

Love Romances of the Aristocracy eBook

Love Romances of the Aristocracy

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A PRINCESS OF PRUDES

Among the many fair and frail women who fed the flames of the “Merrie Monarch’s” passion from the first day of his restoration to that last day, but one short week before his death, when Evelyn saw him “sitting and toying with his concubines,” there was, it is said, only one of them all who really captured his royal and wayward heart, that loveliest, simplest, and most designing of prudes, *La belle Stuart*.

When Barbara Villiers was enslaving Charles by her opulent charms, the queen of his many mistresses, Frances Stuart was growing to beautiful girlhood, an exile at the French Court, with no dream or care of her future conquest of a king. Her father, a son of Lord Blantyre, had carried his death-dealing sword through many a fight for the first Charles, a distant kinsman of his own; and, when the Stuart sun set in blood, had made good his escape to the friendly shores of France, where he had found a fresh field for his valour.

Meanwhile his daughter was happy in the charge of the widowed Queen Henrietta Maria, who although, as Cardinal de Retz tells us, she frequently “lacked a faggot to leave her bed in the Louvre,” and even a crust to stay the pangs of hunger, proved a tender foster-mother to brave Walter Stuart’s child, and watched her growth to beauty with a mother’s pride.

Even before she emerged from short frocks, Frances Stuart had established herself as the pet *par excellence* of the Court of France. With Anne of Austria the little Scottish maiden was a prime favourite; every gallant, from “Monsieur” to the rakish Comte de Guise, loved to romp with her, and to join in her peals of childish laughter; and the King himself, Louis XIV., stole many a kiss, and was proud to be called her “big sweetheart.” So devoted was His Majesty to *La belle Ecossaise* that, when her mother talked of taking her away to England, he begged that she would not remove so fair an ornament from his Court, and vowed that he would provide the child with a splendid dower and a noble husband if she would but allow her to remain.

But Madame Stuart had other designs for her pretty daughter; and when Henrietta Maria took boat to England to shine again at the Court of Whitehall, under her son’s reign, Frances Stuart joined her retinue, and found herself transported from the schoolroom to the most brilliant and dangerous court in Europe. When this transformation came in her life Walter Stuart’s daughter was just blossoming into as sweet and fragrant a flower as ever bloomed in woman’s guise. Fair and graceful as a lily, with luxuriant brown hair, eyes of violet, and a proud, dainty little head, she had a figure which, although yet not fully formed, was faultless in its modelling and its exquisite grace. And these physical charms were allied to an unspoiled freshness, which combined the artless fascinations of the child with the allurements of the woman.



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Such was Frances Stuart when she made her appearance at the Court of Charles II. as maid-of-honour, to his Queen, Catherine; and one can scarcely wonder that, even among the most beautiful women in England, the French “Mademoiselle,” as she was called, was hailed as a new revelation of female fascination, especially as she brought with her the bubbling gaiety and passionate zest of life of the land of her exile.

To the “Merrie Monarch’s” senses, sated with riper beauties and more stolid charms, this unspoiled child of nature was as a wild rose compared with exotic hot-house flowers. She was, he vowed, so “dainty, so fresh, so fragrant,” that none but the sourest of anchorites could resist her—and he was no anchorite, as the world knew well. Almost at sight of her he fell madly in love with her, and brought to bear on her the battery of all his fascinations. Was ever maid placed, on the threshold of life, in so dangerous a predicament? For the King, who was her first lover, was also one of the most captivating men in England, a past-master in the conquest of woman. But, in response to all his advances, his honeyed words and oglings, the Stuart maid only laughed a merry childish laugh. She would romp with him, as she had done with the gallants at the French Court; to her he was only another “big playfellow” to tease and play with. She knew nothing of love, and did not wish to know more. He might kiss her—*vraiment*—why not? and that Charles made abundant use of this concession, we know, for we are told that “he would kiss her for half an hour at a time,” caring little who looked on.

And all her other Whitehall lovers—a legion of them, from the Duke of Buckingham to the youngest page at Court, she treated in precisely the same way. Was it innocence or artfulness, this assumption of childish prudery? “She was a child,” says Count Hamilton, “in all respects save playing with dolls”—a child who refused to grow into a woman, and yet, one shrewdly suspects that behind her childishness was a motive deeper than is usually associated with so much simplicity.

She infected the whole Court with her exuberant youthfulness. Basset-tables and boudoir intrigues were alike deserted to enjoy the new era of nursery games which she inaugurated. Jaded gallants and sedate Ladies of the Bedchamber mingled their shrieks of laughter in blind-man’s buff and hunt-the-slipper with the Stuart maid as Lady of Misrule and arch-spirit of jollity. Pepys was shocked—or affected to be—one day by seeing all the great and fair ones of the Court squatting on the floor in the Whitehall gallery playing at “I love my love with an A because he is Amorous”; “I hate him with a B because he is Boring,” and so on; and no doubt rocking with glee at some sally of wit, for, Pepys says, “some of them were very witty.”



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The little madcap even carried her games and toys into the sacred environment of the Audience Chamber. Seated on the floor, innocently exposing the prettiest pair of ankles in England, and surrounded by her big playfellows, she would challenge them to a competition in castle-building with cards; and when her carefully-reared edifice toppled to the ground she would break into a silvery peal of laughter, and clap her hands for the King to come and help her to rebuild it, for no less distinguished assistant would she allow to touch her cards. And Charles never failed to respond to the summons, though he were hobnobbing with chancellor or archbishop, and would be sent away happy, with a kiss for his pains. No wonder poor Pepys was horrified at such unseemly goings-on.

And equally small wonder that the King's mistresses and the great ladies of the Court cast many a jealous and vindictive glance on the child, who had power to lure away their slaves to her nursery shrine. The Duke of Buckingham, himself, was prouder to be her favourite playfellow than of all his conquests in the field of love. He wrote songs, and sang them for her pleasure; he kept her in a ripple of laughter for hours together by his stories and clever mimicry, and rushed to her side whenever she summoned him to build card-castles or to join in a romp—until what was “play to the child” began to prove a serious matter to the man of the world. He found that, while he was building castles or chasing the elusive fairy blindfolded, she had stolen his heart away; but when he ventured to tell his love to her she boxed his ears, and told him to run away and not be so naughty again.

Was there ever so tantalising and inscrutable a maid? And as she had treated the King and his chief favourite, she treated all her other playfellows. The Earl of Arlington, a grave, dignified Lord of the Bedchamber, so far unbended as to make love to the little witch, who stood so well in the favour of his Sovereign; and never did man exert himself more to win the favour of a maid.

“Having provided himself,” says Hamilton, “with a great number of maxims and some historical anecdotes, he obtained an audience of Miss Stuart, in order to display them; at the same time offering her his most humble services in the situation to which it had pleased God and her virtue to raise her. But he was only in the preface of his speech, when he reminded her so ludicrously of Buckingham's mimicry of him that she burst into a peal of laughter in his very face, and rushed stifling from the room. Thus ignominiously was sounded the death-knell of Arlington's hopes!”

George Hamilton, one of the most handsome and fascinating men in England, fared better, but retired from the pursuit of so seductive and tantalising a maid. Still Hamilton was the most congenial playfellow of them all. He was a madcap like herself, always ripe for fun and frolic; and for a time she revelled

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in his comradeship. He first won her heart in the following fashion. One day old Lord Carlingford was delighting and convulsing her by placing a lighted candle in his mouth, and hobbling to and fro thus illuminated. "I can do better than that," exclaimed the irrepressible Hamilton. "Give me two candles." The candles were produced. Hamilton lit them, and thrust the pair into his capacious mouth, and minced three times round the room before they were extinguished, while *La belle Stuart* paraded after him, clapping her hands and laughing in her glee.

Such a feat was an efficient passport to her favour. Rollicking George was at once installed as playmate-in-chief to the spoiled child, and was privileged with a greater intimacy than any of her other favourites had ever enjoyed.

"Since the Court has been in the country," he confessed, "I have had a hundred opportunities of seeing her. You know that the *deshabille* of the bath is a great convenience for those ladies who, strictly adhering to their rules of decorum, are yet desirous to display all their charms and attractions. Miss Stuart is so fully acquainted with the advantages she possesses over all other women, that it is hardly possible to praise any lady at Court for a well-turned arm and a fine leg, but she is ever ready to dispute the point by demonstration. After all, a man must be very insensible to remain unconcerned and unmoved on such happy occasions."

It is conceivable that Hamilton, stimulated by such, no doubt, artless encouragement as he seems to have enjoyed, might have made a conquest where so many had failed, had not his future brother-in-law, Gramont, taken him seriously to task and warned him of the grave danger of flirting with the lady on whom the King had set eyes of love, and persuaded him at the eleventh hour to beat a dignified retreat.

Pepys draws a pretty picture of Miss Stuart at this time, as he saw her riding, among the Ladies of Honour, with the Queen in the Park.

"I followed them," he says, "up into Whitehall, and into the Queen's presence, where all the ladies walked, talking and fiddling with their hats and feathers, and changing and trying one another's by one another's heads and laughing. But, above all, Mrs Stuart in this dresse, with her hat cocked and a red plume, with her sweet eyes, little Roman nose, and excellent *taille*, is now the greatest beauty I ever saw, I think, in my life; and, if ever woman can, do exceed my Lady Castlemaine, at least in this dress. Nor do I wonder if the King changes, which I verily believe is the reason of his coldness to my Lady Castlemaine."

How many hearts Frances Stuart toyed with and broke in these days of her girlish beauty and irresponsibility will never be known; but we know that at least one hopeless wooer committed suicide, and another, Francis Digby, Lord Bristol's handsome son,

after years of unrequited idolatry, in his despair rushed away to seek and find death in the Dutch war.



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And it was not only over men that Frances Stuart cast the spell of her witchery. One of her earliest and most ardent admirers was none other than my Lady Castlemaine herself, who alone claimed to hold her Sovereign's heart. So secure she thought herself of her supremacy that she not only took the French beauty into favour, but actually encouraged Charles in his pursuit of her, probably little realising how dangerous a rival she was taking to her bosom. It is said that this was but an artifice to divert Charles's attention from an intrigue that she was carrying on with that rakish beau, Henry Jermyn; but, whatever the cause, there is no doubt that for a time she lost no opportunity of throwing her Royal lover and the fair Stuart together. She even looked on smilingly at a mock marriage, at one of her own entertainments, between the pair—"with ring and all other ceremonies of church service and ribands, and a sack-posset in bed, and flinging the stocking, evincing neither anger nor jealousy, but entering into the diversion with great spirit."

And not only did she thus trifle with fire; for some months she rarely saw the King but in Miss Stuart's presence.

"The King," to quote Hamilton again, "who seldom neglected to visit the Countess before she rose, seldom failed likewise to find Miss Stuart with her. The most indifferent objects have charms in a new attachment; however, the Countess was not jealous of this rival's appearing with her in such a situation, being confident that whenever she thought fit, she could triumph over all the advantages which these opportunities could afford Miss Stuart."

As a matter of fact Charles's *maitresse en titre* regarded the "Mademoiselle" as nothing more dangerous than a pretty, winsome child. "She is a lovely little thing," she once said patronisingly, "but she is only a spoiled child, fonder of her toys and games than of the finest lover in the world." But she was not long left in this unsuspecting Paradise. There was soon no doubt that the "child" had made a conquest of the King, and that she, the mother of his children, no longer held the throne of his heart.

Her first rude disillusionment came when Charles was presented by Gramont with "the most elegant and magnificent carriage (called a 'calash') that had ever been seen." The Queen herself and Lady Castlemaine each decided that she and no other should be the first to take an airing in Hyde Park in this gorgeous vehicle, which was sure to create an unparalleled sensation; and each exerted her utmost arts and eloquence to secure this concession from the King.

"Miss Stuart, however, had the same wish and requested to have the calash on the same occasion. The Queen retired in disdain from such a contest, while the King was driven to distraction between the cajoling and threats of the two rival beauties."

It was Miss Stuart, however, who won the day, to Lady Castlemaine's unrestrained rage and disgust. The child had scored the first point in the duel, the prize of which was the King's favour.



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According to Hamilton, this victory was believed to have cost the “prude” her virtue; but Miss Stuart had proved again and again that she was no such compliant maid. The only passport to her favours, though a King sought them, was a wedding-ring; and amid all the temptations of a dissolute Court, where virtue was as hard to seek as a needle in a a bundle of hay, she adhered to this high resolve. Probably no maid ever found her way with such a sure step through the iniquitous mazes of Charles II.'s Court to an honourable marriage as *La belle Stuart*; though at one time she so despaired of realising her ambition “to be a Duchess” that she declared she was “ready to marry any gentleman of fifteen hundred a year that would have her in honour.”

And never, perhaps, have the designs of a dissolute King been so cleverly and consistently baffled. Charles made no concealment of his passion for the beautiful maid-of-honour, and the more coldly she treated his advances, the more marked and ardent was his pursuit.

“Mr Pierce tells me,” Pepys writes, “that my Lady Castlemaine is not at all set by by the King, but that he do doat upon Mrs Stuart only, and that to the leaving of all business in the world, and to the open slighting of the Queen. That he values not who sees him, or stands by while he dallies with her openly; and then privately in her chamber below, while the very sentrys observe him going in and out; and that so commonly that the Duke, or any of the Nobles, when they would ask where the King is, they will ordinarily say, ‘Is the King above or below?’ meaning with Mrs Stuart; that the King do not openly disown my Lady Castlemaine, but that she comes to Court.”

Such was the spell which this enchantress cast over the King. Nor were her conquests by any means confined to the circle of the Court in which she moved a splendid, but unassailable Queen, for every man who came within the magic of her presence seems to have lost both head and heart. One of the most infatuated of all her victims was Phillippe Rotier, the youngest brother of the famous medallists whom Charles had invited to England, and whose first commission was to design a medal in celebration of the Peace of Breda. For the purposes of this medal Miss Stuart was asked by the King to pose as Britannia; and so captivated was Phillippe Rotier, to whom she gave sittings, by the exquisite perfection and grace of her figure, and so entranced by her beauty, that he fell madly in love with her, and narrowly escaped the loss of reason as well as of his heart. Since that day the figure of Britannia has appeared on millions of coins and medals to perpetuate through the centuries the faultless form of the woman who drove artist as well as King to the verge of despair by her beauty and her inaccessible prudery.

It was destined, however, that a prize which had so long eluded the handsomest gallants in England should fall at last to one of the most insignificant of all Charles's courtiers, a man who had neither good looks, intellect, nor character to commend him to a lady's favour. Such a gilded nonentity was Charles Stuart, Duke of Richmond and of Lennox, who, having buried two wives, now began to cast envious eyes on the maid-of-honour whom his Sovereign could not win.



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Small in stature, deformed in figure—a caricature of a man, His Grace of Richmond was the last degenerate scion of the Stuarts of Richmond-d'Aubigny, a man of depraved tastes and besotted brain, the butt and the clown of Charles's Court. That this middle-aged buffoon should aspire to the hand of the loveliest and most elusive woman in England was only less amazing than that she should smile on his suit. The Court was struck with consternation—and convulsed with laughter. Nothing so utterly astonishing and so ludicrous had come within its experience. But there could be no doubt about it. *La belle Stuart*, who had so long resisted the King, and given the cold shoulder to such gallants as the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Arlington, was not only smiling on her ill-favoured suitor, she was actually giving him midnight assignations in her own apartments, and risking for a clown the reputation a King had been powerless to sully.

Here, at last, was a fine weapon placed in the hands of the outraged and vindictive Castlemaine. Here was a splendid opportunity of paying off old scores, of showing to her Royal lover the kind of woman for whom he had supplanted her, and of reinstating herself in his good graces. One night, as he returned in an evil temper from a fruitless visit to Miss Stuart's apartments, from which he had been sent away on some frivolous pretext, he was accosted by my Lady Castlemaine, who, with ill-concealed triumph, told him that at the moment *La belle Stuart* turned him away from her door, she was actually dallying with his new and contemptible rival, the Duke of Richmond, at the other side of it.

Charles was incredulous, furious at the suggestion. "Come with me," Lady Castlemaine answered, "and I will prove that I am telling you the simple truth;" and taking his hand she led him exultantly down the gallery from his apartments to the threshold of Miss Stuart's door, where, with a sweeping curtsy and an invitation to enter, she left him. On throwing open the door, to quote Hamilton, the King

"found Miss Stuart in bed, but far from being asleep. The Duke of Richmond was seated at her pillow, and in all probability was less inclined to sleep than herself. The King, who of all men was usually one of the most mild and gentle, testified his resentment to the Duke of Richmond in such terms as he had never used before. The Duke was speechless and almost petrified; he saw his master and King justly irritated. The first transports which rage inspires on such occasions are dangerous. Miss Stuart's window was very convenient for a sudden revenge, the Thames flowing close beneath it. He cast his eyes upon it, and seeing those of the King more incensed and fired with indignation than he thought his nature capable of, he made a profound bow, and retired without replying a single word to the vast torrent of threats and menaces that were poured on him."

But if the Duke proved thus a poltroon, Miss Stuart

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showed a very different metal. She was furious at the indignity of the King's intrusion on her privacy, and proceeded to read him such a lecture as his Royal ears had never listened to. She was no slave, she said, with flashing eyes, to be treated in such a manner, not to be allowed to receive visits from a man of the Duke of Richmond's rank, who came with honourable intentions. She was perfectly free to dispose of her hand as she thought proper; and if she could not do it in England, there was no power on earth that could hinder her from going over to France, and throwing herself into a convent to enjoy that tranquillity that was denied her in his Court! And the enraged beauty wound up her lecture by pointing imperiously to the door and bidding the King begone, "to leave her in repose, at least for the remainder of the night."

Charles went away baffled and cowed, but with a fierce rage in his heart. He had been defied, browbeaten, insulted by the woman for whom he would almost have bartered his crown; and he vowed that he would be revenged. On the following morning Miss Stuart, her anger now cooled, and awake to the enormity of her offence against Charles, sought an audience with Queen Catherine, to whom she told the whole story, begging her to appease the King, and to induce him to allow her to retire to a convent. So affecting was this interview that, we are told, the Queen and the maid-of-honour mingled their tears together, and Catherine promised to do her utmost to bring about a reconciliation.

One final attempt Charles made to capture the prize before it was lost to him for ever. He offered to dismiss all his mistresses, from the Castlemaine herself to saucy Nell Gwynn, and to dower her with large revenues and splendid titles if she would but consent to be his *maitresse en titre*; but to all his seductions and bribes the inflexible maid-of-honour turned a blind eye. No future, however dazzling, could compensate her for the loss of her dearest possession. "I hope," said the King at last, "I may live to see you old and willing," as he walked away in high dudgeon. To the proposed match with the Duke he point-blank refused his consent, and vowed that if his sovereign will were defied, the punishment would be in proportion to the offence.

But the fair Stuart had finally made up her mind. It had long been her ambition—from childhood, it is said—to be a Duchess, and she was not going to let the opportunity slip for all the kings in the world. What might come after was another matter. A Duchess's coronet and a wedding-ring were her immediate goal. Thus it came to pass that one dark night she stole away from the Palace of Whitehall, and was rowed to London Bridge, where the Duke awaited her in his coach. Through the night the runaway pair were driven to Cobham Hall, in Kent, where, long before morning dawned, an obliging parson had made them man and wife. Frances Stuart was a Duchess at last; and Charles's long intrigue had ended (or so it seemed) in final discomfiture.

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On hearing the news the King was beside himself with anger. He forbade the runaways ever to show their faces near his Court—he even dismissed his Chancellor Clarendon, whom he suspected of having a hand in the plot.

But all his wrath fell impotently on the new Duchess, who returned his presents and settled smilingly down to enjoy her new dignities and her honeymoon. Within a year—so powerless is anger against love—Charles summoned the truants back to favour, and the Duchess, as Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen, was installed once more at Whitehall, more splendid and pre-eminent than ever. During her brief exile, she had held a rival court of her own as near Whitehall as Somerset House, where, says Pepys,

“she was visited for her beauty’s sake by people, as the Queen is at nights. And they say also she is likely to go to Court again, and there put my Lady Castlemaine’s nose out of joint. God knows that would make a great turn.”

How far the Duke’s bride succeeded in putting Lady Castlemaine’s “nose out of joint” must remain a matter of speculation. There seems little doubt that as a wife she proved more complaisant to Charles than as a maid. She had carried her virtue unstained to the altar and a Duchess’s coronet, and this seems to have been the main concern of the beautiful prude. That Charles was more infatuated even with the wife than with the maid-of-honour is incontestable. He not only made open love to her at Court, but, especially after he had packed off her husband, the Duke, as Ambassador to Denmark, his pursuit took a clandestine and more dangerous shape. Pepys throws a light on what looks like a secret amour, when he tells us, on the authority of Mr Pierce, that Charles once “did take a pair of oars or a sculler, and all alone, or but one with him, go to Somerset House (from Whitehall), and there, the garden-door not open, himself clamber over the wall to make a visit to the Duchess, which is a horrid shame.”

[Illustration: FRANCES, DUCHESS OF RICHMOND]

But the Duchess’s new reign of conquest was destined to be brief. To the consternation of her Royal lover she was struck down with small-pox,

“by which,” to quote Pepys again, “all do conclude she will be wholly spoiled, which is the greatest instance of the uncertainty of beauty that could be in this age; but then she hath had the benefit of it to be first married, and to have kept it so long, under the greatest temptations in the world from a King, and yet without the least imputation.”

That Pepys’s fears were realised we know from Ruvigny’s letters to Louis XIV., in which he says that “her matchless beauty was impaired beyond recognition, one of her brilliant eyes being nearly quenched for ever.” During this tragic illness Charles, who was consumed with anxiety, visited her more than once, thus proving, at a terrible risk, the sincerity of his devotion. And it is even said that his admiration of her was not diminished by the loss of her beauty.



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With this loss of her beauty, however, the Duchess's reign may be said to have come to an end. King Charles's eyes were soon to be dazzled by the fresher charms of Louise de Querouaille, whom the "Sun-King" had sent from France to turn his head and influence his foreign policy in Louis's favour; and *La belle Stuart* was not slow to realise that at last her sun had set. During the remainder of her long life, at least until the Orange King came to the Throne, she retained her office of Lady of the Bedchamber to two Queens; but her appearances at Court, the scene of so many triumphs, were as few as she could make them.

For the rest her days were spent in retirement, among her beloved books and pictures and cats; until, after thirty years of widowhood, full of years and wearied of life's vanities, she was laid to rest in her ducal robes in Westminster Abbey. The bulk of her enormous fortune went to her nephew, Lord Blantyre, with a direction that he should purchase with part of it an estate, to be known as "Lennox's Love to Blantyre"; and to this day "Lennox-Love" perpetuates, like the Britannia of our coins, the memory of one of the most beautiful and tantalising women who have ever driven men to distraction by their beauty.

CHAPTER II

THE NIGHTINGALE OF BATH

A century and a half ago Bath had reached the zenith of her fame and allurements, not only as "Queen of the West," but as Empress of all the haunts of pleasure in England. She drew, as by an irresistible magnet, rank and beauty and wealth to her shrine. In her famous Assembly Rooms, statesmen rubbed shoulders with card-sharppers, Marquises with swell mobsmen, and Countesses with courtesans, all in eager quest of pleasure or conquest or gain. The Bath season was England's carnival, when cares and ceremonial alike were thrown to the winds, when the pleasure of the moment was the only ambition worth pursuing, and when even the prudish found a fearful joy in playing hide-and-seek with vice.

But although the fairest women in the land flocked to Bath, by common consent not one of them all was so beautiful and bewitching as Elizabeth Ann Linley, the girl-nightingale, whose voice entranced the ear daily at the Assembly Rooms concerts as her loveliness feasted the eye. She was, as all the world knew, only the daughter of Thomas Linley, singing-master and organiser of the concerts, a man who had plied chisel and saw at the carpenter's bench before he found the music that was in him; but, obscure as was her birth, she reigned supreme by virtue of a loveliness and a gift of song which none of her sex could rival.

It is thus little wonder that Elizabeth Linley's fame had travelled far beyond the West Country town in which she was cradled. George III. had summoned her to sing to him



in his London palace, and had been so overcome by her gifts of beauty and melody that, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he had stroked her hair and caressed her hands, and declared to the blushing girl that he had never seen any one so beautiful or heard a voice so divinely sweet.



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Charles Dibdin tried to enshrine her in fitting verse, but abandoned the effort in despair, vowing that she was indeed of that company described by Milton:

“Who, as they sang, would take the prisoned soul
And lap it in Elysium.”

The Bishop of Meath, in his unepiscopal enthusiasm, declared that she was “the link between an angel and a woman”; while Dr Charles Burney, supreme musician and father of the more famous Madame d’Arblay, wrote more soberly of her:

“The tone of her voice and expression were as enchanting as her countenance and conversation. With a mellifluous-toned voice, a perfect shake and intonation, she was possessed of the double power of delighting an audience equally in pathetic strains and songs of brilliant execution, which is allowed to very few singers.”

To her Horace Walpole also paid this curious tribute:

“Miss Linley’s beauty is in the superlative degree. The king admires and ogles her as much as he dares to do in so holy a place as oratorio.”

Such are a few of the tributes, of which contemporary records are full, paid to the fair “Nightingale of Bath,” whom Gainsborough and Reynolds immortalised in two of their inspired canvases—the latter as Cecilia—her face almost superhuman in its beauty and the divine rapture of its expression—seated at a harpsichord and pouring out her soul in song.

It was inevitable that a girl of such charms and gifts—“superior to all the handsome things I have heard of her,” John Wilkes wrote, “and withal the most modest, pleasing and delicate flower I have seen”—should have lovers by the score. Every gallant who came to Bath, sought to woo, if not to win, her. But Elizabeth Linley was no coquette; nor was she a foolish girl whose head could be turned by a handsome face or pretty compliments, or whose eyes could be dazzled by the glitter of wealth and rank. She was wedded to her music, and no lover, she vowed, should wean her from her allegiance. It was thus a shock to the world of pleasure-seekers at Bath to learn that the beauty, who had turned a cold shoulder to so many high-placed gallants, had promised her hand to an elderly, unattractive wooer called Long, a man almost old enough to be her grandfather.

That her heart had not gone with her hand we may be sure. We know that it was only under the strong compulsion of her father that she had given her consent; for Mr Long had a purse as elongated as his name, and to the eyes of the poor singing-master his gold-bags were irresistible. Her elderly wooer loaded his bride-to-be with costly presents; he showered jewels on her, bought her a trousseau fit for a Queen; and was

on the eve of marrying her, when—without a word of warning, it was announced that the wedding, to which all Bath had been excitedly looking forward, would not take place!



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Mr Linley was furious, and threatened the terrors of the law; but the bridegroom that failed was adamant. It was said that, in cancelling the engagement, Mr Long was acting a chivalrous part, in response to Miss Linley's pleading that he would withdraw his suit, since her heart could never be his, and by withdrawing shield her from her father's anger. However this may have been, Mr Long steadily declined to go to the altar, and ultimately appeased the singing-master by settling £3,000 on his daughter, and allowing her to keep the valuable jewels and other presents he had given her.

It was at this crisis in the Nightingale's life, when all Bath was ringing with the fiasco of her engagement, and she herself was overcome by humiliation, that another and more dangerous lover made his appearance at Bath—a youth (for such he was) whose life was destined to be dramatically linked with hers. This newcomer into the arena of love was none other than Richard Brinsley Sheridan, grandson of Dean Swift's bosom friend, Dr Thomas Sheridan, one of the two sons of another Thomas, who, after a roaming and profitless life, had come to Bath to earn a livelihood by teaching elocution.

This younger Thomas Sheridan seems to have inherited none of the wit and cleverness of his father, Swift's boon companion. Dr Johnson considered him "dull, naturally dull. Such an excess of stupidity," he added, "is not in nature." But, in spite of his dulness, "Sherry"—as he was commonly called—had been clever enough to coax a pension of £200 a year out of the Government, and was able to send his two boys to Harrow and Oxford.

The Sheridan boys had been but a few days in Bath when they both fell head over heels in love with Elizabeth Linley, with whom their sister had been equally quick to strike up a friendship. But from the first, Charles, the elder son, was hopelessly outmatched.

"On our first acquaintance," Miss Linley wrote in later years, "both professed to love me—but yet I preferred the youngest, as by far the most agreeable in person, beloved by every one."

Indeed, from a boy, Richard Sheridan seemed born to win hearts. His sister has confessed:

"I admired—I almost adored him. He was handsome. His cheeks had the glow of health; his eyes—the finest in the world—the brilliancy of genius, and were soft as a tender and affectionate heart could render them. The same playful fancy, the same sterling and innoxious wit that was shown afterwards in his writings, cheered and delighted the family circle."

Such was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, when, in the year 1769, he first set eyes on the girl, who, after many dramatic vicissitudes, was to bear his name and share his glories. From the first sight of her he was hopelessly in love, although none but his sister knew

it. He was little more than a school-boy, and was content to “bide his time,” worshipping mutely at the shrine of the girl whom some day he meant to make his own.



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He gave no sign of jealousy when his elder brother made love to her before his eyes—only to retire quickly, chilled by a coldness which he realised he could never thaw; or even when his Oxford chum, Halhed, his dearest friend and the colleague of his youthful pen, fell a victim to Elizabeth's charms, and, in his innocence, begged Sheridan to plead his suit with her. Halhed, too, had to retire from the hopeless suit; and Richard Sheridan, still silent, save, perhaps, for the eloquence of tell-tale eyes, held the field alone.

It was at this stage of our story that a grave element of danger entered Elizabeth Linley's life, with the arrival at Bath of a Major Matthews, a handsome *roue*, with a large rent-roll from Welsh acres, and a dangerous reputation won in the lists of love. At sight of the fair Nightingale in the Assembly Rooms this hero of many conquests was himself laid low. He was frantically in love, and before many days had passed vowed that he would shoot himself if his charmer refused to smile on him. Her coldness only fanned his ardour; and his persecution reached such a pitch that in her alarm she appealed to young Sheridan for help.

Nothing could have been more fortunate for the young lover than such an appeal and the necessity for it. It was a tribute to her esteem, and to his budding manliness, which delighted him. Moreover, it gave him many opportunities of meeting her, and talking over the situation with her. At any cost this persecution must end; and the result of the conferences was that an excellent plan was evolved. Richard was to worm himself into the confidence of the Major, and, in the character of friend and well-wisher, was to advise him, as a matter of diplomacy, to cease his attentions to Miss Linley for a time. Meanwhile arrangements were to be made for the Nightingale's escape to France, where she proposed to enter a convent until she was of age—thus finding a refuge from the persecution to which her beauty constantly subjected her, and also from the scandal which the Long fiasco had given rise to, and which was still a great source of unhappiness to her.

The plot was cunningly planned and worked smoothly. The Major was induced by subtle pleading to leave Miss Linley in peace for a time; and, to quote Miss Sheridan:

“At length they fixed on an evening when Mr Linley, his eldest son and Miss Mary Linley were engaged at the concert (Miss Linley being excused on the plea of illness) to set out on their journey. Sheridan brought a sedan-chair to Mr Linley's house in the Crescent, in which he had Miss Linley conveyed to a post-chaise that was waiting for them on the London road. A woman was in the chaise who had been hired to accompany them on this extraordinary elopement.”

For elopement it really was, although ostensibly Sheridan was merely playing the part of a friendly escort to a distressed lady, whatever deeper scheme, unknown to her, may have been in his mind. After a brief stay in London a boat was taken to Dunkirk, and the journey resumed towards Lille.

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It was during this last stage of the journey that Sheridan disclosed his hand. With consummate, if questionable, cleverness he explained that he could not, in honour, leave her in a convent except as his wife; that he had loved her since first he met her more than anything else in life, and that he could not bear the thought of her fair name being sullied by the scandal that would surely follow this journey taken in his company.

To such plausible arguments, pleaded by one who confessed that he loved her, and to whom she was (as she now realised) far from indifferent, Miss Linley could not remain deaf. And before the coach had travelled many miles from Calais the runaways found an accommodating priest to make them one. The would-be nun thus dramatically ended her journey to the convent at the altar.

“It was not,” she wrote to him later, “your person that gained my affection. No, it was that delicacy, that tender interest which you seemed to take in my welfare, that were the motives which induced me to love you.”

The honeymoon that followed these strange nuptials was of short duration; for, a few days later, Mr Linley arrived, in a high state of anger, to reclaim and carry off his runaway daughter; and Sheridan was left to follow ignominiously in their wake. When he reached Bath it was to find his hands full. During his absence the irate Major, quick to discover his perfidy, had published the following notice in the local *Chronicle*:—

“Mr Richard S., having attempted, in a letter left behind him for that purpose, to account for his scandalous method of running away from this place, by insinuations derogating from my character and that of a young lady, innocent as far as relates to me or my knowledge, since which he has neither taken notice of my letters, nor even informed his own family of the place where he has hid himself, I cannot longer think he deserves the treatment of a gentleman, than in this public manner to post him as a Liar and a treacherous Scoundrel.—THOMAS MATTHEWS.”

Such a public insult could, of course, only have one issue. Sheridan promptly challenged Matthews to a duel, the result of which was that the Major was compelled to make an apology, as public as his insult. But, so far was he from penitence, that within a few weeks he demanded a second meeting—and this proved a much more serious matter for Sheridan.

The rivals met the following morning on Claverton Down; and after a few furious exchanges both swords were broken, and the opponents were struggling together on the ground. Matthews, however, being much the stronger, was able to pin Sheridan down, and with a piece of the broken sword stabbed him repeatedly in the face. “Beg your life, and I will spare it,” he demanded of the prostrate and defenceless man. “I will neither beg it, nor receive it from such a villain,” was the unflinching answer.

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“Matthews then renewed the attack, and, having picked up the point of one of the swords, ran it through the side of the throat and pinned him to the ground with it, exclaiming, ‘I have done for him.’ He then left the field, accompanied by his second, and, getting into a carriage with four horses which had been waiting for him, drove off.”

Sheridan, unconscious and apparently dying, was driven from the Downs to a neighbouring inn, “The White Hart,” where for a time he hung betwixt life and death. On hearing of his condition Miss Linley (who at the time was singing at Cambridge) travelled post-haste to his bedside; and, tenderly nursed by his wife and his sister, the wounded man slowly fought his way back to strength.

One would have thought that, after such a tragic experience and observing the mutual devotion of the young couple, their parents would have relented and given their approval of the union, however improvident and inexcusable it might appear to them. But, on both sides, they were obdurate; and Mr Sheridan carried his opposition to the extent of extracting from his son a promise that he would not even see his wife.

But love laughs at parents’ frowns and usually triumphs in the end. When Elizabeth Linley went away to London to sing in oratorio, her husband followed her; and, in the *role* of hackney coachman, had the pleasure of driving not only his wife but her father, home nightly from the concert-room, without either of them suspecting his identity. When at last he revealed himself to his wife, her delight was so great as to leave no doubt of the sincere love she bore him. Many a secret meeting followed; a final joint appeal ultimately broke down the obduracy of the parents; and once again Sheridan led his bride to the altar, to make her finally and securely his own.

For a time Richard Sheridan and his Nightingale found a haven in a remote, rose-covered cottage at East Burnham. These were days of unclouded happiness, when, the “world forgetting and by the world forgot,” they lived only for love, caring nothing of the future. They were days of simple delights; for their entire income was the interest of Mr Long’s L3000, which proved ample for their needs. Mrs Sheridan, now at the zenith of her fame, might have won thousands by her voice—she actually refused offers of nearly L4000 for one short season—but her husband wished to keep the Nightingale’s voice for his own exclusive delight; and she was only too happy in thus turning her back on fame and fortune.

But such halcyon days could not last long. Even Paradise might pall on such a restless temperament as that of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. He began to sigh for the outer world in which he felt that it was his destiny to shine, for an arena in which he could do justice to the gifts which were clamouring for scope and exercise. And thus, to Mrs Sheridan’s lasting regret, cottage and roses and simple delights of the country were left behind, and she found herself installed in a Portman Square house, in the heart of the world of fashion.

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Here Sheridan, always the most improvident of men, launched out into extravagances more suited to an income of £5000 a year than the paltry £150 which was all he could command. He entertained on a lavish scale; and his wit and charm, supplemented by his wife's beauty and gift of song, soon surrounded them with a fashionable crowd eager to eat his dinners and to attend his wife's *soirees*. Sheridan was in his element in this environment of luxury and prodigality; but the Bath Nightingale would gladly have changed it all for "a little quiet home that I can enjoy in comfort," as she told her husband—above all, for the Burnham cottage where she had been so idyllically happy.

Perhaps if Sheridan had never left the cottage and the roses, his name would never have been known to fame. His ambition needed some such stimulus as this spasm of extravagance to wake it to activity. He must now make money or be submerged by debts; and under this impulse of necessity it was that he wooed fortune with *The Rivals*, and awoke to find himself famous and potentially rich. Other comedies followed swiftly from his eager and inspired pen—*The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna*, and *The Critic*—each greeted with enthusiasm by a world to which such dramatic triumphs were a revelation and a delight. Sheridan was not only the "talk of the town"; he was hailed universally as the brightest dramatic star of the age.

It is needless to say that Sheridan's fame was a delight to his wife.

"Not long ago," she wrote to a friend, "he was known as 'Mrs Sheridan's husband.' Now the tables are turned, and, henceforth, I expect I shall be just Mr Sheridan's wife. Nor could I wish any more exalted title. I am proud and thankful to be the wife of the cleverest man in England, and the best husband in the world!"

That Mrs Sheridan adored her husband is evident from every letter she wrote to him. She addresses him as "my dearest Love" and "my darling Dick," and vows that she cannot be happy apart from him. "I cannot love you," she declares, "and be perfectly satisfied at such a distance from you. I depended upon your coming to-night, and shall not recover my spirits till we meet." But through her letters runs the same hankering after the old simple, peaceful days—the days of love in a cottage. "I could draw," she writes, "such a picture of happiness that it would almost make me wish the overthrow of all our present schemes of future affluence and grandeur."

But greatly as he loved his wife, Sheridan was now too much wedded to his ambition to listen to such tempting. He had conquered fame with his pen; now he aspired to subdue it with his tongue. In 1780, while he was still in the twenties, he was sent to Parliament by Stafford suffrages; and from his first appearance at Westminster captivated his fellow law-makers by the magic of his eloquence. A new star had arisen in the oratorical firmament, and soon began to pale all other luminaries. Within two years he was a Minister of the Crown; and in another year he had electrified the world by the most brilliant oratory that had ever been heard in our tongue—notably by his

historic speech in the trial of Warren Hastings, to the preparation of which his wife had devoted herself body and soul.



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Fresh from listening to this latest sensational triumph of her husband in Westminster Hall, she wrote:—

“It is impossible to convey to you the delight, the astonishment, the admiration he has excited in the breasts of every class of people. Every party prejudice has been overcome by this display of genius, eloquence and goodness.... What my feelings must be, you can only imagine. To tell you the truth, it is with some difficulty that I can ‘let down my mind,’ as Mr Burke said afterwards, to talk or think on any other subject. But pleasure too exquisite becomes pain; and I am at this moment suffering from the delightful anxieties of last week.”

But Mrs Sheridan’s day of happiness and triumph was soon to draw near to its close. She saw her husband climb to the dizzyest pinnacle of fame, and she watched with pain his brilliance dimmed, and his marvellous intellect clouded by excessive drinking, before the fatal seeds of consumption, which had already carried off her dearly-loved sister, began to show themselves in her. Her illness was as swift as it was, happily, painless. She simply drooped and faded and died, tenderly watched over to the last by her husband with a silent anguish that was pitiful to see.

“During her last days,” says Mrs Canning, her devoted friend, “she read sometimes to herself, and after dinner sat down to the piano. She taught Betty (her little niece) a little while, and played several slow movements out of her own head, with her usual expression, but with a very trembling hand. It was so like the last efforts of an expiring genius, and brought such a train of tender and melancholy ideas to my imagination, that I thought my poor heart would have burst in the conflict.”

And one June day, when the world she had loved so well was flooded with a glory of sunlight, her beautiful spirit sped silently away to join the “choir invisible.” Nine days later she was laid to rest in Wells Cathedral, thousands flocking to pay farewell homage to the closest link the world has ever known “between an angel and a woman.” As for Sheridan he survived his grief twenty-four years, to end his days in poverty, and to crown his life’s drama with a stately funeral in Westminster Abbey.

CHAPTER III

THE ROMANCE OF THE VILLIERS

The Villiers have had a liberal share of romance, ever since the far-away days, three centuries and more ago, when the fourth son of Sir George opened his eyes at Brookesby, in Leicestershire. From being a “threadbare hanger-on” at Court this son of an obscure knight rose to be the boon companion of two kings and the lover of a Queen of France. Honours and riches were showered on this spoiled child of fortune. He was created, in rapid succession, Viscount and Marquis, and finally Duke of Buckingham; he



won for bride an Earl's daughter, the richest heiress in the land; and for some years dazzled the world by his splendours and wealth as he alienated it by his arrogance. And just when his meteoric career had reached its zenith, his life was closed in tragedy by the assassin's knife.



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His mantle of romance, however, fell on his son and successor, the second Duke, who was brought up in a Palace nursery, and had for playmates the children of Charles I.; and who, after a career which in its dramatic adventure outstripped fiction, ended his turbulent life, if not, as Pope says,

“In the worst inn’s worst room, with mat half-hung,”

at least in extreme poverty and suffering in a Yorkshire inn, at Kirby Moorside. Of all the vast estates he had inherited, his kinsman, Lord Arran, said: “There is not so much as one farthing towards defraying the expense of his funeral.”

Nor have the men of Villiers’ blood had any monopoly of adventure. Their wives and daughters have seldom been content to lead the unromantic life which happily contents so many of their sex. From Barbara Chaffinch, whose intrigues secured the Earldom of Jersey for her husband in William III.’s reign, to the Lady Adela Villiers who ran away with Captain Ibbetson, a handsome young officer of Hussars, to Gretna Green and the altar, they have played many diverse and sensational *roles* on the stage of their time.

It was but fitting that George Villiers, fifth Earl of Jersey, should make a Countess of the Lady Sarah Sophia Fane, in whose veins was an adventurous strain as marked as in his own; for she was the fruit of one of the most dramatic unions recorded in the annals of our Peerage. A year before she was cradled her mother was Anne Child, the richest heiress in England—the only daughter of Robert Child, head of the great banking firm at Temple Bar, and a descendant of Francis Child, the industrious London apprentice who married the daughter of his master, William Wheeler, goldsmith, whose riches and business he inherited.

“Old Child,” as Anne’s father was familiarly known, had many aristocratic clients who used his cheques and overdrew their accounts; but the most prodigal, as also the most ingratiating, of them all was the young Earl of Westmorland, who, not content with making large demands on the banker’s exchequer and patience, had the audacity to aspire to all his wealth through his daughter’s hand.

Anne was perhaps as naturally flattered by the attentions of a lord as she was fascinated by his handsome face and figure and his courtly manners; but the father had other designs for his heiress than marrying her to a prodigal young nobleman. “Your blood, my lord, is good,” he once told him; “but money is better.”

