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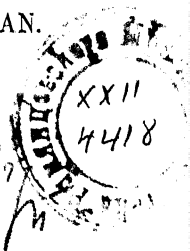
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HOME, SWEET HOME BY MRS. RIDDELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



HOME, SWEET HOME.

A Novel.

BY

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ETC.

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HOME, SWEET HOME.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT HOUSE.

A LARGE, old fashioned, rambling white house with red-tiled roof, standing high up on the side of a steep green hill; a background of dark fir-trees crowning that hill, belts of plantation running down to a split oak fence; a long broad strip of common-land, the turf smooth and close as velvet; a narrow sandy country road—made up a landscape on which I gazed day after day, and year after year, from the windows of our cottage, till it became photographed on my brain, a very part and parcel of my memory.

It is not often people begin a story by telling what their eyes beheld; but I am compelled to do so, since that house and those trees, the green hillside, the sward across which lay broad shadows and broader patches of sunshine, always

pass before my mind's eye when I sit down in the twilight and think about those early days which are now a portion of the long ago.

My own home plays a very small part in the programme memory recalls when compared with that large white house, and the fir plantations reflected dark and grim against the horizon.

In the summer mornings, whilst the dew was still glittering on the grass, I used to look up at "The Great House"—that was the name of the place—and seeing the blinds drawn close and the shutters unopened, speculate concerning the lives led by human beings who lay so long a-bed. In the spring I longed to search the plantations for violets and wood anemones. When the autumn came, and the "family" departed, as was its wont, to a seaside resort some thirty miles distant, I have trespassed amongst the firs in search of pine-cones whilst all the time there was a terrible fascination for me in the idea of the large deserted rooms, of the high walled-in gardens where the flowers bloomed and the fruit ripened with never a one to admire or enjoy. Whilst winter's rain descended I was wont to marvel in what way the occupants of the Great House employed their time. In brief, whether with hand shading my eyes or nose flattened against the window-panes, through mists of driving rain or a veil of softly falling snow, I contemplated the view, that mansion on the hillside with wings—I did not

mention the wings containing windows which resembled eyes—proved to me just what the far Western Land did to Columbus.

Bits of strangely carved wood, fruits of unfamiliar hue, were borne over the waters to him, and he longed to go forth and discover the country whence such wonders came. Waifs from that far-away sphere of society floated on the waves of imagination into my heart, and I too like Columbus, became unconsciously an explorer.

I have been to the Great House in my time. Yes; and to a few other houses, which it is more than possible might never have been visited by me had those trees and that gaunt mansion failed to rear themselves before my childish sight.

Not higher above our modest cottage stood the Great House than the family who abode in it ranked socially above ourselves. The Wiffordes had been "county people" from the beginning of time, and promised to be county people till the end of it. There never was a period of the world's history when a Wifforde of Lovedale had no existence; and for a man in all Fairshire, in which county Lovedale is situated, to be ignorant of the name only proved that he must be a very new comer indeed, and have spent the previous portion of his life in the remotest wilds of England. As for us, there was a time when