on the 24th of March, 1853, from Joshua Ransom and Maria Ransom (formerly Burgess) his wife, Eliza Burgess, Hannah Burgess, Mary Anne Burgess, William Neild and Caroline Neild (formerly Burgess) his wife, Edward Shipley Ellis and Emma Ellis (formerly Burgess) his wife, for the total sum of £1,928 11s. 6d. The names of the various occupiers of the southernmost house are given as Thomas Coleman, Ann Peppin, Ann Ayscough, Miss Bond, Miss Jones, Richard Warner Wood, Mrs. Burgess and Edward Shipley Ellis. The tenants of the northernmost house, which faced the Trinity Hospital, appear as Edward Cooper, John Ryley, Richard Warner Wood and William Henry Osborne. According to the deeds, the property originally consisted of one house only, and was occupied, apparently in succession, by John Goude, John Coltman and Edward Cooper; but we know, from Alicia Cooper's chronicle, that Edward Cooper first lived in the northernmost house, which was specially built







LEICESTER CASTLE, ST. MARY'S CHURCH AND THE NEWARKE IN 1861  
Taken from the West Bank of the Soar

for him and his wife by John Coltman, at the time of his marriage to John Coltman's daughter. The dates of occupation are not stated in the deeds.

2. A piece of land, consisting of one thousand, seven hundred and ten square yards, bounded on the north partly by the messuages and partly by the Female Orphan Asylum, on the south by Queen Street (now called Richmond Street), on the west by Asylum Street, and on the east by the Newarke, was purchased by the late Edward Shipley Ellis from William Dabbs, John Dabbs and Thomas William Dabbs on the 24th of June, 1854, for £710 0s. 0d.

By his will of the 19th of May, 1877, Edward Shipley Ellis appointed his sons, John Edward Ellis, George Henry Ellis and Sydney Ellis, his executors and trustees. He devised the freehold messuage in which he then lived, situate in the Newarke, and also the freehold messuage or dwelling house adjoining thereto, then in the occupation of John Joseph Kinton, with the stables, etc., unto his wife, Emma Ellis, during her life, and, subject thereto, to the use of his sons, John Edward Ellis, George Henry Ellis and Sydney Ellis, upon trust for sale.

Edward Shipley Ellis died on the 3rd of September, 1879, his son Sydney predeceased him, and George Henry died on the 1st of October, 1889. Mrs. Emma Ellis, the testator's widow, died on the 2nd of January, 1890. Three years later, on the 4th of March, 1893, the Corporation of Leicester purchased the whole of the property from John Edward Ellis, M.P., the only surviving executor.

To this information, derived from the documents in his charge, Mr. Pritchard, adds the following personal note:—"The prior deeds are not in the possession of the Corporation. I have spoken to Messrs. Salusbury and Woodhouse on the telephone for the purpose of getting a sight of the deeds, but they cannot be traced. It appears to me that the messuages were vested in the family of Burgess some years before Mr. Edward Shipley Ellis purchased the property in 1853". My own hypothetical view was that Mrs. Ellis and the other female vendors were probably the daughters of the Mrs. Burgess whose name appears, immediately before that of Edward Shipley Ellis, in the list of persons who had occupied the southernmost house. It seemed to me also

that Mrs. Burgess was not unlikely to have been a widow, who had enjoyed life-possession of the property under the will of her husband, whose name does not appear in the Town Clerk's notes. Edward Shipley Ellis and his relatives were prominent members of the Society of Friends, and the Burgesses were of the same quiet persuasion. As both were families of good standing in the district, much respected for their integrity and unostentatious public spirit, I thought it worth while to pursue the enquiry a little further. I therefore enlisted the help of Mr. Bernard Ellis, who was good enough to submit the queries I had addressed to him to Miss Edith M. Ellis, a grand-daughter of Edward Shipley, who lives at Scalby, near Scarborough. In the course of her reply, Miss Ellis says:—"I am afraid that I cannot answer all your questions, but it is no trouble to try to do so. We do not know whether John Burgess bought the property or whether my grandfather, Edward [Shipley] Ellis did so for his mother-in-law; but Mrs. John Burgess lived there with her daughters, and we have no knowledge who was the tenant in the other house [the one built for Edward and Anne Cooper] at that time. The most interesting thing was the old arches in the cellar of grand-mamma's house, which I remember seeing as a little child (after my grandfather's death, of course). They are mentioned in Evelyn's Diary . . . and were part of an old church. . . . My grandfather owned the whole property, but had a tenant in the other part."

It appears from this that Edward Shipley Ellis, and his widow after him, occupied the southernmost house; and that, during their tenure, the house facing the Trinity Hospital was let to a separate tenant. It also appears that Mrs. Ellis's father was named John Burgess, and that he may, or may not, have owned the property in his lifetime. The two messuages may have been bought from the representatives of John Coltman, or there may have been intervening owners. The two arches, mentioned by Miss Ellis in her letter, formed part of the crypt of the collegiate church of the Newarke, which was built by the first duke of Lancaster and demolished at the Reformation. The northernmost house, or part of it, was occupied for a time by the late John Fulleylove, the painter, who had a studio there before he migrated to London. Soon after the property came into the hands of the Corporation, the oldest portion of the Colleges of Art and Tech-

nology, then modestly called the School of Art and the Technical School, was erected on the site of Mr. Ellis's garden. This building, which was originally designed by the late Mr. Perkins Pick, with a view to its extension, has since been added to, from time to time, so that it now occupies practically the whole of the ground mentioned in the deeds of 1853 and 1854.

In the course of some family reminiscences, the manuscript of which is in the possession of Mrs. Bernard Ellis, Mrs. Carey Franklin says:—"Also in the Newarke, quite near to the old house [the southernmost of the two messuages], lived my mother's old great-aunt, the Elizabeth Coltman who never married. Some handsome iron gates enclose a little yard, and are the entrance to two good houses—Miss Elizabeth Coltman lived in one, the Vaughan family in the other." The "two good houses" must be those adjoining, on the east, William Wigston's chantry house, which stands near the ruined southern gateway to the castle yard. These two houses were formerly a single mansion, built by one of the Skeffington family, in the seventeenth century, upon the foundation of the prebendal house of Thomas Wigston, the ecclesiastical brother of William. It would have been interesting to find out more particulars of Elizabeth Coltman's occupation of this house, in which she spent her last years and died; but, though serious efforts to do so were made, no further information of any kind was discovered. In her endeavours to obtain more knowledge, my wife was very courteously helped by Mr. Edward Freer, who facilitated her inspection of a large parcel of deeds relating to the two houses, next to the chantry house, which were once the mansion of the Skeffingtons.

For the nineteenth-century tenurial information concerning the two old houses in the Newarke, we are greatly obliged to Mr. H. A. Pritchard, and we are grateful to Messrs. Salusbury and Woodhouse for their efforts to trace the earlier deeds referred to in Mr. Pritchard's note. While I am making these acknowledgments, my wife wishes me to express her thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Ellis, Mrs. J. E. Ellis, Miss B. M. Ellis, and Mr. J. Russell Gimson, all of whom gave her willing help of one kind or another, and to Mr. Newton, the photographer, whose sympathetic co-operation in preparing the illustrations she found invaluable. Most of all, however, she is indebted to Mrs. M. E.

Franklin Rudd, who not only lent her the manuscript chronicles of Alicia Cooper, but also, in many pleasant conversations, enabled her to acquire an insight into the relationships to each other of the numerous descendants of John and Bridget Coltman that could not, without great labour, have been obtained in any other way.