Lord Westmorland was not, however, the man to be turned aside from the gilded goal on which he had set his heart. If he could not wed the heiress with her father’s blessing, he would dispense with the benediction. That he *would* marry her he was determined; and Anne was just the girl to assist a bold lover in such an ambition.



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One day, so the story is told, Lord Westmorland decided to bring the matter to a crisis. He had been dining with Mr Child, and, after the wine had circulated freely, he said, "Now, sir, that we have discussed business thoroughly, there is another matter on which I should be grateful for your opinion." "What's that?" enquired the banker, beaming benevolently on his guest, as a man who has dined well and is at peace with the world. "Well, sir, suppose you were deeply in love with a girl who returned your love, and that her father refused his consent. What would you do?" "What should I do?" laughed the banker, "why, run away with her, of course, like many a better man has done!"

What more direct encouragement could an ardent lover want? It is possible that the next morning the banker had completely forgotten the conversation, and his vinous approval of runaway matches; but, two days later, he was destined to have a rude awaking. In the middle of the night he was aroused by the watchman to learn that his front door had been found open; and a little later the alarming discovery was made that his daughter had flown. His suspicions fell at once on that "rascally young lord"; and they were confirmed when he found that the Earl, too, had disappeared, and that a chaise, with four galloping horses, had been seen dashing northwards as fast as whip and spur could drive them.

The banker was furious. He raged and stormed as he ordered his servants to procure the fastest horses money could command; and with lavish promises of reward to the postboys he set out in hot pursuit of the fugitives. Luckily they had no long start; and, with better horses, more frequent changes, and a heavier purse, he had little doubt that he would soon overtake them. But the chase was sterner and longer than he had imagined. Cupid lends wings to runaway lovers. Fast as Mr Child's sweating horses raced, they gained but little on the pursued. Through the long night, the next day, and the following night the desperate race continued—through sleeping villages and startled towns, over hill and moor, until the borderland grew near. Then, between Penrith and Carlisle, the quarry was at last sighted.

Mr Child's horses, urged to a final effort by the postboys, slowly but surely reduced the interval; and now inch by inch they draw abreast of the runaway chaise. The moment of triumph has come. Mr Child, with body half protruding from the chaise, calls loudly on the fugitives to halt, shaking his fist at the smiling face of the Earl, who with one hand waves a graceful adieu, with the other presents a pistol at Mr Child's near leader. A flash, a report, and the horse falls dead. A few minutes later the Earl's chaise is a distant dark speck in a cloud of dust, at which the baffled banker impotently shakes his fist.

Before the fallen horse could be removed and the chase resumed the runaways had got so long a start that they could laugh at further pursuit; and by the time Child's chaise rattled impotently through the street of Gretna village, his daughter had been a Countess a good hour.



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For three years the banker kept his vow that he would never forgive her and her shameless husband. The Earl, indeed, he never did forgive, but his daughter won her way back into his heart, and to her he left the whole of his colossal fortune, amounting, it is said, to little less than L100,000 a year.

It was from this romantic union that the Lady Sarah Sophia Fane came, who was to unite the 'prentice strain of Francis Child with the blood of the proud Villiers. As a young girl the Lady Sarah needed no such rich dower as was hers to commend her to the eyes of wooers. From the Fanes she inherited a full share of the beauty for which their women were noted, and to it she added many charms of her own. She had a figure, tall, commanding, and of exquisite grace, eyes blue as violets, a luxuriant crown of dark hair, and a complexion pure and beautiful as a lily.

It is little wonder that a young lady so dowered with gold and good looks should attract lovers by the score, all anxious to win so fair a prize. But to one only of them all would she listen, Lord Villiers, heir to the Earldom of Jersey, a man of towering stature and handsome face, aristocrat and courtier to his finger-tips, a fearless and graceful rider, and an expert in manly sports. Such a combination of attractions the daughter of Anne Child could not long, nor was she at all disposed to, resist. And one May day in 1804—almost twenty-two years to the day after her parents' dramatic flight to Gretna Green—the Lady Sarah became Vicountess Villiers. A year later she was Countess of Jersey.

From her first entry into society the child-countess (for she was little more than a child) took the position of a Queen, to which her rank, wealth, and beauty entitled her, and which she held, supreme and unassailable, as long as life lasted. Her *salon* was a second Royal Court to which flocked all the greatest in the land, proud to pay homage to the "Empress of Fashion." She entertained kings with a regal splendour. Their Majesties of Prussia and Belgium, Holland and Hanover, and the Tsar Nicholas I. were all delighted to do honour to a hostess so captivating and so queenly.

At Middleton Park, her lord's Oxfordshire seat, she dispensed a hospitality which was the despair of her rivals. Her retinue of servants seldom numbered less than a hundred, and many a week her guests, with their attendants, far exceeded a thousand. Money was squandered with a prodigal hand. The very servants, it is said, drank champagne and hock like water; her housemaids had their riding horses, and dressed in silks and satins. Among her thousands of guests were such men as Wellington and Peel, Castlereagh and Canning, all humble worshippers at her shrine; and Lord Byron who, in his gloomy moods, would shut himself in his bedroom for days, living on biscuits and water, and stealing out at dead of night to wander ghost-like through the neighbouring woods. These moods of black despondency he varied by turbulent spirits, when he would be the gayest of the gay, and would challenge his fellow-guests to drinking bouts, in which he always came off the victor.



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Lady Jersey had no more ardent admirer than Byron, whose muse was inspired to many a flight in honour of

“The grace of mien,
The eye that gladdens and the brow serene;
The glossy darkness of that clustering hair,
Which shades, yet shows that forehead more than fair.”

And among her army of guests the Countess moved like a Queen, who could stoop to frivolity without losing a shred of dignity. Surely never was such superabundant energy enshrined in a form so beautiful and stately.

“Shall I tell you what Lady Jersey is like?” wrote Creevey. “She is like one of her numerous gold and silver dicky-birds that are in all the showrooms of this house. She begins to sing at eleven o’clock, and, with the interval of the hour when she retires to her cage to rest, she sings till twelve at night without a moment’s interruption. She changes her feathers for dinner, and her plumage both morning and evening is the most beautiful I ever saw.”

She seemed indeed incapable of fatigue. Tongue and body alike never seemed to rest, from rising to going to bed.

“She is really wonderful,” says Lady Granville; “and how she can stand the life she leads is still more wonderful. She sees everybody in her own house, and calls on everybody in theirs. She is all over Paris, and at all the *campagnes* within ten miles, and in all *petites soirees*. She begins the day with a dancing-master at nine o’clock, and never rests till midnight.... At ten o’clock yesterday morning she called for me, and we never stopped to take breath till eleven o’clock at night, when she set me down here more dead than alive, she going to end the day with the Hollands!”

A life that would have killed nine women out of ten seemed powerless to touch her. When far advanced in the sixties she was acknowledged to be still one of the most beautiful women in England, retaining to an amazing degree the bloom and freshness of youth. And when she appeared at a fancy-dress ball arrayed as a Sultana, in a robe of sky-blue with coral embroideries and a turban of gold and white, she was by universal consent acclaimed as the most beautiful woman there. It may interest my lady readers to learn that she attributed her perpetual youth to the use of gruel as a substitute for soap and water.

Although Lady Jersey had admirers by the hundred among the most fascinating men in Europe, no breath of scandal ever touched her fair fame. Indeed, she carried her virtue to the verge of prudery, and repelled with a freezing coldness the slightest approach to familiarity. So prudish was she that on one occasion she declined to share a carriage alone with Lord John Russell, one of the least physically attractive of men, and begged

General Alava to accompany them. “Diable!” laughed the General, “you must be very little sure of yourself if you are afraid to be alone with little Lord John!”

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She was merciless to any of her lady friends who lapsed from virtue, or in any way, however slight, offended the proprieties. But the vials of her fiercest anger were reserved for her mother-in-law, the Dowager-Countess, whose shameless intrigue with the Prince Regent scandalised the world in an age of lax morals; and the outraged Princess Caroline had no more valiant champion. She not only declined to have anything to say to her husband's mother, she carried her disapproval to the extent of refusing point blank to appear at Court. So furious was the Regent at this slight that "the dotard with corrupted eye and withered heart," as Byron calls him, had her portrait removed from the Palace Gallery of Beauties, and returned to its owner.

A few days later, however, the Countess had her revenge. At a party in Cavendish Square she was walking along a corridor with Samuel Rogers when she saw the Regent coming towards them. As he approached he drew himself to his full height, and passed with an insolent and disdainful stare, which Lady Jersey returned with a look even more cold and contemptuous. Then, with a toss of her proud head, she turned to Rogers and laughingly said, "I did that well, didn't I?"

It was, perhaps, as Queen and Autocrat of "Almack's" that Lady Jersey won her chief fame—Almack's, that most exclusive and aristocratic club in Berkeley Street, Piccadilly, the membership of which was the supreme hall-mark of the world of fashion. No rank, however exalted, no riches, however great, were a passport to this innermost social circle, over which Lady Jersey reigned like a beautiful despot.

Scores of the smartest officers of the Guards, men of rank and fashion, and pets of West End drawing-rooms, clamoured or cajoled for admission to this jealously-guarded temple, but its doors only opened to receive, at the most, half a dozen of them. Even such social autocrats as Her Grace of Bedford and Lady Harrington were coldly turned away from the doors by the male members of the club; while the ladies shut them in the face of Lord March and Brook Boothby, to the amazed disgust of these men of fashion and conquest—for, by the rules of the club, male members were selected by the ladies, and *vice versa*. But beyond all doubt the destinies of candidates were in the hands of the half dozen Lady Patronesses who formed the Committee of the club—Princess Esterhazy, Princess von Lieven, Ladies Jersey, Sefton and Cowper, and Mrs Drummond Burrell; and of these my Lady Jersey was the only one who really counted.

"Three-fourths even of the nobility," says a writer in the *New Monthly Magazine*, "knock in vain for admission. Into this *sanctum sanctorum*, of course, the sons of commerce never think of intruding; and yet into the very 'blue chamber,' in the absence of the six necromancers, have the votaries of trade contrived to intrude themselves." "Many diplomatic arts,"

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writes Captain Gronow, “much *finesse*, and a host of intrigues were set in motion to get an invitation to Almack’s. Very often persons whose rank and fortunes entitled them to the *entree* anywhere, were excluded by the cliqueism of the Lady patronesses; for the female government of Almack’s was a despotism, and subject to all the caprice of despotic rule. It is needless to say that, like every other despotism, it was not innocent of abuses.”

The fair ladies who ruled supreme over this little dancing and gossiping world issued a solemn proclamation that no gentleman should appear at the assemblies without being dressed in knee-breeches, white cravat, and *chapeau bras*. On one occasion, the Duke of Wellington was about to ascend the staircase of the ballroom, dressed in black trousers, when the vigilant Mr Willis, the guardian of the establishment, stepped forward and said, “Your Grace cannot be admitted in trousers,” whereupon the Duke, who had a great respect for orders and regulations, quietly walked away.

Another inflexible rule of the club was that no one should be admitted after eleven o’clock; and it was a breach of this regulation that once overwhelmed the Duke of Wellington with humiliation. One evening, the Duke, who had promised to meet Lady Mornington at Almack’s, presented himself for admission. “Lady Jersey,” announced an attendant, “the Duke of Wellington is at the door, and desires to be admitted.” “What o’clock is it?” she asked. “Seven minutes after eleven, your Ladyship.” She paused for a moment, and then said with emphasis and distinctness, “Give my compliments—Lady Jersey’s compliments—to the Duke of Wellington, and say that she is very glad that the first enforcement of the rule of exclusion is such that, hereafter, no one can complain of its application. He cannot be admitted.” And the Duke, whom even Napoleon with all his legions had been powerless to turn back, was compelled to retreat before the capricious will of a woman.

Such an autocrat was this “Queen of Almack’s.”

“While her colleagues were debating,” says the author of the “Key to Almack’s,” “she decided. Hers was the master-spirit that ruled the whole machine; hers the eloquent tongue that could both persuade and command. And she was never idle. Her restless eye pried into everything; she set the world to rights; her influence was resistless, her determination uncontrollable.”

“Treat people like fools, and they will worship you,” was her favourite maxim. And as Bryon, her intimate friend, once said, “She was the veriest tyrant that ever governed Fashion’s fools, and compelled them to shake their cap and bells as she willed.”

It was at Almack’s, it is interesting to recall, that Lady Jersey first introduced the quadrille from Paris.



“I recollect,” says Captain Gronow, “the persons who formed the first quadrille that was ever danced there. They were Lady Jersey, Lady Harriet Buller, Lady Susan Ryder, and Miss Montgomery; the men being the Count St Aldegonde, Mr Montgomery, and Charles Standisti.”

It was at Almack’s, too, that she introduced the waltz, which so shocked the proprieties even in that easy-going age.



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“What scenes,” writes Mr T. Raikes, “have we witnessed in these days at Almack’s! What fear and trembling in the *debutantes* at the commencement of a waltz, what giddiness and confusion at the end! It was, perhaps, owing to the latter circumstance that so violent an opposition soon arose to the new recreation on the score of morality. The anti-waltzing party took the alarm, and cried it down; mothers forbade it, and every ballroom became a scene of feud and contention.”

But through it all Lady Jersey circled round and round the ballroom divinely, with Prince Paul Esterhazy, Baron Tripp, St Aldegonde, and many another graceful exponent of the new dance, for partners; and her victory was complete when the world of fashion saw the arm of the Emperor Alexander, his uniform ablaze with decorations, round her waist, twirling ecstatically, if ungracefully, round in the intoxication of the waltz.

For fifty years, Lord Jersey’s Countess reigned supreme in the social world, carrying her autocracy and her charms into old age. As was inevitable to such a dominant personality she made enemies, who resented her airs and scoffed at her graces. Lady Granville called her “a tiresome, quarrelsome woman”; the Duke of Wellington, one of her most abject slaves, once exclaimed, “What —— nonsense Lady Jersey talks!” and Granville declared that she had “neither wit, nor imagination, nor humour.” But to the last day of her long life she retained the homage and admiration of hundreds, over whom she cast the spell of her beauty and personal charm.

The evening of her life was clouded by a succession of tragedies, each sufficient to break the spirit of a less indomitable woman. One by one, her children, the pride of her life, were taken from her; but she hid her breaking heart from the world, and in the intervals between her bereavements she showed as brave and bright a face as in the days of her unclouded youth. The death in 1858 of her daughter, Clementina, the darling of her old age, was a terrible blow; but still the hand of the slayer of her hopes was not stayed. Her husband, whose devotion had so long sustained her, followed soon after; three weeks later her eldest son, the new Earl, died tragically in the zenith of his life; and the crowning blow fell when, in 1862, her last surviving child was taken from her.

For five more years she survived her triumphs and sorrows, until, one January day in 1867, she passed suddenly and painlessly away, and the world was the poorer by the loss of one of the noblest women who have ever worn the crown of beauty or held the sceptre of power.

CHAPTER IV

THE STAIN ON THE SHIRLEY 'SCUTCHEON



The Shirleys have been men of high honour and fair repute ever since the far-away days when the conqueror found their ancestor, Sewallis, firmly seated on his broad Warwickshire lands at Easington; but their proud 'scutcheon, otherwise unsullied, bears one black, or rather red, stain, and it was Laurence Shirley, fourth earl of his line, who put it there.

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Horace Walpole calls this degenerate Shirley “a low wretch, a mad assassin, and a wild beast.” He was, as my story will show, all this. He was indeed an incarnate fiend. But was he to blame? He was possessed by devils; but they were devils of insanity. The taint of madness was in his blood before he uttered his first cry in the cradle. His uncle, whose coronet he was to wear, was an incurable madman. His aunt, the Lady Barbara Shirley, spent years of her life shut up in an asylum. And this hereditary taint shadowed Laurence Shirley’s life from his infancy, and ended it in tragedy.

As a boy, he was subject to violent attacks of rage, when it was not safe to approach him; and his madness grew with his years. Strange tales are told of him as a young man. We are told that he would spend hours pacing like a wild animal up and down his room, gnashing his teeth, clenching his fists, grinning diabolically, and uttering strange incoherent cries. He would stand before a mirror, making horrible grimaces at his reflection, and spitting upon it; he walked about armed with pistols and dagger, ready at a moment to use both on any one who annoyed or opposed him; and in his disordered brain he nursed suspicion and hatred of all around him.

When he was little more than thirty, and some years after he had come into his earldom, he wooed and won the pretty daughter of Sir William Meredith; but before the honeymoon was ended he had begun to treat her with such gross brutality that, before she had long been a wife, she petitioned Parliament for a divorce, which set her free. And as he was obviously quite unfit to administer his estates, it became necessary to appoint some one to receive his rents and control his revenue.

Such was the pitiful plight to which insanity had reduced Laurence, Earl Ferrers, while still little over the threshold of manhood; and these calamities only, and perhaps naturally, accentuated his madness. He became more and more the terror of the neighbourhood in which he lived, and few had the courage to meet him when he took his solitary walks.

“I still retain,” writes a Mr Cradock in his “Memoirs,” “a strong impression of the unfortunate Earl Ferrers, who, with the Ladies Shirley, his sisters, frequented Leicester races, and visited at my father’s house. During the early part of the day his lordship preserved the character of a polite scholar and a courteous nobleman, but in the evening he became the terror of the inhabitants; and I distinctly remember running upstairs to hide myself when an alarm was given that Lord Ferrers was coming armed, with a great mob after him. He had behaved well at the ordinary; the races were then in the afternoon, and the ladies regularly attended the balls. My father’s house was situated midway between Lord Ferrers’s lodgings and the Town Hall, where the race assemblies were then held. He had, as was supposed, obtained liquor privately, and then became outrageous; for,



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from our house he suddenly escaped and proceeded to the Town Hall, and, after many violent acts, threw a silver tankard of scalding negus among the ladies. He was then secured for that evening. This was the last time of his appearing at Leicester, till brought from Ashby-de-la-Zouche to prison there. "It has been much regretted by his friends that, as Lady Ferrers and some of his property had been taken from him, no greater precaution had been used with respect to his own safety as well as that of all around him. Whilst sober, my father, who had a real regard for him, always urged that he was quite manageable; and when his sisters ventured to come with him to the races, they had an absolute reliance on his good intentions and promises."

Once he disappeared for a time, and made his way to London, where he lodged obscurely in the neighbourhood of Muswell Hill. Here he surrounded himself with grooms and ostlers, and other low company of both sexes, abandoning himself to orgies of debauchery. Among his milder eccentricities he would, we are told, mix mud with his beer, and drain tankard after tankard of the nauseating mixture. He drank his coffee from the spout of the coffee-pot, and wandered about, a grotesque figure, with one side of his face clean-shaven.

But even then he had sane moments, when the raving madman of yesterday became the courteous, polite, shrewd man of to-day, charming all by his wit and high-bred geniality. It was, of course, inevitable that a career such as this, marked by a madness which grew daily, should lead sooner or later to tragedy. And tragedy was coming swiftly. It came early in the year 1760, before Lord Ferrers had reached his fortieth birthday. And this is how it came.

The Court of Chancery had ordered that his lordship's rents should be received and accounted for by a receiver, who, by way of concession to his feelings, was to be appointed by himself. The Earl, who rarely lacked shrewdness, looked round for the most suitable person to fill this delicate post—for a man who should be as clay in his hands; and such a "tool" he thought he had found in his steward, Mr John Johnson, who had known him since boyhood, and who had never thwarted him even in his maddest caprices. Mr Johnson was duly appointed receiver; but the Earl's self-congratulation was short-lived. The steward proved that he was possessed of a conscience, and that neither cajolery nor threats could make him swerve from the straight path of honesty.

In vain the Earl coaxed and blustered and bullied. The receiver was adamant. He had a duty to perform, and at any cost he would discharge it. His lordship's rage at such unlooked-for recalcitrancy was unbounded. He began to hate the too honest steward with a murderous hatred; behind his back he loaded him with abuse, and vowed that, of all his enemies, the steward was the most virulent and implicable. But while the Earl was nursing this diabolical hatred, he showed little sign of it to Johnson, who was so unsuspectingly walking to meet tragedy.



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One January day, in 1760, Lord Ferrers sent a polite message to his steward to come to Staunton Harold on an urgent matter of business. It was on a Friday; and punctually at two o'clock, the hour appointed, Mr Johnson made his appearance, and was ushered into his Lordship's study. Unknown to him, Lord Ferrers had sent away his housekeeper and his menservants on various pretexts; and, apart from the Earl and the steward (the spider and the fly), there was no one in all the great house but three maidservants, whose chief anxiety was to keep as far away as possible from their mad master.

With a courteous greeting Lord Ferrers invited Mr Johnson to take a seat; and then, placing before him a document, which proved to be a confession of fraud and dishonesty in his office of receiver, he commanded his steward to sign his name to it.

On reading the confession which he was ordered to sign, Mr Johnson indignantly refused to comply with such an outrageous demand. "You refuse to sign?" asked the Earl with ominous calmness. "I do," was the emphatic reply. "Then," continued his lordship, producing a pistol, "I command you to kneel." Mr Johnson, now alarmed and awake to his danger, looked first at the stern, cold eyes bent on him, and then at the pistol pointed at his heart, and sank on one knee. "Both knees!" insisted the Earl. Mr Johnson subsided on the other knee, looking calmly at his would-be murderer, though beads of perspiration were standing on his forehead. A moment later a shot rang out in the silent room, and the steward fell to the floor mortally wounded. Laying down the smoking weapon, Lord Ferrers opened the door and called loudly for assistance. The horrified servants, who had heard the report, came, huddled and fearful, at his bidding. One he despatched for a doctor, and, with the assistance of the other two, he carried the fast-dying man to a bedroom. When the doctor arrived he found the Earl standing by the bedside, trying to stop the flow of blood which was ebbing from the steward's chest; but the victim was beyond all human aid. He had but a few hours at the most to live. An hour later Lord Ferrers was lying dead drunk on the floor of his bedroom, while Mr Johnson's life was ebbing out in agony at his house, a mile away.

"As soon as it became known," to quote the account given by an eye-witness in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, "that Mr Johnson was really dead, the neighbours set about seizing the murderer. A few persons, armed, set out for Staunton, and as they entered the hall-yard they saw the Earl going towards the stable, as they imagined, to take horse. He appeared to be just out of bed, his stockings being down and his garters in his hand, having probably taken the alarm immediately on coming out of his room, and finding that Johnson had been removed. One Springthorpe, advancing towards his lordship, presented a pistol, and required him to surrender; but his lordship putting his hand to his pocket,



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Springthorpe imagined he was feeling for a pistol, and stopped short, being probably intimidated. He thus suffered the Earl to escape back into the house, where he fastened the doors and stood on his defence. "The crowd of people who had come to apprehend him beset the house, and their number increased very fast. In about two hours Lord Ferrers appeared at the garret window, and called out: 'How is Johnson?' Springthorpe answered: 'He is dead,' upon which his lordship insulted him, and called him a liar, and swore he would not believe anybody but the surgeon, Kirkland. Upon being again assured that he was dead, he desired that the people might be dispersed, saying that he would surrender; yet, almost in the same breath, he desired that the people might be let in, and have some victuals and drink; but the issue was that he went away again from the window, swearing that he would not be taken. "The people, however, still continued near the house, and two hours later he was seen on the bowling-green by one, Curtis, a collier. 'My lord' was then armed with a blunderbuss and a dagger and two or three pistols; but Curtis, so far from being intimidated, marched boldly up to him, and his lordship was so struck with the determinate resolution shown by this brave fellow, that he suffered him to seize him without making any resistance. Yet the moment that he was in custody he declared that he had killed a villain, and that he gloried in the deed."

The tragedy is now hastening to its close. The assassin was kept in custody at Ashby until a coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful Murder" against him, when he was transferred to Leicester, and a fortnight later to London, making the journey in his own splendid equipage with six horses, and "dressed like a jockey, in a close riding-frock, jockey boots and cap, and a plain shirt." He was lodged in the Round Tower of the Tower of London, where, with a couple of warders at his elbow night and day, with sentries posted outside his door, and another on the drawbridge, he passed the last weeks of his doomed life.

In mid-April he was duly tried by his Peers at the Bar of the House of Lords; and, although he tried with marvellous skill and ingenuity to prove that he was insane when he committed the murder, he was, without a dissentient voice, pronounced "Guilty," and sentenced to be "hanged by the neck until he was dead," when his body should be handed over to the surgeons for dissection. One concession he claimed—pitiful salve to his pride—that he should be hanged by a cord of silk, the privilege due to his rank as a Peer of the realm; and this was granted as a matter of course.

One day in early May the scaffold was reared at Tyburn, where so many other malefactors had looked their last on the world; and at nine o'clock in the morning Lord Ferrers started on his last journey—the most splendid and most tragic of his chequered life. He was allowed, as a last favour, to travel to his death, not in the common hangman's cart as an ordinary criminal, but in his own landau, drawn by 'six beautiful horses; and thus he made his stately progress to Tyburn.



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Probably no man ever journeyed to the scaffold under such circumstances of pomp and splendour. It might well, indeed, have been the bridal procession of a great nobleman that the black avenues of curious spectators in London's streets had come to see, and not the last grim journey of a malefactor to the hangman's rope. His very dress was that of a bridegroom, consisting, as it did, to quote again from the *Gentleman's Magazine*,

“of a suit of light-coloured clothes, embroidered with silver, said to have been his wedding-suit; and soon after the Sheriff entered the landau, he said, 'You may, perhaps, sir, think it strange to see me in this dress, but I have my particular reasons for it.' The procession then began in the following order: A very large body of constables of the county of Middlesex, preceded by one of the high constables; a party of horse grenadiers, and a party of foot; Mr Sheriff Errington, in his chariot, accompanied by his under-Sheriff, Mr Jackson; the landau escorted by two other parties of horse grenadiers and foot; Mr Sheriff Vaillant's chariot, in which was Under-Sheriff Mr Nichols; a mourning-coach and six, with some of his lordship's friends; and, lastly, a hearse and six, provided for the conveyance of his lordship's corpse from the place of execution to Surgeons' Hall. “The procession moved so slowly that Lord Ferrers was two hours and three-quarters in his landau but during the whole time he appeared perfectly easy and composed, though he often expressed his desire to have it over, saying that the apparatus of death and the passing through such crowds of people was ten times worse than death itself. He told the Sheriff that he had written to the King, begging that he might suffer where his ancestor, the Earl of Essex, had suffered—namely, on Tower Hill; that 'he had been in the greater hope of obtaining this favour as he had the honour of quartering part of the same arms and of being allied to his Majesty; and that he thought it hard that he should have to die at the place appointed for the execution of common felons.' As to his crime, he declared that he did it 'under particular circumstances, having met with so many crosses and vexations that he scarcely knew what he did.”

At the top of Drury Lane he paused to drink his last glass of wine, handing a guinea to the man who presented it. On the scaffold not a muscle moved as he surveyed the black crowd of onlookers with a calm and amused eye. To the chaplain he confessed his belief in God; and he exchanged a few pleasant words with the executioner as he placed a gold coin in his hand.

Thus, cold, calm, without rancour or regret, perished Laurence, Earl Ferrers, not even a struggle marking the moment when life left him. After hanging for an hour, his body was taken down and removed to Surgeons' Hall, where it was dissected; and, thus mutilated, it was exposed to public derision and malediction before it found a final resting-place, fourteen feet deep under the belfry of old St Pancras Church.



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Such is the stain which burns red on the Shirley shield, and such was the man who placed it there. But, as we have seen, Laurence Shirley was mad beyond all doubt, and “knew not what he did”; and in the eyes of all charitable and right-thinking men the ‘scutcheon of the Ferrers Earldom remains as virtually unsullied to-day as when it was virginally fresh two centuries ago.

CHAPTER V

A GHOSTLY VISITANT

There is scarcely a chapter in the story of the British Peerage more tragic and mysterious than that which chronicles the closing days of Thomas, second Lord Lyttelton, whose dissolute life had its fitting climax of horror at the exact moment foretold to him by a ghostly visitor. Various and somewhat conflicting accounts are given of this singular tragedy; but in them all the chief incidents stand out so clear and unassailable that even such a hard-headed sceptic as Dr Johnson declared, “I am so glad to have evidence of the spiritual world that I am willing to believe it.”

Thomas, second Lord Lyttelton, son of the first Baron, the distinguished poet and historian, was the degenerate descendant of five centuries of Lyttelton ancestors, who had held their heads among the highest in the county of Worcester since the days of the third Henry. Unlike his clean-living forefathers, he was famous as a debauchee in a dissolute age.

“Of his morals,” Sir Bernard Burke says, “we may judge by the fact of his having died the victim of the coarsest debauchery, and leaving behind him a diary more disgustingly licentious than the pages of Aratine himself.”

William Coombe, who had been at Eton with Lyttelton, is said to have had his old schoolfellow in mind when he dedicated his *Diaboliad* “to the worst man in His Majesty’s Dominions,” and when he penned those terrible lines:—

“Have I not tasted every villain’s part?
Have I not broke a noble parent’s heart?
Do I not daily boast how I betrayed
The tender widow and the virtuous maid?”

From the days when he wore his Eton jacket the life of this perverse lord seems to have been one long record of profligacy; at least, until that day, but six years before its end, when, to quote his own words, “I awoke, and behold I was a lord!”

“From the time when,” Mr Stanley Makower writes, “although no more than a youth of nineteen, his engagement to General Warburton’s daughter had been broken off on the discovery of the vicious life he had led in his travels in France and Italy, he had been a



source of shame and trouble to his family.... To measure the depths of Lyttelton's vices, it is necessary to read his own letters, in which the literary style is as perfect as the fearless admission of fault is bewildering."

Indeed, even more remarkable than the viciousness of his life, was the brazen openness with which he flaunted it in the face of the world.

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With this depravity were oddly allied gifts of mind and graces of person, which, but for the handicap of vice, should have made Lord Lyttelton one of the most eminent and useful men of his time. When he was at Eton Dr Barnard, the headmaster, predicted a great future for the boy, whose talents he declared were superior to those of young Fox. In literature and art his natural endowment was such that he might easily have won a leading place in either profession; while his gifts of statemanship and his eloquent tongue might with equal ease have won fame and high position in the arena of politics.

Shortly after he succeeded to his Barony he married the widow of Joseph Peach, Governor of Calcutta, and for a time seems to have made an effort to reform his ways; but the vice in his blood was quick to reassert itself; he abandoned his wife under the spell of a barmaid's eyes, and plunged again into the morass of depravity, in which alone he could find the pleasure he loved.

Such was Lord Lyttelton at the time this story opens, when, although still a young man (he was but thirty-five when he died), he was a nervous and physical wreck, draining the last dregs of the cup of pleasure.

And yet, how little he seems to have realised that he was near the end of his tether the following story proves. One day in the last month of his life a cousin and boon companion, Mr Fortescue, called on him at his London home.

"He found," to quote the words of his lordship's stepmother, "Lord Lyttelton in bed, though not ill; and on his rallying him for it, Lord Lyttelton said: 'Well, cousin, if you will wait in the next room a little while, I will get up and go out with you.' He did so, and the two young men walked out into the streets. In the course of their walk they crossed the churchyard of St James's, Piccadilly. Lord Lyttelton, pointing to the gravestones, said: 'Now, look at these vulgar fellows; they die in their youth at five-and-thirty. But you and I, who are gentlemen, shall live to a good old age!'"

How little could he have anticipated that within a few days he, too, would be lying among the "vulgar fellows" who die in their youth at five-and-thirty!

And, indeed, there seemed little evidence of such a tragic possibility; for the very next day he was charming the House of Lords with a speech of singular eloquence and statesmanlike grasp—the speech of a man in the prime of his powers. Such efforts as this, however, were but as the spasmodic flickerings of a candle that is burning to its end, and were followed by deeper plunges into the dissipations that were surely killing him.

It was towards the close of the month of November, in 1779, that Lord Lyttelton left London and its fatal allurements for a few days' peaceful life at his country seat, Pit Place, at Epsom (in those days a fashionable health resort), where he had invited a



house-party, including several ladies, to join him. And, it should be said, no host could possibly be more charming and gracious; for, in spite of his depraved tastes, Lord Lyttelton was a man of remarkable fascination—a wit, a born raconteur, and a courtier to his finger-tips.



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During the first day of his residence at Epsom the following incident—which may or may not have had a bearing on the strange events that followed—took place.

“Lord Lyttelton,” to quote Sir Digby Neave, “had come to Pit Place in very precarious health, and was ordered not to take any but the gentlest exercise. As he was walking in the conservatory with Lady Affleck and the Misses Affleck, a robin perched on an orange-tree close to them. Lord Lyttelton attempted to catch it, but failing, and being laughed at by the ladies, he said he would catch it even if it was the death of him. He succeeded, but he put himself in a great heat by the exertion. He gave the bird to Lady Affleck, who walked about with it in her hand.”

On the following morning his lordship appeared at the breakfast-table so pale and haggard that his guests, alarmed at his appearance, asked what was the matter. For a time he evaded their enquiries, and then made the following startling statement:—“Last night,” he said, “after I had been lying in bed awake for some time, I heard what sounded like the tapping of a bird at my window, followed by a gentle fluttering of wings about my chamber. I raised myself on my arm to learn the meaning of these strange sounds, and was amazed at seeing a lovely female, dressed in white, with a small bird perched like a falcon on her hand. Walking towards me, the vision spoke, commanding me to prepare for death, for I had but a short time to live. When I was able to command my speech, I enquired how long I had to live. The vision then replied, ‘Not three days; and you will depart at the hour of twelve.’”

Such was the remarkable story with which Lord Lyttelton startled his guests on the morning of 24th November 1779. In vain they tried to cheer him, and to laugh away his fears. They could make no impression on the despondency that had settled on him; they could not shake the conviction that he was a doomed man. “You will see,” was all the answer he would vouchsafe, “I shall die at midnight on Saturday.”

But in spite of this alarming experience and the gloomy forebodings to which, in his shattered state of nerves, it gave birth, Lord Lyttelton did not long allow it to interfere with the work he had in hand, the preparation of a speech on the disturbed condition in Ireland which he was to deliver in the House of Lords that very day—a speech which should enhance his great and rapidly growing reputation as an orator. He spent some hours absorbed in polishing and repolishing his sentences, and in verifying his facts; and, when he rose in the House, he was as full of confidence as of his subject.

Never, it was the common verdict, had his lordship spoken with more eloquence and lucidity or with more powerful grasp of his subject and his hearers.



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“Cast your eyes for a moment,” he declared, amid impressive silence, “on the state of the Empire. America, that vast Continent, with all its advantages to us as a commercial and maritime people—lost—for ever lost to us; the West Indies abandoned; Ireland ready to part from us. Ireland, my lords, is armed; and what is her language? ‘Give us free trade and the free Constitution of England as it originally was, such as we hope it will remain, the best calculated of any in the world for the preservation of freedom.’”

It was the speech of a far-seeing statesman; and although it proved but the “voice of one crying in the wilderness,” Lord Lyttelton felt that he had done his duty and had crowned his growing political fame with the laurels of the patriot and the orator.

On the following morning Fortescue met his cousin sauntering in St James’s Park, as Mr Makower tells us, “with the idleness of one who has never known what occupation means.”

“Is it because Hillsborough, the stupidest of your brother peers, paid you such fine compliments on your speech?” he asked.

Lyttelton smiled faintly. “No, it was not of that I was thinking,” he answered. “Those are things of yesterday. Hillsborough was wrong; the majority who voted with him were wrong; and I was right with my minority. They don’t know Ireland as I do. But a Government which can lose America can do anything. I have done with politics. I was thinking of something entirely different when you came upon me. I was thinking—of death.”

Fortescue laughed. But, when he had heard the story of Lyttelton’s dream, something in the manner of the narrator conveyed to him a feeling of uneasiness.

“No man has more thoroughly enjoyed doing wrong than I have,” continued Lyttelton. “But I should not have enjoyed it so much if I believed in nothing. With me sin has been conscientious; and I enjoyed the wrong thing not only for itself but also because it was wrong. Suppose it be true that I have not more than three days to live—”

“You take the thing too seriously,” interposed his cousin.

“Join me at Pit Place to-morrow,” said Lyttelton. “Then you shall see if I take it too seriously.”

During the intervening two days he fluctuated between profound gloom and boisterous hilarity. One hour he was plunged into the depths of despair, the next he was the soul of gaiety, laughing hysterically at his fears, and exclaiming, “I shall cheat the lady yet!”

During dinner on the third and fatal day he was the maddest and merriest at the table, convulsing all by his sallies of wit and his infectious high spirits; and, when the cloth was removed, he exclaimed jubilantly, “Ah, Richard is himself again!” But his gaiety was

short-lived. As the hours wore on his spirits deserted him; he lapsed into gloom and silence, from which all the efforts of his friends could not rouse him.



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As the night advanced he began to grow restless. He could not sit still, but paced to and fro, with terror-haunted eyes, muttering incoherently to himself, and taking out his watch every few moments to note the passage of time. At last, when his watch pointed to half-past eleven, he retired, without a word of farewell to his guests, to his bedroom, not knowing that not only his own watch, but every clock and watch in the house had been put forward half-an-hour by his anxious friends, "to deceive him into comfort."

Having undressed and gone to bed, he ordered his valet to draw the curtains at the foot, as if to screen him from a second sight of the mysterious lady, and, sitting up in bed, watch in hand, he awaited the fatal hour of midnight. As the minute hand slowly but surely drew near to twelve he asked to see his valet's watch, and was relieved to find that it marked the same time as his own. With beating heart and straining eyes he watched the hand draw nearer and nearer. A minute more to go—half a minute. Now it pointed to the fateful twelve—and nothing happened. It crept slowly past. The crisis was over. He put down the watch with a deep sigh of relief, and then broke into a peal of laughter—discordant, jubilant, defiant.

"This mysterious lady is not a true prophetess, I find," he said to his valet, after spending a few minutes in further mirthful waiting. "And now give me my medicine; I will wait no longer." The valet proceeded to mix his usual medicine, a dose of rhubarb, stirring it, as no spoon was at hand, with a tooth-brush lying on the table. "You dirty fellow!" his lordship exclaimed. "Go down and fetch a spoon."

When the servant returned a few minutes later he found, to his horror, his master lying back on the pillow, unconscious and breathing heavily. He ran downstairs again, shouting, "Help! Help! My lord is dying!" The alarmed guests rushed frantically to the chamber, only to find their host almost at his last gasp. A few moments later he was dead, with the watch still clutched in his hand, pointing to half-past twelve. He had died at the very stroke of midnight, as foretold by his ghostly visitant of three nights previously.

Thus strangely and dramatically died Thomas, second Lord Lyttelton, statesman, wit, and debauchee, precisely as he had been warned that he would die in a dream or vision of the night. How far his death was due to natural causes, to the effect of fear on a diseased heart, none can say with certainty. That his heart was diseased, that he had had many former seizures, during which his life seemed in danger, is beyond question; but if it was merely coincidence, it was surely the most remarkable coincidence on record, that his death should come at the exact moment foretold by the lady of his vision, as related by himself three days before the event.

Such a happening was strange and weird enough in all conscience; but it was no more inexplicable on natural grounds than what follows. Among Lord Lyttelton's boon companions was a Mr Andrews, with whom he had often discussed the possibilities of a

future life. On one such occasion his lordship had said: "Well, if I die first, and am allowed, I will come and inform you."



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The words were probably spoken more in jest than in earnest, and Mr Andrews no doubt little dreamt how the promise would be fulfilled. On the night of Lord Lyttelton's death Mr Andrews, who expected his lordship to pay him a visit on the following day, had retired to bed at his house at Dartford, in Kent.

When in bed, to quote from Mr Plumer Ward's "Illustrations of Human Life," he fell into a sound sleep, but was waked between eleven and twelve o'clock by somebody opening his curtains. It was Lord Lyttelton, in a nightgown and cap which Andrews recognised. He also spoke plainly to him, saying that he was come to tell him all was over. It seems that Lord Lyttelton was fond of horseplay; and, as he had often made Andrews the subject of it, the latter had threatened his lordship with physical chastisement the very next time that it should occur. On the present occasion, thinking that the annoyance was being renewed, he threw at Lord Lyttelton's head the first thing that he could find—his slippers. The figure retreated towards a dressing-room, which had no ingress or egress except through the bed-chamber; and Andrews, very angry, leaped out of bed in order to follow it into the dressing-room. It was not there, however.

Surprised and amazed, he returned at once to the bedroom, which he strictly searched. *The door was locked on the inside*, yet no Lord Lyttelton was to be found. In his perplexity, Mr Andrews rang for his servant, and asked if Lord Lyttelton had not arrived. The man answered: "No, sir." "You may depend upon it," said Mr Andrews, thoroughly mystified and out of humour, "that he is somewhere in the house. He was here just now, and he is playing some trick or other. However, you can tell him that he won't get a bed here; he can sleep in the stable or at the inn if he likes."

After a further vain search of the bed-chamber and the dressing-room, Mr Andrews returned to bed and to sleep, having no doubt whatever that his too jocular friend was in hiding somewhere near. On the afternoon of the following day news came to him that Lord Lyttelton had died the previous night at the very time that he (Mr Andrews) was searching for his midnight visitant, and abusing him roundly for what he considered his ill-timed practical joke. On hearing the news, we are told, Mr Andrews swooned away, and such was its effect on him that, to use his own words, "he was not himself or a man again for three years."

CHAPTER VI

A MESSALINA OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

There have been bad women in all ages, from Messalina, who waded recklessly through blood to the gratification of her passions, to that Royal mountebank, Queen Christina of Sweden, whose laughter rang out while her lover Monaldeschi was being foully done to death at her bidding by Count Sentinelli, his successor in her affections; and in this baleful company the notorious Lady Shrewsbury won for herself a



dishonourable place by a lust for cruelty as great as that of Christina or Messalina, and by a Judas-like treachery which even they, who at least flaunted their crimes openly, would have blushed to practise.



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No woman could have had smaller excuse for straying from the path of virtue, much less for making foul crimes the minister to her lust than Anna Maria, Countess of Shrewsbury. The descendant of a long line of honourable Brudenells, daughter of an Earl of Cardigan, there was nothing in the history of her family to account for the taint in her blood. She had been dowered with beauty and charms which made conquest easy, inevitable; and she was honourably wedded to a noble husband, the eleventh Earl of Shrewsbury, who, although a man of no great character or attainments, was an indulgent and faithful husband. Nor does she, until she had reached the haven of married life, appear to have shown any trace of the wickedness that must have been slumbering in her.

And yet, before she had worn her Countess's coronet a year, she had made herself notorious, even in Charles II.'s abandoned Court, for passions which would ruthlessly crush any obstacle in the way of their indulgence. Lover after lover, high-placed and base-born indifferently, succeeded one another in her fickle favour, as Catherine the Great's favourites trod one on the heels of the other, each in turn to be flung contemptuously aside to make room for a more favoured rival.

