

in the oak windows in the dark Maiden Lane entrance hall, looking out to see the fashions'.

But there is also available to us another description by means of which we can enter even more intimately into the proceedings, and that comes from the writings of the Rev. Tom Mozley, published many years later (1885) under the very non-committal title of *Reminiscences chiefly of towns, villages and schools*. Mozley was a cousin of the Maw brothers and this is the tale that he tells about the family in Maiden Lane:

'I know not how my cousin had already become acquainted with the family of a gold assayer, pursuing his quiet occupation in a narrow lane near Goldsmiths' Hall, behind where now stands the General Post Office. The alchemist, for such he might have been, did his work in a very small dark room with what looked like an oven at his right hand, a broad ledge before him, and a window in front. On the window-sill were many bottles of chemicals. He was himself a rather grim, very taciturn, elderly man. His large hands seemed hardly suited for delicate manipulation, and they were stained all over with the corrosive stuffs about him. Opening the oven door, he disclosed a small furnace, from out of which he took out very small earthenware cups, or crucibles as they were called. Among what looked like ash, or other debris, there were very minute beads of shiny metal. These were the gold and silver from which the alloy had been extracted by an acid or some other substance under fusion. It must have been a tolerably thriving business in those days, for the assayer occupied a nice little house in a row in Kennington, to which I several times accompanied my cousins over the fields. As many as a dozen or a score of samples would come in one morning, and as even the Goldsmiths' Company had then a small apparatus and a small staff, they sometimes employed the assayer when they had more than they could manage in a day. The wife of this taciturn gentleman, who must once have been pretty, was a good writer and listener till middle age, when she was run over by a cart and deprived of hearing. She then became a very good and continual talker. With abundance of tongue exercise, she lived healthy and happy to near a hundred. Her two daughters married my two cousins, and their grandchildren, indeed I think their great-grandchildren, are now well established here and there over the land.'

Now there is no doubt that Mozley's acid portrait of Mary Johnson does her great injustice. In all the Johnson records and traditions about her she stands out as a kindly generous and gracious figure, especially as her years multiplied towards the 'near a hundred'. The picture of her drawn by

her grand-daughter Anne Mary Wood is a gentler one:

'She was faithful and sincere, what she called "staunch" - she was I think scrupulously exact about money matters, though nobly generous, her gifts and purchases being always of the best and finest quality. She audited personally every day, almost to the very last, her small house-keeping expenditure, with her "companion" Hannah Corfield, about whose rudeness and stupidity her complaints were many and not wholly undeserved. Perhaps the sweetest feature in a somewhat stormy and passionate character was her intense family affection, reaching out to all who were allied to her even distantly, but embracing children and grandchildren with a warmth of love and longing which seemed to quicken as she neared the grave. - Poor Grannie! even as a child I had the impression that she was a person unique and unappreciated.'

Elsewhere the diarist deploras her waste of opportunity in failing to take advantage of 'the wealth of antiquarian and even historical anecdote I might have drawn from my communicative and loquacious grannie', and here her thoughts are evidently running parallel with those of Mozley but how much more sympathetic their course! In a final summing up she says this:

'Grannie always seemed to me like a survival of the pre-revolutionary Frenchwoman, of whose wit and of whose *salon* one reads; indeed she was curiously French, not only in her love for the language (which she spoke abominably) but also in her love for Paris, which attracted her like a lodestone, and in her quickness of repartee, her love of display and admiration, and her eagerness, to the very last, for any little excitement and change of scene.'

Against this bright portrait, the figure of her husband must necessarily loom darker and less clearly cut. One has the impression of a heavy conscientiousness and diligence and a great sense of responsibility towards both business and family. The diarist refers to him as 'the plodding citizen of Maiden Lane' and dwells on his calm obstinate nature and the painful extremes to which his conscientiousness went. The two temperaments were very different but no one can say that the marriage was anything but a happy one, with a happiness that prevailed until the end.