Even Gramont, seasoned man of the world and far removed from a saint as he was, was frankly horrified at the carryings-on of this English Messalina, compared with whom the most lax ladies of the English Court were veritable prudes. "I would lay a wager," he says, "that if she had a man killed for her every day she would only carry her head the higher. I suppose she must have plenary indulgence for her conduct." The only indulgence she had or needed was that of her own imperious will and her elastic conscience.

As we glance down the list of her victims, we see some of the most honourable names, and also some of the most despicable characters in the England of the Restoration. The Duke of Ormond's heir caught her capricious fancy for awhile; but, though his love for her drove him to the verge of suicide, she wearied of him and trampled him under foot to seek a fresh conquest.

To my Lord Arran succeeded Captain Thomas Howard, brother of the Earl of Carlisle, a shy, proud young man of irreproachable character, whose love for the fascinating Countess was as free from dishonour as a weakness for another man's wife could be. She caught him securely in the net of her charms, ensnared him with her *beaute de diable*, and then, satisfied with her ignoble triumph, proceeded to make a fool of him.

Nothing pleased this Countess more than to bring her lovers together, to watch with gloating eyes their rivalries, their jealousies, and their quarrels, which frequently led to her crowning enjoyment—the shedding of blood. And it was with this object that one day she induced Howard to join her at a *petit souper* at Spring Gardens, a favourite pleasure-haunt of the day, near Charing Cross. The supper had scarcely commenced when the *tete-a-tete* was interrupted by the appearance of none other than the

“invincible Jermyn,” one of the handsomest and most notorious *roues* of the day, a famous duellist, and one of my lady’s most ardent lovers.



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Here was a prospect of amusement such as was dear to the heart of the Countess, who, needless to say, had arranged the plot. Jermyn needed no invitation to make a third at the feast of love. That was precisely what he had come for; and although Howard played the host with admirable dignity to the unwelcome intruder, Jermyn ignored his courtesy and brought all his skill to bear on fanning the flames of his jealousy. He flirted outrageously with the Countess, kept her in peals of laughter by his sallies of wit and scarcely-veiled gibes at her companion, until Howard was roused to such a pitch of silent fury that only the presence of a lady restrained him from running the insolent intruder through with his sword. Nothing would have delighted her ladyship more than such a climax to the little play she was enjoying so much; but Howard, with marvellous self-restraint, kept his temper within bounds and his sword in its sheath.

Such an outrage, however, could not be passed over with impunity; and before Jermyn had eaten his breakfast on the following morning, Howard's friend and second, Colonel Dillon, was announced with a demand for satisfaction—a demand which met with a prompt acquiescence from Jermyn, who vowed he would “wipe the young puppy out.” The duel took place in the “Long Alley near St James's, called Pall Mall,” and proved to be of as sanguinary a nature as even the grossly-insulted Howard could have desired.

On the 19th of August 1662, Pepys writes:—

“Mr Coventry did tell us of the duel between Mr Jermyn, nephew to my Lord of St Alban's, and Colonel Giles Rawlins, the latter of whom is killed, and the first mortally wounded as it is thought. They fought against Captain Thomas Howard, my Lord Carlisle's brother, and another unknown; who, they say, had armour on that they could not be hurt, so that one of their swords went up to the hilt against it. They had horses ready and are fled. But what is most strange, Howard sent one challenge before, but they could not meet till yesterday at the old Pall Mall at St James's; and he would not till the last tell Jermyn what the quarrel was; nor do anybody know.”

If no one else knew of the cause of the quarrel, certainly Jermyn did; and never did man pay a more deserved penalty for dastardly behaviour. Lady Shrewsbury's delight at thus ridding herself of two lovers, of both of whom she seems to have grown weary, may be better imagined than described. Although Jermyn was carried off the field of battle, to all appearance a dead man, he survived until 1708 when he died, full of years and wickedness, Baron Jermyn of Dover.

The Court, as Pepys records, was “much concerned in this fray”; but it was long before Lady Shrewsbury's part in it came to light, to add to the infamy which she had by that time heaped on herself. Her wayward fancy next settled on a man of a different stamp to either Howard or Jermyn. It seemed, indeed, to be her ambition to make her conquests as varied as humanity itself. Her next victim was Harry Killigrew, one of the most notorious profligates in London, a man of low birth and lower tastes, a haunter of

taverns, the terror of all decent women, and a roystering swashbuckler, with a sword as ready to leap at a word as his lips to snatch a kiss from a pretty mouth.



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Such was my Lady Shrewsbury's successor to the aristocratic, high-minded brother of Lord Carlisle. Killigrew's father was a well-known man of his day, for he wore cap and bells at Charles's Court, and was privileged to practise his clowning on King and courtier and maid-of-honour with no heavier penalty than a box on the ears. The extreme licence he permitted himself is proved by that joke at the expense of Louis XIV., which might well have cost any other man his head. Louis, who always unbended to a merry jester, was showing his pictures to Killigrew, when they came to a painting of the Crucifixion, placed between portraits of the Pope and the "Roi Soleil" himself. "Ah, Sire," said the Jester, as he struck an attitude before the trio of canvases, "I knew that our Lord was crucified between two thieves, but I never knew till now who they were."

Such was Tom Killigrew who kept Charles's Court alive by his pranks and jests, and who is better remembered in our day as the man to whose enterprise we owe Drury Lane Theatre and the Italian Opera; and it would have been better for the world of his day if his son had been as decent a man as himself. His fun, at least, was harmless, and his life, so far as we know it, was reasonably clean. His son, however, was notorious as the most foul-mouthed, evil-living man in London, whose very contact was a pollution. Once Pepys, always eager for new experiences, was inveigled into his company and that of the "jolly blades," who were his boon companions; "but Lord!" the diarist says ingenuously, "their talk did make my heart ache!"

That my Lady Shrewsbury should stoop to such a *liaison* astonished even those who knew how widely she cast her net, and how indiscriminating her passion was in its quest for novelty. That such a man should boast of his conquest over the beautiful Countess was inevitable. He published it in every low tavern in London, gloating in his cups over "his lady's most secret charms, concerning which more than half the Court knew quite as much as he knew himself."

Among those to whom Killigrew thus boasted was the dissolute second Duke of Buckingham, whose curiosity was so stimulated by what he heard that he entered the lists himself, and quickly succeeded in ousting Killigrew from his place in my lady's favour. To the tavern-sot thus succeeded the most splendid noble in England, a man who, in his record of gallantry, was no mean rival to the Countess herself. To be thus displaced by the man to whom he had boasted his conquest was a bitter blow to the libertine's vanity; to be cut dead by Lady Shrewsbury, who had no longer any use for him, roused him to a frenzy of rage in which he assailed her with the bitterest invectives; "painted a frightful picture of her conduct, and turned all her charms, which he had previously extolled, into defects." The Duke's warnings were powerless to stop his vindictive tongue; even a severe thrashing, which resulted in Killigrew begging abjectly for his life from his successful rival, failed to teach him prudence. His slanders grew more and more venomous until they brought on him a punishment which nearly cost him his life.



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But before Killigrew's tongue was thus silenced, the wooing of the Duke and the Countess was marred by a tragedy, to which our history happily furnishes no parallel. The Countess's husband had hitherto looked on with seeming indifference, while lover after lover succeeded each other in his wife's favour. But even the Earl's long forbearance had its limits; and these were reached when he saw the insolent coxcomb, Buckingham, a man whom he had always detested, usurp his place. He screwed up his laggard manhood to the pitch of challenging the Duke to a duel, which took place one January morning in 1667, and of which Pepys tells the following story:

"Much discourse of the duel yesterday between the Duke of Buckingham, Holmes and one Jenkins, on one side, and my Lord Shrewsbury, Sir John Talbot and one Bernard Howard, on the other side; and all about my Lady Shrewsbury, who is at this time, and hath for a great while, been a mistress to the Duke of Buckingham. And so her husband challenged him, and they met yesterday in a close near Barne-Elmes, and there fought; and my Lord Shrewsbury is run through the body, from the right breast through the shoulder; and Sir John Talbot all along up one of his armes; and Jenkins killed upon the place, and the rest all, in a little measure, wounded. This will make the world think that the King hath good Councillors about him, when the Duke of Buckingham, the greatest man about him, is a fellow of no more sobriety than to fight about a mistress."

It is said that the Countess, in the guise of a page, accompanied her lover to the scene of this bloodthirsty duel; held his horse as, with sparkling eyes, she saw her husband receive his death-blow; and, when the foul deed was done, flung her arms around the assassin's neck in a transport of gratitude and affection. Never surely since Judas sent his Master to his death with a kiss has the world witnessed such an infamous betrayal.

From the scene of this tragedy the Duke escorted the Countess-page to his own home, where he installed her as his avowed mistress in the eyes of the world, at the same time ordering the carriage which was to take his outraged wife back to her father's house. Even in such an abandoned and profligate Court as that of Charles II., the news of this dastardly crime and Lady Shrewsbury's callous treachery was received with execration, while a thrill of horror and fierce indignation ran through the whole of England. But the Countess and her paramour smiled at the storm they had brought on their heads, and with brazen insolence flaunted their amour in the face of the world.

Now that the Countess's husband had been removed from their path the shameless pair had time to attend to Killigrew, whose malicious tongue must be silenced once for all. They hired bravos to track his footsteps, and at a convenient moment to remove him from their path. The opportunity came one day when it was learnt that Killigrew, who seemed to know that his life was in danger and for a long time had evaded his enemies successfully, intended to travel from town to his house at Turnham Green late at night. His chaise was followed at a discreet distance by my Lady Shrewsbury, who arrived on the scene just in time to witness the prepared tragedy which was to crown her revenge. Killigrew, who was sleeping in his chaise, awoke, to quote a contemporary account,



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“by the thrust of a sword which pierced his neck and came out at the shoulder. Before he could cry out he was flung from the chaise, and stabbed in three other places by the Countess’s assassins, while the lady herself looked on from her own coach and six, and cried out to the murderers, ‘Kill the villain!’ Nor did she drive off till he was thought dead.”

The man whose murder she thus witnessed and encouraged was not, however, Killigrew, as in the darkness she imagined, but his servant. Killigrew himself, although severely wounded, was more fortunate in escaping with his life. But the lesson he had received was so severe that for the rest of his days he gave the Countess and her lover the widest of berths, and retired into the obscurity in which alone he could feel safe from such a revengeful virago. This second crime, like its predecessor, went unpunished, so powerful was Buckingham, and so deep in the King’s favour; and he and the Countess were left in the undisturbed enjoyment of their lust and their triumphs.

“Gallant and gay, in Clieveden’s proud alcove,
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love,”

the infamous pair defied the world, and crowned their ignominy by standing together at the altar, where the Duke’s chaplain made them one, almost before the body of the Countess’s husband (who had survived his duel two months) was cold, and while the Duchess of Buckingham was, of course, still alive. The Countess was not long before her brazen effrontery carried her back to Court, where she took the lead in the revels and at the gaming-tables, and made love to the “Merrie Monarch” himself. Evelyn tells us that, during a visit to Newmarket, he

“found the jolly blades racing, dancing, feasting and revelling, more resembling a luxurious and abandoned rout than a Christian country. The Duke of Buckingham was in mighty favour, and had with him that impudent woman, the Countess of Shrewsbury, and his band of fiddlers.”

It was only with the downfall of the Stuarts that this shameless alliance came to an end, when Buckingham’s reign of power was over, and he was haled before the House of Lords to answer for his crimes. He and the partner of his guilt were ordered to separate; and for this purpose to enter into security to the King in the sum of £10,000 apiece. Thus ignominiously closed one of the most infamous intrigues in history. Buckingham, buffeted by fortune, rapidly fell, as the world knows, from his pinnacle of power to the lowest depths of poverty, to end his days, friendless and destitute, in a Yorkshire inn.

“No wit, to flatter, left of all his store!
No fool to laugh at, which he valued more.
There reft of health, of fortune, friends,
And fame, this lord of useless thousands ends.”



To my Lady Shrewsbury, as to her paramour, the condemnation of the Lords marked the setting of her sun of splendour. The slumbering rage of England against her long career of iniquity awoke to fresh life in this hour of her humiliation, and she was glad to escape from its fury to the haven of a convent in France, where she spent some time in mock penitence.



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But the Countess was, by no means, resigned to end her days in the odour of a tardy and insincere piety. As soon as the sky had cleared a little across the Channel, she returned to England, and tried to repair her shattered fame by giving her hand to a son of Sir Thomas Bridges, of Keynsham, in Somerset, who was so enslaved by her charms that he was proud to lead the tarnished beauty to the altar. And with this mockery of wedding bells "Messalina's" history practically ended as far as the world, outside the Somersetshire village, where the remainder of her life was mostly spent, was concerned. The fires of her passion had now died out, and the restless and still ambitious woman exchanged love for political intrigue. She became the most ardent of Jacobites, and plotted as unscrupulously for the restoration of the Stuarts, as in earlier years she had planned the capture and ruin of her lovers.

Not content with treading the shady and dangerous path of intrigue herself, she set to work to undermine the loyalty of her only son, the young Earl of Shrewsbury, one of the most trusted ministers and friends of the Orange King; and such was her influence over the high-principled, if weak Earl that she infected him with her own treachery, until the man, whom William III. had called "the soul of honour," stood branded to the world as a spy, leagued with the King's enemies, and was compelled to leave England for ten years of exile and disgrace.

This corruption and ruin of her own son was the crowning infamy of one of the worst women who ever enlisted their beauty, of their own free will, in the service of the devil.

CHAPTER VII

A PROFLIGATE PRINCE

Of the sons of the profligate Frederick, Prince of Wales, Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland, was, by universal consent, the most abandoned, as his eldest brother, George III., of "revered memory," in spite of his intrigue with the fair Quakeress, was the least vicious. Each brother had his amours—many of them highly discreditable; but for unrestrained and indiscriminate profligacy Henry Frederick took the unenviable palm.

Even the verdict of posterity is unable to credit this Princeling with a solitary virtue, unless a handsome face and a passion for music can be placed to his credit. In his career of female conquest, which began as soon as he had emancipated himself from his mother's apron strings, he left behind him a wake of ruined lives; not the least tragic of which was that of the lovely and foolish Henrietta Vernon, Countess Grosvenor, whom he dragged through the mire of the Divorce Court, only to fling her aside, a soiled and crushed flower of too pliant womanhood.

And yet, when his passion was in full flame, no woman was ever wooed with apparently more sincere ardour and devotion.



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“My dear Angel,” he once wrote to her, “I got to bed about ten. I then prayed for you, my dearest love, kissed your dearest little hair, and lay down and dreamt of you, had you ten thousand times in my arms, kissing you and telling you how much I loved and adored you, and you seemed pleased.... I have your heart, and it is warm at my breast. I hope mine feels as easy to you. Thou joy of my life, adieu!”

In another letter he exclaims:

“Oh, my dearest soul ... your dear heart is so safe with me and feels every motion mine does. How happy will that day be to me that brings you back! I shall be unable to speak for joy. My dearest soul, I send you ten thousand kisses.”

So irrepressible was his passion that it burst the bounds of prose, and gushed forth in verses such as this:

“Hear, solemn Jove, and, conscious Venus, hear!
And thou, bright maid, believe me while I swear,
No time, no change, no future flame shall move
The well-placed basis of my lasting love.”

When the fair and frail Countess, in a fit of alarm, took refuge at Eaton Hall, her Royal lover followed her in disguise, installed himself at a neighbouring inn, and continued his intrigue under the very nose of her jealous husband, who at last was driven to sue for divorce. He won an easy verdict, and with it £10,000 damages—a bill which George III. himself had ultimately to pay. Within a few months the incorrigible Duke had another “dearest little angel” in his toils, and pursued his gallantries without a thought of the Countess he had left to her shame.

Such was this degenerate brother of the King when the most memorable of his victims crossed his blighting path one summer day in the year 1771, at Brighton—a radiantly beautiful young woman who had just discarded her widow’s weeds, and was arrayed for fresh conquests.

Anne Luttrell, as the widow had been known in her maiden days, was one of the three lovely daughters of Lord Irnham, in later years Earl of Carhampton, and a member of a family noted for the beauty of its women, and the wild, lawless living of its men. Her brother, Colonel Luttrell, was the most reckless swashbuckler and the deadliest duellist of his time—a man whose morals were as low as his temper and courage were high.

At seventeen Anne had become the wife of Christopher Horton, a hard-drinking, fast-living Derbyshire squire, who left her a widow at twenty-two, in the prime of her beauty, and eager, as soon as decency permitted, to enter the matrimonial lists again.



About this time Horace Walpole, who had a keen eye for female charms, describes her as

“extremely pretty, very well-made, with the most amorous eyes in the world, and eyelashes a yard long. Coquette beyond measure, artful as Cleopatra, and completely mistress of all her passions and projects. Indeed, eyelashes three-quarters of a yard shorter would have served to conquer such a head as she has turned.”

In another portrait Walpole says:

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“There was something so bewitching in her languishing eyes, which she could animate to enchantment if she pleased, and her coquetry was so active, so varied, and yet so habitual, that it was difficult not to see through it, and yet as difficult to resist it. She danced divinely, and had a great deal of wit, but of the satiric kind.”

Such were the charms and witchery of Mrs Horton when the lascivious young Prince, who was still a boy, was first dazzled by her beauty at Brighton; and when, in fact, she was on the eve of smiling on the suit of one of the legion of lovers who swelled her retinue, one General Smith, a handsome man with a seductive rent-roll to add to his attractions. But the moment the Prince began to cast admiring eyes at the young widow the General's fate was sealed. She had no fancy to go to her grave plain “Mrs Smith” when a duchess's coronet (and a Royal one to boot) was dangled so alluringly before her eyes.

For from the first she had made up her mind that she would be the Prince's legal wife, and no light-o'-love to be petted and flung aside when he chose, butterfly-like, to flit to some other flower; and this she made abundantly clear to Henry Frederick. Her favours—after a period of coquetry and coy reluctance—were at his disposal; but the price to be paid for them was a wedding-ring—nothing less. And such was the infatuation she had inspired that the Duke—flinging scruples and fears aside, consented. One October day they took boat to Calais, and were there made man and wife. The widow had caught her Prince and meant the world to know she was a Princess.

For a few indecisive weeks the Duke put off the evil day of announcing his marriage to his brother, the King, and to his mother, the Dowager Princess of Wales, whose frowns he dreaded still more. But his Duchess was inexorable. She declined to play any longer the *role* of “virtuous mistress” in an obscure French town, when she ought, as a Princess of the Blood Royal, to be circling in splendour and state around the throne.

Between his wife's tears and tantrums on one side of the Channel and the Royal anger on the other, the Duke was driven to the extremity of his exiguous Royal wits; until finally, in sheer desperation, he decided to make the plunge—to break the news to the King. Had he but known how inopportune the time was he would surely have taken the first boat back to Calais rather than face his brother's anger. George was distracted by trouble at home and abroad. His mother was dying; across the Atlantic the clouds of war were massing; the political atmosphere was charged with danger and unrest. And when the quaking Duke presented himself before his brother as he was moodily walking in his palace garden, George was in no mood to accept quietly any addition to his burden of worries.



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No sooner had the King read the ill-spelled, clumsily-worded note which the Duke shamefacedly placed in his hand than his anger blazed into flame. “You idiot! You blockhead! You villain!” he shouted, purple in face and hoarse with passion. “I tell you that woman shall never be a Royal Duchess—she shall never be anything.” “What must I do, then?” gasped the Duke, quailing before the Royal outburst. “Go abroad until I can decide what to do,” thundered the King, waving his brother imperiously away.

It was a very crestfallen Duke who returned to Calais to face the upbraiding of Duchess Anne on his failure. But it took much more than this to cow a Luttrell. She at least was not afraid of any king. She would defy him to his face, and compel him to acknowledge her—before her child was born. And within a few weeks she was installed at Cumberland House, with all the state and more than the airs of a Royal Princess. The days of concealment were over; she stood avowed to the world, Duchess of Cumberland and sister-in-law to the King; and she only smiled when George, in his Royal wrath at such insolence, announced through his Chamberlain that “there was no road between Cumberland House and Windsor Castle—that the Castle doors would be closed against any who dared to visit his repudiated sister-in-law.”

There were some, however, who dared to brave George’s displeasure by paying court to the Duchess, whose beauty and grace surrounded her with a small body of admirers. The daughter of an Irish nobleman played to perfection her new and exalted *role* of Princess. “No woman of her time,” says Lord Hervey, “performed the honours of her drawing-room with such grace, affability, and dignity.” And, in spite of George’s frowns, the only real thorn in her bed of roses was the knowledge that the Duchess of Gloucester, who, as the daughter of a Piccadilly sempstress, was infinitely her inferior by birth, and not even her superior in beauty, was received with open arms at the Castle, and drew to her court all the greatest in the land.

She even made overtures to her rival and enemy, and proposed that they should appear together in the same box at the opera—an overture to which the Duchess of Gloucester retorted contemptuously: “Never! I would not smell at the same nosegay with her in public!”

By sheer effrontery Duchess Anne at last forced her way into the Royal Court and public recognition as a member of George’s family; and the fact that both the King and the Queen snubbed her mercilessly for her pains, detracted little from her triumph and gratification. What her Grace of Gloucester had won by submission and ingratiating arts, she had won by brazen defiance and importunity. But the goal, though so differently reached, was the same. Her triumph was complete.



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To her last day, however, she never forgave the King and Queen. While they had smiled on the sempstress's daughter, who had been guilty of precisely the same offence as herself—that of wedding a Royal Prince without the King's sanction—they had scorned her, a Luttrell, the daughter of a noble house; and terrible was the revenge she took. She deliberately set herself to debase the Prince of Wales—a youth whose natural tendencies made him a pliant tool in her hands. She enmeshed him in the web of her beauty and charms; she pandered to his vanity and his passions; while her husband initiated him into the vices of which he himself was a past-master—drinking, gambling, and lust. Notorious profligate as George IV. became, there is little doubt that he would have been a much better man if he had not fallen thus early into the hands of a revengeful and unprincipled woman. Thus infamously the Duchess of Cumberland repaid George and his Consort for their slights; and her shameless reward was when she witnessed their grief at the moral degradation of their eldest son.

But even in the hour of her greatest triumph and splendour Anne Luttrell was an unhappy woman. She had climbed to the dizziest heights of the social ladder; her pride was more than satisfied; but her heart was empty and desolate. Her fickle husband soon wearied of her charms, and flaunted his fresh conquests before her face. In the royal family circle, into which she had forced her way, she was an unwelcome stranger; and such homage as she received was conceded to her rank and not to herself. "Of all princesses," she once wrote to a friend, "I really think I am the most miserable."

Her husband died at the age of forty-five, worn out with excesses, regretted by none, execrated by many. Of his father it had been written by way of epitaph:—

"He was alive and is dead,
And, as it is only Fred,
Why, there's no more to be said."

Henry Frederick's epitaph, if it had been written by the same hand, would have been much more scathing. His Duchess survived him a score of years—unhappy years of solitude and neglect, a Princess only in name—harassed and shamed by her eldest sister, Elizabeth, a woman of coarse tastes and language, a confirmed gambler and cheat, whose failings, which she tried in vain to conceal, brought shame on the Duchess.

The fate of Elizabeth—one of the "three beautiful Luttrells"—is among the most tragic stories of the British Peerage. When her Duchess-sister died she drifted into low companionships, was imprisoned for debt, and actually bribed a hairdresser to marry her, in order to recover her liberty. On the Continent, to which she escaped, she fell to still lower depths—was arrested for pocket-picking, and for a time cleaned the streets of Augsburg chained to a wheelbarrow, until a dose of poison set her free from her fetters.

CHAPTER VIII



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THE GORGEOUS COUNTESS

If, a century ago, Edmund Power, of Knockbrit, in County Tipperary, had been told that his second daughter, Marguerite, would one day blossom into a Countess, and live in history as one of the “most gorgeous” figures in the fashionable world of London under three kings, he would certainly have considered his prophetic informant an escaped lunatic, and would probably have told him so, with the brutal frankness which was one of his most amiable characteristics.

The Irish squire was a proud man—proud of his pretty and shiftless wife, with her eternal talk of her Desmond ancestors; proud of two of his three daughters, whose budding beauty was to win for them titled husbands—one an English Viscount, the other a Comte de St Marsante; and proudest of all of his own handsome figure and his local dignities. But he was frankly ashamed to own himself father of his second daughter, Marguerite, the “ugly duckling” of a good-looking family, and with no gifts or promise to qualify her plainness.

But the squireen was probably too full of his own self-importance to waste much thought or regret on an insignificant, unattractive girl, though she was his own child. He loved to strut about among his humble neighbours in all the unprovincial glory of ruffles and lace, buck-skins and top-boots, and snowy, wide-spreading cravat. He was the king of Tipperary dandies, known far beyond his own county as “Buck Power” and “Shiver-the-Frills”; and what pleased his vanity still more, he was a Justice of the Peace, with authority to scour the country at the head of a company of dragoons, tracking down rebels and spreading terror wherever he went. That he was laughed at for his coxcombry and hated for his petty tyranny only seemed to add to the zest of his enjoyment of life; and he saw, at least, a knighthood as the prospective recognition of his importance, and his services to the King and the peace.

Such was the father and such the home of Marguerite Power, who was one day to dazzle the world as the “most gorgeous Lady Blessington.”

As with many another “ugly duckling” Marguerite Power’s beauty was only dormant in these days of childhood; and before she had graduated into long frocks, the bud was opening which was to grow to so beautiful a flower. If her father was blind to the change, it was patent enough to other eyes; and she had scarcely passed her fourteenth birthday when she had at least two lovers eager to pay homage to her girlish charm—Captains Murray and Farmer, brother-officers of a regiment stationed at Clonmel. To the wooing of Captain Murray, young, handsome, and desperately in earnest, she lent a willing ear; but when thus encouraged, he asked her to be his wife, she blushingly declined the offer, on the ground that she was yet much too young to think of a wedding-ring. To the rival Captain, old enough to be her father, a man, moreover, whose evil living and Satanic temper were notorious, she showed the utmost

aversion. "I hate him," she protested in tears to her father, who supported his suit; "and I would rather die a hundred times than marry him."



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But “Beau Power” was the last man to be moved from his purpose by a child’s tears or pleadings. Captain Farmer was a man of wealth and good family, and also one of his own boon companions. And thus, tearful, indignant, protesting to the last, the girl was led to the altar, by the biggest scoundrel in Tipperary—a “maiden tribute” to a lover’s lust and a father’s ambition.

[Illustration: MARGUERITE, COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON]

The child’s fears were more than realised in the wedded life that followed. Before the honeymoon had waned, the Captain began to treat his young wife with all the brutality of which he was such a past-master. Blows and oaths were her daily lot; and when his cruelty wrung tears from her, her husband would lock her in her room, and leave her for days, without fire or food, until she condescended to beg for mercy.

After three months of this inferno the Captain was ordered to a distant station; and, as his wife refused point-blank to accompany him, was by no means reluctant to “be rid of the brat” by sending her back to her home. Here, however, the child-wife found herself less welcome than, and almost as unhappy as in her wedded life; and, driven to despair, she left the home in which she had been cradled, and fared forth alone into the world, which could not be more unkind than those whose duty it was to shield and care for her.

How, or where, Beau Power’s daughter lived during the next twelve years must always remain largely a mystery. At one time she appears in Dublin; at another, in Cahir; but mostly she seems to have spent her time in England. Over this part of her adventurous life a curtain is drawn; though some have endeavoured to raise it, and have professed to discover scandalous doings for which there seems to be no vestige of authority. We know that, by the time she was twenty, Sir Thomas Lawrence was so struck by her beauty that he immortalised it on canvas; but it is only in 1816 that the curtain is actually raised, and we find her living with her brother in London, where, to quote her sister,

“she received at her house only those whose age and character rendered them safe friends, and a very few others, on whose perfect respect and consideration she could wholly rely. Among the latter was the Earl of Blessington, then a widower.”

Whatever may have been her life during this obscure period, when her charms were maturing into such exquisite beauty, it is thus certain that at its close she was moving in a good circle, and was as irreproachable as she was lovely. Of her rascally husband she had happily seen nothing during all those years of more or less lonely adventure; and the end of this tragic union was now near. One day in October 1817, the Captain ended his misspent days in tragedy. He had drifted through dissipation and crime to the King’s Bench prison; and in a fit of frenzy—or, as some say, in a drunken quarrel—had flung himself to his death through a window of his gaol.



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Thus, at last, the nightmare that had clouded the young life of the squireen's daughter was over, and she was free to plan her future as she would. What this future was to be was soon placed beyond doubt. The widowed Earl of Blessington had long been among the most ardent admirers of the lovely Irishwoman; and before Farmer had been many months in his prison-grave, he had won her consent to be his Countess. The "ugly duckling" had reached a coronet through such trials and vicissitudes as happily seldom fall to the lot of woman; and her future was to be as radiant as her past had been ignoble and obscure.

Seldom has a woman cradled in comparative poverty made such a splendid alliance. Lord Blessington was a veritable Croesus among Irish landlords, with a rent-roll of £30,000 a year; allied, it is true, to an extravagance more than commensurate with his revenue. He had a passion for all things theatrical, and an almost barbaric taste in the gorgeous furnishings with which he loved to surround himself; and this taste his wife seems to have shared.

When the Earl took his bride to his ancestral home, Mountjoy Forest, she revelled in her boudoir, with its hangings of "crimson Genoa silk-velvet, trimmed with gold bullion fringe; and all the furniture of equal richness." But she had had enough of Irish life in the days of her childhood, and soon sighed to return to London and to a wider sphere for her beauty and her social ambition; and before she had been a bride six months we find her installed in St James's Square, drawing to her *salon* all the greatest and most famous in the land, and moving among her courtiers with the dignity and graciousness of a Queen.

Royal Dukes kissed her hand; statesman basked in her smile; Moore sang his sweetest songs for her delight; and all the arts and sciences worshipped at her shrine, and raved about her beauty of face and graces of mind.

Sated at last with all this splendour and adulation, my Lady Blessington yearned for more worlds to conquer; and so, one August day in 1822, she and her lord set out on a triumphal progress through Europe, with a retinue of attendants, and with luxurious equipages such as a king might have been proud to boast. In France they added to their train Count d'Orsay, who threw up his army-commission under the lure of the Countess's beautiful eyes; and seldom has fair lady had so devoted and charming a cavalier as this "Admirable Crichton" of Georgian days.

"Count d'Orsay," says Charles James Mathews, the famous comedian, who knew him well, "was the beau-ideal of manly dignity and grace. He was the model of all that could be conceived of noble demeanour and youthful candour; handsome beyond all question; accomplished to the last degree; highly educated, and of great literary acquirements; with a gaiety of heart and cheerfulness of mind that spread happiness on all around him. His conversation was brilliant and engaging, as well as instructive. He



was, moreover, the best fencer, dancer, swimmer, runner, dresser, the best shot, the best horseman, the best draughtsman, of his age.”

Such was the Count, then a youth of nineteen, who thus entered Lady Blessington’s life, in which he was to play such an intimate part until its tragic close.



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From France the regal progress continued to Italy, everywhere greeted with wonder at its magnificence and admiration of my lady's beauty. Two spring months in 1823 were passed at Genoa, where Lord Byron loved to sit at the Countess's feet and pay homage to her with eye and tongue. From Genoa the procession fared majestically to Rome, of which her ladyship, in spite of the sensation she produced and the adulation she received, soon wearied; she sighed for Naples, where she was regally lodged in the Palazzo Belvidere, a Palace, as she declared, "fit for any queen." And how the squire's daughter revelled in her new pleasure-house, with its courtyard and plashing fountain, its arcade and its colonnade, "supporting a terrace covered with flowers"; its marvellous gardens, filled with the rarest trees, shrubs and plants; and long gallery, "filled with pictures, statues, and bassi-relievi."

"On the top of the gallery," she says, "is a terrace, at the extreme end of which is a pavilion, with open arcades and paved with marble. This pavilion commands a most charming prospect of the bay, the foreground filled up by gardens and vineyards. The odour of the flowers in the grounds around the pavilion, and the Spanish jasmine and tuberoses that cover the walls, render it one of the most delicious retreats in the world. The walls of all the rooms are literally covered with pictures; the architraves of the doors of the principal rooms are oriental alabaster and the rarest marbles; the tables and consoles are composed of the same costly materials; and the furniture bears the traces of its pristine splendour."

Such was the Arabian palace of all delights of which her gorgeous ladyship now found herself mistress; and yet nothing would please her indulgent lord but the spending of a few thousands in adding to its splendours by new and costly furnishings. Here she spent two-and-a-half years of ideal happiness, sailing by moonlight on the lovely bay, with d'Orsay for companion; visiting all the sights, from Pompeii to the galleries and museums, with a retinue of experts, such as Herschell and Gell in her train, and entertaining with a queenly magnificence Italian nobles and all the great ones of Europe who passed through Naples.

From Naples Lady Blessington took her train to Florence, where she cast her spell over Walter Savage Landor, who spent every possible hour in her fascinating company; and where she was joined by her husband's daughter, the Lady Harriet Gardiner, a girl of fifteen, who, within a few weeks of reaching Italy, became the wife of my lady's handsome protege, d'Orsay. And it was not until 1828, six years after leaving London, that the stately procession turned its face homewards, halting for a few months of farewell magnificence in Paris, where Lady Blessington was installed in Marshal Ney's mansion, in an environment even more gorgeous than the Palazzo Belvidere of Naples could boast, thanks to the prodigality of her infatuated lord.

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The description which her Ladyship gives of her Paris palace reads, indeed, like a passage from the “Arabian Nights.”

“The bed,” she says, “which is silvered instead of gilt, rests on the backs of two large silver swans, so exquisitely sculptured that every feather is in alto-relievo, and looks nearly as fleecy as those of a living bird. The recess in which it is placed, is lined with white fluted silk, bordered with blue embossed lace; and from the columns that support the frieze of the recess, pale blue silk curtains, lined with white, are hung. A silvered sofa has been made to fit the side of the room opposite the fireplace—pale blue carpets, silver lamps, ornaments silvered to correspond.”

Her bath was of white marble; her *salle de bain* was draped with white muslin trimmed with lace, and its ceiling was beautiful with a painted Flora scattering flowers and holding an elaborate lamp in the form of a lotus. And all the rest of the equipment of this dream-palace was in keeping with these splendours, from the carpets and curtains of crimson to the gilt consoles, marble-topped *chiffonieres*, and *fauteuils* “richly carved and gilt and covered with satin to correspond with the curtains.”

This, although Lady Blessington little dreamt it, was to be the last lavish evidence of her lord’s devotion to his beautiful wife; for, before they had been many months back in England the Earl died suddenly in the prime of his days. Large as his fortune had been, the last few years of extravagance had made such inroads in it that all that was left of his £30,000 a year was an annual income of £600, which went to his illegitimate son. Fortunately the Countess’s jointure of £2,000 a year was secure; and on this income Lady Blessington was able to face the future with a heart as light as it could be after such a bereavement; for, eccentric as her husband had been, and in some ways almost contemptible, she had loved him dearly for the great and touching love with which he had always surrounded her.

It was during her early years of widowhood that her ladyship turned for solace, and also for additional revenue to support the extravagance which had now become second nature, to her pen, in which she quickly found a small mine of welcome gold. Her “Books of Beauty” and “Gems of Beauty” were an instantaneous success—they made a strong appeal to the flowery sentiment of the time, and sold in tens of thousands of copies. Her “Conversations with Byron,” a record of those halcyon days at Genoa, fed the curiosity which then invested the most romantic of poets with a glamour which survives to our day; and her novels and gossip books of travel were hailed in succession by an eager public of readers.

In these years of prolific literary labour she was able to double her jointure, and to maintain much of the splendour to which she had become so accustomed. Even her literary children were cradled in luxury on a *fauteuil* of yellow satin, in a library crowded with sumptuous couches and ottomans, enamel tables and statuary. To her house in Seamore Place her beauty and fame drew the most eminent men in England, from



Lawrence and Lyndhurst to Lytton and young Disraeli, gorgeous as his hostess, in gold-flowered waistcoat, gold rings and chains, white stick with black tassel, and his shower of ringlets.



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But the Seamore Place house proved too cabined and too modest for my lady's exacting social ambition. She demanded a more spacious and magnificent shrine for her beauty, which was still so remarkable that she was considered the loveliest woman at the Court of George III. when well advanced in the forties—and this she found at Gore House, in Kensington, a stately mansion in which Wilberforce had made his home, and which, surrounded by beautiful gardens and shut in with a girdle of spreading trees, might have been in the heart of the country, instead of within sight of the tide of fashion which flowed in Hyde Park.

Here for thirteen years, with the handsome, gay, accomplished d'Orsay, who had separated from his wife, as major-domo, she dispensed a princely hospitality. Her dinners and her entertainments were admittedly the finest in London; and invitations to them were as eagerly sought as commands to a Court-ball.

“At Gore House,” said Brougham, “one is sure to meet some of the most interesting people in England, and equally sure not to have a dull moment.” Brougham was himself a constant and a welcome guest, and the men he met there ranged from Prince Louis Napoleon, then an exile without a prospect of a crown, and the Duke of Wellington to Albert Smith and Douglas Jerrold—so wide was the net of Lady Blessington's hospitality. And all paid the same glowing tribute, not only to their hostess's loveliness but to the warmth of heart, which was one of her greatest charms. And of all the great ones who sat at her dinner-table or thronged her drawing-rooms not one was wittier or more fascinating than Count d'Orsay, who, in spite of envious and malicious tongues, never occupied to the Countess any other relation than that of a dearly-loved and devoted son.

Although Lady Blessington's income rarely fell below L4,000 a year, it was quite inadequate to her expenditure; and it was clear to her that this era of splendid hospitality could not last for ever. A day of reckoning was sure to come; and it came sooner than she had anticipated. D'Orsay, who seems to have been even more careless of money than his mother-in-law, plunged deeper and deeper in debt—some of it, at least, incurred in helping to keep up the Gore House *menage*—until he found himself at last face to face with liabilities far exceeding L100,000, and besieged with duns and bailiffs. Once he was arrested at the suit of a bootmaker, and was rescued from prison by Lady Blessington's rapidly-emptying purse. The climax came when a sheriff's officer smuggled himself into Gore House, and brought down on d'Orsay's head an avalanche of angry creditors, each resolute to have his “pound of flesh.” The Countess was powerless to stem the invasion; her own resources were at an end, the Count himself was penniless. The only safety was in flight; and one day Gore House was found empty. The birds had flown to Paris; and the mansion which had been the scene of so much magnificence was left to the mercy of a horde of clamorous creditors.



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A few weeks later, all “the costly and elegant effects of the Right Honourable, the Countess of Blessington, retiring to the Continent” were put up to auction; and twenty thousand curious people were pouring through the rooms which her gorgeous ladyship had made so famous—among them Thackeray, who was moved to tears at the spectacle of so much goodness and greatness reduced to ruin. The sale, although many of the effects brought absurdly low prices, realised £12,000—a smaller sum probably than would be paid to-day for half-a-dozen of the Countess’s pictures.

This crushing blow to her fortunes and her pride no doubt broke Lady Blessington’s heart; for within a few months of the last fall of the auctioneer’s hammer, she died suddenly in Paris, to the unspeakable grief of d’Orsay, who declared to the Countess’s physician, Madden, “She was to me a mother! a dear, dear mother—a true, loving mother to me.” Three years later this “paragon of all the perfections” followed the Countess behind the veil, and rests in a mausoleum, of his own designing, at Chamboury, with one of the most lovely women who have ever graced beauty with rare gifts of mind and with a warm and tender heart.

CHAPTER IX

A QUEEN OF COQUETTES

The 29th of May in the year 1660 was indeed a red-letter day in the calendar of jovial fox-hunting Squire Jennings, of Sandridge, in Hertfordshire. It was the day on which his Royal idol, the second Charles, set out from Canterbury on the last stage of the journey to his crown. Mounted on his horse, caparisoned in purple and gold, at the head of a gay cavalcade of retainers, he rode proudly through the Kentish lanes and villages: through avenues of wildly-cheering crowds, flinging sweet may-blossoms and flowers under his horse’s feet, and waving green boughs over their heads in a frenzy of welcome.

[Illustration: SARAH, DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH]

And it was on this very day, as the “Merrie Monarch” was riding under the flowery arches and fluttering pennons of London streets, to the clanging of joy-bells and the thundering of cannon, with a procession twenty thousand strong behind him, that Squire Jennings’ daughter first opened her eyes on the world in which, though her simple-minded father little dreamt it, she was destined to play so brilliant a part. No birthday could have been more auspicious than this which saw the restoration of a nation’s hope; and the sun which flooded it with splendour was typical of the good fortune that was to gild the life-path of the Sandridge baby.

If on that day Squire Richard had been told that his baby-girl would live to wear a Duchess’s coronet and to be the bosom-friend and counsellor of a Queen of England,



he would have laughed aloud; and yet Fate had this and more in waiting for Sarah Jennings in the years to come. The Squire himself professed to be no more than a plain country-gentleman, who knew as much as any man about horses and the management of acres, but knew no more of courts and coronets than of the man in the moon.



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His family, it is true, had been seated for generations on its broad Hertfordshire lands, and his father had been dubbed a Knight of the Bath when the Prince of Wales, later Charles I., himself received the accolade. His mother, too, was a Thornhurst, of Agnes Court, Old Romney, a family of old lineage and high respectability; but, apart from Sir John, no Jennings had ever aspired even as high as a mere knighthood, and certainly they were as far removed from coronets as from the North Pole.

Squire Jennings had another daughter, Frances, at this time a winsome little maid of eight summers, already showing promise of a rare loveliness. And she, too, was destined to a career, almost as brilliant as, and more adventurous than that of her baby-sister. Her story opened when one day she was transported, as maid-of-honour to the Duchess of York, from the modest home in Hertfordshire to the glamour and splendours of the Royal Court, where her beauty dazzled all eyes.

The Duke of York himself lost his heart at sight of her, and turned on her the battery of his sighs and smiles, his ogling and flattering speeches. When she met his advances with coldness, he bombarded her with notes “containing the tenderest expressions and most magnificent promises,” slipping them into her pocket or muff, as opportunity served; but the disdainful beauty dropped the *billets-doux* on the floor for any one to read who chose to pick them up, until at last the Royal lover was compelled to abandon the pursuit in despair.

James’s brother, the King, made violent love to her; and every Court gallant, from the Duke of Buckingham to Henry Jermyn, the richest beau in England, fluttered round her beauty like moths around a candle. How, after many romantic vicissitudes, Frances Jennings gave her heart and hand to Dick Talbot, the handsomest man in the British Isles; how she raised him to a Dukedom, and, as Duchess of Tyrconnel, queened it as Vicereine of Ireland; and how, in later life, she sank from this dizzy pinnacle to such depths of poverty that for a time she was thankful to sell tapes and ribbons in the New Exchange bazaar in the Strand, is one of the most romantic stories in the annals of our Peerage.

While Frances Jennings was coquetting with coronets and playing the madcap at the Court of Whitehall, Sarah was growing to girlhood in her rustic environment in Hertfordshire, more interested in her pony and her toys than in all the baubles that made up the life of that very fine lady her sister, and giving no thought to her beauty, to which each day was adding its touch of grace. But she was not long to remain in such innocence; for one day when she was still but a child of twelve her sister came in a splendid Court carriage, and took her off to London, where a very different life awaited her.

She was not, it is true, to move like Frances in the splendid circle of the Throne, though she was to be on its fringe and to catch many a glimpse of it. Her more modest *role* was to be playfellow and companion of the Duke of York’s younger daughter, Anne—a

shy, backward child, a few years younger than herself, who suffered from an affection of the eyes, which practically closed books and the ordinary avenues of education to her.



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To such a child cradled in a palace and hedged round by ceremonial, Sarah Jennings, with the superabundant health and vitality of a country-bred girl, was an ideal playmate; and before many days had passed the timid, clinging Princess was the very slave of the vivacious, romping, strong-willed daughter of the squire. Thus was begun that union between the strong and the weak, which in later years was to make Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, virtual Queen of England, while her childish playfellow, Anne, wore the crown.

It was under such conditions that Sarah Jennings blossomed rapidly into young womanhood—little less lovely than her ravishing sister, but infinitely more dowered with strength of mind and character—an imperious young lady, with the cleverest brain and tongue, and the most inflexible will within the circle of the Court.

While Sarah was playing with her Royal charge in the Palace nursery, John Churchill, son of a West Country knight, whose life was to be so closely linked with hers, had already climbed several rungs of the ladder at the summit of which he was to find a Duke's coronet. He had made his first appearance at Court while she was still in the cradle at Sandridge; and although, no doubt, she had caught many a glimpse of the handsome young courtier and favourite of the King, in her eyes he moved in a world apart, as far removed by his splendid environment as by his ten years' superiority in age.

John Churchill was, at least, no better born than herself. He was son of one Winston Churchill, of a stock of West Country gentry, who had flung aside his cap and gown at Oxford to wield a sword for King Charles; and who, when Cromwell took the fallen reins of government into his own hands, was made to pay a heavy price for his loyalty by the forfeiture of his lands and a fine of £4,000. When Charles I.'s son came to his own, Winston's star shone again; his acres were restored, he was dubbed a knight, and was rewarded with well-paid offices under the Crown. Moreover, a place at Court, as page-boy, was found for his young son John; and another, as maid-of-honour to the Duchess of York, for his daughter Arabella.

From the day young Churchill entered the service of James, Duke of York, Fortune smiled her sweetest on him. The Duke was captivated by the boy's handsome face, his intelligence and charming manners, and took him at once into favour. By the time he was sixteen he was a full-blown officer of the Guards, and the idol of the Court. His good looks, his graces of person, and powers of fascinating wrought sad havoc in the breast of many a Court-lady; and, boy though he was, there were few favours which might not have been his without the asking.



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Even Barbara Villiers, my Lady Castlemaine, who had for many years been the King's "light o' love," and had borne him three sons, all Dukes-to-be, cast amorous eyes on the handsome young Guardsman; and, what is more, succeeded where beauty failed, in drawing him within the net of her coarse, middle-aged charms. Strange stories are told of the love-making of this oddly-assorted pair, which had a ludicrous conclusion. One day King Charles was informed that if he would take the trouble to go to Lady Castlemaine's rooms he would be rewarded by a singular spectacle—that of young Churchill dallying with his mistress and the mother of his children. And so it proved; for when the King made an unexpected appearance he was just in time to see the lieutenant-Lothario disappearing through an open window and his inamorata on the verge of hysterics on a sofa.

One cannot blame the "Merrie Monarch" for deciding that such activities were better fitted for another field of exercise. The young Lothario was packed off to Tangier to cool his ardour by a little bloodshed; but before he went Lady Castlemaine handed him a farewell present of £5,000 with which, according to Lord Chesterfield, "he immediately bought an annuity of £500 a year of my grandfather Halifax, which was the foundation of his subsequent fortune."

A young man so enterprising and so gifted by nature could scarcely fail to go far, when his energies were directed into a suitable channel. He proved that he could serve under the banner of Mars as gallantly as under the pennon of Cupid. He did such doughty deeds against the Dutch, under Monmouth, that he was made a Captain of Grenadiers. At the siege of Nimeguen his reckless bravery won the unstinted praise of Turenne, who, when one of his own officers cowardly abandoned an important outpost, exclaimed, "I will bet a supper and a dozen of claret that my handsome Englishman will recover the post with half the number of men that the officer commanded who has lost it." And the "handsome Englishman" promptly won the supper for the Marshal. Moreover, by an act of splendid daring, during the siege of Maestricht he saved the Duke of Monmouth's life; and returned to England a hero and a colonel, having thoroughly purged his indiscretion in Lady Castlemaine's boudoir. If he had toyed dangerously with the King's mistress, he had at least saved the life of his Sovereign's best-loved son.

It was at this time that Churchill seems to have first set eyes on Sarah Jennings, now standing on the verge of womanhood, and as sweet a flower as the Court garden of fair girls could show. He saw her moving with queenly grace and dainty freshness among a crowd of the loveliest women at a Royal ball, her proud well-poised head rising above them as a lily towers over meaner flowers. And—such are the strange ways of love—from that first glance he was fascinated by her as no other woman ever had power to fascinate him. When he sought an introduction to her, the bright spirit that shone in her eyes, her clever tongue, and her graciousness quickly forged the chains which he was proud to wear to his life's end. Seldom has a woman's spell worked such quick magic—never has the love it gave birth to proved more loyal and enduring.



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But Sarah Jennings was no maid to be easily won by any man—even by a lover so dowered with physical graces and so invested with the halo of romance as John Churchill. She knew all about his heroism on battlefields; she knew also of that little incident in a palace boudoir, and of many another youthful peccadillo of the gallant young colonel. She was no flower to be worn and flung aside; and she meant that Colonel Churchill should know it. She could be gracious to him, as to any other man; but she quickly made the limits of her indulgence clear. To all his amorous advances she presented a smiling and inscrutable front; his ardour was as unwelcome as it was premature.

Had she designed to make a conquest of her martial lover she could not have set to work more diplomatically. Colonel Churchill had basked for years in woman's smiles, often unsought and undesired; to coldness and indifference he was a stranger; but they only served, as becomes a soldier, to make him more resolute on victory. As a subtle tongue and a handsome person made no impression on this frigid beauty, he had recourse to his pen (since his sword was useless for such a conquest) and inundated her with letters, breathing undying devotion, and craving for at least a smile or a look of kindness.

"Show me," he writes, "that, at least, you are not quite indifferent to me, and I swear that I will never love anything but your dear self, which has made so sure a conquest of me that, had I the will, I had not the power ever to break my chains. Pray let me hear from you and know if I shall be so happy as to see you to-night."

But to all his protestations and appeals she returns no response. If she is deaf to the pleadings of love she must, he determined, at least give him her pity. He writes to tell her that he is "extreme ill with the headache," and craves a word of sympathy, as a beggar craves a crust. He vows, in his pain,

"by all that is good I love you so well that I wish from my soul that if you cannot love me, I may die, for life could be to me one perpetual torment. If the Duchess," he adds, "sees company I hope you will be there; but if she does not, I beg you will then let me see you in your chamber, if it be but for one hour. If you are not in the drawing-room you must then send me word at what hour I shall come."

At last the iceberg thaws a little—though it is only to charge him with unkindness! She assumes the *role* of virtue; and, with a woman's capriciousness, charges her lover with the coldness and neglect which she herself has visited on him.

"Your not writing to me," she says, "made me very uneasy, for I was afraid it was want of kindness in you, which I am sure I will never deserve by any action of mine."



Was ever wayward woman so unjust? For weeks Churchill had been deluging her with ardent letters, to which she had not deigned to answer one word. Now she assumes an air of injured innocence, and accuses *him* of unkindness! She even promises to see him, but cannot resist the temptation to qualify the concession with a gibe.



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“That would hinder you,” she says, with delicious, if cruel satire, “from seeing the play, which I fear would be a great affliction to you, and increase the pain in your head, which would be out of anybody’s power to ease until the next new play. Therefore, pray consider; and, without any compliment to me, send me word if you can come to me without any prejudice to your health.”

At any rate, the Sphinx had spoken and shown that she had some feeling, if only that of pique and unreason; and the despairing lover was able to take a little heart. After all, coquetry, even if carried to the verge of cruelty, holds more promise than Arctic coldness.

But the course of love, which could scarcely be said to have even begun, was not to run at all smoothly. Sir Winston Churchill had set his heart on his son marrying a gilded bride, and he had discovered the very woman for his ambitious purpose—one Catherine Sedley, daughter of his old friend Sir Charles Sedley, a lady, no longer quite young, angular and unattractive, but heiress to much gold and many broad acres. And he lost no time in impressing on his handsome boy the necessity of such an alliance. Pretty maids-of-honour were all very well to practise love-making on; but land and money-bags far outlast and outshine penniless beauty.

For a few undecided weeks the lure seemed to attract Churchill, coupled though it was with the death of his romance. He dallied with the temptation as far as the stage of marriage-settlements; and rumour had it that the match was as good as made. Handsome Jack Churchill was to marry an elderly and gilded spinster, and to mount on her money-bags to greatness!

No sooner had these rumours reached the ear of Sarah Jennings than she flew into a towering rage. “Marry a shocking creature for money!” she raved; “and this was what all his passionate protestations of love amounted to!” Sitting down in her anger she poured out the vials of her wrath on her treacherous swain, bidding him wed his gold.

“As for seeing you,” she wrote, “I am resolved I never will in private or in public if I can help it; and, as for the last, I fear it will be some time before I can order so as to be out of your way of seeing me. But surely you must confess that you have been the falsest creature upon earth to me. I must own that I believe I shall suffer a great deal of trouble; but I will bear it, and give God thanks, though too late I see my error.”

Never had maid been so cruelly treated by man! After spurning Churchill for months, returning nothing to his ardour and homage but a disdainful shoulder or a gibe, the moment he dares to turn his eyes on any other divinity she is the most outraged woman who ever staked happiness on a man’s constancy. But at least her anger served the purpose of bringing Churchill back to his allegiance more promptly than smiles could have done. He, who had never yielded a foot to an enemy on the field of battle, quailed before the tornado of his lady’s anger. He broke off the negotiations for his marriage

with Miss Sedley, who quickly found a solace in the Duke of York's arms in spite of her lack of beauty, and came back to the feet of his outraged lady on bended knees.



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But if she was coy and cold before, she was unapproachable now. In vain did he vow that he had never ceased to love her more than life—that he adored her even more now in her anger than in her indifference.

“I vow to God,” he wrote, “you do so entirely possess my thoughts that I think of nothing else in this world but your dear self. I do not, by all that is good, say this that I think it will move you to pity me, for I do despair of your love, but it is to let you see how unjust you are, and that I must ever love you as long as I have breath, do what you will. I do not expect in return that you should either write or speak to me. I beg that you will give me leave to do what I cannot help, which is to adore you as long as I live; and in return I will study how I may deserve, though not have, your love.”

Was ever lover more abject, or ever maid so hard of heart, at least in seeming? To this pathetic effusion, which ought to have melted the heart of, and at least wrung forgiveness from, a sphinx, she retorted that he had merely written it to amuse himself, and to “make her think that he had an affection for her when she was assured he had none.” At last, however, importunity tells its tale. She consents to see him; but warns him that

“if it be only to repeat those things which you have said so often, I shall think you the worst of men and the most ungrateful; and ’tis to no purpose to imagine that I will be made ridiculous to the world.”

Still again she gave signs of thawing. To his next letter, in which he wrote:

“I do love and adore you with all my heart and soul, so much that by all that is good, I do and ever will be better pleased with your happiness than my own,”

she answered:

“If it were sure that you have that passion for me which you say you have, you would find out some way to make yourself happy—it is in your power. Therefore press me no more to see you, since it is what I cannot in honour approve of; and if I have done so much, be as good as to consider who was the cause of it.”

At last Churchill had received a crumb of real encouragement. Even the veriest poltroon in love must take heart at such words as these—“you would find out some way to make yourself happy—it is in your power.” And it was with a light step and buoyant heart that he went the following day to the Duchess’s drawing-room to pursue in person the advantage her letter suggested. But the very moment he entered the room by one door his capricious mistress left it by the other; and when, in his anger at such cavalier treatment, he wrote to ask the meaning of it, and if she did not think it impertinent, she



left him in no doubt by answering that she did it “that I may be freed from the trouble of ever hearing from you more!”

Once more Churchill, just as he had begun to hope again, was relegated to the shades of despair. She refused to speak to him, she avoided him in a manner so marked that it became the talk of the Court, and brought her lover into ridicule. To such extremity was he reduced that he actually wrote to her maid to beg her intercession.



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“Your mistress’s usage to me is so barbarous that sure she must be the worst woman in the world, or else she would not be thus ill-natured. I have sent her a letter which I desire you will give her. I do love her with all my soul, but will not torment her; but if I cannot have her love I shall despise her pity. For the sake of what she has already done, let her read my letter and answer it, and not use me thus like a footman.”

In her reply to this letter Sarah assumed again an air of wounded innocence. She had done nothing, she declared, with tears in her pen, to deserve what he had written to her; and since he evidently had such a poor opinion of her she was angry that she had too good a one of him.

“If I had as little love as yourself, I have been told enough of you to make me hate you, and then I believe I should have been more happy than I am like to be now. However,” she continued, “if you can be so well contented never to see me, as I think you can by what you say, I will believe you, though I have not other people.”

No wonder the poor man was driven to his wits’ end by such varied and contradictory moods. After avoiding him for weeks in the most marked and merciless manner she charges him with “being content never to see her.” Although she had never uttered or penned a syllable of love in return for his reams of passionate protestations, she taunts him with having less love than herself! Was ever woman so hard to woo or to understand, or lover so patient under so much provocation?

She further accused him of laughing at her when he was “at the Duke’s side,” to which he retorted “I was so far from that, that had it not been for shame I could have cried.” She even swore that it was he who avoided *her*; and he proves to her that he had followed her elusive shadow everywhere, and had even “made his chair follow him, because I would see if there was any light in your chamber, but I saw none.”

But even this arch-coquette recognised that the most devoted lover’s forbearance has its bounds, and she was much too clever a woman to strain them too far. When she had brought him to the verge of suicide by her moods and vapours she saw that the time of surrender had come; and when her lover’s arm was at last around her waist and her head on his shoulder, she vowed that she had never ceased to love him from the first, and that she had never meant to be unkind!

Thus it came to pass that one winter’s day in 1677, at St James’s Palace, John Churchill led his bride to the altar, which proved the portal to one of the happiest wedded lives that have ever fallen to the lot of mortals. How little, at that crowning moment, Sarah Churchill could have foreseen those distant days of the future, when she was left to walk alone the last stage of life, in which she would read and re-read, with tear-dimmed eyes, the faded letters which her coldness had wrung from her lover in the flood-tide of his passion and his despair.



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CHAPTER X

THE ADVENTURES OF A VISCOUNT'S DAUGHTER

When the Hon. Mary King first opened her eyes in Cork County late in the eighteenth century, her parents, who already had a “quiverful” of offspring, could little have foreseen the tragic chapter in the family annals in which this infant was to play the leading part. Had they done so, they might almost have been pardoned for wishing that she might die in her cradle, a blossom of innocence, before the blighting hand of Fate could sully her.

Her father, Robert, Viscount Kingsborough, was heir to the Earldom of Kingston, and member of a family which had held its head high, and preserved an untarnished 'scutcheon since its founder, Sir John King, won Queen Elizabeth's favour by his zeal in suppressing the Irish rebellion. All its men had been honourable, all its women pure; and it was not until Mary King came on the scene that this fair repute was ever in danger.

Not that there was anything vicious in Lord Kingsborough's young daughter. She was the victim of a weak nature and a lover as unscrupulous as he was handsome and clever. She grew up in the Mitchelstown nursery—one of a dozen brothers and sisters—a wholesome, merry, mischievous girl, with no great pretensions to beauty, but with the fresh charms, the dancing grey eyes, and brown hair (which, in its luxuriant abundance, was her chief glory) of a daughter of Ireland.

Among those whom her bright nature and winsome ways captivated was one Henry Gerald Fitzgerald, the natural son of her mother's brother, and thus her cousin by blood, if not by law. Fitzgerald, who was many years Mary's senior—indeed, at the time this story really opens, he was a married man—had been brought up by Lady Kingsborough as one of her children. He had been the companion of Mary's elder brothers, and Mary's “big playfellow” when she was still nursing her dolls. He was, moreover, a young man of remarkable physical gifts—tall, of splendid figure, and strikingly handsome. It is thus small wonder that the child made a hero of him long before she had emerged from short frocks. When she grew into young womanhood Fitzgerald's attentions to her grew still more marked. He was her constant companion on walks and rides, her partner at dances—in fact, her shadow everywhere, until even her unsuspecting parents began to grow alarmed.

One summer day in 1797, when the Kingsborough family were spending a few weeks by the Thames-side, near Fitzgerald's home at Bishopsgate, the blow fell. Miss King disappeared, leaving behind her a note to the effect that she intended to drown herself in the Thames. Her family and friends were distracted. The river was dragged, but no trace of the missing girl was found. On the river bank, however, were discovered her



bonnet and shawl, mute witnesses to the fate that seemed to have overtaken her. Her father alone refused to believe that his daughter had ended her life tragically. He persisted in his search for her, and was soon rewarded by a clue which threw a different and more ominous light on her fate.

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From a postboy he learned that a young lady, answering exactly to the description of his daughter, had been driven, in the company of a handsome man, to London, where they had walked off arm in arm together. In London they had vanished; and advertisements and placards offering large rewards failed to discover a trace of them. Then it was that Lord Kingsborough's suspicions fixed themselves firmly on Fitzgerald. He and no other must have been the scoundrel who had done this dastardly deed—a shameful return for all the kindness lavished on him by the family of the girl he had abducted.

When his lordship sought Fitzgerald out, and charged him with his infamy, he was met with open surprise and honest indignation. So far from being the guilty man, Fitzgerald avowed the utmost disgust at the deed, and declared that he would know no rest until the girl had been restored to her parents, and the miscreant properly punished. And from this time no one appeared to be more zealous in the search for the runaway than her abductor.

For weeks all their efforts to trace the fugitive proved of no avail, until one day a girl of the lower-classes called on Lady Kingsborough, to whom she told the following strange tale. She was, she said, servant at a boarding-house in Kennington, to which, some weeks earlier (in fact, at the very time of the disappearance), a gentleman had brought a young lady who answered to the advertised description of the missing girl, especially in her profusion of beautiful hair, which fell below the knees. The gentleman, she continued, often visited the girl.

“It must be my daughter!” exclaimed Lady Kingsborough. “But who is the gentleman? Pray describe him as fully as you can.” “He is tall and handsome——” began the girl. At that moment the door opened, and in walked Fitzgerald himself. “Why,” exclaimed the servant, as with startled eyes she looked at the intruder, “that’s the very gentleman who visits the lady!”

For once Fitzgerald’s coolness deserted him. At the damning words he turned and dashed out of the room, thus confirming the worst suspicions against him. The rage and indignation of the injured family were boundless. Such an outrage could only be wiped out with blood, and within an hour Colonel King, elder brother of the wronged girl, called on Fitzgerald, with Major Wood as second, struck him on the cheek, and demanded a meeting on the following morning.

The next day at dawn the duellists met near the Magazine in Hyde Park, Colonel King bringing with him his second and a surgeon. Fitzgerald came alone. He had been unable to find a friend to accompany him. Even the surgeon, when requested, point blank refused to undertake the dishonourable office of second to such a miscreant. The combatants were placed ten yards apart, and, at the signal, two shots rang out. Neither man was touched. Again and again shots were exchanged, and both men remained uninjured.



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After the fourth ineffectual exchange Major Wood tried to make peace between the duellists. But Colonel King turned a deaf ear alike to his second and to Fitzgerald, to whom he said: "You are a —— villain, and I will not hear a word you have to offer!" Once more the duellists took up their positions, three more shots were exchanged without the least effect, and, as Fitzgerald's ammunition was now exhausted, the combatants left the ground, after making another appointment for the next day. The next day, however, both were placed temporarily under lock and key, to prevent a further breach of the peace.

Meanwhile, the unhappy girl had been rescued from the Kennington lodging-house, and taken back to the family seat at Mitchelstown, where at least she ought to be safe from further harm from the scoundrelly Fitzgerald. The Kings, however, had not reckoned on the desperate, vindictive nature of the man, who was now more resolute than ever to get Mary into his power.

Disguising himself, he journeyed to Cork, carrying the fight into the enemy's camp. He took up his quarters at the Mitchelstown Inn to develop his plans for a second abduction. But in his scheming Fitzgerald had literally "bargained without his host," who chanced to be an old trusted retainer of the King family, and who from the first was not a little suspicious of the strange guest, who kept so mysteriously indoors all day and walked abroad at night.

No honest man would act in this secretive way, he thought. There had been strange "goings-on" lately; and the least he could do was to communicate his fears to Lord Kingsborough, in case his guest should be "up to some mischief." His lordship, who was away from home, hurried back to Mitchelstown, convinced, from the description, that the suspected man was none other than Fitzgerald himself, and arrived at the inn only to discover that the bird had already flown.

Luckily, it was no difficult matter to trace the fugitive in the wilds of County Cork. The postboy who had driven him was easily found, and from him it was learnt that the stranger had been put down at the Kilworth Hotel. There was no time to be lost. Jumping on to his horse, Lord Kingsborough accompanied by his son, the Colonel, raced as fast as spurs and whip could take him to Kilworth, and demanded to see the newly-arrived guest at the hotel. A waiter, despatched to the guest's room, returned with the announcement that his door was locked, and that he refused to see any one. But the pursuers had heard and recognised the voice through the closed door. It was Fitzgerald himself.



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Bursting with rage and indignation, father and son rushed up the stairs and demanded that Fitzgerald should come out. When he refused with oaths, they broke in the door—and found themselves face to face with a brace of pistols. Before they could be used, however, Colonel King, stooping suddenly, made a dash at Fitzgerald, closed with him, and was at once engaged in a life and death struggle. Backward and forward the combatants swayed, straining every muscle to bring their pistols into play for the fatal shot. By an almost superhuman effort, Fitzgerald at last wrested his right arm free. His pistol was pointed at the Colonel's head. But before he could press the trigger, a shot rang out, and he fell back dead, shot through the heart. Lord Kingsborough had killed his daughter's betrayer to save his son's life.

The news of the tragedy flew throughout the country, in all the distorted forms that such news assumes on passing from mouth to mouth. But wherever it travelled—from the shebeens of Connemara to the coffee-houses of Cheapside—it carried with it a wave of compassion for the assassin and execration for his victim. As for Lord Kingsborough, he confessed to a friend: "God knows, I don't know how I did it; but I wish it had been done by some other hand than mine!"

As was inevitable, the Viscount and his son were arrested on a charge of murder. Colonel King was tried at the Cork Assizes, and acquitted to a salvo of deafening cheers, as there was no prosecution. For Lord Kingsborough a different escape was reserved. Before he could be brought to trial at Cork, his father, the Earl of Kingston, died, and the Viscount became an Earl, with all the privileges of his rank—including that of trial by his Peers.

In May 1798, a month after his son's acquittal, Lord Kingston's trial took place in the House of Lords, with all the state and ceremony appropriate to this exalted tribunal. Preceded by the Masters in Chancery, the judges in scarlet and ermine, by the minor lords and a small army of eldest sons, the Peers filed in long and stately procession into the House, followed by the Lord High Steward, the Earl of Clare, walking alone in solitary dignity.

Then began the trial, with all its quaint and dignified ceremonial; and Robert, Earl of Kingston, pleaded "Not Guilty," and claimed to be tried "by God and my Peers." But the trial, which drew thousands to Westminster, was of short duration. To the demand that "all manner of persons who will give evidence against the accused should come forth," no response was given. Not a solitary witness for the Crown appeared. One by one the Peers pronounced their verdict, "Not Guilty, upon my honour"; the Lord Steward broke his white staff; and amid a crowd of congratulating friends, the Earl walked out a free man.



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And what was the fate of Mary King, the cause, however innocent, of all this tragedy? For her own sake, and for obvious reasons, it was important that she should disappear for a time until the scandal had subsided; and with this object she was sent, under an assumed name, to join the family of a Welsh clergyman, not one of whom knew anything of her story. Here, secluded from the world, and in a happy environment, she soon recovered her old health and gaiety. She was young; and youth is quick to find healing and forgetfulness. In the Welsh parsonage she made herself beloved by her amiability and admired for her gifts of mind.

Among the latter was a talent for story-telling, with which she beguiled many a long, winter evening. On one such evening she told the story of her late tragic experiences, disguising it only by giving fictitious names to the characters. And she told the story with such power and pathos that, at its conclusion, her auditors were reduced to tears for the maiden and execrations for her betrayer.

Carried away by the excitement of the moment and the effect she had produced, she exclaimed: "I, myself, am the person for whom you express such sorrow." Then, horrified by her indiscretion, she added: "And now, I suppose, you will drive me from your home." But such was not to be Mary King's fate. The clergyman, who was a widower, had already almost lost his heart to her charms; and her sufferings made his conquest complete. A few weeks later the bells rang merrily out when Mary King became the wife of her kindly host; and for many a long year there was no one more beloved or happy in all Wales than the parson's wife, who had thus romantically come through the storm into a haven of peace.

CHAPTER XI

A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ELOPEMENT

In the latter days of Queen Elizabeth there was no merchant in England better known or held in higher repute than Sir John Spencer, the Rothschild or Rockefeller of his day, whose shrewdness and industry had raised him to the Chief Magistrateship of the City of London.

From the day on which John Spencer fared from his country home to London in quest of gold, Fortune seems to have smiled sweetly and consistently on him. All his capital was robust health and a determination to succeed; and so profitably did he turn it to account that within a few years of emerging from his 'prentice days he was a master of men, with a business of his own, and striding manfully towards his goal of wealth. Everything he touched seemed to "turn to gold"; before he had reached middle-age he was known far beyond the city-walls as "Rich Spencer"; and by the time his Lord Mayoralty drew near he was able to instal himself in a splendour more befitting a Prince than a citizen,

in Crosby Hall, which a century earlier Stow had described as “very large and beautiful, and the highest at that time in London.”



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Indeed, Crosby Hall, ever since the worthy alderman, whose name it bore, had raised its walls late in the fifteenth century, had been the most stately mansion in the city, and had had a succession of famous tenants. When Sir John Crosby left it for his splendid tomb in the Church of St Helen's, it was for a time the palace of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in which, to quote Sir Thomas More, "he lodged himself, and little by little all folks drew unto him, so that the Protector's Court was crowded and King Henry's left desolate"; and it was in one of its magnificent rooms that Richard was offered, and was pleased to accept, the Crown of England.

Shakespeare, who lived in St Helen's in 1598, knew Crosby Hall well, and has immortalised it in "Richard III.;" Queen Elizabeth was feasted more than once within its hospitable walls, and trod more than one measure there with Raleigh. For seven years it was the home of Sir Thomas More when he was Treasurer of the Exchequer; and, to his friend and successor as tenant, More sent that affecting farewell letter, written in the Tower with a piece of charcoal, the night before his execution. Such was the historic and splendid home in which "Rich Spencer" dispensed hospitality as Lord Mayor of London in the year 1594.

Not content with the lordliest mansion in London Sir John must also have his house in the country, to which he could repair for periods of leisure and rest from his money-making; and this he found in Canonbury Tower, which he purchased, together with the manor, from Lord Wentworth. It is said that Sir John had a bargain in his purchase; but, in the event, he narrowly escaped paying for it with his life. It seems that the news of "Rich Spencer's" wealth had travelled as far as the Continent, and there tempted the cupidity of a notorious Dunkirk pirate, who conceived the bold idea of kidnapping the merchant and holding him to a heavy ransom. How the attempt was made, and how providentially it failed is told by Papillon.

"Rich men," says this chronicler, "are commonly the prey of thieves; for where store of gold and silver is, there spirits never leave haunting, for wheresoever the carcass is, there will eagles be gathered together. In Queen Elizabeth's days, a pirate of Dunkirk laid a plot with twelve of his mates to carry away Sir John Spencer, which, if he had done, £50,000 ransom had not redeemed him. He came over the sea in a shallop with twelve musketeers, and in the night came into Barking Creek, and left the shallop in the custody of six of his men; and with the other six came as far as Islington, and there hid themselves in ditches near the path in which Sir John came always to his house. But by the providence of God—I have this from a private record—Sir John, upon some extraordinary occasion, was forced to stay in London that night; otherwise they had taken him away; and they, fearing they should be discovered, in the night-time came to their shallop, and



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so came safe to Dunkirk again. This," adds Papillon, "was a desperate attempt."

But proud as Sir John Spencer was of his money-bags, he was prouder still of his only child, Elizabeth, heiress to his vast wealth, who, as she grew to womanhood, developed a beauty of face and figure and graces of mind which pleased the merchant more than all his gold. So fair was she that Queen Elizabeth, on one of her many progressions through the city, attracted by her sparkling eyes and beautiful face at a Cheapside window, stopped her carriage, summoned her to her presence, and, patting her blushing cheeks, vowed that she had "the sweetest face I have seen in my City of London."

That a maiden so dowered with charms and riches should have an army of suitors in her train was inevitable. A lovely wife who would one day inherit nearly a million of money was surely the most covetable prize in England; and, it is said, the bewitching heiress had more than one coronet laid at her feet before she had well left her school-books. But to all these offers, dazzling enough to a merchant's daughter, Elizabeth turned a deaf, if dainty ear. "It is not me they want," she would laughingly say, "but my father's money. I shall live and die, like the good Queen, my namesake, a maid."

And so has many another much-sought maiden said in the pride of an untouched heart; but to them as to her the "Prince Charming," before whom all her defences crumble, comes at last. In Elizabeth Spencer's case, the conquering prince was William, second Lord Compton, one of the handsomest, most accomplished and fascinating young men in London. In person, as in position, he was alike unimpeachable—an ideal suitor to win even the richest heiress in England; and it is little wonder that the heart of the tradesman's daughter began to flutter, and her pretty cheeks to flame when this gallant, whose conquests at the Royal Court itself were notorious, began to pay marked homage to her charms.

That his reputation in the field of love was none of the best, that he was as prodigal as he was poor, mattered little to her—probably such defects made him all the more romantic in her eyes, and his attentions all the more welcome. To Sir John, however, who was even more jealous of his treasure than of all his gold, the young lord's reputation and, above all, his poverty were fatal flaws in any would-be son-in-law of his. As soon as he realised the danger he put every obstacle in the way of his daughter's silly romance, even to the extent, it is said, of locking her in her room, and closing his door in the face of her lover. "If your reputation, my lord, were equal to your rank," he told him in no ambiguous terms; "and if your fortune matched your family, I should have naught to say against your suit. But as it is, I tell you frankly, I would rather see my girl dead than wedded to such as you."



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To his daughter's tears and pleading he was equally obdurate. She might ask anything else of him and he would grant it gladly, though it were half his wealth; but he would be unworthy to be her father if he encouraged such folly as this. But Spencer's daughter, when she found conciliatory measures of no avail, proved that she had a will as strong as her father's; she told him to his face that with or without his sanction she meant to be my Lady Compton. "I will marry him," she declared with flushed face and panting breast, "even if you make me a beggar." "And that, madam," the defied and furious father retorted, "I can promise you I will do; for not a shilling of mine shall Lord Compton's wife ever have."

For a time the artful Elizabeth feigned submission to Sir John's anger; and he began to congratulate himself that this trouble at least, whatever others might follow, was at an end. But how little he knew his daughter, or her lover, the sequel proved.

One day, a few weeks after Sir John's fierce ultimatum, a young baker, carrying a large flat-topped basket, called at his house, from which he soon emerged, touching his cap to the merchant as he passed him in the garden, and giving him a respectful "good day." "A civil young man," Sir John said to himself, as he continued his promenade; "his face seems somehow familiar to me." And well might it be familiar; for the baker who gave him such a civil greeting was none other than the scapegrace, Compton; and inside the basket, which he carried so lightly, was the merchant's only daughter and heiress, whom her lover had taken this daring and unconventional way of abducting under the very nose of her parent.

It was not long before Sir John's disillusionment came. His daughter was nowhere to be seen; and none of his domestics knew of her whereabouts. Alarm gave place to suspicion, and suspicion to fury against his child and against the young reprobate who, he felt sure, had outwitted him. Messengers were despatched in all directions in chase of the runaways; but the escapade had been much too cunningly planned to fail in execution. Before Sir John set eyes on his daughter again—now becomingly penitent—she had blossomed into the Baroness Compton, wife of the last man her father would have desired to call his son-in-law.

To "Rich Spencer" the blow was crushing, humiliating. It was bad enough to be defied and outwitted, to be made a fool of by his own daughter; but to know that the treasure he had lost had fallen into such undesirable hands was bitter beyond words. His home and his heart were alike desolate; and, in his despair and wrath, he vowed that he would never own his daughter as his child, and that not one penny of his should ever go into the Compton coffers.

In this mood of sullen, unforgiving anger Sir John remained for a full year; when to his surprise and delight he received a summons to attend, at Whitehall, on the Queen, whose graciousness during his mayoralty he remembered with pleasure and gratitude;

and no man in England was prouder or more pleased than he when, at the time appointed, he made his bow to his Sovereign-Lady and kissed her hand.



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“I have summoned you, Sir John,” Her Majesty said, “to ask a great favour of you. I do not often stoop, as you know, to beg a favour of any man; nor should I now, did I not know that I have no more dutiful subject than yourself, and that to ask of you is to receive. I am interested in two young people who have had the misfortune to marry against the wishes of the lady’s father, and who have thus forfeited his favour. And I wish you to give me and the youthful couple pleasure by taking his place and standing sponsor to their first child.”

To such a request made by his Sovereign Sir John could but give a delighted consent. He would do much more than this, he vowed, to give her a moment’s gratification; and he not only attended the baptismal ceremony, but on the suggestion of the Queen, who was also present, allowed the child to bear his own Christian name. “More than this, your Majesty,” he declared, “as I have now no child of my own, I will gladly adopt this infant as my heir.”

“Your goodness of heart, Sir John,” Her Majesty answered, beaming with pleasure, “shall not go unrewarded; for the child you have now taken to your heart and made inheritor of your wealth is indeed of your own flesh and blood—the first-born son of your daughter, and my friend, Elizabeth Compton.”

Such was the dramatic plight into which “Rich Spencer’s” loyalty and generosity had led him. He had innocently pledged himself to adopt as his heir, the son of the daughter he had disowned for ever. “And now, Sir John,” continued the Queen, “that you have conceded so much to make me happy, will you not go one step farther and take your wilful and penitent daughter to your heart again?” What could the poor merchant do in such a predicament, when his Sovereign stooped to beg as a favour what his lonely heart yearned to grant? Before he was many minutes older he was clasping his child to his breast; and was even shaking hands with her graceless husband.

* * * * *

When, full of years, Sir John died in 1609, his obsequies were worthy of his wealth and fame. He was followed to his grave in St Helen’s Church by a thousand mourners, clad in black gowns; and three hundred and twenty poor men, we are told, “had each a basket given them, containing a black gown, four pounds of beef, two loaves of bread, a little bottle of wine, a candlestick, a pound of candles, two saucers, two spoons, a black pudding, a pair of gloves, a dozen points, two red herrings, four white herrings, six sprats and two eggs”—a quaint and lavish symbol of his charity when alive.

So enormous was the fortune he left, that it is said Lord Compton, on hearing its amount (£800,000) “became distracted, and so continued for a considerable length of time, either through the vehement apprehension of joy for such a plentiful succession, or of carefulness how to take up and dispense of it.”



That my Lady Compton, who a few years after her father's death blossomed into a Countess, proved a devoted and dutiful wife to her lord there is no reason to doubt; but that she had an adequate idea of her own importance and a determination to have her share of her father's money-bags is shown by the following letter, which is sufficiently remarkable to bear quotation in full.



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“My sweet life,—Now that I have declared to you my mind for the settling of your estate, I suppose that it were best for me to bethink what allowance were best for me; for, considering what care I have ever had of your estate, and how respectfully I dealt with those which both by the laws of God, nature, and civil policy, wit, religion, government, and honesty, you, my dear, are bound to, I pray and beseech you to grant to me, your most kind and loving wife, the sum of one thousand pounds per an., quarterly to be paid.”Also, I would, besides that allowance for my apparel, have six hundred pounds added yearly for the performance of charitable works; these I would not neither be accountable for. Also, I will have three horses for my own saddle, that none shall dare to lend or borrow; none lend but I, none borrow but you. Also, I would have two gentlewomen, lest one should be sick; also, believe that it would be an indecent thing for a gentlewoman to stand mumping alone, when God has blest their Lord and Lady with a great estate. Also, when I ride hunting or hawking, or travel from one house to another, I will have them attending, so for each of those said women I must have a horse. Also, I will have six or eight gentlemen, and will have two coaches; one lined with velvet to myself, with four very fair horses; and a coach for my women lined with sweet cloth, ore laid with gold; the other with scarlet, and laced with watchet lace and silver, with four good horses. Also, I will have two coachmen, one for myself, the other for my women. Also, whenever I travel, I will be allowed not only carroches and spare horses for me and my women, but such carriages as shall be fitting for all, orderly, not pestering my things with my women’s, nor theirs with chambermaids, nor theirs with washmaids.”Also, laundresses, when I travel; I will have them sent away with the carriages to see all safe, and the chambermaids shall go before with the grooms, that the chambers may be ready, sweet, and clean.”Also, for that it is indecent for me to croud myself with my gentleman-usher in my coach, I will have him have a convenient horse to attend me either in city or country; and I must have four footmen; and my desire is that you will defray the charges for me.”And for myself, besides my yerely allowance, I would have twenty gowns apparel, six of them excellent good ones, eight of them for the country, and six others of them excellent good ones. Also, I would have to put in my purse two thousand and two hundred pounds, and so you to pay my debts. Also, I would have eight thousand pounds to buy me jewels, and six thousand pounds for a pearl chain.”Now seeing I have been, and am, so reasonable unto you, I pray you to find my children apparel, and their schooling, and all my servants, men and women, their wages.”Also, I will have all my houses



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furnished, and all my lodging-chambers to be suited with all such furniture as is fit, as beds, stools, chairs, cushions, carpets, silver warming-pans, cupboards of plate, fair hangings, *etc.*; and so for my drawing-chambers in all houses, I will have them delicately furnished with hangings, couch, canopy, cushions, carpets, *etc.* “Also, my desire is that you would pay your debts, build up Ashby House and purchase lands and lend no money (as you love God) to the Lord Chamberlain, which would have all, perhaps your life from you; remember his son, my Lord Wildan, what entertainments he gave me when you were at the Tilt-yard. If you were dead, he said, he would be a husband, a father, a brother, and said he would marry me. I protest I grieve to see the poor man have so little wit and honesty to use his friend so vilely; also, he fed me with untruths concerning the Charter-House; but that is the least; he wished me much harm; you know how. God keep you and me from him, and such as he is. “So now I have declared to you my mind, what I would have, and what I would not have; I pray you, when you be Earl, to allow a thousand pounds more than now I desire and double allowance.—Your loving wife, ELIZABETH COMPTON.”

CHAPTER XII

TRAGEDIES OF THE TURF

In the whole drama of the British Peerage there are few figures at once so splendid in promise and opportunities, so pathetic in failure and so tragic in their exit as that of the fourth and last Marquess of Hastings. Seldom has man been born to a greater heritage; scarcely ever has he flung away more prodigally the choicest gifts of fortune.

When Henry Weysford Charles Plantagenet was born one July day in 1842 it was a very fair world on which he opened his eyes, a world in which rank and wealth and exceptional personal gifts should have ensured for him a leading *role*. He was still in the cradle when his father, the second lord, died; and he was barely nine years old when the death of his elder brother made the school-boy a full-blown Marquess, the inheritor of vast estates and a princely rent-roll.

But Fate, which had showered such gifts on the young lord had, as so often happens, marred them all by the curse of heredity. The taint of gambling was in the boy's blood. His mother had won an unenviable reputation throughout Europe by her passion for gambling; indeed there were few gaming-tables in Europe at which the “jolly fast Marchioness” was not a familiar and notorious figure. And his father, the Marquess, was as devoted to horses and turf-gambling as his wife to her cards and roulette. That the child of such parents should inherit their depraved tastes is not to be marvelled at. And it was not long before they manifested themselves in a dangerous form.



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While he was still an undergraduate at Oxford the young Marquess who, from childhood, could not bear the sight of a book when there was a dog or a horse to claim his attention, began that career on the turf which was to be as tragic in its end as it was dazzling in its zenith. He bought from a Mr Henry Padwick for L13,500 a horse called Kangaroo, which was not worth the cost of his keep. What a fraudulent animal he was is proved by the fact that he never won a penny for his purchaser, and ended his career, as he ought to have begun it, between the shafts of a hansom.

But, so far from being disheartened by this initial experience, Lord Hastings had barely thrown aside his cap and gown before he was owner of half a hundred race-horses, with John Day as trainer; and was fully embarked on his turf-career. From the very first year of his enlarged venture success smiled on him. Ackworth won the Cambridgeshire for him, in 1864; the Duke captured the Goodwood Cup two years later; and the Earl carried off the Grand Prix de Paris. In the four years, 1864 to 1867 the Marquess won over L60,000 in stakes alone, while his winnings in bets were larger still. So excellent a judge of a horse was he that he only spoke the truth when he boasted, "I could easily make L30,000 a year by backing other men's horses." Indeed on one race, Lecturer's Cesarewitch, he cleared L75,000. Such was the brilliant start of a racing-career which was to close so soon in failure and disgrace.

In the world of the Turf the youthful Marquess was hailed as a new deity. At Epsom, Newmarket, and a dozen other race-courses his appearance created as much sensation as that of the Prince of Wales himself; he was greeted everywhere with cheers and a salvo of doffed hats; and the way in which he scattered his smiles and his bets was regal in its prodigality.

"As he canters on to the course," we are told, "he slackens speed as he passes through the line of carriages, from which come shrill, plaintive cries, 'Dear Lord Hastings, do come here for one second,' and others to like purpose. Conveniently deaf to the voice of the charmers, he rides straight into the horseman's circle, and takes up his position on the heavy-betting side. 'They're laying odds on yours, my lord,' exclaims a bookmaker. 'What odds?' blandly asks the owner. 'Well, my lord, I'll take you six monkeys to four!' 'Put it down,' is the brief response. 'And me, three hundred to two—and me—and me!' clamour a score of pencillers, who come clustering up. 'Done with you, and you, and you'—the bets are booked as freely as offered. 'And now, my lord, if you've a mind for a bit more, I'll take you thirty-five hundred to two thousand.' 'And so you shall!' is the cheery answer, as the backer expands under the genial influence of the biggest bet of the day. Then, with their seventies to forties, and seven ponies to four, the smaller fry are duly enregistered, and the Marquess wheels his hack, his escort



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gathers round him, and away they dash.”

Such was the splendid, reckless fashion in which the Marquess would fling about his wagers until he frequently stood to win or lose L50,000 on a single race. If he had always kept his head under the intoxication of this wild gambling he might perhaps have made another fortune equal to that he had inherited. But his wagering was as erratic as himself, and his gains were punctuated by heavy losses which began to make inroads on even his enormous resources.

The first crushing blow fell on that memorable day when Hermit struggled through a blinding snowstorm first past the post in the Derby of 1867, to the open-mouthed amazement of every looker on; for Mr Chaplin's colt had been considered so hopeless that odds of forty to one were freely laid against him.

Hermit's sensational victory was the climax of a singular and romantic story. Three years earlier Lady Florence Paget, daughter of the second Marquess of Anglesey, had been the affianced bride of Mr Henry Chaplin, who was passionately devoted to her, little dreaming that another had stolen her heart from him. One day Lady Florence, with Mr Chaplin for escort, drove to Messrs Swan & Edgar's, ostensibly on shopping bent; but the shopping was merely a cloak to another and treacherous design. She entered the shop, slipped out through the back entrance where Lord Hastings was awaiting her, jumped into his cab, and was whirled away while her *fiance* patiently and unsuspectingly awaited her return at the opposite side of the building.

When Mr Chaplin realised the dastardly trick that had been played on him, he bore the blow to his pride and affection right bravely. No trace of resentment was ever shown to the world; but he would have been less than a man if he had not cherished thoughts of retaliation. His opportunity came when Hermit was offered for sale by auction, and Lord Hastings was among the keenest bidders for the son of Newminster and Eclipse. At any cost Mr Chaplin determined to baffle his betrayer for once—and he succeeded; for, when the Marquess stopped short at 950 guineas, Mr Chaplin secured the colt by a further bid of 50 guineas.

At the time he little realised—nor did he much care—what a bargain he had got; for Hermit not only sired two Derby winners in Shotover and St Blaise, before he died his sons and daughters had won among them L300,000 in stake-money alone. Not much later came that ill-starred Derby, which none who saw it can ever forget. Lord Hastings, angry at having lost the horse to his rival, laid the long odds against Hermit so recklessly that he stood to lose a large fortune by his success; and Hermit's last few gallant strides cost him over L100,000.

It was a staggering blow, under which the most stoical man with the longest purse might well have reeled; but the Marquess met it with a smile of indifference; and when, a few



minutes later, he drove off the course, with his friends, in a barouche and four to dine at Richmond, he seemed the gayest of the company. A few days before his death, recalling this tragic moment in his life, he said proudly, "Hermit fairly broke my heart. But I didn't show it, did I?"

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That his smiling face must have masked a very heavy heart, it scarcely needed his own confession to prove. Rich as he still was, the loss of more than £100,000 was a very serious matter. Indeed we know that he was only able to meet his liabilities by parting with his magnificent estate of Loudoun in Scotland, which realised £300,000. When the doors of Tattersall's opened on the morning of settling-day, the first to present themselves were his agents, who handed over £103,000 in settlement of all claims against the Marquess. Mr Chaplin had scored, and scored heavily; but at least it should never be said that his defeated rival had shrunk from paying the last ounce of the penalty the moment it was due.

When next his lordship appeared on a race-course—it was at Ascot, a few months later—he was greeted with thunders of cheers from the bookmakers, a tribute to his pluck and sportsmanship, which must have taken away some of the sting of defeat. But fate which had dealt this merciless blow to the Marquess was in no mood to spare him further disaster. The second stroke fell within five months of the first—at the Newmarket second October Meeting. The favourite for the Middle Park Plate was Lord Hastings' filly, Elizabeth, whose chances he fancied so much that he backed her heavily, confident that he would recover a great part of his Derby losses.

When Elizabeth, instead of running away from her rivals, passed the winning-post a bad fifth, even his iron nerve failed him for once. He uttered no word; but he grew pale as death, and staggered as if about to fall. A moment later, however, he had pulled himself together and was helping Lady Aylesbury to count her small losses. "Tell me how I stand," asked her ladyship, as she placed her betting-book in his hand. The Marquess made the necessary calculation; and with a smile of sympathy, answered: "You have lost £23." And he, who could thus calmly calculate so trifling a loss, was £50,000 poorer by his filly's failure to win the Plate!

He knew well that he was a ruined man—worse than this, unutterably galling to his proud spirit—he knew that he was a disgraced man. His vast fortune had crumbled away until he had not £50,000 in the world to pay this last debt of honour. And yet he continued to smile in the face of ruin, carrying through this crowning disaster the brave heart of an English gentleman and a sportsman.

He sold the last of his remaining acres, his hunters and hounds, and all his personal belongings; and all the money he could raise from the wreckage of his fortune was a pitiful £10,000. His last sovereign was gone, and he was £40,000 in debt, without a hope of paying it. When he next appeared on a race-course the very men who had cheered him to the echo at Ascot greeted him with jeers and angry shouts at Epsom. The hero of the Turf, the idol of the Ring, was that blackest of black sheep, a defaulter!

And not only was he thus branded as a defaulter. Strange stories were being circulated to his further discredit as a sportsman. The running of Lady Elizabeth in one race was, it was said, more than open to suspicion. The Earl, who was considered a certainty for

the Derby, was unaccountably scratched on the very evening before the race, though the Marquess stood to win L35,000 by her, and did not hedge the stake-money.



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The public indignation at these discreditable incidents found a vent in the columns of the *Times*; and although Lord Hastings denied that there was “one single circumstance mentioned as regards the two horses, correctly stated,” and offered a frank explanation in both cases, the public refused to be appeased, and the stigma remained.

So overwhelmed was he by this combination of assaults on his fortune and his good name that his health—undermined no doubt by excesses—broke down. He spent the summer months of 1868 in his yacht, cruising among the northern seas in search of health; but no sea-breezes could bring back colour to his cheeks or hope to his heart. He was a broken man before he had reached his prime, and he realised that his sun was near its setting. When he returned to England no one who saw him could doubt that the end was at hand. But his ruling passion remained strong to the last. He was advised by his friends to stay away from the Doncaster races; but he would go, though he could only with difficulty hobble on crutches.

The last pathetic glimpse the world caught of this former idol of the Turf was as, from a basket-carriage, with pale, haggard face and straining eyes, he watched Athena, a beautiful mare which had once been his, win a race. As she was being led to the weighing-house he struggled from his carriage, hobbled on his crutches up to the beautiful animal, and lovingly patted her glossy neck.

Such was the last appearance of the ill-fated Marquess on a scene of his former triumphs. For a few months longer he made a gallant fight for life. He even contemplated another voyage, and a winter in Egypt; but, almost before winter had set in, on the 11th November 1868, he gave up the struggle and drew his last breath—“leaving neither heir to his honours nor the smallest vestige of his ruined fortune; but leaving, in spite of his final failure, the memory of a true sportsman, and of a perfect gentleman who was no man’s enemy but his own.”

* * * * *

Before the Marquess of Hastings had mounted his first pony another meteor of the Turf, equally dazzling, had flashed across the sky, and been merged in a darkness even more tragic than his own.

Lord William George Frederick Cavendish Bentinck, commonly known and loved as “Lord George,” who was cradled at Welbeck in February 1802, was the second son of the fourth Duke of Portland, a keen sportsman who won the Derby of 1809 with Teresias. The boy thus had the love of sport in his veins; and a passion for racing was the dominant note in his too brief life from the day, in 1833, when he started a small stud of his own, to that fatal day on which, piqued by his repeated failure to win the coveted “blue riband,” he sold every horse in his stables at a word, and abandoned the Turf in despair.

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“Lord George Bentinck,” wrote Thormanby, a few years ago, “was the idol of the sportsmen of his own day. The commanding personality of the man threw a spell over all with whom he was brought into contact; they were half-fascinated, half-awed—judgment and criticism surrendered to admiration. There are still veterans left, like old John Kent, who talk with bated breath of Lord George as a superior being, a god-like man, a king of men.”

From the day he joined the Army as a cornet of Hussars in 1819, to the tragic close of his life, Lord George always cut a conspicuous and brilliant figure in the world. He was the spoilt child of Fortune; and, like all such spoilt children, was constantly getting into hot water—and out of it again. As a subaltern, for instance, he showed such little respect for his seniors that, one day on parade, a Captain Kerr exclaimed aloud: “If you don’t make this young gentleman behave himself, Colonel, I will.” Whereupon the insubordinate sub. retorted: “Captain Kerr ventures to say on parade that which he dares not repeat off.”

Such was the youth and such the man—gay, debonair, and popular to the highest degree, but always uncontrollable and reckless. As a sportsman he was the chief of popular heroes, his appearance on a race-course being the invariable signal for an ovation, such as the King might have envied. And, indeed, his Turf transactions were all conducted on a scale of truly regal magnificence. Though he was never by any means rich, he often had as many as sixty horses in training, while his racing stud numbered a hundred. He kept three stud farms going, and his out-of-pocket expenses ran to L50,000 and more a year. To provide the money for such prodigality he wagered enormous sums. For the Derby of 1843, for instance, he stood to win L150,000 on his horse Gaper, and actually pocketed L30,000, though Gaper was not even placed. In 1845 his net winnings on bets reached L100,000; and he thought nothing of staking his entire year’s private income on a single race.

One by one all the great prizes of the Turf fell to him—some many times—but the only prize he ever cared a brass farthing for, the Derby, always eluded his grasp, though again and again it seemed a certainty. So deep at last became his disgust and mortification at the unkindness of Fate in withholding the only boon he coveted that, in a moment of pique, he decided to sell his stud and leave the turf for ever.

“I’ll sell you the lot,” he impulsively said to George Payne at Goodwood, “from Bay Middleton to little Kitchener (his famous jockey), for L100,000. Yes or no?” Payne offered him L300 to have a few hours to think the offer over, and handed the sum over at breakfast the next morning. No sooner had the forfeit been paid than Mr Mostyn, who was sitting at the same table, looked up quietly and said: “I’ll take the lot, Bentinck, at L10,000, and will give you a cheque before you go on the course.” “If you please,” was Lord George’s placid answer; and thus ended one of the most brilliant Turf careers on record.



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And now for the irony of Fate! Among the stud thus sold, in a fit of pique, for “an old song” was Surplice, the winner of the next year’s Derby and St Leger. Lord George had actually had the great prize in his hand and had let it go!

How keenly he felt the blow may be gathered from the following passage in Lord Beaconsfield’s biography:

“A few days before—it was the day after the Derby, May 25, 1848—the writer met Lord George Bentinck in the library of the House of Commons. He was standing before the bookshelves with a volume in his hand, and his countenance was greatly disturbed. His resolution in favour of the Colonial interest, after all his labours, had been negated by the Committee on the 22nd; and on the 24th, his horse, Surplice, whom he had parted with among the rest of the stud, had won that paramount and Olympic stake, to gain which had been the object of his life. He had nothing to console him, and nothing to sustain him, except his pride. Even that deserted him before a heart, which he knew at least could yield him sympathy. He gave a sort of superb groan.

“All my life I have been trying for this, and for what have I sacrificed it?’ he murmured. It was in vain to offer solace.

“You do not know what the Derby is,’ he moaned.

“Yes, I do; it is the Blue Riband of the Turf.’

“It is the Blue Riband of the Turf,’ he slowly repeated to himself; and, sitting down at a table, buried himself in a folio of statistics.”

Just a few months later, on 21st September 1848, his body was found lying, cold and stiff, in a meadow about a mile from Welbeck. That very morning he had risen full of health and spirits, and at four o’clock in the afternoon had set out to walk across country to Thoresby, Lord Manvers’ seat, where he was to spend a couple of days. He had sent on his valet by road in advance; but the night fell, and Lord George never made his appearance. A search with lanterns was instituted, and about midnight his body was discovered lying face downwards close to one of the deer-park gates. He had been dead for some hours.

What was the cause of his mysterious death? The coroner’s jury appear to have found no difficulty in coming to a decision. Their verdict was, “Died by the visitation of God—to wit, a spasm of the heart.” Thus vanished from the world one of its most brilliant and picturesque ornaments, in the very prime of his life and his powers (he was only forty-six), and when he seemed assured of a political future even more dazzling than his Turf fame.



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But there were many, among the thousands who deplored the tragic eclipse of such a promising life, who were by no means satisfied with the vague verdict of the inquest. Lord George had always been a man of remarkable vigour and health, and never more so than on the day of his death. Was it at all likely that such a man would drop dead during a quiet and unexciting stroll across country? Later years, however, have brought new facts to light which suggest a very different explanation of this tragedy. "The hand of God" it was, no doubt, which struck the fatal blow—it always must be; but was there no other agency, and that a human one? Could it not be the hand of a brother? Some have said it was; and although the story is involved in obscurity and may be open to grave doubt (indeed it has been more than once flatly contradicted) there can, perhaps, be no harm in including it in this volume. This is the story as it has been told.

Though Lord George Bentinck was the handsomest man, and one of the most eligible *partis* of his day he never married; yet, no doubt, he had many an "affair of the heart." But not one of all the high-born ladies, who would have turned their backs on coronets to become "Lady George," could in his eyes compare with Annie May Berkeley, a lovely and penniless girl, who could not even boast a "respectable" parentage.

Miss Berkeley was, so it is said, a child of that most romantic union between the Earl of Berkeley and pretty Mary Cole, the butcher's daughter. This girl he professed to have made his countess shortly after in the parish church of Berkeley. That his lordship legally married his low-born bride at Lambeth eleven years later is beyond doubt, but that alleged first secret marriage was more than open to suspicion. There seems little doubt that the entry in Berkeley church register was a forgery; and that, not until Mary Cole had borne several children to the Earl, did she become legally his wife by the valid knot tied at Lambeth. It was, in fact, decided by the House of Peers that the Berkeley marriage was not proven, and thus seven of the children were illegitimate.

It was one of Lord Berkeley's children thus branded to the world who is said to have won the heart and the homage of Lord George Bentinck. And little wonder; for Annie May Berkeley had inherited more than her mother's beauty of face and of figure, with the patrician air and refinement which came from generations of noble ancestors.

But handsome Lord George was only one of many wooers whom her charms had enslaved. There were others equally ardent, if less favoured; and among them none other than the Marquess of Titchfield, Lord George's elder brother, and the future "eccentric Duke" of Portland, often referred to as "The Wizard of Welbeck." The Marquess and his younger brother had never been on the best of terms. They had little in common; and when they found themselves rival suitors for the smiles of the same maiden this incompatibility gave place to a bitter estrangement.



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It was not, however, until Lord George discovered that the Marquess was more intimate with his ladylove than he should be, that their mutual relations became strained to a dangerous degree. It is said that the brothers quarrelled fiercely whenever they met, and that Lord George, whose temper was violent, frequently struck his brother, who was no physical match for him. One day, so the story goes, their constant squabbles reached a climax. After a fiercer quarrel than usual Lord George struck his brother and rival repeatedly, until the latter, roused to fury, struck back and landed a heavy blow on his brother's chest, over the heart. Lord George's heart was diseased, and the blow proved fatal.

This, then, is said to be the true explanation of the tragedy of that September day in 1848; of that "spasm of the heart" which, according to the verdict of the coroner's jury, was the cause of Lord George Bentinck's death. If this story is true, much that has been so long mysterious becomes clear. Lord George's sudden and tragic death is explained; as also the fact that it was from this period that the Duke of Portland's moroseness and shunning of the world became so marked as to be scarcely distinguishable from insanity. If the death of a brother, however provoked and accidental, had been on his conscience, what could be more natural than that the fratricide should thus shut himself from the world in sorrow and remorse?

CHAPTER XIII

THE WICKED BARON

The British Peerage, like most other human flocks, has had many black sheep within its fold; but few of them have been blacker than Charles, fifth Baron Mohun of Okehampton, who shocked the world by his violence and licentiousness a couple of centuries ago.

Charles Mohun had in his veins the blood of centuries of gallant men and fair women, from Sir William de Mohun, who fought so bravely for the Conqueror on the field of Hastings, to his father, the fourth Lord of Okehampton, who took to wife a daughter of the first Earl of Anglesey, a man who won fame in his day by his statesmanship and his pen. But there was also in his veins a black strain which branded the Mohun 'scutcheon with the stigma of eternal shame.

From his early youth he exhibited an unbridled temper and a passion for low pursuits. In an age when loose morals and violence were winked at, he soon won an unenviable notoriety by his excesses in both. Wine and women, gambling and duelling, were the breath of life to him, and in each indulgence he was infamously supreme. He was twice arraigned for murder, and in the prime of life he died a murderer.



Such was the fifth Lord Mohun when our story opens, towards the close of his shameless career; and in the first of the disgraceful episodes that marked its close, as in so many others of his career, a beautiful woman figures prominently—none other than the celebrated Mrs Bracegirdle, the most fascinating actress of her day, whose witcheries made a lover of every man who came under the spell of her charms.



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Her army of lovers ranged from Congreve and Rowe, who wrote inspired and passionate plays for her, to the Dukes of Dorset and Devonshire and Lord Lovelace (among a hundred other titled gallants), who were ready to shed their last drop of blood in defence of her fair fame; though each sought in vain to besmirch it in his own person. But her virtue was reputed to be “as impregnable as the rock of Gibraltar.” Dr Doran describes her as “that Diana of the stage, before whom Congreve and Lord Lovelace, at the head of a troop of bodkined fops, worshipped in vain”; although, with all her unassailable propriety, she did not escape outspoken suspicions of being Congreve’s mistress all the time.

Describing her charms, another chronicler says:

“She was of a lovely height, with dark brown hair and eyebrows, black sparkling eyes, and a fresh blushing complexion; and, whenever she exerted herself, had an involuntary flushing in her breast, neck, and face.”

Such, in the cold medium of print, was Mrs Bracegirdle when she became the central figure of a great tragedy, the horrors of which have sent a thrill down to our own time.

Among Mrs Bracegirdle’s many baffled wooers was Captain Richard Hill, a boon companion of Charles, Lord Mohun, and a man of unrestrained passion. To all the Captain’s coarse advances the actress turned a contemptuous shoulder, until in his rage he swore that at any cost she should be his. There was, he was convinced, only one real obstacle to the success of his suit, Jack Montford, the handsomest actor of his day, to whom Mrs Bracegirdle was said to be very kind; and the furious Captain vowed: “I am resolved to have the blood of Montford, and to carry off his charmer by force if need be.”

Captain Hill made no concealment of his purpose. He mouthed his threats aloud at his favourite tavern in Covent Garden and elsewhere; and he found a willing helper in Lord Mohun, who was always ripe for any dastardly scheme; and, with Mohun’s help, he carefully prepared his plans for both murder and abduction, for on both his heart was set.

By lavish bribes the two conspirators engaged half a dozen soldiers to assist in their scheme; they arranged that a coach with two horses, and four others in reserve, should be in waiting at nine o’clock in Drury Lane, close to the theatre at which Mrs Bracegirdle made her appearance nightly; and, equipped with a formidable armoury of swords, daggers, and pistols, they repaired at the appointed time to the scene of action.

For a full hour they waited, watching with lynx eyes the door from which the fair actress would emerge; but, as luck would have it, she was not playing that night. She was, in fact, at the moment supping at the house of a friend, Mrs Page, in Princes Street, close by; and they were on the point of proceeding there when the lady made her

appearance, with her mother as companion and Mr Page and her brother for escort, on her way home to her lodgings in Howard Street across the Strand.



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At sight of their fair prey two of the soldiers rushed forward, snatched Mrs Bracegirdle from her mother's arm and dragged her, screaming and resisting, towards the coach in which Lord Mohun was sitting by his cases of pistols, and in which it was intended to carry her off to Totteridge. When her escort rushed to her rescue, Hill struck at the old lady with his sword; but the cries and sounds of scuffling attracted such a crowd that a change of plans became necessary.

With consummate cleverness the adroit Captain now took each of the ladies by the arm and coolly conducted them himself out of the crowd to their lodgings, Mohun and the soldiers following ignominiously behind. Upon reaching Howard Street, the ladies safely indoors, the soldiers were dismissed, and Mohun and his ally, with drawn swords, paced up and down the street, vowing vengeance on the unhappy Montford, whom they considered the cause of all their troubles, and who, sooner or later, must pass through Howard Street on his way to his house in Norfolk Street adjoining.

For two long hours they kept their bloodthirsty vigil, feeding the flames of hate with copious draughts of wine, which they procured from a neighbouring tavern. The lady had escaped them, but they would at least make sure of her lover, the handsome actor, who on the stroke of midnight turned the corner into Howard Street.

Montford had, it appears, already heard of the frustrated attempt to carry off Mrs Bracegirdle, and that Mohun and Hill were keeping watch outside her lodgings; so that he was not unprepared for an unpleasant scene. Picture his amazement then when Lord Mohun advanced smilingly to meet him, and embraced him with a great show of affection. "I am not prepared for such cordiality," the actor said coldly, as he disengaged himself from the unwelcome embrace. "I should prefer to learn how you justify Captain Hill's abominable rudeness to a lady, or keeping company with such a scoundrel."

At this moment the Captain, inflamed with drink, strolled insolently up to the pair, and, giving Montford a resounding box on the ear, exclaimed, "Here I am to justify myself. Draw, fellow!" But before Montford had time to recover from the blow and to unsheath his sword, Hill ran him through the body. Without a groan the wounded man sank to the ground. A cry of "Murder" arose; the watchmen rushed to the scene. But before they arrived Hill had made his escape; while Mohun, who at least had the courage of his race, submitted himself to arrest. His first question to the watchmen was, "Has Hill escaped?" And when he was assured that he had, he added: "I am glad of it! I should not care if I were hanged for him."

Such was the story which sent a thrill of horror through London on the day following the tragedy, and which aroused a fury of anger against the cowardly assassins; for not only was Jack Montford a popular idol who had captured all hearts with his handsome face and figure, his clever acting and his unaffected personal charm, but his wife, who had been thus tragically widowed, was one of the most gifted and delightful women who ever adorned the stage.



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It was thus inevitable that Lord Mohun's trial by his Peers, which was opened on the 31st of January 1693, in Westminster Hall, and which was invested with all the pomp and ceremonial befitting such an occasion, should attract crowds of excited spectators, curious to see the principal actors in this sensational drama, and burning to see justice done to the noble instigator of the murder. The pent-up excitement culminated when Mrs Bracegirdle, looking more beautiful than ever in spite of her pallor and evidences of suffering, entered the witness-box; and every word of the story she told was listened to in a silence that was painful in its intensity.

In answer to the Attorney-General's request that she should "give my lord an account of the whole of your knowledge of the attempt that was made upon you in Drury Lane, and what followed upon it," she said:

"My lord, I was in Prince's Street at supper at Mr Page's, and at ten o'clock at night Mr Page went home with me; and, coming down Drury Lane there stood a coach by my Lord Craven's door, and the hood of the coach was drawn, and a great many men stood by it. Just as I came to the place where the coach stood, two soldiers came and pushed me from Mr Page, and four or five men came up to them, and they knocked my mother down almost, for my mother and my brother were with me." "My mother recovered and came and hung about my neck, so that they could not get me into the coach, and Mr Page went to call company to rescue me. Then Mr Hill came with his drawn sword and struck at Mr Page and my mother; and when they could not get me into the coach because company came up, he said he would see me home, and he had me by one hand and my mother by the other. And when we came home he pulled Mr Page by the sleeve and said, "Sir, I would speak with you."

"ATTORNEY-GENERAL:—'Pray, Mrs Bracegirdle, did you see anybody in the coach when they pulled you to it?'

"MRS BRACEGIRDLE:—'Yes, my Lord Mohun was in the coach; and when they pulled me to the coach I saw my Lord Mohun in it. As they led me along Drury Lane, my Lord Mohun came out of the coach and followed us, and all the soldiers followed them; but they were dismissed, and, as I said, when we came to our lodgings, Mr Hill pulled Mr Page by the sleeve and said he would speak with him. Saith Mr Page, "Mr Hill, another time will do; to-morrow will serve." With that, when I was within doors, Mr Page was pulled into the house, and Mr Hill walked up and down the street with his sword drawn. He had his sword drawn when he came alone with me.'

"ATTORNEY-GENERAL:—'Did you observe him to say anything whilst he was with you?'



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“MRS BRACEGIRDLE:—’As I was going down the hill he said, as he held me, that he would be revenged, but he did not say on whom. When I was in the house several persons went to the door, and afterwards Mrs Browne (my landlady), went to the door, and spoke to them, and asked them what they stayed and waited there for. At last they said they stayed to be revenged of Mr Montford; and then Mrs Browne came in to me and told me of it.’

“ATTORNEY-GENERAL:—’Were my Lord Mohun and Mr Hill both together when that was said, that they stayed to be revenged of Mr Montford?’

“MRS BRACEGIRDLE:—’Yes, they were. And when Mrs Browne came in and told me, I sent my brother and my maid and all the people we could out of the house to Mrs Montford to desire her to send, if she knew where her husband was, to tell him of it; and she did. And when they came indoors again I went to the door, and the doors were shut, and I listened to hear if they were there still; and my Lord Mohun and Mr Hill were walking up and down the street. By-and-bye the watch came up to them, and when the watch came they said, “Gentlemen, why do you walk with your swords drawn?” Says my Lord Mohun, “I am a peer of England—touch me if you dare!” Then the watch left them, and they went away; and a little after there was a cry of “murder.” And that is all I know, my lord.’

When at the close of the case Lord Mohun was asked if he had anything to say in his defence, he answered:

“My lords, I hope it will be no disadvantage to me my not summing up my evidence like a lawyer. I think I have made it plainly appear that there never was any formal quarrel or malice between Mr Montford and me. I have also made appear the reason why we stayed so long in the street, which was for Mr Hill to speak with Mrs Bracegirdle and ask her pardon, and I stayed with him as my friend. So plainly appeareth I had no hand in killing Mr Montford, and upon the confidence of my own innocency I surrendered myself to this honourable house, where I know I shall have all the justice in the world.”

The trial, which lasted five days, resulted in a verdict of acquittal—sixty-nine peers voting Lord Mohun “Not Guilty,” and fourteen finding him “Guilty.”

One would have thought that such a severe lesson and narrow escape would have given Mohun pause in his career of vice and crime. On the contrary, it seems merely to have whetted his appetite for similar adventures. He plunged into still deeper dissipation; one mad revel succeeded another; duel followed duel, all without provocation on any part but his own. He killed in cold blood two more men who had innocently provoked his enmity, “as if increase of appetite did grow by that it fed on,” until he rightly became the most dreaded and hated man in all England, a man to whom a glance, a gesture, or a harmless word might mean death.



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But his evil days were drawing to their end; and appropriately he died in a welter of innocent blood. When the Duke of Hamilton was appointed Ambassador to the French Court, the Whigs were so alarmed by his known partiality for the Pretender that the more unscrupulous of them decided that, at any cost, he must be got rid of. What simpler plan could there be than by provoking him to a duel; what fitter tool than the fire-eating, bloodthirsty Mohun, the most skilled swordsman of his day?

Mohun jumped at the vile suggestion, and lost no time in seeking the Duke and insulting him in public. His Grace, however, who knew the man's reputation only too well, treated the insult with the silence and contempt it deserved; whereupon Mohun, roused to fury by this studied slight, changed his *role* to that of challenger. Thrice he sent his second, one Major-General Macartney, almost as big a scoundrel as himself, to the Duke's house in St James's Square; the fourth time a meeting was arranged for the following morning at the Ring, in Hyde Park, a favourite duelling-ground of the time. The intervening night hours Mohun and his satellite spent in debauchery in a low house of pleasure.

In the cold, grey dawn of the following morning—the morning of 15th November 1712—the principals and seconds appeared almost simultaneously at the Ring—in the daytime the haunt of beauty and fashion, in the early morning hours a desolate part of the Park—and the preliminaries were quickly arranged. Turning to Macartney, the Duke said: "I am well assured, sir, that all this is by your contrivance, and therefore you shall have your share in the dance; my friend here, Colonel Hamilton, will entertain you." "I wish for no better partner," Macartney replied; "the Colonel may command me."

A few moments later the double fight began with infinite fury. Swords flashed and clattered; lunge and parry, parry and lunge followed in lightning succession; the laboured breaths went up in gusts of steam on the morning air. There was murder in two pairs of eyes, a resolve as grim as death itself in the stern set faces of their opponents. Soon the blood began to spurt and ooze from a dozen wounds; the Duke was wounded in both legs; his adversary in the groin and arm. Faces, swords, the very ground, became crimson. Colonel Hamilton had at last disarmed his opponent, but the others fought on—gasping, reeling, lunging, fainting, the strength ebbing with each thrust.

At last each made a desperate lunge at the other; the Duke's sword passed clean through his adversary up to the very hilt; Mohun, reeling forward, with a last effort shortened his sword and plunged it deep into the Duke's breast. Colonel Hamilton rushed to his friend and raised him in his arms, when Macartney, snatching up his fallen sword, drove it into the dying man's heart, then took to his heels and made his way as fast as horse and boat could carry him to Holland.



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Before the Duke could be raised from the ground to which he had fallen, he had drawn his last breath. A few moments later Mohun, too, succumbed to his wounds—the “Dog Mohun,” as Swift called him, lying in death but a few yards from his victim.

“I am infinitely concerned,” Swift wrote the same day,
“for the poor Duke, who was an honest, good-natured man.
I loved him very well, and I think he loved me better.”

Thus, steeped in innocent blood, perished Charles Lord Mohun, who well earned his unenviable title, “The wicked Baron.”

CHAPTER XIV

A FAIR *INTRIGANTE*

The face of a baby, the heart of a courtesan, and the brain of a diplomatist. Such was Louise de Querouaille who, two centuries and a half ago, came to England to barter her charms for a King’s dishonour, and, incidentally, to found a ducal house as a memorial to her allurements and her shame.

If she had been taken at her own estimate Louise was at least the equal in lineage of any of the proud beauties whose claim she thus challenged to Charles II.’s favour. She had behind her, she said, centuries of noble ancestors, among the greatest in France; and she was kin, near or remote, to every great name in the land of her birth. All, however, that is known of this Queen of *intrigantes* is that she had for father a worthy, unassuming Breton merchant, who had made a sufficient fortune in the wool-trade to take his ease, as a country gentleman, for the latter part of his days, and whose only ambition was to bring up his son and two daughters respectably, and to dispense a modest hospitality among his neighbours. It was at Brest that Evelyn enjoyed this hospitality for a brief period; and the diarist has nothing but what is good to say of the retired tradesman.

But the worthy merchant had his hands full with one at least of his two daughters, who was developing dangerous fascinations, and with them a precocious knowledge of how to turn them to account. He was thankful to pack Louise off to a boarding-school, where she seems to have led her teachers such a dance that it became necessary to place her in stronger hands; and with this view the foolish father sent her to Paris, the last place in the world for such a charming and designing minx, and to the custody of a weak-willed aunt.

Nothing could have suited Louise better than this change of arena for the exercise of her wilfulness and witchery. Before she had been many days in the French capital she was able to twist her aunt round her little finger—indeed her power of captivating was,



to the end of her life, her chief dower—and to obtain all the freedom she wanted. And it was not long before her allurements won the admiration of the dissolute Duc de Beaufort, High Admiral of France, a man skilled in all the arts of love. The girl's bourgeois head was completely turned by the splendour of her first captive; and, to make him secure, she counted no sacrifice too great. Not, indeed, that she ever regarded her virtue as anything but the principal piece she intended to play on the chessboard of life.



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For a few years Louise revelled in the new life which the amorous Duc opened to her, and which only came to an end when the Admiral was despatched, in command of a fleet, against the Turks, an expedition from which he was fated never to return. Before he said good-bye, however, Louise took care to make the next step on her ladder of world-conquest secure. Through the Duc's influence she was appointed maid-of-honour to Madame, sister-in-law to Louis XIV., and sister to the second Charles of England, now restored to the throne of his fathers.

We can well imagine that the wool merchant's daughter wasted no sighs on the lover she had lost. She had now a much wider and more splendid field at the Court of France, for the exploiting of her dangerous gifts and the indulgence of her ambition. That the new maid had no lack of lovers we may be sure; for though she was not richly dowered with beauty she always seems to have had a magnetic power over the hearts of men. We know, too, that she singled out for special favour, the Comte de Sault, the handsomest noble in France, a man skilled above all his fellows in the then moribund knightly exercises; and that her *liaison* with the Comte, in a court where such intimacies were the fashion, added to, rather than detracted from, her social prestige.

Such was the life of Louise de Querouaille up to the time when she made her first acquaintance with the land in which she was destined to crown her adventurous career, and to make herself at once the most dazzling and the most hated figure in England. At this time Louis' designs on Spain and Holland had received a rude check by the signing of an alliance between England, Sweden, and the United Provinces; and it became a matter of vital importance to detach England from a combination so fatal to his schemes. With this object he decided to send Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans, on a visit, ostensibly of affection, to her brother Charles II., charged with a secret mission to induce him by every artifice in her power to withdraw from the alliance.

How Henrietta returned flushed with triumph from this iniquitous embassy, after ten days of high revelry at Dover, is well-known history. Charles, in response to his favourite sister's pleading and bribes, not only consented to desert his allies, but, as soon as he decently could, to follow in the steps of his brother, the Duke of York, to Rome; and in return for these evidences of friendship, Louis was gracious enough to promise him substantial aid and protection; and, further, to grant him a subsidy of L1,000,000 a year if he would take up arms with France against Holland.

It is more to our purpose to know that among the gay galaxy of courtiers who accompanied Madame to England was Louise de Querouaille, who thus first set eyes on the King, in whose life-drama she was to play so brilliant and baleful a *role*; and that before Charles, with streaming eyes, said "good-bye" to his scheming sister, she had made excellent use of her opportunities to enslave this English "King of Hearts." So much at least was reported to Louis on the return of the embassy, when he was assured by Madame that, of all the beautiful women in her train, the only one to make any impression on her Royal brother was Louise de Querouaille.



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This information, no doubt, was in Louis' mind when, later, it became necessary to cement Charles's allegiance to his compact. Gold was always a potent lure to the "Merrie Monarch," whose purse was never deep enough for the demands made on it by his extravagance; but a still more seductive bait was a beautiful woman to add to his seraglio. The Duchess of Cleveland had now lost her youth and good looks; the incomparable Stuart's beauty had been fatally marred by small-pox. Of all the fair and frail women who had held Charles in thrall there was none left to dispute the palm with the French maid-of-honour except Nell Gwynn, the Drury Lane orange-girl, whose sauciness and vulgarity gave to the jaded Sybarite a piquant relish to her charms.

Here was a splendid opportunity for Louis to complete the conquest of his vacillating cousin whose allegiance was so vital to his plans of aggrandisement. Louise should go to Whitehall to play the part of beautiful spy on Charles, and, by her favours, to make him a pliant tool in the hand of "le Roi Soleil."

Charles, who was by no means loth to renew his Dover acquaintance with the bewitching maid-of-honour, sent a yacht to Dieppe to bring her to England, and charged no less a personage than the Duke of Buckingham to be her escort to Whitehall. The Duke, however, who was probably too much occupied with his own affairs of the heart, "totally forgot both the lady and his promise; and, leaving the disconsolate nymph at Dieppe, to manage as best she could, passed over to England by way of Calais,"—a slight which the indignant Louise never forgave.

Thus it was that the new favourite of the King made her journey across the Channel under the escort of the English Ambassador, and was given by him into the charge of Buckingham's political rival, Lord Arlington. "The Duke of Buckingham thus," to quote Bishop Burnet, "lost all merit he might have pretended to, and brought over a mistress whom his strange conduct threw into the hands of his enemies."

The arrival of the "French spy," whose mission was well understood, was hailed by the English nation with execration, modified only by a few stilted lines of greeting from Dryden, as laureate, and some indecent verses by St Evremond—efforts which the new beauty equally rewarded with gracious smiles and thanks. That the English frankly hated her without having even seen her was a matter of small concern—she was prepared for it. All she cared for was that Charles should give her a cordial welcome; and this he did with effusiveness and open arms. Apart from her character as ambadress to his "dear brother" of France, she was a new and piquant stimulus to his sated appetite—a "dainty dish to set before a King."

She was installed at Whitehall to the flourish of trumpets; was appointed maid-of-honour to the Queen, who frankly disliked and dreaded this new rival in her husband's accommodating affection; and at once assumed her position as chief of those women the King delighted to honour. And with such restraint and discretion did she conduct

herself during these early days at Whitehall that she disarmed the jealousy of the Court ladies, while receiving the homage of their gallants.



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To Charles she was coyness itself—virtue personified. While smiling graciously on him she kept him at arm's length, thus adding to her attractions the allurements of an unexpected virtue. So jealously did she guard her favours that the French Ambassador began to show alarm.

“I believe,” he wrote at this time, “that she has so got round King Charles as to be of the greatest service to our Sovereign lord and master, *if she only does her duty.*”

That Louise was fully conscious of her duty and meant to do it, was never really in question—but the time to unbend was not yet. It was no part of her clever strategy to drop like a ripe plum into Charles's mouth. *Il faut reculer pour mieux sauter.* She would be accounted all the greater prize for proving difficult to win.

The psychological moment, she decided, had come when Lord Arlington invited Charles and his Court to his palatial country-seat, Euston, where, removed from censorious eyes and in the abandon of country-house freedom, she could exhibit her true colours to full advantage. Over the revels of which Euston was 183 the scene during a few intoxicating weeks, it is but decent to draw the curtain. With such guests as the merry and dissolute Charles, his boon-companions, experts in gallantry, and his ladies, with most of whom an acquaintance with virtue was but a faded memory, it is no difficult matter to raise a corner of the curtain in imagination. One typical scene Forneron records thus:

“Lady Arlington, under the pretext of killing the tedium of October evenings in a country-house, got up a burlesque wedding, in which Louise de Querouaille was the bride and the King the bridegroom, with all the immodest ceremonies which marked, in the good old times, the retirement of the former into the nuptial chamber.”

It was precisely such a ceremony in which, a few years earlier, Charles had figured with *La belle Stuart*, while Lady Castlemaine looked on with laughter and applause.

[Illustration: LOUISE, DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH]

Such was the revolution that resulted from this country visit that Louise de Querouaille returned to Whitehall, the avowed *maitresse en titre* to the King. The French maid-of-honour had justified the confidence Louis reposed in her; and as reward she was appointed Lady of the Bedchamber to Catherine, and wore a coronet as Duchess of Portsmouth. More than this, the delighted Louis raised the wool merchant's daughter to the proud rank of Duchesse d'Aubigny, in exchange for which dignity she pledged herself to induce Charles to go to war with Holland; to avow himself a Catholic; and to persuade his brother and successor, the Duke of York, to take to wife a Princess of France.



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Louise de Querouaille had now reached a dizzier height than, in the wildest dreams of her girlhood, she had ever hoped to climb. She was a double-Duchess, of England and of France, the mistress and counsellor of a puppet-King, and an arbiter of the destinies of nations. Well might her humble father, when he paid his Duchess-daughter a visit in London, throw up his hands in amazement at the splendours with which his "petite Louise" had surrounded herself! So high had she climbed that it seemed at one time that even the Crown of England was within her reach; for when Catherine was brought to the verge of death the Duchess was probably not alone in thinking that she might be her successor on the throne.

"She has got the notion," wrote the French Ambassador, "that it is possible she may yet be Queen of England. She talks from morning till night of the Queen's ailments as if they were mortal."

But at least, if the crown was not to be hers, there was as much gold to be had as she cared to garner. Not content with her allowance, which, nominally £10,000 a year, in one year reached the enormous sum of £136,000, she heaped fortune on fortune by trafficking in a wide range of commodities, from peerages and Court appointments to Royal pardons and slaves. A few years of such rich harvesting made her incomparably the richest woman in England, although she squandered her ill-gotten gold with a prodigal hand. Her apartments at Whitehall were crowded with the costliest furnishings and objects of art that money could buy. When Evelyn paid a visit to the Court he records:

"But that which engaged my curiosity was the rich and splendid furniture of this woman's apartment, now twice or thrice pulled down to satisfy her prodigality and expensive pleasures; while her Majesty's does not exceed some gentlemen's wives in furniture and accommodation."Here I saw the new fabrics of French tapestry, for design, tenderness of work and incomparable imitation of the best paintings, beyond anything I ever beheld. Some pieces had Versailles, St Germain's, and other palaces of the French King, with huntings, figures, and landscapes, exotic flowers and all to the life, rarely done. Then for Japan cabinets, screens, pendule clocks, great vases of wrought plate, table-stands, sconces, branches, braseras, etc., all of massive silver and out of number, besides some of his Majesty's best paintings!"

Probably at this time of her illicit queendom the only thorn in Louise de Querouaille's bed of roses was that vulgar, "gutter-rival" of hers, Nell Gwynn, with whom she suffered the indignity of sharing Charles's affection. To the high-born, blue-blooded daughter of centuries of French nobles (of whom her tradesman-father always affected a disconcerting ignorance) the very sight of her saucy and successful rival, the ex-orange-wench, was a contamination. She pretended to stifle in breathing the same air, and with high-tossed head sailed past Madame Nell (the mother of a duke), in the Court *salons* and corridors, as if she were carrion.



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And to all these grand, disdainful airs Madame Nell only retorted with a Drury Lane peal of silvery laughter. She, who was accustomed to “chuck Charles’s royal chin,” and to call him her “Charles the third,” in unflattering reference to his two predecessors of the name in her favour, could afford to snap her fingers at the French madame who, after all, was no better than herself.

“The Duchess,” she would say, “pretends to be a person of quality. She says she is related to the best families in France; and when any great person dies she puts herself in mourning. If she be a lady of such quality, why does she demean herself to be what she is? As for me, it’s my profession; I don’t profess to be anything better. And the King is just as fond of me as he is of his French miss.”

But while Her Grace of Portsmouth was revelling in her splendour and her gold, her mission as Louis’s Ambassadors was making unsatisfactory progress. However disposed Charles may have been to change his faith to the advantage of his pocket, he was not prepared to risk his crown, possibly his head, for any Pope who ever lived; nor did the project of providing a French bride for his successor, the Duke of York, promise much better. Louis proposed the Duchess of Guise, his own cousin; but James had heard too much of this unamiable and unattractive Princess from his sister, Henrietta, to relish the venture. The Duchess herself suggested a Princess of Lorraine, as a suitable bride, but Louis, who had no love for the d’Elboeuf ladies, nipped this project in the bud.

After a long resistance, however, she had induced her Royal lover to declare war on Holland; and Louis professed himself so pleased with this concession to his schemes, that he dazzled her eyes with splendid promises if she would but carry out his programme to the full. It had become her crowning ambition to win the right to a *tabouret* at the Court of Versailles—the highest privilege accorded to the old *noblesse*, that of sitting on a stool in the presence of the King; and this proud distinction, which would raise her to the highest pinnacle in France, inferior only to the crown itself, could be hers if Louis would but grant her the d’Aubigny lands to accompany her title, for the *tabouret* went with the Duchy domains. Even this most coveted of all the gifts in his power Louis promised to the little adventuress if she would but carry out, not only all she had undertaken, but any future commands he might lay upon her.

His immediate object now was to take advantage of the distraction caused by the war between England and Holland to annex the Palatinate and the Franche Comte, on which he had long set covetous eyes; but he quickly discovered that for once his vaulting ambition had overleaped itself. The whole of Europe took alarm; England to a man rose in angry protest, sworn enemies joining hands to resist such an outrageous aggression; and Charles, in a frenzy of fear for his crown, dismissed his hireling army paid with Louis’s gold. The proud edifice which the Duchess of Portsmouth had so carefully reared was threatened with a cataclysm of popular rage against the “painted French spy” who was regarded, and perhaps rightly, as a prime instigator of the

mischief, and the worst enemy of the country that had given her such generous hospitality.



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To add to the danger of her position she became seriously ill; sustained heavy money losses; and even her supremacy with the King was gravely imperilled by the arrival at Court of Mazarin's loveliest niece, Hortense de Mancini, with whom Charles had flirted in the days of his exile, and who now came to England in the full bloom of her peerless beauty to complete her conquest of the amorous Sovereign—"the last conquest of her conquering eyes," as Waller wrote in his fulsome greeting of the new divinity of the Whitehall seraglio.

For once Louise's indomitable courage showed signs of yielding. The whole armoury of fate seemed arrayed against her at this crisis in her life; even Louis, for whom she had striven so hard, began to distrust her powers and to show indifference to her. When Forneron paid her a visit at this time he found her in tears. "She opened her heart to him, in the presence of her two French maids, who stood by with downcast eyes. Tears rained down her cheeks; and her speech was broken with sobs and sighs." Never had this designing beauty been so near the verge of absolute ruin.

It is not necessary perhaps to follow the Duchess through the period of her eclipse; to watch the weak-kneed Charles sink deeper and deeper into the morass of his disloyalty until, in return for a subsidy of £4,000,000, he offered to dissolve parliament and to make England the bond-slave of Louis's designs on Europe; or to see Louise, the chief instrument of all this ignominy, reach the climax of her disgrace and her peril when mobs besieged Whitehall, and clamoured that the "Jezebel" should be sent to the scaffold.

It is sufficient for our purpose to know that through all this terrible time she steered her way with almost superhuman skill back to the sunshine of success and favour. Her life-long ambition was crowned when Louis gave her the d'Aubigny lands and, with them, the *tabouret* which had so long dazzled her eyes and eluded her grasp. When the sky in England had at last cleared she paid a visit to her native land. For four ecstatic months the wool merchant's daughter made a triumphant progress through France, acclaimed and feted as a Queen. At her castle of d'Aubigny she held a splendid court and dispensed a regal hospitality to the greatest in the land, who had scarcely deigned to notice her in her days as maid-of-honour. When, according to St Simon, she paid a visit to the Capucines in Paris her approach was heralded by a procession of monks, scattering incense and bearing aloft the holy cross. "She was received," we are told, "as if she were a Queen, which quite overwhelmed her, as she was not prepared for such an honour." To such a pitch indeed did this popular idolatry reach that she was actually painted as a Madonna to grace the altar of the richest convent in France.

On her return to England from this tour of conquest she found a reception almost equally regal awaiting her. She was reinstated as chief favourite of the King, all his other mistresses—even the Queen herself being relegated to the background; and high statesmen and Ambassadors did their homage to her before they sought audience with



Charles himself. She was, in fact, as Louis's deputy, Vice-Queen of England—*plus roi que le Roi*.



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Thus secure of her power the Duchess was not unwilling to indulge once more her old propensity for flirtation (to give it its mildest name). The handsome and graceless Duke of Monmouth, Charles's favourite son, Danby and many another gallant, succeeded one another in her favours, which she dispensed without any care for concealment. But the only one of her lovers of this time who made any real impression on such heart as she had was the rakish Philippe de Vendome, grandson of Henri IV. and nephew of her first lover, the Admiral, Duc de Beaufort, who, as we have seen, gave her the first start on her career of infamy and conquest. She seems to have conducted an open and shameless intrigue with De Vendome—a man who, according to St Simon, had never gone sober to bed for a generation, who was a swindler, liar, and thief, and the most despicable and dangerous man living. When the Duchess, realising that her intrigue with this handsome scoundrel was going too far, sought to withdraw, he threatened to show certain incriminating letters she had written to him, to the King; and it was only when Louis intervened and, by bribes and commands, induced her lover to return to France, that she was able to breathe again.

Not content with setting such a shameless example to the Court, she was the arch-priestess of the gaming-tables at which Charles and his courtiers spent their nights to the chink of glasses and gold. She made light, we learn, of losing 5,000 guineas at a sitting. No wonder Pepys was shocked at such scenes.

"I was told to-night," he writes, "that my Lady Castlemaine is so great a gamester as to have won L15,400 in one night, and lost L25,000 in another night at play, and has played L1000 and L1500 at a cast."

The Duchesse de Mazarin, he tells us,

"won at basset, of Nell Gwynne 1400 guineas in one night, and of the Duchess of Portsmouth above L8000, in doing which she exerted her utmost cunning and had the greatest satisfaction, because they were rivals in the Royal favour."

But the end of these saturnalia was at hand. The last glimpse we have of them was on the night of 1st February 1685—the last Sunday Charles was permitted to spend on earth.

"The great courtiers," says Evelyn, "and other dissolute persons were playing at basset round a large table, with a bank of at least L2000 before them. The King, though not engaged in the game, was to the full as scandalously occupied, sitting in open dalliance with three of the shameless women of the Court, the Duchesses of Portsmouth, Morland, and Mazarin, and others of the same stamp, while a French boy was singing love-songs in that glorious gallery. Six days after," he adds, "all was in the dust."



As the end of that wasted Royal life drew near the Duchess's chief concern—for it was her last opportunity of redeeming one of her pledges to Louis, her paymaster—was that Charles should at least die an avowed Catholic.



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"I found her," Barillon wrote to Louis, "overcome with grief. But, instead of bewailing her own unhappy and changed condition, she led me into an adjoining chamber and said: 'M. l'Ambassadeur, I want to confide a secret to you, although if it were publicly known my head would pay the forfeit. The King is a Catholic at heart, and yet there he lies surrounded by Protestant bishops. I dare not enter the room, and there is no one to talk to him of his end and of God. The Duke of York is too much occupied with his own affairs to trouble about his brother's conscience. Pray go to him and tell him that the end is near, and that it is his duty to lose no time in saving his brother's soul.'"

The remainder of the Duchess's life-story is soon told. The days of her queendom and glory were at an end. She was glad to escape to France before James's tempestuous reign ended in tragedy. Here trouble and loss were largely her portion. She lost favour with Louis to such an extent that, at one time, he seriously thought of exiling her; her son deserted and disgraced her; her ill-gotten riches took wings, until only a pension of L800, wrung from Louis, saved her from absolute destitution. True, she was still able to claim her *tabouret* at the Court of Versailles, and, for a few hours occasionally, to revive the glories of the past; but apart from these ironical spasms of splendour she spent her last years in loneliness and sadness, turning to a tardy piety as a refuge from the coldness of the world, and as a solace for its lost vanities. She saw all the great figures, among whom she had moved, pass one by one behind the veil before she died, a wrinkled hag of eighty-five, shorn of the last vestige of the charms which had wrought such havoc in the world.

CHAPTER XV

THE MERRY DUCHESS

When Elizabeth Chudleigh first opened her eyes on the world, nearly two centuries ago, at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, of which her father was Deputy-Governor, we may be sure that her parents little anticipated the romantic and adventurous *role* Fate had assigned to her on the stage of life. A member of an ancient family, whose women had ever been distinguished for their virtue as its men for their valour, the Chelsea infant was destined to shock Society by the laxity of her morals as she dazzled it by her beauty and charm, and to make herself conspicuous, in an age none too strait-laced, as an adventuress of rare skill and daring, and as a profligate in petticoats.

As a child she amused all who knew her by the airs she assumed. Before she was long out of the nursery she vowed that "she would be a Duchess," and a Duchess she was before she died. She was quick to learn the power of beauty and of a clever tongue; and before she was emancipated from short frocks she was a finished coquette.



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Such was Elizabeth Chudleigh when, at fifteen, she blossomed into precocious womanhood. Her father, the Colonel, had long been dead, and his widow had made her home in the neighbourhood of Leicester House, where the Prince and Princess of Wales held their Court. Here she made the acquaintance of Mr Pulteney, later Earl of Bath, a great favourite of the weak and dissolute Prince; and through his interest, Elizabeth, now a radiantly lovely and supremely fascinating young woman, was appointed a maid-of-honour to the Princess.

In the environment of a Court, surrounded by gallants, and with women almost as lovely as herself to pit her charms against, Colonel Chudleigh's daughter, eager to drink the cup of pleasure and of conquest, was in her element. She was the merriest madcap in a Court where licence was unrestrained; and she soon had high-placed lovers at her dainty feet, including, so they say, none other than Frederick himself. Coronets galore dazzled her eyes with their rival allurements; but while, with tantalising coquetry, she kept them all dangling, one alone tempted her—that which was laid at her feet by the Duke of Hamilton, a gallant whose high rank was rivalled by his handsome face and figure, and his many courtly accomplishments.

When the Duke asked her to be his wife she graciously consented, and her Duchess's coronet seemed assured thus early, with a prospect of happiness that does not always accompany it; for in this case she seems to have given her heart where she gave her hand. For a time the course of true love ran smoothly, and the maid-of-honour became a model of decorum as the affianced wife of the man she loved.

But her dream of happiness was destined to be short-lived. An intriguing aunt, Mrs Hanmer, who had no love for the Hamiltons, set to work to dash the cup of happiness from her niece's lips. She intercepted the Duke's letters, poured into Elizabeth's ears poisonous stories of his infidelities and entanglements to account for his silence, and, when the poison began to show signs of working, whisked her niece away on a visit to the country-house of her cousin, Mr Merrill, at Lainston, where among her fellow-guests was a dashing young naval lieutenant, the Hon. Augustus Hervey, who was second heir to his father's Earldom of Bristol.

The lieutenant, as was inevitable, perhaps, fell promptly under the spell of the maid-of-honour's charms, and made violent love to her, with, of course, Mrs Hanmer's whole-hearted connivance. The girl, blazing with resentment of the Duke's coldness, and his apparent indifference to her beauty and his vows, lent a willing ear to his pleadings, and within a few days had promised to be wife to a man whom, as she confessed later, she "almost hated."

The wedding was, by mutual consent, to be secret, partly on account of the bridegroom's lack of means to support a wife, and partly from fear of giving offence to his family. In the dead of an August night, in 1744, the bridal party stole out of Mr Merrill's house, and made its way to the neighbouring church, where the ceremony was

performed by the light of a taper concealed in the best man's hat. Thus, romantically and mysteriously, Elizabeth Chudleigh took her first matrimonial step, which was to lead to such dramatic developments.



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Forty-eight hours later the bridegroom had joined his ship at Portsmouth; and his bride's greatest joy, as she confessed, was when he had departed. Such a marriage, the fruit of pique and anger, boded ill for happiness. Frankly, the union was one long misery, broken by the intervals when the husband was away at sea, and accentuated during his, happily brief, visits to her. Two children were born to this ill-assorted pair, but both died young; and Elizabeth Hervey had abundant opportunity to follow her natural bent, by seeking forgetfulness in dissipation.

In the full glow of her beauty, a wife who was no wife, she resumed her broken career of conquest. She made a tour of Europe, leaving a train of broken-hearted and languishing lovers behind her. At Berlin she brought Frederick the Great to his knees, and made an abject slave of him; she shocked the ladies of the Dresden Court by her laxity and the prodigal display of her charms, and by the same arts bewitched the men. She led, we are told, a life of shameless dissipation, which only her beauty and intellectual gifts redeemed from vulgar depravity. She had lovers in every capital she visited, and discarded them as lightly as so many playthings.

On her return to England, so anxious was she to obliterate that fatal episode in the dark church, she made a journey with certain friends to Lainston, and, while the vicar's back was turned, tore the fatal page out of the marriage register.

Meanwhile, the naval lieutenant had blossomed into an Earl, on his father's death; and when the new Earl, her husband, showed signs of failing health, and there was an early prospect of graduating as a wealthy dowager Countess, she saw the wisdom of making another journey to Lainston to replace the record of her marriage. Alas, for her scheming; the moribund Earl took a new lease of life, and the gilded dowagerhood became nebulous and remote again.

But Elizabeth Chudleigh was not to be long balked in her ambitious designs. Though her charms had grown too opulent and were faded—for she was now near her fiftieth birthday—she was able to count among her slaves the aged Duke of Kingston, an amiable and weak old gentleman of enormous wealth, and with one accommodating foot already “in the grave.”

Wife, or no wife, she now made up her mind to be a Duchess at last. She appealed to Lord Bristol, the husband from whom she had so long been estranged, to divorce her, even going so far as to offer to qualify for the divorce by an open and flagrant act of infidelity; but his lordship only shrugged a scornful shoulder. Still, not to be thwarted, she brought a suit of jactitation of marriage, and, by a lavish use of bribes and cajolery, got a sentence from the Ecclesiastical Court which at last set her free. Within a month she had blossomed into “the most high and *puissante* Princess, the Duchess of Kingston,” thus realising her childish ambition.



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For four and a half years the Duchess was a dignified pattern of all the virtues. The passions of youth had lost their fires; the scenes of revelry and coarse dissipation to which they had given birth were only a memory. She would yet die in the odour of sanctity, however tardy. But storms were brewing, and the Duke's death, in 1746, precipitated them, though not before she had had another fling with the riches he left to her.

Throwing aside her widow's weeds, she flung herself again—old, obese, and faded as she was—into a round of dissipation which shocked and disgusted even London, accustomed as it was to the vagaries of the “quality,” until she was glad to escape from the storm of censure she had brought on her head.

She bought a magnificent yacht and sailed away to Rome, where Pope and Cardinal alike conspired to do her honour; and was only saved from eloping with a titled swindler by his arrest and later suicide in prison. It was while in Rome that news came to her that her late husband's heirs were planning a charge of bigamy against her, with a view to setting aside his will in her favour.

Her exchequer was empty for the time; but, presenting herself before her banker, pistol in hand, she compelled him to provide her with funds to enable her to return to London—to find all arrangements already made for her trial in Westminster Hall on a charge of bigamy. Public opinion was arrayed against her; she was received with abuse, jeers, and lampoons. Foote made her the object of universal ridicule by a comedy entitled, “A Trip to Calais.” But the Duchess metaphorically snapped her fingers at them all. She was no woman to bow before the storm of ridicule and censure. She openly defied it to do its worst. Her splendid equipage was to be seen everywhere, with the autocratic Duchess, serene, smiling, contemptuous.

It was of this period of her life that the following story is told. One day when driving in London her gorgeous carriage was brought to a halt by a coal-cart which was being unloaded in a narrow street. The Duchess was furious at the delay, and protruding her head and shoulders from the carriage and leaning her arms on the door, she cried out to the offending carter: “How dare you, sirrah, to stop a woman of quality in the street?” “Woman of quality!” sneered the man. “Yes, fellow,” rejoined her Grace, “don't you see my arms upon my carriage?” “Indeed I do,” he answered, “and a pair of d—— coarse arms they are, too!”

Seldom has a trial excited such widespread excitement and interest.

“Everybody,” Horace Walpole wrote to his friend Sir Horace Mann, “is on the quest for tickets for her Grace of Kingston's trial. I am persuaded that her impudence will operate in some singular manner; probably she will appear in weeds, with a train to reach across Westminster Hall, with mourning maids-of-honour to support her when she swoons at the dear Duke's



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name, and in a black veil to conceal her blushing or not blushing. To this farce, novel and curious as it will be, I shall not go. I think cripples have no business in crowds, but at the Pool of Bethesda; and, to be sure, this is no angel that troubles the waters.”

But if Walpole resisted the temptation to witness a scene so piquant and remarkable, hundreds of the highest in the land, including Queen Charlotte herself, the Prince of Wales and many another Royal personage, ambassadors and statesmen, flocked to Westminster to see the notorious Duchess on her trial on the charge of bigamy. And the vast Hall was packed with a curious and expectant crowd when her Grace made her stately entry with a retinue of *femmes de chambre*, her doctor, apothecary, and secretary, and proceeded to her seat, in front of her six bewigged Counsel, with the dignified step and haughty mien of an Empress.

Hannah More, who was present at the trial, says that hardly a trace of her once enchanting beauty was visible; and that, had it not been for her white face, “she might easily have been taken for a bundle of bombasin.”

The trial lasted several days, during the whole of which the Duchess conducted herself with remarkable dignity and composure, in face of the damning array of evidence that was brought against her—the evidence of a maid who had witnessed her midnight marriage in Lainston Church; of the widow of the parson who officiated at the nuptials; and of Serjeant Hawkins, who authenticated the birth of her first child by Augustus Hervey.

“The scene opened on Wednesday with all its pomp,” wrote Walpole, who although not present seems to have followed the trial with the keenest interest, “and the doubly-noble prisoner went through her part with universal admiration. Instead of her usual ostentatious folly and clumsy pretensions to cunning, all her conduct was decent, and even seemed natural. Her dress was entirely black and plain; her attendants not too numerous; her dismay at first perfectly unaffected. A few tears balanced cheerfulness enough, and her presence of mind and attention never deserted her. This rational behaviour and the pleadings of her Counsel, who contended for the finality of her Ecclesiastical Court’s sentence against a second trial, carried her triumphantly through the first day, and turned the stream much in her favour.”

The following day proved a much more severe test to her Grace’s composure; and no sooner had the Court risen than “she had to be blooded, and fell into a great passion of tears.” And each succeeding day added to the tension and anxieties which she struggled so bravely to conceal.

On the third day of the trial Walpole says:



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“The plot thickens, or rather opens. Yesterday the judges were called on for their opinions, and *una voce* dismantled the Ecclesiastical Court. The Attorney-General, Thurlow, then detailed the ‘Life and Adventures of Elizabeth Chudleigh, *alias* Hervey, *alias* the most high and *puissante* Princess, the Duchess of Kingston.’ Her Grace bore the narration with a front worthy of her exalted rank. Then was produced the first capital witness, the ancient damsel who was present at her first marriage. To this witness her Grace was benign, but had a transitory swoon at the mention of her dear Duke’s name; and at intervals has been blooded enough to have supplied her execution if necessary. Two babes were likewise proved to have blessed her first nuptials, one of whom, for aught that appears, may exist and become Earl of Bristol.”

Three days later Horace Walpole concludes his narrative of the trial, which we are afraid his antipathy to the adventurous Duchess has coloured a little too vividly:

“The wisdom of the land,” he writes, “has been exerted for five days in turning a Duchess into a Countess, and yet does not think it a punishable crime for a Countess to convert herself into a Duchess. After a pretty defence, and a speech of fifty pages (which she herself had written and pronounced very well), the sages, in spite of the Attorney-General (who brandished a hot iron) dismissed her with the single injunction of paying the fees, all voting her guilty; but the Duke of Newcastle, her neighbour in the country, softening his vote by adding ‘erroneously, not intentionally.’ So ends the solemn farce. The Earl of Bristol, they say, does not intend to leave her that title.... I am glad to have done with her.”

A few days later, in spite of a writ, *ne exeat regno*, which had been issued against her, she was back in France, travelling in state as “Madame la Duchesse de Kingston.” From Calais she made her magnificent progress to Rome, where Pope and Cardinals vied in doing honour to so exalted and charming a lady, and entertained her as regally as if she had been a Queen. Returning to Calais she installed herself in a palatial house where she dispensed a lavish hospitality, and flung her gold about with prodigal hands.

But Calais soon palled on her exacting taste. It was too dull, too cabined for her activities. So away she sailed in a splendid yacht to St Petersburg where Catherine received her as a sister-Empress, and gave balls, banquets, and receptions in her honour. From St Petersburg she continued her journey to Poland, and made a conquest of Prince Radzivil, who exhausted his purse and ingenuity in devising entertainments for her, including the excitement of a bear-hunt by torchlight.



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Back again in France, flushed with her triumphs, she purchased a Palace in Paris, and the chateau of Sainte Assize in the country, at which alternately she held her Court, and moved among her courtiers an obese Queen, alternately charming them with her graciousness and shocking them by her profanity and indelicacies. Here she made her will, leaving most of her jewels to her “dear friend,” the Russian Empress; a large diamond to her equally good friend the Pope; and an extremely valuable pearl necklace and earrings to my Lady Salisbury, for no other reason than that they had been originally worn some centuries earlier by a lady who bore the same title.

But the career of the profligate and eccentric Duchess was nearing its close, and she died as she had lived, game and defiant. While she was sitting at dinner news came that a lawsuit had been decided against her. She broke out in a violent passion and burst a blood-vessel. But, even dying as she was, she refused to remain in bed. “At your peril, disobey me!” she said to her protesting attendants. “I *will* get up!” She got up, dressed, and walked about the room. Then, calling for wine, she drained glass after glass of Madeira. “I will lie down on the couch,” she then said. “I can sleep, and after that I shall be quite well again.”

From that sleep she never awoke. The maidservants who held her hands felt them grow gradually cold. The Duchess was dead. After life’s fitful fever, she had found rest. Thus died, in the sixty-ninth year of her life Elizabeth, Duchess of Kingston, who had drunk deep of life’s cup of pleasure; who had alternately shocked and dazzled the world; and who had found that the greatest triumphs of her beauty and the most prodigal indulgence of her appetites were “all vanity.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE KING AND THE PRETTY HAYMAKER

If ever woman was born to romance it was surely the Lady Sarah Lennox, whose beauty and witchery nearly won for her a crown as England’s Queen a century and a half ago; and who, after ostracising herself from Society by a flagrant lapse from virtue, lived to become the mother of heroes, and to end her days in blindness and a tragic loneliness.

There was both passion and a love of adventure in the Lady Sarah’s blood; for had she not for great-grandfather that most fascinating and philandering of monarchs, the second Charles; and for great-grandmother, the lovely and frail Louise Renee de Querouaille, Duchess of Portsmouth, the most seductive of the beautiful trio of women—the Duchesses of Portsmouth, Morland, and Mazarin—who spent their days in “open dalliance” with the “Merrie Monarch,” and their nights at the basset-table, winning or losing guineas by the thousand.



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As an infant, too, she drank in romance from her mother's breast—the mother whose marriage is surely the most romantic in the annals of our Peerage. One day, so the story runs, the Duke of Richmond, when playing cards with the first Earl of Cadogan, staked the hand and fortune of his heir, the Earl of March, on the issue of the game, which was won by Lord Cadogan. On the following day the debt of honour was paid. The youthful Earl was sent for from his school, Cadogan's daughter from the nursery; a clergyman was in attendance, and the two children were told they were immediately to be made husband and wife.

At sight of the plain, awkward, shrinking girl who was to be his bride the handsome school-boy exclaimed in disgust, "You are surely not going to marry me to that dowdy!" But there was no escape; the demands of "honour" must be satisfied. The ceremony was quickly performed; and within an hour of first setting eyes on each other, the children were separated—Lord March being whisked back to his school-books, and his bride to her nursery toys.

Many years later Lord March returned to London after a prolonged tour round the world—a strikingly handsome, cultured young man, by no means eager to renew his acquaintance with the "ugly duckling" who was his wife. One evening when he was at the opera his eyes were drawn to a vision of rare girlish loveliness in one of the boxes. He had seen no sight so fair in all his wide travels; it fascinated him as beauty never yet had had power to do.

Turning to a neighbour he asked who the lovely girl was. "You must indeed be a stranger to London," was the answer, "if you do not know the beautiful Lady March, the toast of the town!" Lady March! Could that exquisite flower of young womanhood be the ugly, awkward girl he had married so strangely as a boy? Impossible! He proceeded to the box, introduced himself, and found to his delight that the beautiful girl was indeed none other than Lady March, whom he had every right to claim as his wife. A few too brief years of happy wedded life followed; and when the Earl died in the prime of manhood his Countess, unable to live without him, began to droop and, within a few months, followed him to the grave.

Such was the singular romance to which Lady Sarah Lennox owed her being, a romance which was to have a parallel in her own life. As a child in the nursery she gave promise of charms at least as great as those of her mother. And she was as merry and full of mischief as she was beautiful.

One day (it is her son who tells the story) she was walking with her nurse and her aunt, Lady Louisa Conolly, in Kensington Gardens, when George II. chanced to stroll by. Breaking away from her guardian the pretty little madcap ran up to the King and exclaimed in French: "How do you do, Mr King? You have a beautiful house here, *n'est-ce pas?*" George was so delighted with the child's *naivete* that he took her up in

his arms, gave her a hearty kiss, and would not release her until she had promised to come and see him.



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And how the King and his “little sweetheart,” as he called her, enjoyed these visits! and the merry romps they had together!

“On one occasion,” says Captain Napier (Lady Sarah’s son of much later days), “after a romp with my mother, the King suddenly snatched her up in his arms, and, after squeezing her in a large china jar, shut down the cover to prove her courage; but soon released her when he found that the only effect was to make her, with a merry voice, begin singing the French song of Malbruc, with which he was quite delighted.”

But these happy days of romping with a King came too soon to an end. On her mother’s death Lady Sarah, then only five years old, was carried off to Ireland, to the home of Lady Kildare. There she remained for eight years, when she returned to England and the guardianship of her eldest sister, Lady Holland. As soon as George heard of the return of his little playmate he sent for her, hoping to resume the romps of early years. But Lady Sarah, though prettier than ever, proved so shy and so embarrassed by the King’s familiarities that at last he exclaimed in disgust: “Pooh! she has grown too stupid!”

But if Lady Sarah’s shyness had cost her the King’s favour, her beauty and girlish grace quickly won for her another Royal friend—none other than George’s grandson and heir to the throne, then a handsome boy little older than herself, and at least equally diffident. Every time the young Prince saw her he became more and more her slave, until his conquest was complete. He was only happy by her side; while she found her dogs and squirrels more entertaining company than the King-to-be.

Lady Sarah was now blossoming into young womanhood. Every year added some fresh touch of beauty and grace. She was the pet and idol of the Court, captivating young and old alike by her charms and winsomeness. Horace Walpole raved about her. When she took part in a play at Holland House, of which he was a spectator, he wrote:

“Lady Sarah was more beautiful than you can conceive.... When she was in white, with her hair about her ears and on the ground, no Magdalen by Correggio was half so lovely and so expressive.”

And Lord Holland, her brother-in-law, draws this alluring picture of her:

“Her beauty is not easily described otherwise than by saying she had the finest complexion, most beautiful hair, and prettiest person that was ever seen, with a sprightly and fine air, a pretty mouth, and remarkably fine teeth, and excess of bloom in her cheeks.”

Although the Prince’s passion for her was patent to all the Court, she seems either not to have seen it or to have been indifferent to it—an indifference which naturally only



served to feed the flames of his love. One day shortly after he had succeeded to the throne, George, the shyest of Royal lovers, determined to unbosom himself to Lady Sarah's friend, Lady Susan Strangways, since



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he could not summon up courage to declare his passion to the lady herself. After turning the conversation to the Coronation, "Ah!" he exclaimed with a sigh, "there will be no Coronation until there is a Queen." "But why, sir?" asked Lady Susan in surprise. "They want me to have a foreign Queen," George answered, "but I prefer an English one; and I think your friend is the fittest person in the world to be my Queen. Tell her so from me, will you?"

A few days later when the King met Lady Sarah, he asked: "Has your friend given you my message?" "Yes, sir." "And what do you think of it? Pray tell me frankly; for on your answer all my happiness depends. What do you think of it?" "Nothing, sir," Lady Sarah answered demurely, with downcast eyes. "Pooh!" exclaimed the King, as he turned away in dudgeon, "nothing comes of nothing."

Thus foolishly Lady Sarah turned her back on a throne, which there is small doubt might have been hers for a word. Why that word was not spoken will always remain a mystery. It was said that her heart had already been won by Lord Newbattle, a handsome young gallant of the Court; but what was taken for a conquest seems to have been but a passing flirtation. How little Lord Newbattle's heart was involved was shortly proved when, on learning that Lady Sarah had been thrown from her horse and had broken her leg, he made the heartless remark, "That will do no great harm, for her legs were ugly enough before!"

The news of this accident, however, had a very different effect on the young King, who was consumed with anxiety about the girl he still loved passionately, in spite of her coldness. He promptly sent the Court surgeon to attend to her; kept couriers constantly travelling to and fro to bring the latest bulletins, and knew no peace until she was restored to health again. When at last she was able to return to London he was unremitting in his attentions to her. He was never happy apart from her; and, in fact, his intentions became so marked that his mother, the Princess-Dowager, and the ministers were reduced to despair.

Secret orders were given that the young people were never to be allowed to be together. The Princess, indeed, carried her interference to the extent of breaking in on their conferences, and rudely laughing in Lady Sarah's face as she led her son away. "I felt many a time," the insulted girl said in later years, "that I should have loved to box her ears." But Lady Sarah, who seems at last to have awakened to the attractions of the alliance offered to her, was not the girl to sit down tamely under such interference with her liberty. Her spirit was aroused, and she brought all her arts of coquetry to her aid.

If she could not see the King at Court she would see him elsewhere. When George took his daily ride he was sure to meet or overtake Lady Sarah, attired in some bewitching costume; or to see her daintily plying her rake among the haymakers in the

meadows of Holland House, a picture of rustic beauty well-calculated to make his conquest more complete.



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Once, it is said, when she had not seen her Royal lover for some days she even disguised herself as a servant and intercepted him in one of the corridors of the Palace. The coy and cold maiden who had told the King that she “thought nothing” of his advances, had developed into the veriest coquette who ever set her heart on winning a man. Such is the strange waywardness of woman; and by such revolutions she often courts her own defeat.

That King George still remained as infatuated as ever is quite probable. Had it been possible for him to have his own way, Lady Sarah Lennox might still have won a crown as Queen of England. But the forces arrayed against him were too strong for so pliant a monarch. In a weak moment, despairing of winning the girl he loved, he had placed his matrimonial fate unreservedly in the hands of the Privy Council; and from this surrender of his liberty there was no escape.

Colonel Graeme had been despatched to every Court on the Continent, in quest of a suitable bride for him; and his verdict had been given in favour of Charlotte Sophia, the unattractive daughter of the Duke of Mecklenburg Strelitz. The die was cast; and George, just when happiness was within his reach, was obliged to bury the one romance of his young life and to sacrifice himself to duty and his Royal word. To Lady Sarah the news of the arranged marriage was no doubt a severe blow—to her vanity, if not to her heart. It was a “bolt from the blue,” for which she was not prepared. But she was too proud to show her wounds.

“I shall take care,” she wrote to her friend, Lady Susan, on the very day on which the blow fell, “I shall take care to show that I am not mortified to anybody; but if it is true that one can vex anybody with a reserved, cold manner, he shall have it, I promise him. Now as to what I wish about it myself, excepting this little message, I have almost forgiven him. Luckily for me I did not love him, and only liked, nor did the title weigh with me. So little, at least, that my disappointment did not affect my spirits more than an hour or two, I believe. I did not cry, I assure you, which I believe you will, as I know you were more set on it than I was. The thing I am most angry at is looking so like a fool, as I shall, for having gone so often for nothing, but I don’t much care. If he was to change his mind again (which can’t be, tho’) and not give me a very good reason for his conduct, I would not have him; for if he is so weak as to be governed by everybody, I shall have but a bad time of it.”

A few days later, the Royal betrothal was made public. At the wedding Lady Sarah tasted the first fruits of revenge, when she was by common consent, the most lovely of the ten beautiful bridesmaids who, in robes of white velvet and silver and with diamond-crowned heads, formed the retinue of George’s homely little bride. During the ceremony George had no eyes for any but the vision of peerless beauty he had lost, who, compared with his ill-favoured bride, was “as a queenly lily to a dandelion.”



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The ceremony was marked by a dramatic incident which crowned Lady Sarah's revenge, and of which her son tells the following story. Among the courtiers assembled to pay homage to the new Queen was the half-blind Lord Westmorland, one of the Pretender's most devoted adherents.

"Passing along the line of ladies, and seeing but dimly, he mistook my mother for the Queen, plumped down on his knees and took her hand to kiss. She drew back startled, and deeply colouring, exclaimed, 'I am not the Queen, sir.' The incident created a laugh and a little gossip; and when George Selwyn heard of it he observed, 'Oh! you know he always loved Pretenders.'"

But if Lady Sarah had lost a crown there was still left a dazzling array of coronets, any one of which was hers for the taking. Her beauty which was now in full and exquisite flower drew noble wooers to her feet by the score; but to one and all—including, as Walpole records, Lord Errol—she turned a deaf ear. Picture then the amazement of the world of fashion when, within a year of refusing a Queendom, she became the bride of a mere Baronet—Sir Thomas Bunbury, who had barely reached his majority, and who, although he was already a full-blown Member of Parliament and of some note on the Turf, was scarcely known in the circles in which Lady Sarah shone so brilliantly.

More disconcerting still, Lady Sarah was avowedly happy with her baronet-husband.

"And who the d——," she wrote to her bosom-friend, Lady Susan, "would not be happy with a pretty place, a good house, good horses, greyhounds for hunting, so near Newmarket, what company we please in the house, and L2,000 a year to spend? Pray now, where is the wretch who would not be happy?"

And no doubt she was happy, with her dogs and horses, her peacocks and silver-pheasants, and her genial sport-loving husband who simply idolised her. Even after five years of this rustic life she wrote to Lady Susan, who was now also a wife:

"Good husbands are not so common, at least I see none like my own and your description of yours, from which I reckon that we are the two luckiest women living. As for me, I should be a monster of ingratitude if I ever made a single complaint and did not thank God for making me the happiest of beings."

It was fortunate that she had an idolatrous husband; for even in Arcadia she could not, or would not, keep her coquetry within decent bounds. She flirted outrageously with the neighbouring squires and with such men of rank as drifted her way; but the baronet saw no cause for alarm or resentment. He was frankly delighted that his wife had so many admirers. He basked genially in the reflected glory of his wife's conquests!

And Lady Sarah might have lived and died the baronet's adored wife had not Lord William Gordon crossed her path. Lord William was young, handsome, full of romance,



a dangerous rival to the bucolic and stolid baronet, under whose unobservant eyes he carried on an open flirtation with his wife. Before Lady Sarah realised her danger, she had drifted into a *liaison* with the handsome Scot, which could only have one termination. One morning in February 1769 Sir Thomas awoke to find his nest empty. Lady Sarah had flown, and Lord William with her.



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Then followed for Lady Sarah a brief period of fearful joy, of intoxicating passion. Far away near the Scottish border she and her lover spent halcyon days together. Their favourite walk by the banks of the Leader is known to-day as the "Lovers' Walk." It was a foolish paradise in which they were living, and a rude awaking was inevitable. After three months of bliss Lord William's family brought such pressure to bear on him that the lovers were compelled to separate—he to travel abroad, she to find a refuge from her shame under the roof of her brother, Charles, Duke of Richmond, at Goodwood, where, with her child (but not Sir Thomas Bunbury's), she spent a dozen years in penitence and isolation.

The life which had dawned so fairly seemed to be finally merged in night. Her betrayed husband had procured a divorce; and although he was chivalry itself in his forgiveness of and kindness to her, she realised that there was no hope of reunion with him. Days of weeping, nights of remorse, were her portion. But though she little dared to hope it, bright days were still in store for her—a happy and honourable wifehood, and the pride and blessing of children to rise up to do her honour.

It was the coming of the Hon. George Napier, an old Army friend of her brother, that heralded the new dawn for her darkened life. There were few handsomer men in England than this tall, stalwart son of the sixth Lord Napier, who is described as "faultless in figure and features." When he met Lady Sarah, under the roof of his old friend, her brother, he was still mourning the wife whom he had recently buried in New York; but the sight of such suffering and beauty allied touched a heart which he had thought dead to passion. That she was as poor as he was, and many years older mattered nothing to him. He soon realised that his only hope of happiness lay in winning her. In vain the lady protested that she was not fit to be his wife.

"He knows," she wrote to Lady Susan, "I *do* love him; and being certain of that, he laughs at every objection that is started, for he says that, loving me to the degrees he does, he is quite sure never to repent marrying me."

Lady Sarah's family put every possible obstacle in the way of the proposed union, but the masterful soldier had his way; and one August day in 1781 Captain Napier led his tarnished but loved and loving bride to the altar. For many years poverty was their lot; but they laughed at their empty purse and found their reward in mutual devotion and the sight of their children growing in strength and beauty by their side. Of their five sons, three won laurels on many battlefields and died generals; one of the trio was the famous conqueror of Scinde, another was the historian of the Peninsular War.

When, after twenty-three years of ideally happy life together, Colonel Napier (as he had become) died, his widow was disconsolate.

“How I wish I could go with him,” she wrote; “the gentlest, bravest man who ever brought sunshine and solace into a woman’s darkened heart.”



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But Lady Sarah was destined to walk life's path alone for nearly twenty years longer, finding her only comfort in watching the careers of her gallant boys.

To add to her misfortunes her last days were spent in darkness. The eyes that had melted with love and sparkled with mischief, could no longer even look on the sons she loved.

A pathetic story is told of these last clouded days of Lady Sarah's life. In the year 1814, when, although an old woman she had still twelve years to live, she was present at a sermon preached by the Dean of Canterbury in aid of an Infirmary for the cure of diseases of the eye. As the preacher drew a pathetic picture of King George, a liberal patron of the Infirmary, spending his days in darkness among the splendours of his palace, tears were seen to stream down Lady Sarah's cheeks, until, overcome by emotion, she asked her attendant to lead her out of the church.

Who shall say what sad and tender memories were evoked by this picture of her lover of fifty years earlier, in his darkness and isolation, shut out like herself by a dark barrier from the joy and light of life. Among the mental pictures that thronged her brain was, probably, that of a dainty maiden, rake in hand, glancing archly from under her bonnet at a gallant young Prince, whose eyes spoke love to hers as he rode lingeringly by; and that other picture of the same maid, with downcast eyes, declaring that she "thought nothing" of her Royal lover's vows, though they carried a crown with them.

CHAPTER XVII

THE COUNTESS WHO MARRIED HER GROOM

Life has seldom dawned for any daughter of a noble house more fair or full of promise than for the infant Lady Susanna Cochrane, second daughter of John, fourth Earl of Dundonald. All that rank and wealth and beauty could give were hers by birth. Her mother was an Earl's daughter, and had for grandfather the Duke of Atholl. Her paternal grandmother was Lady Susanna Hamilton, daughter of the Duke of Hamilton; and on both sides she came from a line of fair women, many of whom, like her mother, had ranked among the most beautiful in all Scotland.

Such was the splendid heritage of Lady Susanna when she opened her eyes on the world two centuries ago; and, during the earlier years of her life, it seemed that Fortune, who had already dowered her so richly, could not smile too sweetly on her. She grew to girlhood and young womanhood more beautiful even than her mother or her two sisters, Anne and Catherine, of whom the former became a Duchess at sixteen; while Catherine was not long out of the schoolroom before her hand was won by the Earl of Galloway.

As for Susanna, the loveliest of the “three Graces”—“Scotland’s fairest daughter,” to quote a chronicler of the time—she counted her high-placed lovers by the score almost before she had graduated into long frocks; and Charles, sixth Earl of Strathmore, was accounted the luckiest man north of the Tweed when he won her for his bride.



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It was an ideal union, this of the beautiful Lady Susanna with the stalwart and handsome young Earl—"the fairest lass and bonniest lad" in all Scotland; and none who saw their radiant happiness on their wedding-day could have dreamt how soon tragedy was to close so bright a chapter of romance.

For a few short years the young Earl and his Countess were ideally happy.

"I never thought," Lady Strathmore wrote to a friend,
"that life could be so sweet. The days are all too short
to crowd my happiness into."

Then, when the sky was fairest, the blow fell.

One May day in the year 1728, the young Earl went to Forfar to attend the funeral of a friend, and among his fellow-mourners were two men of his acquaintance, James Carnegie, of Finhaven, and a Mr Lyon, of Brigton, the latter a distant relative of the Earl.

After the funeral the three men sat drinking together, as was the custom of the time, and then adjourned to a tavern in Forfar, where they continued their potations until all three were, beyond all doubt, in an advanced state of intoxication, and ripe for any mischief.

From the tavern they went, uproariously drunk, to call on a sister of Carnegie, where Mr Lyon not only became quarrelsome, but with drunken jocularly, had the audacity to pinch his hostess's arms. It was with the utmost difficulty that Lord Strathmore induced his two companions to leave the house, in which one of them had so far forgotten what was due from him as a gentleman; and it was scarcely to be wondered at that an unseemly brawl began almost as soon as they were in the street.

Mr Lyon began to conduct himself more outrageously than before, now that the modified restraint of a lady's presence was removed. With boisterous horseplay, he pushed Carnegie into a deep gutter which ran by the roadside, and from which Carnegie emerged covered with mud and raging with fury. Such an insult could only be wiped out with blood; and, drawing his sword, Carnegie rushed at his tormentor. The Earl, in order to avert a tragedy, imprudently threw himself between the two antagonists, with the intention of diverting the blow. Carnegie's sword entered his body, passing clean through it; and he fell to the ground a dying man. Two hours later the young Earl gasped his life out in the tavern, where he had drunk "not wisely, but too well."

Thus a drunken brawl, following on a funeral, made a widow of the beautiful Countess of Strathmore just when life was at its brightest and best, and when the days seemed all too short to hold her happiness.

As for James Carnegie of Finhaven, he was brought to trial on a charge of murder, and every nerve was strained to bring him to the gallows. That this was not his fate, in spite



of the terrible provocation he had received, and the obviously accidental nature of the tragedy, he owed entirely to the skill and eloquence of his counsel, Robert Dundas of Arniston, who played so cleverly on the feelings and self-importance of the jury that they returned a verdict of acquittal.



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The widowed Countess mourned her lord deeply and sincerely. More beautiful than ever (she was barely twenty when this tragedy came to cloud her life), and richly dowered, many a wooer sought to console her with a new prospect of wedded happiness. She had naught to say to any of them. She preferred to live alone with her memories, and to find solace in good works. And thus for seventeen years she lived, a model of all that is beautiful in womanhood, captivating all hearts by her sweetness and graciousness, and by a beauty which sorrow only served to refine and make more lovely still.

Thus we find her in 1745, a gracious and lovely woman, still young, dispensing her charities and hospitalities, and esteemed everywhere as a model of all the proprieties. But she was still a woman. Romance and passion were by no means dead in her; and to this "eternal feminine" we must look for an explanation of the strange event which now follows in her story.

Among the Countess's many servants was one George Forbes, a young and strikingly handsome groom, who had been taken on as stable-boy by her late husband. Forbes was a simple, manly fellow, a peasant's son, and with no ambition beyond the state of life to which he had been born. He was proud of the fact that he had served his mistress well, and that she liked him. That Lady Strathmore valued her groom was proved by the fact that she chose him as her escort whenever she went riding, and that she promoted him to the charge of her stables—a proof of confidence which no doubt he had earned. But that his high-placed mistress should regard him otherwise than as a servant was an absurd idea which never entered his head.

One day, however, the Countess summoned the groom to her presence, and, to his amazement and embarrassment, told him that she had long grown to love him, and that she asked nothing better of life than to become his wife. Overcome with surprise and confusion, Forbes protested—"But my lady, think of the difference between us. You are one of the greatest ladies in the land, and I am no better than the earth you tread on." "You must not say that," the Countess replied. "You are more to me than rank or riches. These I count as nothing, compared with the happiness you have it in your power to bestow."

In the face of such pleading, from one so beautiful and so revered, what could the poor groom do but consent, fearful though he was of the consequences of such an ill-assorted union? And thus strangely and romantically it was that, one April day in 1745, the Countess of Strathmore, the descendant of dukes and kings, gave her hand at the altar to the ex-stable-lad and peasant's son.

What followed this singular union was precisely what was to be expected. The Countess was disowned by her noble relatives; her friends with one consent gave her the cold shoulder; and, unable to bear any longer the constant slights and her complete isolation, she was thankful to escape with her low-born husband to the Continent.



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Here familiarity with the groom quickly, and naturally, perhaps, bred contempt and disillusion. His coarseness offended every susceptibility; he was frankly impossible in such an intimate relation; and after she had given birth to a daughter in Holland, she arranged a separation, for which the groom was, at least, as grateful as herself. The child—the very sight of whom, reminding her as she did of the father, she could not bear—was placed in a convent at Rouen, where she was tenderly cared for by the abbess and nuns. As for the mother, weary and disillusioned, she rambled aimlessly and miserably about the Continent until, after nine years of unhappiness, death came to her at Paris as a merciful friend. Such was the sordid close of a life that had opened as fairly as any that has fallen to the lot of woman.

And what of the child who drew from her mother royal and ducal strains, and from her father the blood of stablemen and peasants? At the Rouen convent she grew up to girlhood, perfectly happy, among the nuns she learned to love. The sad and beautiful lady who had come once or twice to see her, and who, she was told, was her mother, had become a dim memory of early girlhood. Who the great lady was, and who was her father, she did not know. This knowledge the nuns, in their wisdom, kept from her—if, indeed, they knew themselves.

One day, in 1761, her days of childish happiness came to an abrupt and sensational end. A rough seafaring man called at the convent with a letter from her father demanding the return of his daughter. The bearer was sent by the captain of a merchant-vessel, who had instructions to convey the girl from Rouen to Leith; and, after an affecting farewell to the abbess and nuns, who had been so kind to her, Susan Janet Emilia (for that was the girl's name) started with her strange escort on the long journey to a parent whom she had never consciously seen. The father, released by the death of the Countess, had married a second wife of his own station, and had settled as a livery-stable keeper at Leith, where, with his rapidly-growing family, he had now made his home for some years.

At last Emilia was handed over to the custody of her groom-father, who conducted her to his home, which, as may be imagined, was a pitiful and sordid exchange for the peace and happiness of her convent life. From the first day the new life was impossible. Emilia was treated by her stepmother with coarseness and brutality; she was daily taunted with her dependent position, and shown in a hundred ways that her presence was unwelcome.

Can one wonder that the proud spirit of the girl rebelled against such ignominy? It was better far to trust to the mercy of the world than to bear the brutal treatment of her low-born stepmother. And thus it came to pass that, early one morning, before the household was awake, Emilia slipped stealthily away with a few shillings, all her worldly possessions, in her pocket. Walking a few miles along the shore, she took the packet-boat, and crossed to the Fife coast, thus placing a broad arm of the sea between herself and the house of misery and oppression she had left for ever.



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For days this descendant of Scotland's proudest nobles tramped aimlessly through the country, sleeping in barns or craving the shelter of the humblest cottage, and, when her money was exhausted, even begging her bread from door to door.

At last human nature reached its limit. Late one night, footsore and fainting from exhaustion and hunger, she presented herself at a remote farmhouse, and begged piteously for a meal and a night's rest. None but the hardest heart could have resisted such a pathetic appeal, and Farmer Lauder and his good wife had hearts as large as their bodies. At last the waif had fallen among good Samaritans. She was received with open arms; and instead of being sent away in the morning, was cordially invited to make her home with them.

The rest of Emilia's strange life-story can be told in few words. After a few years of peaceful and happy life in the hospitable farmhouse, she married the farmer's only son, an honest and worthy young fellow who loved her dearly. She became the mother of many children, who in their humble life knew nothing of their high-placed cousins, the Dukes and Earls of another world than theirs.

When, in process of time, her husband died—many of her children had died young, the rest were far from prosperous—Mrs Lauder retired to spend her last days in a small cottage at St Ninian's, near Stirling, where for a time she lived in the utmost poverty. Then, when her life was almost flickering out in destitution, a few of her great relatives condescended to acknowledge her existence. The Earls of Galloway and Dunmore, the Duke of Hamilton, and Mrs Stewart Mackenzie combined to provide her with an annuity of L100; and, thus secure against want, the old lady contrived to spin out the thread of her days a few years longer. Thus died, at the advanced age of eighty-five, eating the bread of charity, the woman who had in her veins the blood of Scotland's greatest men and her fairest women.

CHAPTER XVIII

A NOBLE VAGABOND

The circle of the British Peerage has included many "vagabonds," some of whom have worn coronets in our own day; but it is doubtful whether any one of them all has had the *wanderlust* in his veins to the same degree as Edward Wortley Montagu, whose adventurous life was ignominiously ended by a partridge-bone more than a century and a quarter ago.

It would have been strange if this blue-blooded "rolling-stone" had been a normal man, since he had for mother that most wayward and eccentric woman, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who dazzled England by her beauty and brilliant intellect, and amused it by her oddities in the days of the first two Georges. This grandson of the Duke of

Kingston, and great-grandson of the first Earl of Sandwich was “his mother’s boy”—with much of his mother’s physical and mental charms, and more than her eccentricities, as his story abundantly proves.



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As a child of three he accompanied his parents to Constantinople, where his father, the Hon. Sydney Montagu, was sent as our Ambassador; and there he won a place in history at a very early age as the first English child to be inoculated for the small-pox. Probably, too, it was his boyish life in Turkey that inoculated him with the passion for all things Eastern, that so largely influenced his later life.

His adventures began when his parents returned to London, and the boy was sent as a pupil to Westminster. It was not long before he rebelled against the discipline and trammels of school-boy life; and one day he threw down his Euclid and Caesar and vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed him. Every street, court, and alley was searched in vain for the truant; advertisements and handbills offering a reward for his recovery were equally futile. Not a trace of the runaway was to be found anywhere.

One day, a good twelve months after his family had concluded that the lad was dead, or, at least, lost for ever, Mr Foster, a friend of his father, chanced to be in Blackwall when he heard a familiar voice crying fish. "That is the voice of young Montagu," he exclaimed, and promptly despatched his servant to bring the boy to him. The fish-seller innocently came back, his basket of plaice and flounders on his head, and was at once recognised by Mr Foster as the truant son of Lady Mary.

For a time he denied his identity with the utmost coolness; then, seeing that denial was useless, he flung away his basket and took to his heels. It was not, however, difficult to trace him; he was tracked to his master's shop, where it was found that he had been a model apprentice and fish-hawker for a year; and he was induced to return to his parents and to school. Thus ignominiously ended Edward's first adventure, the precursor of a hundred others.

He had, however, only been back at his books a few months when he vanished again—this time as apprentice on a vessel bound to Oporto, the captain of which, a Quaker, treated the lad with all kindness and consideration. Arrived at Portugal he ran away again, and, tramping into the interior, begging food and shelter on the way, he found work in the vineyards, where for two years or more he shared the life of the peasants. One day, as good or ill luck would have it, he was ordered to drive some asses to the nearest seaport, where he was recognised both by the English Consul and his old friend, the Quaker; and once more the prodigal was induced to return to his father's roof.

For a time he proved a model student, to the surprise and delight of his parents; but once more "hope told a flattering tale." For the third time he disappeared, and was soon on his way to the Mediterranean as a sailor working before the mast, and ideally happy in his vagabond life. This time his father's patience was quite exhausted. He refused to trouble any more about his prodigal son, declaring that "he had made his bed and must lie on it."



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Mr Foster, however, the rescuer from the fish-basket, was of another mind. He went in chase of the fugitive, ran him to earth, and brought him again triumphantly home, submissive but unrepentant. It was quite clear that the boy would never settle down to the humdrum life of home and school, and, with his father's permission, Mr Foster took the restless youth for a long visit to the West Indies, where it seemed that at last he was cured of his passion for straying. A few years later we find him back in England, a model of stability, a student and a scholar, who, in 1747, blossomed into a knight of the shire for the County of Huntingdon. The rolling-stone had come to rest at last, and had actually developed into a pillar of the State!

But this eminently respectable chapter in Montagu's chequered life was destined to be a short one. He soon found himself so uncomfortably deep in debt that he vanished again—this time to escape from his creditors. He turned up smiling in Paris, where the sedate legislator blossomed into the gambler and *roue*, dividing his time between the seductive poles of the gaming-table and fair women.

His course of dissipation, however, received a sudden and severe check one Sunday morning in the autumn of 1751, when he was rudely disturbed by the entry of a *posse* of officials into his room, armed with a warrant for his imprisonment.

"On Sunday, the 31st of October 1751," Mr Montagu records, "when it was near one in the morning, as I was undressed and going to bed, I heard a person enter my room; and upon turning round and seeing a man I did not know, I asked him calmly *what he wanted?* His answer was that *I must put on my clothes*. I began to expostulate upon the motive of his apparition, when a commissary instantly entered the room with a pretty numerous attendance, and told me with great gravity that he was come, by virtue of a warrant for my imprisonment, to carry me to the Grand Chatelet. I requested him again and again to inform me of the crime laid to my charge; but all his answer was, that *I must follow him*. I begged him to give me leave to write to Lord Albemarle, the English Ambassador, promising to obey the warrant if his Excellency was not pleased to answer for my forthcoming. But the Commissary refused me the use of pen and ink, though he consented that I should send a verbal message to his Excellency, telling me at the same time that he would not wait the return of the messenger, because his orders were to carry me instantly to prison. As resistance under such circumstances must have been unavailable, and might have been blameable, I obeyed the warrant by following the Commissary, after ordering one of my domestics to inform my Lord Albemarle of the treatment I underwent." "I was carried to the Chatelet, where the jailors, hardened by their profession, and brutal for their profit, fastened upon me as upon one of those guilty objects whom they



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lock up to be reserved for public punishment; and though neither my looks nor my behaviour betrayed the least symptom of guilt, yet I was treated as a condemned criminal. I was thrown into prison, and committed to a set of wretches who bore no character of humanity but its form. My residence—to speak in the jail dialect—was in the SECRET, which is no other than the dungeon of the prison, where all the furniture was a wretched mattress and a crazy chair. The weather was cold, and I called for a fire; but I was told I could have none. I was thirsty, and called for some wine and water, or even a draught of water by itself, but was denied it. All the favour I could obtain was a promise to be waited on in the morning; and then was left by myself under a hundred locks and bolts, with a bit of candle, after finding that the words of my jailors were few, their orders peremptory, and their favours unattainable. “I continued in this dismal dungeon till the 2nd of November, entirely ignorant of the crime I was accused of; but at nine in the morning of that day, I was carried before a magistrate, where I underwent an examination by which I understood the heads of the charge against me, and which I answered in a manner that ought to have cleared my own innocence.”

The story of the charge and trial is a long one; but it can be briefly outlined as follows:—It seems that one, Abraham Paya, a Jew, who, disguised as “Mr Roberts,” was staying with a Miss Rose who was not his wedded wife, accused Montagu and two of his friends, Mr Taafe and Lord Southwell, of making him drunk as a preliminary to inveigling him into play and winning 870 louis d’or from him.

As the Jew, whom his losses had sobered, refused to pay, Montagu and his associates had compelled him by violence and threats to give them drafts for the sums owing to them. Then, knowing that payment would be refused, “Roberts” shook the dust of Paris off his feet, turned his back on lady and creditors alike, and ran away to Lyons. Whereupon, so said the complainant, Montagu and his fellow-thieves had ransacked his baggage (which he had foolishly left behind him), and appropriated all his money and jewels, to the value of many thousands of livres.

To quote Mr Montagu again, the latter part of the charge was that Mr Taafe

“smashed all the trunks, portmanteaus and drawers belonging to the complainant, from whence he took out in one bag 400 louis d’or, and out of another, to the value of 300 louis d’or in French and Portuguese silver; from another bag, 1200 livres in crown pieces, a pair of brilliant diamond buckles, for which the complainant paid 8020 livres to the Sieur Pierre; his own picture set around with diamonds to the amount of 1200 livres ... laces to the amount of 3000 livres, seven or eight women’s robes; two brilliant diamond rings, several gold snuff-boxes, a travelling-chest containing his plate and china,



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and divers other effects, all of which Mr Taafe (one of Montagu's co-defendants) packed up in one box, and, by the help of his footman, carried in a coach to his own apartment. That afterwards Mr Taafe carried Miss Rose and her sister in another coach to his lodgings, where they remained three days, and then sent them to London, under the care of one of his friends."

Fortunately for Montagu, the verdict of the Court was in his favour; and, after such an unpleasant experience, he was glad to return to England, where, such an adept at quick-changing was he, that we soon find him a full-blown Member of Parliament for Bossinery, lightening his legislative labours by writing a learned treatise on the rise and fall of ancient Republics. Was there ever such a man? Duke's grandson, fish-hawker, common sailor, peasant, *roue*, gambler, Member of Parliament, scholar—all *roles* came equally easily to him; and many more just as varied were to follow. It was while thus wearing the halo of learning and high respectability that his father died, leaving him a substantial income, and a large estate in Yorkshire to his eldest son, if he should have one. And now we find him leaving his law-making and cultivating letters and science in Italy, further enriched by the guinea which was all his mother, Lady Mary, condescended to leave her vagrant son. The rest—an enormous property—went to his sister, the Countess of Bute.

From Italy he went on a long tour through the East, where he seems to have played the *role* of Lothario very effectually. At Alexandria (to give only one of his love adventures) he lost his fickle heart to the beautiful wife of the Danish Ambassador, whom, under various pretences, he induced to leave the coast clear by getting him to go to Holland. The husband thus safely out of the way, Montagu proceeded to dispose of him. He showed the lady a letter from Holland giving sad details of his sudden death, and consoled the bereaved "widow" so well that she consented to reward him with her hand and to accompany him to Syria.

By the time the dead husband had returned to life Montagu was already weary of honeymooning, and was thankful to make his escape to Italy, free to woo, and, if necessary, to wed again.

We next find this human chameleon at Venice, wearing a beard down to his waist, sleeping on the ground, eating rice and drinking water, and recounting his adventures to all who cared to hear them. He was an Armenian, and played the part to perfection—until he wearied of it, and found another to play. At this time he wrote:

"I have been a labourer in the fields of Switzerland and Holland, and have not disdained the humble profession of postillion and ploughman. I was a *petit maitre* at Paris, and an abbe at Rome. I put on, at Hamburg, the Lutheran ruff, and with a triple chin and a formal countenance I dealt about me the word of God so as to excite the envy of the



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clergy. My fate was similar to that of a guinea, which at one time is in the hands of a Queen, and at another is in the fob of a greasy Israelite.”

From land to land he wandered, assuming a fresh character in each, and thoroughly enjoying them all. During a two years' residence at Venice he was visited by the Duke of Hamilton and a Dr Moore, the latter of whom gives the following entertaining account of the visit.

“He met us,” Dr Moore writes, “at the stairhead, and led us through some apartments furnished in the Venetian manner, into an inner room quite in a different style. There were no chairs, but he desired us to seat ourselves on a sofa, while he placed himself on a cushion on the floor, with his legs crossed, in the Turkish fashion. A young black slave sate by him; and a venerable old man with a long beard served us with coffee. After this collation, some aromatic gums were brought and burnt in a little silver vessel. Mr Montagu held his nose over the steam for some minutes, and snuffed up the perfume with peculiar satisfaction; he afterwards endeavoured to collect the smoke with his hands, spreading and rubbing it carefully along his beard, which hung in hoary ringlets to his girdle. This manner of perfuming the beard seems more cleanly, and rather an improvement upon that used by the Jews in ancient times.” “We had a great conversation with this venerable-looking person, who is, to the last degree, acute, communicative, and entertaining, and in whose discourse and manners are blended the vivacity of a Frenchman with the gravity of a Turk. We found him, however, wonderfully prejudiced in favour of the Turkish characters and manners, which he thinks infinitely preferable to the European, or those of any other nation. He describes the Turks in general as a people of great sense and integrity; the most hospitable, generous, and the happiest of mankind. He talks of returning as soon as possible to Egypt, which he paints as a perfect paradise. Though Mr Montagu hardly ever stirs abroad, he returned the Duke's visit, and as we were not provided with cushions, he sate, while he stayed, upon a sofa with his legs under him, as he had done at his own house. This posture, by long habit, has become the most agreeable to him, and he insists upon its being by far the most natural and convenient; but, indeed, he seems to cherish the same opinion with regard to all customs which prevail among the Turks.”

It was during this interview that Mr Montagu declared: “I have never once been guilty of a small folly in the whole course of my life”—probably making the mental reservation that all his follies had been great ones. Thus this singular sprig of nobility drifted through his kaleidoscopic life, changing his religion as lightly as he changed from priest to ploughman, or from debauchee to Armenian storyteller.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing he ever did was the publication of the following advertisement, the object of which was evidently to secure the large Yorkshire estate devised by his father to any son he might have:



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“MATRIMONY.—A gentleman who hath filled two succeeding seats in Parliament, is near sixty years of age, lives in great splendour and hospitality, and from whom a considerable estate must pass if he dies without issue, hath no objection to marry any lady, provided the party be of genteel birth, polished manners, and about to become a mother. Letters directed to —— Brecknock, Esq., at Wills’s Coffeehouse, facing the Admiralty, will be honoured with due attention, secrecy, and every possible mark of respect.”

At this time Montagu was the father of three children—two sons (one a black boy of thirteen, who was his favourite companion) and a daughter; but they all lacked the sanction of the altar.

A lady answering these delicate requirements was actually found, and Montagu would probably have graduated as a respectable husband and father of another man’s child had not his vagabond career been cut tragically short. One day, when he was dining at Padua with Romney, the famous artist, a partridge-bone lodged in the old man’s throat, and refused to budge. He was suffocating; his face grew purple—almost black. In terrified haste a priest was summoned to administer the last consolations of religion; but the dying man would have none of him. When he was asked in what faith he wished to leave the world, he gasped, “A good Mussulman, I hope.” A few moments later Edward Wortley Montagu, who had played more parts on the world’s stage than almost any other man who ever lived, was a corpse. This grandson of a Duke had begun his life of adventure as a fish-hawker, and ended it as “a good Mussulman.”

CHAPTER XIX

FOOTLIGHTS AND CORONETS

Ever since that tough old soldier Charles, first Earl of Monmouth and third Earl of Peterborough, hauled down his flag before the battery of Anastasia Robinson’s charms, and made a Countess of his victor, a coronet has dazzled the eyes of many an actress with its rainbow allurements, and has proved the passport by which she has stepped from the stage to the gilded circle which environs the throne.

The hero of the Peninsula and the terror of the French was an old man, with one foot in the grave, when the “nightingale” of the London theatres brought him to his gouty knees; but so resolute was he to give her his name that, to make assurance doubly sure, he faced the altar twice with her, before starting on his honeymoon journey across the Channel.

Pope, who was a friend of the amorous Earl, draws a pathetic picture of him in the latter unromantic days of his romance. During a visit to Bevis Mount, near Southampton, the poet writes:



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“I found my Lord Peterborough on his couch, where he gave me an account of the excessive sufferings he had passed through, with a weak voice, but spirited. He next told me he had ended his domestic affairs through such difficulties from the law that gave him as much torment of mind as his distemper had done of body, to do right to the person to whom he had obligations beyond expression (Anastasia Robinson). That he had found it necessary not only to declare his marriage to all his relations, but since the person who married them was dead, to re-marry her in the church at Bristol, before witnesses. He talks of getting toward Lyons; but undoubtedly he can never travel but to the sea-shore. I pity the poor woman who has to share in all he suffers, and who can, in no one thing, persuade him to spare himself.”

Pope, however, understated the Earl's vigour or his indomitable spirit; for he not only succeeded in getting to the sea-shore, but as far as Lisbon, where he died in the following October, but a few months after his second nuptials. My Lady Peterborough and Monmouth lived to see many more years, and by her dignity and sweetness to win as much approval in the Peerage as in the lowlier sphere of the stage.

Anastasia Robinson was the first star of the stage to wear a coronet, but where she led the way, there were many dainty feet eager to follow; and, curiously enough, it was Gay's famous *Beggar's Opera* that pointed the way to three of them.

Any one who chanced to drop in at a certain coffee-house at Charing Cross, kept by a Mr Fenton, in the days when the first George was King, might—indeed, he could not have failed to—have made the acquaintance of a “little witch” (as Swift called her) with a voice of gold, who was destined one day to be a Duchess. This little elf with the merry eyes, dancing feet, and the voice of an angel, was none other than Mrs Fenton's daughter by a former husband, a naval officer, and the prime favourite of all the wits and actors whom her fame drew to the coffee-house.

She sang for her stepfather's customers, danced for them, charmed them with her ready wit, and sent them into fits of laughter by her childish drolleries. Of course there was only one career possible for her, they all declared. She must go on the stage, and then she could not fail to take London by storm. She had the best masters money could secure for her; and when she reached her eighteenth birthday Lavinia Fenton made her first curtsy on the Haymarket stage as Monimia, in *The Orphan*. Her *debut* was electrifying, sensational. Such beauty, such grace, such wonderful acting were a revelation, a fresh stimulus to jaded appetites. Within a few days she had London at her feet. She was the toast of the gallants, the envy and despair of great ladies. Titled wooers tumbled over each other in their eagerness to pay her homage; but Lavinia laughed at them all. She knew her value; and her freedom was more to her than luxury which had not the sanction of the wedding-ring.



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Her real stage triumph, however, was yet to come. After appearing in the *Beaux's Stratagem* with brilliant success she was offered the part of Polly Peachum in Gay's Opera, which was about to make its first bow to the public. The salary was but fifteen shillings a week (afterwards doubled); but the part was after Lavinia's own heart. For a few intoxicating weeks she was the idol and rage of London; her picture filled the windows of every print-shop; the greatest ladies had it painted on their fans. Royalty smiled its sweetest on her.

Then, at the very zenith of her triumph, the startling news went forth—"The Duke of Bolton has run away with Polly Peachum." And the news was true. The popular idol, who had turned her back on so many tempting offers, had actually run away with Charles Paulet, third Duke of Bolton and Constable of the Tower of London; and the stage knew her no more. For twenty-three years she was a Duchess in all but name, until the Duke, on the death of his legal wife, daughter of the Earl of Carberry, was at last able to put Lavinia in her place.

As Duchess, a title which she lived nine years to enjoy, she won golden opinions by her modest dignity, her large-heartedness, and by the cleverness and charm of her conversation, which none admired more than Lord Bathurst and Lord Granville.

Duchess Lavinia had been dead thirty years when Mary Catherine Bolton, who was to follow in her footsteps, was obscurely cradled in Long Acre in 1790. Like Lavinia Fenton, Mary Bolton was born for the stage. As a child the sweetness of her voice and the grace of her movements charmed all who knew her. The greatest teachers of the day taught her to sing, and when only sixteen she made a brilliant *debut* as Polly, recalling all the triumphs of her famous predecessor.

But it was as Ariel that she made her real conquest of London. "So pretty and winning in pouting wilfulness, so caressing, her voice having the flowing sweetness of music, she bounded along with so light a foot that it scarcely seemed to rest upon the stage." It is little wonder that Ariel danced her way into many hearts, and that even such a sedate personage as Edward, second Lord Thurlow, should so far succumb to her fascinations as to offer her marriage. Her wedded life was only too brief, but she rewarded her lord with three sons; and a liberal share of her blood flows in the veins of the Baron of to-day, her grandson.

Not many years after Mary Bolton had danced her way into the Peerage London was losing its head over still another "Polly Peachum"—Catherine Stephens, daughter of a carver and gilder in the West of London. Miss Stephens, who like her predecessors in the *role*, sang divinely even as a child, was but seventeen when she made her first stage curtsy, and won fame at a bound, as Mandano in *Artaxerxes*. One triumph succeeded another until she reached the pinnacle of success as Polly of the *Beggar's Opera*.



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Catherine Stephens had no lack of gilded and titled lovers; but she was too much wedded to her art to listen to any vows or to be lured from it even by a coronet. Although, however, she eluded her destiny until the verge of middle age she was fated to die a Countess; and a Countess she became when George Capel, fifth Earl of Essex, asked her to be his wife. The Earl had passed his eightieth birthday, and was nearly forty years her senior; but he made her his bride, though he left her a widow within a year of their nuptial-day.

Since Catherine Stephens wore her coronet—and before—many an actress has found in the stage-door a portal to the Peerage. Elizabeth Farren, who was cradled in the year before George III came to his Throne, was the daughter of a gifted and erratic Irishman, who abandoned pills and potions to lead the life of a strolling actor, a career which came to a premature end while his daughter was still a child. Fortunately for Elizabeth, her mother was a woman of capacity and character, who made a gallant struggle to give her children as good a start in life as was possible to her straitened means; and by the time she was fourteen the girl, who had inherited her father's passion for the stage, was able to make a most creditable first appearance at Liverpool, as Rosetta, in Bickerstaff's *Love in a Village*.

So adept did she prove in her adopted art that within four years she made her curtsy at the Haymarket as Miss Hardcastle, in *She Stoops to Conquer*; and at once, by her grace and brilliant acting, won the hearts of theatre-going London; while her refinement, at that time by no means common on the stage, and her social graces won for her a welcome in high circles. Many a lover of title or eminence sought the hand of the sparkling and lovely Irishwoman, and none of them all was more ardent in his wooing than Charles James Fox, then at the zenith of his career as statesman; but she would have naught to say to any one of them all. Her fate, however, was not long in coming; and it came in the form of Edward Stanley, twelfth Earl of Derby, who, before his first wife, a daughter of the Duke of Hamilton, had been many months in the family-vault, was at the knees of the beautiful actress. He had little difficulty in persuading her to become his Countess; and one May day, in 1797, he placed the wedding-ring on her finger in the drawing-room of his Grosvenor Square house.

For more than thirty years Lady Derby moved in her new circle, a splendid and gracious figure, received at Court with special favour by George III and his Queen, before she died in 1829, transmitting her blood, through her daughter, Lady Mary Stanley, to the Earl of Wilton of to-day.

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While my Lady Derby was still new to her dignities, Eliza O'Neill was beginning to prattle in the most charming brogue ever heard across the Irish Channel, and to grow through beautiful childhood to witching girlhood. The daughter of a strolling actor who led his company of buskers through every county in Ireland from Cork to Donegal, the love of things theatrical was in her veins; and while she was still playing with her dolls she was impersonating the Duke of York to her father's Richard III. Everywhere the little witch, with the merry dancing eyes, won hearts and applause by her sprightly acting, until even so excellent a judge of histrionic art as John Kemble sought to carry her away to London and to a wider sphere of activity.

From Dublin, he wrote to Harris, manager of Covent Garden Theatre:

"There is a very pretty Irish girl here, with a touch of the brogue on her tongue; she has much talent and some genius. With a little expense and some trouble we might make her an object for John Bull's admiration in the juvenile tragedy. I have sounded the fair lady on the subject of a London engagement. She proposes to append a very long family, to which I have given a decided negative. If she accepts the offered terms I shall sign, seal and ship herself and clan off from Cork direct. She is very pretty, and so, in fact, is her brogue, which, by the way, she only uses in conversation. She totally forgets it when with Shakespeare and other illustrious companions."

And thus it was that John O'Neill's daughter carried her charms and gifts to London town in the autumn of 1812, when she justified Kemble's discernment by one of the most brilliant series of impersonations, ranging from Juliet to Belvidera, that had been seen up to that time on the English stage. For seven years she shone a very bright star in the firmament of the drama, winning as much popularity off as on the stage, before she consented to yield her hand to one of the many suitors who sought it—Mr William Wrixon Becher, a Member of Parliament of some distinction. Eliza O'Neill lived to be addressed as "my Lady," and to see her eldest son a Baronet, and her second boy wedded to a daughter of the second Earl of Listowel.

Five years before Miss O'Neill's Juliet came to captivate London, another idol of the stage was led to the altar by William, first Earl of Craven. Louisa Brunton, for that was the name of Craven's Countess, was cradled, like her successor, on the stage; for her father was well known at every town on the Norwich Circuit as manager of a popular company of actors, as devoted to his family of eight children as to his art. When Louisa made her entry into the world she was the sixth of the clamorous flock who roamed the country in the wake of their strolling father; and it would have been odd indeed if she had not acquired a love of the theatre to stimulate the acting strain in her blood.



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Such were the charms and talent that the child developed that, by the time she came to her eighteenth birthday she was carried off to London to appear at Covent Garden Theatre as Lady Townley in *The Provoked Husband*; and the general verdict was that no such clever acting had been seen since Miss Farren was lured from the stage by a coronet. And not only did she create an immediate sensation by her acting; her beauty, which a contemporary writer tells us, “combined the stateliness of Juno with the gentler and beauty of a Venus,” made her a Queen of Hearts as of actresses. So seductive a prize was not likely to be long left to adorn the stage; and although Miss Brunton consistently turned a blind eye to many a seductive offer, she had to succumb when his Lordship of Craven joined the queue of her courtiers. Four years of stage sovereignty and then the coronet of a Countess; such was the record of this daughter of a strolling player, whose greatest ambition had been to provide food enough for his hungry family. Lady Craven lived nearly sixty years to enjoy her dignities and splendours, surviving long enough to see her grandson take his place as third Earl of his line.

[Illustration: HARRIET, DUCHESS OF ST ALBANS]

For twenty years the English stage had no star to compare in brilliancy with Harriet Mellon, whose life-story is one of the most romantic in theatrical annals. From the January day in 1795 when she made her bow on the Drury Lane stage as Lydia in *The Rivals*, to her farewell appearance in February 1815, a month after she had become a wife, her career was one unbroken sequence of triumphs. To quote the words of a chronicler,

She shone supreme, splendid, unapproachable, not only by her brilliant genius, but by her beauty and social fascinations.

That she revelled in her conquests is certain; for to not one of her army of wooers, many of them men of high rank, would she deign more than a smile, until old Thomas Coutts came, with all the impetus of his money-bags behind him, and literally swept her off her feet. The lady who had spurned coronets could not resist a million of money, qualified though it was by the admiration of a senile lover.

Nor did she ever have cause to regret her choice; for no husband could have been more devoted or more lavish than this shabby old banker who used to chuckle when he was taken for a beggar, and alms were thrust into his receptive hand. Wonderful stories are told of Mr Coutts' generosity to his beautiful wife, for whom nothing that money could buy was too good.

One day—it is Captain Gronow who tells the tale—Mr Hamlet, a jeweller, came to his house, bringing for the banker's inspection a magnificent diamond-cross which had been worn on the previous day (of George IV's Coronation) by no less a personage than the Duke of York. At sight of its rainbow fires Mrs Coutts exclaimed: “How happy I



should be with such a splendid piece of jewellery!" "What is it worth?" enquired her husband. "I could not possibly part with it for less than L15,000," the jeweller replied. "Bring me a pen and ink," was the only remark of the doting banker who promptly wrote a cheque for the money, and beamed with delight as he placed the jewel on his wife's bosom.



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Upon her breast a sparkling cross she wore
Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore.

And this devotion—idolatry almost—lasted as long as life itself, reaching its climax in his will, in which he left his actress-wife every penny of his enormous fortune, amounting to £900,000, “for her sole use and benefit, and at her absolute disposal, without the deduction of a single legacy to any other person.”

That a widow so richly dowered with beauty and gold should have a world of lovers in her train is not to be wondered at. For five years she retained her new freedom, and then yielded to the wooing of William Aubrey de Vere, ninth Duke of St Albans (whose remote ancestor was Nell Gwynn, the Drury Lane orange-girl and actress), who made a Duchess of her one June day in 1827.

For ten short years Harriet Mellon reigned it as a Duchess, retaining her vast fortune in her own hands and dispensing it with a large-hearted charity and regal hospitality, moving among Royalties and cottagers alike with equal dignity and graciousness. At her beautiful Highgate home she played the hostess many a time to two English Kings and their Queens.

“The inhabitants of Highgate still bear in memory,” Mr Howitt records, “her splendid fetes to Royalty, in some of which, they say, she hired all the birds of the bird-dealers in London, and fixing their cages in the trees, made her grounds one great orchestra of Nature’s music.”

When her Grace died, universally beloved and regretted, in 1837, she proved her gratitude and loyalty to her banker-husband by leaving all she possessed, a fortune now swollen to £1,800,000, to Miss Angela Coutts (grand-daughter of Thomas Coutts and his first wife, Eliza Stark, a domestic servant) who, as the Baroness Burdett-Coutts of later years, proved by her large munificence a worthy trustee and dispenser of such vast wealth.

Such are but a few of the romantic alliances between the peerage and the stage, of which, during the last score of years, since Miss Connie Gilchrist blossomed into the Countess of Orkney and Miss Belle Bilton into my Lady Clancarty, there has been such an epidemic.

CHAPTER XX

A PEASANT COUNTESS

In the dusk of a July evening in the year 1791 a dust-covered footsore traveller entered the pretty little Shropshire village of Bolas Magna, which nestles, in its setting of green fields and orchards, almost in the shadow of the Wrekin. The traveller had tramped



many a long league under a burning sun, and was too weary to fare farther. Moreover, night was closing in fast, and a few hissing raindrops and the distant rumble of thunder warned him that a storm was about to break.

He must find some sort of shelter for the night; and among the few thatch-covered cottages in whose windows lights were beginning to twinkle, his steps led him to a modest farmhouse behind the small village church. In answer to his knock, the door was opened by a burly, pleasant-faced farmer, of whom the stranger craved a refuge from the storm until the morning, and a little food for which he offered to pay handsomely. "I shall be grateful for even a chair to sit on," added the weary traveller, when the farmer protested that he had no accommodation to offer him.



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“Very well,” said the farmer, relenting. “Come in, and we’ll do the best we can for you. It’s going to be a bad night, not fit to turn a dog out in, much less a gentleman; and I can see you’re that.” And a few minutes later the grateful stranger was seated in Farmer Hoggins’s cosy kitchen before a steaming plate of stew, while the thunder crashed overhead and the rain dashed in a deluge against the window-panes.

Thus dramatically opened one of the most romantic chapters in the story of the British Peerage. As Farmer Hoggins shrewdly concluded, his travel-stained guest was at least a gentleman. His voice and bearing proclaimed that fact. But the farmer little suspected the true rank of the man he was thus “entertaining unawares,” or all that was to come from his good-hearted hospitality to a stranger who was so affable and so entertaining.

Although he was known in his own world as plain Mr Henry Cecil, he was a man of ancient lineage, and closely allied to some of the greatest in the land. Long centuries earlier, when William Rufus was King, one of his ancestors had done doughty deeds in the conquest of Glamorganshire; and from that distant day all his forefathers had been men who had held their heads among the highest. One of them was none other than the famous Lord Burleigh, one of England’s greatest statesmen, favourite Minister and friend of Henry VIII. and his two Queen-daughters. So great was my Lord Burleigh’s wealth that, as Sir Bernard Burke tells us,

“he had four places of residence—his lodgings at Court, his house in the Strand, his family seat at Burleigh, and his own favourite seat of Theobalds, near Waltham Cross, to which he loved to retire from harness. At his house in London he supported a family of fourscore persons, without counting those who attended him in public.“He kept a standing table for gentlemen, and two other tables for those of a meaner condition; and these were always served alike, whether he was in or out of town. Twelve times he entertained Elizabeth at his house, on more than one occasion for some weeks together; and, as royal visits are rather expensive luxuries, and Elizabeth’s formed no exception to the rule (for they cost between L1,000 and L2,000), the only wonder is that his purse was not exhausted, and that he was able to leave his son L25,000 in money and valuable effects, besides L4,000 a year in landed estates.”

Such was the splendour of this early Cecil, whose two sons were both raised to Earldoms—of Exeter and Salisbury—on the same day.

Henry himself was heir to one of these family Earldoms—that of Exeter—and some day would wear a coronet and be lord of vast estates, although the knowledge gave him little pleasure. His parents had died in his boyhood; and as his uncle, the Earl, took no interest in his heir, the lad was left to his own devices. In good time he had wooed and married the pretty daughter of a West of England squire, a Miss Vernon, who proved as wayward as she was winsome. His wedded life was indeed so far from being a bed of

roses that he was thankful to recover his liberty by divorcing his wife; and at the age of thirty-seven, but a few months before this story opens, he was a free man once more.



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Courts and coronets had no attractions for him. His marriage had proved a bitter draught. He was a disappointed and disillusioned man, and he determined that if ever he took another wife she should be "a plain, homely, and truly virtuous maiden, in whatever sphere of life I find her. Then I swear with King Cophetua, 'This beggar-maid shall be my Queen.'"

Full of this romantic, if quixotic, resolve, Henry Cecil strapped a knapsack on his back, and, staff in hand, tramped off in search of the "beggar-maid" who was to bring him happiness at last; or, if he could not discover her, at least to find some place of retirement where he could lead a simple life, remote from the empty splendours and vanities of the world to which he was born, and in which he had sought happiness in vain.

And thus it was that in his wanderings his steps led him to the little village in Shropshire, and to the hospitable roof of Farmer Hoggins and his good wife, whose hearts he had won before the humble supper-table was cleared on that stormy July night. No doubt the stranger's enjoyment of the farmer's hospitality was enhanced by the glimpses he had caught of his host's daughter, Sarah, a rustic beauty of seventeen summers, with a complexion of "cream and roses," with a wealth of brown hair, and lovely blue eyes which from time to time glanced shyly at the good-looking stranger.

No doubt, too, it was the wish to see more of pretty Miss Sarah that was responsible for the stranger's reluctance to resume his journey on the following morning, which dawned bright and beautiful. So far from showing any anxiety to continue his tramping, Cecil begged his host's and hostess's permission to spend a few days with them. He was, he said, a painter by profession; it would give him the greatest pleasure to spend a few days sketching in such a beautiful district; and he would pay well for the hospitality.

The farmer and his wife, who had already grown attached to their pleasant guest, were by no means unwilling to accept the offer; nor did they raise any protest when the days grew into weeks and months. These were halcyon days for the world-weary man—delightful days of sketching in the open air in an environment of natural beauty; peaceful evenings spent with his simple-minded hosts and friends; and, happiest of all, the hours in which he basked in the smiles and blushes of pretty Sarah Hoggins, carrying home her pails of milk, helping her to churn the butter, or telling to her wondering ears stories of the great world outside her ken, while the sunset steeped the orchard trees above their heads in glory.



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To Sarah he was known as "Mr Jones"; and to her innocent mind it never occurred that he could be other than the painter he professed to be. The villagers, however, were sceptical. True, the stranger was a pleasant man who always gave them a cheery "good-day," and gossiped with them in the friendliest manner. But that there was some mystery connected with him, all agreed. "Painter chaps" were notoriously poor, and this man always seemed to have plenty of money to fling about. Then, he would disappear periodically, and always returned with more money. Where did he go, and how did he get his gold? There could be little doubt about it. This handsome, mysterious, pleasant-tongued stranger must be a highwayman; for it was a fact that every time he was absent, a coach or a chaise was held up in the neighbourhood and its occupants relieved of their valuables.

Suspicion became certainty when Mr Jones bought a piece of land in their village and began to build the finest house in the whole district, a house which must cost, in their bucolic view, a "mint o' money." But Mr Jones simply smiled at their suspicions, and made himself more agreeable than ever. He loved the farmer's daughter, and she made no concealment of her love for him, and nothing else mattered. He had won his "beggar-maid," and happiness was at last within his grasp.

When he asked his hosts for the hand of their daughter in marriage, the good lady was indignant. "Marry Sarah!" she exclaimed. "What, to a fine gentleman? No, indeed; no happiness can come from such a marriage!"

But the farmer for once put his foot down. "Yes," he said, "he shall marry her. The lass loves him dearly; and has he not house and land, too, and plenty of money to keep her?" And thus it came to pass that one October day the church-bells of Bolas rang a merry peal; the villagers put on their gala clothes; and, amid general rejoicing, qualified by not a few dark hints and forebodings, Sarah Hoggins was led to the rustic altar by her "highwayman" bridegroom.

For two ideally happy years Mr Jones lived with his humble bride in the fine new house which he had built for her, and which he called Burleigh Villa. He had lived down his character of highwayman, and was regarded, and respected, as the most important man in the village. He was even appointed to the honourable offices of churchwarden and overseer; while under his tuition his peasant-wife was becoming, in the words of the village gossips, "quite the lady."

One day towards the end of December, 1793, after two years of this idyllic life, Mr Jones chanced to read in a country paper news which he had dreaded, for it meant a revolution in his life, the return to the world he had so gladly forsaken. His dream of the simple life, of peaceful days, was at an end. His uncle, the old Earl, was dead, and the coronet and large estates had devolved on him. Should he refuse to take them, and end his days in this idyllic obscurity, or should he claim the "baubles," and return to the hollow splendour of a life on which he had turned his back?



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The struggle between duty and inclination was long and bitter; but in the end duty carried the day. He would go to "Burghley House by Stamford Town," and fill his place on the roll of the Earls of Exeter. To his wife he merely said: "To-morrow we must start on a journey to Lincolnshire. Business calls me there, and we will go together," a proposal to which she gladly consented, for it meant that she would see something of the great outside world with the husband she loved.

At daybreak next morning "Mr Jones" said good-bye to his kind hosts and relatives and to the scene of so much peaceful happiness, and, mounting his wife behind him on a pillion, started on the journey to distant Lincolnshire. Through Cannock Chase, by Lichfield and Leicester, they rode, finding hospitality at many a great house on the way, rather to the dismay of Sarah, who would have preferred the accommodation of some modest inn, and who marvelled not a little that her husband, the obscure artist, should be known to and welcomed by such great folk. But was he not her hero, one of "Nature's gentlemen," and as such the equal of any man in the land?

At last, after days of happy journeying through the cold December days, they came within view of a stately mansion placed in a lordly park, at sight of which Sarah exclaimed, with sparkling eyes, "Oh, what a beautiful house!" "Yes," answered her husband, reining in his horse to enjoy the view; "it is a lovely place. How would you like, my dear Sally, to be its mistress?" Sally broke into a merry peal of laughter. "Only fancy *me*," she said, "mistress of such a noble house! It's too funny for words. But how I should love it if we were only rich enough to live in it!" "I am so glad you like it, darling," answered her husband, as he turned in the saddle and placed an arm around her waist; "for it is yours. I am the Earl of Exeter, its owner, and you—well, you are my Countess—and my Queen."

"Now welcome, Lady!" exclaimed the Earl—
'This Castle is thine, and these dark woods all.'
She believed him wild, but his words were truth,
For Ellen is Lady of Rosenthal."

He did not, like the hero of Moore's ballad, "blow his horn with a lordly air"; but with his Countess he presented himself at the door of Burleigh to receive the homage and welcome due to its lord.

"Many a gallant gay domestic
Bow before him at the door;
And they speak in gentle murmur
When they answer to his call,
While he treads with footsteps firmer
Leading on from hall to hall.
And while now she wanders blindly,
Nor the meaning can divine,



Proudly turns he round and kindly,
'All of that is mine and thine.'

Thus did Sarah Hoggins, the peasant-girl, blossom into a Countess, chatelaine of three lordly pleasure-houses, and Lady Bountiful to an army of dependents. The news of the romantic story flashed through the county, indeed through the whole of England; and great lords and ladies by the score flocked to Burleigh to welcome and pay homage to its heroine.



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For a few too brief years Countess Sarah was happy in her new and splendid environment, though it is said she often sighed for the dear dead days when her husband was a landscape painter, and she his humble bride in their village home. The modest primrose did not bear well the transplanting to the lordly hot-house. Her cheeks began to lose their roses. She bore to her husband three children; and then, "like a lily drooping, she bowed down her head and died," tenderly and lovingly nursed to the last breath by the husband whose heart, it is said, died with her.

Of her two sons, the elder succeeded to his father's Earldom, and was promoted to a Marquisate. The younger, Lord Thomas Cecil, married a daughter of the fourth Duke of Richmond—thus mingling the peasant blood of Hoggins with the Royal strain of the "Merrie Monarch,"—and survived until the year 1873. Her daughter had for husband the Right Honourable Henry Manvers Pierrepont, and became grandmother to the present Duke of Wellington, who thus has for great-grandmother Sarah Hoggins, the rustic beauty who milked cows and was wooed in the Shropshire orchard by "Mr Jones, the highwayman," when George the Third was King.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FAVOURITE OF A QUEEN

When Robert Dudley was cradled in the year 1532 the ball of Fortune was already at his feet, awaiting the necessary vigour and enterprise to kick it. He had, it is true, no great lineage to boast of. Cecil spoke contemptuously of him in later and envious years as grandson of a mere squire and son of a knight; but the so-called squire was none other than Edmond Dudley, the shrewd financier and crafty-tongued minion of Henry VII., who, with Empson for ally, filled his sovereign's purse with ill-gotten gold, and paid for his enterprise with his head when the eighth Henry set himself to the paying off of old scores. His father, the knight, was that John Dudley, King Henry's trusted friend and executor of his will, Admiral and Earl Marshal of England, whose splendid gifts and boundless ambition won a dukedom for him, and made him for a time more powerful than his King.

[Illustration: ROBERT DUDLEY, EARL OF LEICESTER]

Such was the parentage of Robert Dudley, the Duke of Northumberland's fifth son, who inherited, with his grandfather's scheming brain and plausible tongue, the ambition and love of splendour which made his father the most brilliant subject of two kings. And this great, if dangerous heritage was not long in manifesting itself in the young lordling, who was destined to add to his family's story a chapter more romantic and dazzling than that of which his father was the hero.



As a boy in the schoolroom he was quick to show gifts of mind almost phenomenal in one so young. Latin and Italian, mathematics and abstruse sciences came as easily to this scion of the Dudleys as reading and arithmetic to less-dowered boys. And with this precocity of mind he developed physical graces and skill no less remarkable until, by the time he was well in his 'teens, few grown men could ride a horse, couch a lance, or speed an arrow with such skill as he.



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At the Royal Court, where his ducal father was autocrat, the handsome boy of all the accomplishments found immediate favour and rapid promotion. He was dubbed a knight when most youths of his years were still wrestling with their Latin Grammar; he was appointed for life Master of the Buckhounds; and was chosen one of the six gilded youths who ministered to the King in the Privy Chamber. And in love he was as precocious as at the Royal Court and in mental and manly accomplishments, for at eighteen we find him standing at the altar in the King's Palace at Sheen, near Richmond, with his youthful Sovereign as best man.

Whether it was really a love-match or not is open to doubt, perhaps; for Robert Dudley seems to have had little voice in the choice of his bride. For his elder brother, Guildford, the Duke chose a wife of exalted rank, none other than the Lady Jane Grey, grand-daughter of Louis XII.'s Queen and Henry VIII.'s sister. But for his boy, Robert, a plain knight's daughter seems to have been good enough in his eyes; and she was Amy, child of Sir John Robsart, of Siderstern, a lady whose fate was to be as full of pathos and tragedy as that of his brother Guildford's wife.

For a time, however, Fortune seemed to smile on this union of the Duke's son and the Knight's daughter, who was as fair as she was to be unfortunate, and who was not without a goodly dower of Norfolk lands, on which her youthful husband settled for a few years of peaceful life. He soon became a man of mark in the county of his adoption, taking the lead in local affairs, administering his estates with skill, and finally blossoming into a Member of Parliament to represent his neighbours at Westminster. But the call of Court life was always in his ears; and many a long spell he stole from his wife and his rural duties to spend among the gaieties of Whitehall or the splendours of Henri II.'s French *entourage*.

With the death of the boy-king, Edward VI., a change tragic and unexpected came in the young knight's life. His ambitious father coveted a crown for his daughter-in-law, the Lady Jane Grey, whom he had induced Edward, on his death-bed, to nominate as his successor; and Northumberland, thus armed with Royal authority and spurred by his insatiable ambition, sought by force of arms to give effect to his scheme almost before the breath had left the late Sovereign's body. How his daring project failed is well-known history—how the Princess Mary on her way southward to her throne eluded Robert Dudley, who was sent to intercept her; how she equally outwitted Northumberland and his army, and made her triumphant entry into London as Queen; and how her vengeance fell on those who had sought to snatch the crown from her.

From the Duke and Lady Jane to Robert Dudley, all the traitors who had conspired to do this dastardly deed were sent to cool their misguided ardour in the Tower, from which Northumberland, Jane and her husband were led to the headsman's block; while Robert Dudley was among those who were left to languish in durance, and to while away the tedious hours of captivity by carving their emblems and names on the walls of their

cells, where they may be seen to this day, or to stroll disconsolately on the Tower leads by way of melancholy exercise.



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Robert, it is said, found many of these hours of duress far from unpleasant; for among the prisoners in the Tower was none other than the Princess Elizabeth, sister to the Queen (and her successor on the throne); and we are told, on what authority does not appear, that there were many sweet and stolen meetings between the fair young Princess and the captive knight, when bribed warders turned a blind eye on their dallying. And rumour even goes so far as to speak of secret nuptials, the fruits of which were, in late years, to bear such high names as my Lord of Essex and Francis Bacon.

“Fairy tales,” no doubt; but, stripped of such ornamental embellishment, there can be little doubt that it was within the Tower’s grim walls that Dudley first learnt to love the lady who was to be his Queen, and in whose life he was destined to play such a romantic part, when she should wear her crown, and he should be her avowed lover and aspirant to her hand.

A year of such pleasantly-qualified captivity, and Robert Dudley was a free man again, sent to purge his treason, by a Queen, indulgent to his youth and it may be to his good looks, by wielding a sword in the war then raging between Spain and France; and here he acquitted himself so valiantly for Mary’s Spanish allies that, on his return in 1558, covered with glory, the ban on the Dudleys was removed; and Robert and his brothers and sisters were restored to all the rank and rights their father’s treason had forfeited.

A few months later Queen Mary died; and when Elizabeth ascended the throne, Dudley’s sun burst into splendour. The romance which had been cradled amidst the fearful joys of prison-meetings, was now to flourish under vastly-changed conditions. That the new Queen had lost her heart to the handsome and accomplished cavalier, whose prowess in war had set the seal on the favour won by his graces of person and mind and his ingratiating charm, there can be small doubt; and as little that Dudley, forgetful of the wife left to pine in solitude in her Norfolk home, returned the devotion of the lady, now his Sovereign, who had made his Tower prison a palace of delight.

Nor did Elizabeth make any concealment of her passion. She was a Queen; and none should question her right to smile on any man, be he subject or king. Before she had been a year on the Throne, Dudley was proudly wearing the coveted Garter; was a Privy Councillor and Master of Her Majesty’s horse. She gave him fat lands and monasteries to add to the large possessions with which her brother Edward had endowed his favourite; and wherever she went on her Royal progresses, Robert Dudley rode gallantly at her right hand, a King in all but name. And no Queen ever had more splendid escort.

He was, indeed, a man after her own heart, the *beau ideal* of a cavalier; a lover, like herself, of pomp and splendour, a past-master of the arts of pageantry and pleasure, and the owner of a tongue as skilled in the language of adroit flattery as in the use of honeyed words. Such was Robert Dudley who loved his Queen; and such the Queen who returned undisguised admiration for flattery, and love for love.



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That the greatest Kings and Princes of Europe sought the young Queen's hand; that ambassadors tumbled over each other in their eagerness to press on her this splendid alliance and that, mattered nothing to her. Her hand was her own as much as her Crown—she would dispose of it as she wished, and none should say her nay. To the fears and anger of her people at the prospect of her alliance with a subject she was as indifferent as to the jealousies of Dudley's Court rivals. She could afford to smile at them all—and she did.

And, while Dudley was thus basking in the smiles of his Sovereign, the Lady Amy was eating her heart out in loneliness and a futile jealousy in Norfolk. Her husband, it is true, paid her a duty visit now and then, and kept her purse well supplied for dresses she had not the heart to wear. She knew she had lost his love, if, indeed, she had ever had it; and she spent her days, as was known too late, in tears and prayers for deliverance from a burden she was too weary to bear longer.

One day, in September 1560, an ominous rumour began to take voice. Dudley's wife had been poisoned—by her husband, it was said with bated breath. The Queen herself heard, and repeated the report to the Spanish Ambassador; varying it on the following day by the statement that “Lord Robert's wife had broken her neck. It appears that she fell down a staircase.” And this amended version proved to be tragically true. While Dudley was dallying with his Queen amid the splendours of the Court, his devoted wife was found, with her neck broken, lying at the foot of a staircase in the house of a Norfolk neighbour, whose guest she was.

How had this tragedy happened? and had Dudley any hand in it? were the questions that passed fear-fully from mouth to mouth, from end to end of England. The story, as told at the inquest, throws little light on what must always remain more or less a mystery.

This story was as simple as it was tragic. It seems that Amy Robsart (for by her maiden name she will always live in memory and in pity) rose early on Sunday morning, the 8th of September, the day of her death, and suggested that the entire household at Cumnor Place, at which she was staying, should leave her alone and spend the day at a neighbouring fair at Abingdon. “As for me,” she said, “I shall be quite happy alone. I have no taste for pleasure; but I always like to know that others are enjoying themselves, even if I cannot.” Eagerly responsive to such a welcome suggestion the entire household repaired to the fair, except the hostess (Mrs Owen) and a lady guest; and with them as companions Amy Robsart spent a quiet and peaceful day. During the evening she rose suddenly from the card-table, at which the three ladies were playing, and left the room; and nothing more was seen of her until the servants returning from the fair found her dead body at the stair-foot.



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Was it suicide or a brutal murder? The bucolic jury shrank from either conclusion, and gave as their verdict “accidental death.” That Amy Robsart ended her own life is far from improbable; for it was no secret to her friends that she was weary of it, and would welcome the release death alone could bring. But the general opinion, so far from supporting this plausible theory, turned to thoughts of murder, and branded Dudley as slayer of his wife. It was even commonly whispered that he had bribed one of his minions, Anthony Foster, to hurl her down the stairs to her death.

Whatever may be the truth, none could prove it then; and who shall succeed now? It is more generous and certainly more probable to suppose that Amy Robsart by her own act—wilful, at the dictate of a brain disordered by grief, or accidental—removed the barrier to her husband’s passion for his Queen. Certain it is that Dudley affected, if he did not actually feel, deep sorrow at his wife’s death, and that he spared no pains to solve the mystery that surrounded it.

His grief, however, seems to have been short-lived; for before the unhappy Amy had been many months in her grave we find him more ardent than ever in his devotion to Elizabeth, whose hand he was now free to claim. But the Queen, who was nothing if not an arrant coquette, was in no mood to be caught even by the man she loved. She drove him to distraction by her caprices. One moment she would “rap him on the knuckles,” only to smile her sweetest on him the next. One day she would flaunt in his face a patent of peerage, as evidence of her affection; the next she would cut the parchment to pieces under his nose, laughing the while. She roused him to frenzies of jealousy by dallying with one Royal offer of marriage after another—now it was Philip, the Spanish King, now His Majesty of Sweden—canvassing their respective merits and charms in his presence, and flaring into angry retorts when he ventured to ridicule his august rivals.

She carried her tortures even to the extent of seeming to encourage a match between her favourite and Mary Queen of Scots; and, to make him a worthy suitor for a Royal hand, granted him the peerage she had so long dangled before him. Robert Dudley as Baron Denbigh and Earl of Leicester was no unfit husband for her “Royal sister”; certainly a much more possible personage than “Sir Robert” could have been. But she never intended thus to lose her most acceptable admirer, and was relieved—though she affected to be angry—when news came that Mary had chosen Darnley for her husband. Thus was Leicester’s loss Elizabeth’s gain; and his reward was that he took still a higher place in her favour.

If he was not now King Consort in name, he was, at least, in place and power. When the Queen fancied she was dying of small-pox she announced her wish that he should be appointed Protector of the Realm at a princely salary; and, when she recovered, he was empowered to act as her deputy—to receive ambassadors, to interview ministers, and to sit in her seat at the deliberations of her council. To such an eminence had the favour of a Queen raised the grandson of the “country squire.”



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No wonder it was commonly rumoured either that she was actually Dudley's wife or that her relations with him were open to grave suspicion. "I am spoken of," she once bitterly said to the Spanish Ambassador, "as if I were an immodest woman. I ought not to wonder at it. I have favoured him because of his excellent disposition and his many merits. But I am young, and he is young, and therefore we have been slandered. God knows, they do us grievous wrong, and the time will come when the world knows it also. I do not live in a corner; a thousand eyes see all I do, and calumny will not fasten on me for ever."

But neither Elizabeth nor Dudley (or Leicester, as we must now call him) allowed these rumours and suspicions to affect even their familiarities, which were proclaimed to all on many a public occasion; as when the Earl once, during a heated game of tennis, snatched the Queen's handkerchief from her hand and proceeded to wipe his perspiring forehead with it.

To Elizabeth's passion for pomp and pageantry Leicester was indispensable. It was he who arranged to the smallest detail her gorgeous progresses and receptions, culminating in that historic visit to Kenilworth in 1575, every hour of which was crowded with cunningly-devised entertainments—from the splendid pageantry of her welcome, through banquets and masquerades, to hunting and bear-baiting—all on a scale of lavish prodigality such as even that most gorgeous of Queens had never known.

Thus for thirty long years Leicester held his paramount place in the affections of his Sovereign—a pre-eminence which was never seriously endangered even when he seemed most disloyal, and transferred to other women attentions of which she claimed a monopoly. When he flirted outrageously with my Lady Hereford, one of the loveliest women at Court, she responded by coquetting openly with Sir Christopher Hatton, Lord Ormonde, or Sir Thomas Heneage; and only laughed at the jealousy she aroused. "If a man may flirt," she would mockingly say, "why not a woman, especially when that woman is a Queen?" And, of course, to this question there was no other answer for my lord than to "kiss and be friends," and to promise to be more discreet in the future.

But the Earl was ever weak in the presence of beauty; and in spite of all his vows could not long be true even to his Queen. He lost his heart to the lovely wife of Lord Sheffield; and when her husband died conveniently and mysteriously (it was said that Leicester, with his doctor's help, removed him by a dose of poison) it was not long before he wedded her in secret, only just in time to make her child, whose name, "Robert Dudley," made no concealment of his parentage, legitimate. Before the child was many months old, however, the father was caught in the toils of another charmer, my Lady Essex, and after deserting his wife and, it is said, unsuccessfully trying to poison her, he made Lady Essex his Countess, in defiance of that secret wedding with Sheffield's widow.



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When news of this double treachery, with the ugly suspicions that attended it, reached the Queen's ears, her rage knew no bounds. She vowed that she would send her faithless lover to the Tower, that his head should pay forfeit for his false heart; and it was only when her anger had had time to cool that more moderate counsels prevailed, and she was content to banish him to a virtual prison at Greenwich.

It was not long, however, before her heart, always weak where her "sweet Robin" was concerned, relented; and he was summoned back to Court to resume his place at her side. In fact his very falseness and his follies seemed to make him even dearer to the infatuated woman than his loyalty and his love-making had ever done.

These days of silken ease were, however, soon to be changed. When, in 1585, Elizabeth wished to send her soldiers to help Holland in the struggle with Spain, her choice fell on Leicester to take command of the expedition, though his only experience of war had been more than a quarter of a century earlier, when young Dudley had left the Tower and his fellow Princess-captive's side to give his sword its baptism of blood in Picardy. At Flushing and Leyden, Utrecht and Rotterdam, the great English Earl and friend of England's Queen was received with the rapturous homage due to a Sovereign deliverer rather than to a subject. All Holland abandoned herself to a delirium of joy and festivity, and before he had been many weeks in the Netherlands a heroic statue rose at Rotterdam in his honour; and he was invited with one clamorous and insistent voice to take his place as governor and dictator of the land he had come to save.

Such a splendid lure was too potent for Leicester's ambition to resist. Without troubling to consult his Sovereign at home he accepted the "throne" that was offered to him; and it was only after ten days had elapsed that he deigned to despatch a messenger to Elizabeth with news of his promotion. Meanwhile, and long before his envoy, who was delayed by storms on his journey, could reach the English Court, Elizabeth had heard news of her favourite's presumption, and her Royal anger blazed into flame at his insolence in daring to accept such honours without consulting her pleasure.

She promptly despatched Sir Thomas Heneage, his whilom rival, to the Netherlands armed with a scathing letter in which the Queen poured out the vials of her wrath on Leicester's head.

"How contemptuously we conceive ourselves to have been used," she wrote, "you shall by the bearer understand. We could never have imagined, had we not seen it fall out in experience, that a man raised up by ourself, and extraordinarily favoured by us above any other subject of this land, would have in so contemptible a sort broken our commandment in a cause that so greatly toucheth us in honour ... and therefore, our express pleasure and commandment is that, all delays and excuses laid apart, you



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do presently, upon the duty of your allegiance, obey and fulfil whatsoever the bearer hereof shall direct you to do in our name. Whereof fail you not, as you will answer the contrary at your uttermost peril.”

One can imagine Leicester’s feelings on reading such words of Royal anger and reproach from the woman who had always shown such indulgence to him. His impulse was to resign his governorship forthwith, and to hasten back to London to beg forgiveness on his knees; but before he could give effect to this decision he had learned that Burghley had interceded for him with the Queen to such effect that, supported by a petition from the States-General, he was to be allowed to retain his office with Elizabeth’s reluctant consent.

A few months of rule, however, were sufficient to disillusionise the Dutchmen. Leicester proved as incapable to govern a country, as to lead an army. His arrogance, his outspoken contempt for his subjects, his incompetence and his capricious temper, so thoroughly disgusted the nation that had welcomed him with open arms, that he was asked to resign his office as unanimously as he had been invited to accept it; and in November of 1587, the Earl returned ignominiously to England, eager to repair his damaged credit by at least making peace with his Queen.

To his delight he was received with as much cordiality as if he had done naught at all to earn his Lady’s displeasure. Elizabeth had undoubtedly missed her favourite, her right-hand man. She had in fact become so accustomed to him that she could not be long happy unless he was at her side; and it was by her side that he rode and shared the acclamations with which her soldiers greeted her when she paid that historic visit to the camp at Tilbury on the eve of the Armada.

But Leicester’s adventurous life was now drifting to its close. His health had for some time given him cause for alarm, and in August 1588, he left his Kenilworth home to seek relief by taking baths and drinking healing waters; and from Rycott he wrote the last of his many letters to the Queen.

“I most humbly beseech your Majesty,” he wrote, “to pardon your poor old servant to be thus bold in sending to know how my gracious Lady doth and what ease of her late pain she finds, being the chiefest thing in this world I do pray for is for her to have good health and long life. For my own poor case I continue still your medicine, and find it amend much better than with any other thing that hath been given me. Thus hoping to find perfect cure at the bath, with the continuance of my wonted prayer for your Majesty’s most happy preservation, I humbly kiss your foot. From your old lodging at Rycott this Thursday morning ready to take on my journey. By your Majesty’s most faithful and obedient servant,— R. LEYCESTER.”



But the Earl was not destined to reach the baths. His course was run. He got as far on his journey as Coventry; and there, on the 4th of September, he drew his last breath. Some said that his end was hastened by a dose of poison administered by his Countess, eager to pursue unchecked her intrigue with Christopher Blount; others that she accidentally gave him a draught from a bottle of poison which he had designed for her. But neither suspicion seems to have any evidence to support it.



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Thus perished, little past the prime of life, a man who more than any other of his day drained the cup of pride and pleasure, to find its dregs exceeding bitter to the taste.

CHAPTER XXII

TWO IRISH BEAUTIES

In the winter of 1745 the city of Dublin was thrown into a state of high excitement by the appearance of a couple of girls from the wilds of Connaught, whose almost unearthly beauty won the instant homage of every man, from His Excellency the Earl of Harrington, then Lord Lieutenant, to the sourest jarvey who cracked a whip in her streets. To quote the pardonably extravagant language of a chronicler of the time,

“They swam into the social firmament of the Irish capital like twin planets of dazzling splendour, eclipsing all other constellations, as if the pall of night had been drawn over them.”

They had grown to girlhood, so the story ran from mouth to mouth, in a ruinous thatched house, in the shadow of Castle Coote, in County Roscommon, and were the daughters of John Gunning, a roystering, happy-go-lucky, dram-drinking squireen, whose most serious occupation in life was keeping the brokers' men on the right side of his door. And at the time this story opens they were living in a cottage, rented for a modest eight pounds a year, on the outskirts of Dublin, with their mother, who was a daughter of Lord Mayo.

To say that all Dublin was at the feet of the Gunning sisters, at the first sight of their lovely faces and dainty figures, is an unadorned statement of fact. The young “bloods” of the capital were their slaves to a man, ready to spill the last drop of blood for them; and every gallant of the Viceregal Court drank toasts to their beauty, and vied with his rivals to win a smile or a word from them. Peg Woffington, it is said, threw up her arms in wonder at the sight of them, and, as she hugged each in turn, declared that she “had never seen anything half so sweet”; and Tom Sheridan went down on his knees in involuntary homage to the majesty of their beauty.

It was Tom Sheridan who placed his stage wardrobe at their disposal when they were invited to the great Viceregal ball in honour of King George's birthday; and, attired as Lady Macbeth and Juliet respectively, they danced the stately minuet and rollicking country dances with such grace and abandon that lords and ladies stopped in their dances, and mounted on chairs and tables to feast their eyes on so rare and ravishing a sight.

“With Betty as with Maria,” says Mr Frankfort Moore, “the art of the dance had become part of her nature. Her languorous eyes were in sympathy with the voluptuous



movements of her feet and lithe body, and the curves made by her arms formed an invisible chain that held everyone entranced. The caresses of her fingers, the coyness of her curtsies, the allurements of her movements—all the graces and charms inwoven that make up the



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poem of the minuet—became visible by the art of that exquisite girl, until all other dancers became common-place by comparison.”

Such was the fascination of their beauty that, it is said, the sisters were one day drugged by a party of licentious admirers, whose guests they had innocently consented to be, and were actually being carried away by their ravishers when Sheridan, who had got wind of the plot, appeared on the scene with a number of stout-armed friends, and effected their rescue.

But even Dublin was no suitable market for such peerless beauties, Mrs Gunning decided. Through her they had the blood of the Plantagenets in their veins; and no man less than a Duke or an Earl—certainly not an Irish squire or impoverished lord—was a fitting match for her daughters. And so to England and London they were carried, flushed with their conquests, leaving broken hearts behind them, and heralded across the Channel by many a sonnet singing their beauty.

But, although each was equally fair, the sisters were by no means alike in their charms. Maria, all gladness and mirth, was a sprightly brunette, in whose laughing glances shone the fires of a pleasure-seeking soul; while Elizabeth, the younger, with soft blue eyes and dark golden hair, although infinitely more placid, was no less radiant than her dashing sister.

“Each was,” to quote another description, “divinely tall, with a figure of perfect symmetry, and a grace of dignity enhanced by the proud poise of the small Grecian head. Faultless also were the rounded arms and the hands, with their long, slender tapering fingers.”

All the portraits of Elizabeth reveal the same dainty disdainful lips in the shape of a Cupid’s bow, the long, slender nose, the half-drooping lids and lashes. In colouring there was the same delicacy. A soft, ivory pallor shone in her face, a flush of pink warmed her cheeks, there was a gleam of gold as the sunbeams touched her light brown hair.

Such, in the cold medium of type, were the two Irish sisters who took London by storm, and who “made more noise than any of their predecessors since the days of Helen,” in the summer of 1751. Their conquest was immediate, electrifying. London raved about the new beauties; they were the theme of every tongue, from the Court to the meanest coffee-house. Even Grub Street rubbed its eyes in amazement at the wonderful vision, and ransacked its dictionaries for superlatives; and the poets, with one accord, struck their lyres to a new inspiration.

Whenever the sisters took their walks abroad “they were beset by a curious multitude, the press being once so great that one of the sisters fainted away and had to be carried



home in her chair; while on another occasion their beaux were compelled to draw swords to rescue them from the mob.” When, too, they once went to Vauxhall Gardens, they found themselves the centre of a mob of eight thousand spectators, struggling to catch a glimpse of their lovely faces or to touch the “hem of their garments.”



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When, in alarm, they sought refuge in a neighbouring box, the door was at once besieged by jostling, clamorous thousands, who were only kept at bay by the sword-points of their escort. And when, one day, they visited Hampton Court, the housekeeper showed the company who were "lionising" the place into the room where they were sitting, instead of into the apartment known as the "Beauty Room," with the significant remark, "*These are the beauties, gentlemen.*"

With such universal and embarrassing homage, it is no wonder that all the gallants in town, from the rakish Duke of Cumberland downwards, were at the feet of the fair sisters, or that they had the refusal of many a coronet before they had been many weeks in London. Each sister counted her noble lovers by the score, and each soon capitulated to a favoured wooer.

Among Maria's most ardent suitors was the Earl of Coventry, "a grave young lord" of handsome person and courtly graces, who had singled himself out from them all by the ardour of his wooing; and to him Maria gave her hand. One March day in 1752, the world of fashion was thrown into a high state of excitement by reading the following announcement:—

"On Thursday evening the Earl of Coventry was married to Miss Maria Gunning, a lady possessed of that exquisite beauty and of those accomplishments which will add Grace and Dignity to the highest station. As soon as the ceremony was over they set out for Lord Ashburnham's seat at Charlton, in Kent, to consummate their nuptials."

Of Lady Coventry, who seems to have been as vain and foolish as she was beautiful, many amusing stories are told. So annoyed was her ladyship by the crowds that still followed her when she took the air in St James's Park that she appealed to the King for an escort of soldiers, a favour which was readily granted to "the most beautiful woman in England," Thus, on one occasion, we are told,

"from eight to ten o'clock in the evening, a strange procession paraded the crowded avenues, obliging everyone to make way and exciting universal laughter. In front marched two sergeants with their halberds, then tripped the self-conscious Lady Coventry, attended by her husband and an ardent admirer, the amorous Earl of Pembroke, while twelve soldiers of the guard followed in the rear!"

One day, so runs another story which illustrates her ladyship's lack of discretion, she was talking to King George II., who in spite of his age, was a great admirer of beauty, and especially of my Lady Coventry. "Are you not sorry," His Majesty enquired, "that there are to be no more masquerades?" "Indeed, no," was the answer. "I am quite weary of them and of all London sights. There is only one left that I am really anxious to see, and that is a *coronation!*" This unflattering wish she was not destined to realise; for King George survived the foolish beauty by a fortnight.



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Lady Coventry had no greater admirer of her own charms than herself. She spent her days worshipping at the shrine of her loveliness, and embellished nature with every device of art. She squandered fortunes in adorning it with the most costly jewellery and dresses, of one of which the following story is told. One day she exhibited to George Selwyn a wonderful costume which she was going to wear at an approaching fete. The dress was a miracle of blue silk, richly brocaded with silver spots of the size of a shilling. "And how do you think I shall look in it, Mr Selwyn?" she archly asked. "Why," he replied, "you will look like change for a guinea."

[Illustration: MARIA, COUNTESS OF COVENTRY]

Mrs Delany draws a remarkable picture of my lady at this culminating period of her vanity.

"Yesterday after chapel," she writes, "the Duchess brought home Lady Coventry to feast me—and a feast she was! She is a fine figure and vastly handsome, notwithstanding a silly look sometimes about the month; she has a thousand airs, but with a sort of innocence that diverts one! Her dress was a black silk sack, made for a large hoop, which she wore without any, and it trailed a yard on the ground. She had on a cobweb-laced handkerchief, a pink satin long cloak, lined with ermine mixed with squirrel-skins. On her head a French cap that just covered the top of her head, of blond, and stood in the form of a butterfly with wings not quite extended; frilled sort of lappets crossed under her chin, and tied with pink and green ribbon—a head-dress that would have charmed a shepherd! She had a thousand dimples and prettinesses in her cheeks, her eyes a little drooping at the corners, but fine for all that."

Such vanities may be pardoned in a woman so lovely and so spoiled by Fortune, especially as her reign was fated to be as brief as it was splendid. She was, perhaps, too fair a flower to be allowed to bloom long in the garden of this world. Before she had been long a bride consumption sowed its deadly seeds in her; and she drained the cup of pleasure with the fatal sword hanging over her head. She knew she was doomed, that all the medical skill in the world could not save her; and, with characteristic courage, she determined to enjoy life to its last dregs.

She saw her beauty fade daily, and pathetically tried to conceal its decay by powders and paints. She grew daily weaker; but, with a brave smile, held her place in the vortex of gaiety. Even when the inevitable end was near she insisted on attending the trial of Lord Ferrers for the murder of his steward. As Horace Walpole says,

"The seats of the Peeresses were not nearly full, and most of the beauties were absent; but, to the amazement of everybody, Lady Coventry was there, and, what surprised me more, looked as well as ever. I sat next but one to her, and should not have asked her if she had been ill, yet they are positive she has few weeks to live. She was observed to be 'acting over all the old comedy of eyes' with her former flame, Lord Bolingbroke, an

unscrupulous rake, who seems to have striven for years to make her the victim of his passion.”

Her conduct, indeed, seems never to have been very discreet.



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“Her levities,” says a chronicler of the time, “were very publicly talked of, and some gallantries were ascribed to her which were greatly believed. However, they were never brought home to her; and, if she were guilty, she escaped with only a little private scandal, which generally falls to the lot of every woman of uncommon beauty who is envied by the rest of her sex.”

During the summer of 1760 the unhappy lady lay at the point of death, in her stately home at Croome Court, bravely awaiting the end.

“Until the last few days,” says Mr Horace Bleackley, “the pretty Countess lay upon a sofa, with a mirror in her hand, gazing with yearning eyes upon the reflection of her fading charms. To the end her ruling passion was unchanged; for when she perceived that her beauty had vanished she asked to be carried to bed, and called for the room to be darkened and the curtains drawn, permitting none to look upon her pallid face and sunken cheeks.”

Thus, robbed of all that had made life worth living, and bitterly realising the vanity of beauty, Lady Coventry drew her last breath on October 1st 1760. Ten days later, ten thousand persons paid their last homage to her in Pirton churchyard.

* * * * *

Three weeks before Maria Gunning blossomed into a Countess her younger sister Betty had been led to the altar under much more romantic conditions, after one of the most rapid and impetuous wooings in the annals of Love. A few weeks before she wore her wedding-ring, the man who was to win her was not even known to her by sight; and what she had heard of him was by no means calculated to impress her in his favour. The Duke of Hamilton, while still young, had won for himself a very unenviable notoriety as a debauchee in an age of profligacy. He had drunk deep of every cup of questionable pleasure; and at an age when he should have been in the very prime of his manhood, he was a physical wreck, his vitality drained almost to its last drop by shameful excesses.

Such was the man who entered the lists against a legion of formidable rivals for the guerdon of Betty Gunning’s hand. It was at a masquerade that he first seems to have set eyes on her; and at sight of her this jaded, worn devotee of pleasure fell headlong in love. Within an hour of being introduced he was, Walpole says,

“making violent love to her at one end of the room, in my Lord Chesterfield’s house, while he was playing at pharaoh at the other; that is, he neither saw the bank nor his own cards, which were of L300 each. He soon lost a thousand.”

Such was the first meeting of the lovely Irish girl, and the man whom she was to marry—a man who, even in the thralldom of a violent love, could not refrain from indulging his

passion for gambling. So inflamed was he by this new beauty who had crossed his path that, to quote our entertaining gossip again,



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“two nights afterwards, being left alone with her, while her mother and sister were at Bedford House, he found himself so infatuated that he sent for a parson. The doctor refused to perform the ceremony without licence or ring—the Duke swore he would send for the Archbishop. At last they were married with the ring of the bed-curtain, at half an hour after twelve at night, at Mayfair Chapel. The Scotch are enraged, the women mad that so much beauty has had its effect.”

If the wooing be happy that is not long in doing, the new Duchess should have been a very enviable woman; as no doubt she was, for she had achieved a splendid match; the daughter of the penniless Irish squireen had won, in a few days, rank and riches, which many an Earl's daughter would have been proud to capture; and, although her Ducal husband was “debauched, and damaged in his fortune and his person,” he was her very slave, and, as far as possible to such a man, did his best to make her happy.

Translated to a new world of splendour the Irish girl seems to have borne herself with astonishing dignity and modesty. She might, indeed, have been cradled in a Duke's palace, instead of in a “dilapidated farmhouse in the wilds of Ireland,” so naturally did she take to her new *role*. When Her Grace, wearing her Duchess's coronet, made her curtsy to the King one March day in 1752,

“the crowd was so great, that even the noble mob in the drawing-room clambered upon tables and chairs to look at her. There are mobs at the doors to see her get into her chair; and people go early to get places at the theatre when it is known that she will be there.”

A few weeks after the marriage, the Duke of Hamilton conducted his bride to the home of his ancestors; and never perhaps has any but a Royal bride made such a splendid progress to her future home. Along the entire route from London to Scotland she was greeted with cheering crowds struggling to catch a glimpse of the famous beauty, whose romantic story had stirred even the least sentimental to sympathy and curiosity. When they stopped one night at a Yorkshire inn, “seven hundred people,” we are told, “sat up all night in and about the house merely to see the Duchess get into her post-chaise the next morning.”

Arrived at her husband's Highland Castle she was received with honours that might almost have embarrassed a Queen, and which must have seemed strange indeed to the woman whose memories of sordid life in that small cottage on the outskirts of Dublin were still so vivid. Indeed no Queen could have led a more stately life than was now opened to her.



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“The Duke of Hamilton,” says Walpole, to whom the world is indebted for so much that it knows of the Gunning sisters, “is the abstract of Scotch pride. He and the Duchess, at their own house, walk into dinner before their company, sit together at the upper end of their own table, eat off the same plate, and drink to nobody under the rank of an Earl. Would not indeed,” the genial old chatterbox adds, “one wonder how they could get anybody, either above or below that rank, to dine with them at all? It is, indeed, a marvel how such a host could find guests of any degree sufficiently wanting in self-respect to sit at his table and endure his pompous insolence—the insolence of an innately vulgar mind, which, unhappily, is sometimes to be met even in the most exalted rank of life.”

Perhaps the proudest period in Duchess Betty’s romantic life was when, with her husband, the Duke, she paid a visit, in 1755, to Dublin, the “dear, dirty” city she had known in the days of her poverty and obscurity, when her greatest dread was the sight of a bailiff in the house, and her highest ambition to procure a dress to display her budding charms at a dance. Her stay in Dublin was one long, intoxicating triumph. “No Queen,” she said, “could have been more handsomely treated.” Wherever she went she was followed by mobs, fighting to get a glimpse of her, or to touch the hem of her gown, and blissful if they could win a smile from the “darlint Duchess” who had brought so much glory to old Ireland.

Her wedded life, however, was destined to be brief. Her husband had one foot in his premature grave when he put the curtain-ring on her finger; but, beyond all doubt, his marriage gave him a new if short lease of life. She became a widow in 1758; and before she had worn her weeds three months she had a swarm of suitors buzzing round her. The Duke of Bridgewater was among the first to fall on his knees before the fascinating widow, who, everybody now vowed, was lovelier than ever; but he proved too exacting in his demands to please Her Grace. In fact, the only one of all her new wooers on whom she could smile was Colonel John Campbell, who, although a commoner, would one day blossom into a Duke of Argyll; and she gave her hand to “handsome Jack” within twelve months of weeping over the grave of her first husband.

“It was a match,” Walpole says, “that would not disgrace Arcadia. Her beauty had made enough sensation, and in some people’s eyes is even improved. She has a most pleasing person, countenance and manner; and if they could but carry to Scotland some of our sultry English weather, they might restore the ancient pastoral life, when fair kings and queens reigned at once over their subjects and their sheep.”

It was under such Arcadian conditions that Betty Gunning began her second venture in matrimony, which proved as happy as its promise. Probably the eleven years which the Dowager-Duchess had to wait for her next coronet were the happiest of her life; and when at last Colonel Jack became fifth Duke of Argyll she was able to resume the life of stately splendour which had been hers with her first Duke. By this time her beauty had begun to show signs of fading.

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“As she is not quite so charming as she was,” says Walpole, “I do not know whether it is not better to change her title than to retain that which puts one in mind of her beauty.”

But what she may have lost in physical charms she had gained in social prestige. She was appointed Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte; and was one of the three ladies who acted as escort to the Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz to the arms of her reluctant husband, George III. It is said that when the young German bride came in sight of the palace of her future husband, she turned pale and showed such signs of terror as to force a smile from the Duchess who sat by her side. Upon which the frightened young Princess remarked, “My dear Duchess, you may laugh, for you have been married twice; but it is no joke for me.” Her life as Lady of the Bedchamber appears to have been by no means a bed of roses, for Charlotte proved so jealous of the attentions paid to the beautiful Duchess by her husband, the King, that at one time she contemplated resigning her post. The letter of resignation was actually written and despatched; but Her Grace, who did not approve altogether of its language, added this naive postscript before sending it, “Though I wrote the letter, it was the Duke who dictated it.”

Boswell, when describing a visit he paid to Inverary Castle, in Johnson’s company, gives us no very favourable impression of the Duchess’s courtesy as hostess. When the Duke conducted him to the drawing-room and announced his name,

“the Duchess,” he says, “who was sitting with her daughter and some other ladies, took not the least notice of me. I should have been mortified at being thus coldly received by a lady of whom I, with the rest of the world, have always entertained a very high admiration, had I not been consoled by the obliging attention of the Duke.”

During dinner, when Boswell ventured to drink Her Grace’s good health, she seems equally to have ignored him. And while paying the utmost deference and attention to Johnson, the only remark she deigned to make to his fellow-guest was a contemptuous “I fancy you must be a Methodist.” In fairness to the Duchess it should be said that Boswell had incurred her grave displeasure by taking part against her in the famous Douglas Case in which she was deeply interested; and this was no doubt the reason why for once she forgot the elementary demands of hospitality as well as the courtesy due to her rank; and why, when Johnson mentioned his companion by name, she answered coldly, “I know nothing of Mr Boswell.”

The Duchess saw her daughter, Lady Betty Hamilton, wedded to Lord Stanley, the future Earl of Derby, a union in which she paid by a life of misery for her mother’s scheming ambition; and died in 1790, thirty years after her sister Maria drew the last breath of her short life behind drawn bed-curtains in her darkened room.



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To Betty Gunning, the squireen's daughter, fell the unique distinction of marrying two dukes, refusing a third, and becoming the mother of four others, two of whom were successive Dukes of Hamilton, and two of Argyll.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MYSTERIOUS TWINS

A century and a half ago the "Douglas cause" was a subject of hot debate from John o' Groats to Land's End. It was discussed in Court and castle and cottage, and was wrangled over at the street corner. It divided families and estranged friends, so fierce was the partisanship it generated; and so full was it of complexity and mystery that it puzzled the heads of the wisest lawyers. England and Scotland alike were divided into two hostile camps, one declaring that Archibald Douglas was son of Lady Jean Douglas, and thus the rightful heir to the estates of his ducal uncle; the other, protesting with equal warmth and conviction that he was nothing of the sort.

Dr Johnson was a stalwart in one camp; Boswell in the other. "Sir, sir," Johnson said to his friend and biographer, "don't be too severe upon the gentleman; don't accuse him of a want of filial piety! Lady Jane Douglas was *not* his mother." "Whereupon," Boswell says, "he roused my zeal so much that I took the liberty to tell him that he knew nothing of the cause, which I most seriously do believe was the case." For seven years the suit dragged its weary length through the Courts; the evidence for and against the young man's claim covers ten thousand closely-printed pages; but although Archibald won the Douglas lands, his paternity remains to-day as profound a mystery as when George III. was new to his throne.

Forty years before the curtain rose on this dramatic trial which, Boswell declares, "shook the security of birthright in Scotland to its foundation," the Lady Jean, only daughter of James, second Marquess of Douglas, was one of the fairest maids north of the Tweed—a girl who combined beauty and a singular charm of manner with such abounding vitality and strength of character that she did not require her high rank and royal descent to make her desirable in the eyes of suitors. She was, moreover, the only sister of the head of her family, the Duke of Douglas, who seemed little disposed to provide an heir to his vast estates; and these there seemed more than a fair prospect that she would one day inherit.

It was thus but natural that many a wooer sought Lady Jean's hand; and had she cared for coronets she might have had her pick of them. On the evidence of the man who ultimately became her husband she refused those of the Dukes of Hamilton, Buccleuch and Atholl, the Earls of Hopetoun, Aberdeen and Panrnure, *cum multis aliis*. However this may be, we know that she had several love romances; and that one at least nearly led to the altar while Jean was still a "wee bit lassie." The favoured suitor was the



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young Earl of Dalkeith, heir to the Buccleuch Dukedom, a young man who may have been, as Lady Louisa Stuart described him, “of mean understanding and meaner habits,” but who was at least devoted to her ladyship, and in many ways a desirable *parti*. The Duchess of Buccleuch was frankly delighted with the projected marriage of her son with Lady Jean Douglas, “a young lady whom she had heard much commended before she saw her, and who since had lost no ground with her”; and, no doubt, the fair Douglas would have become Dalkeith’s Countess had it not been for the treacherous intervention of Her Grace of Queensberry, whose heart was set on the Earl marrying her sister-in-law.

The marriage day had actually been fixed when a letter was placed in Lady Jean’s hand, when on her way to the Court—a letter in which the Earl claimed his release as he no longer loved her. That the letter was a clever forgery never occurred to Lady Jean, who was so crushed by it that it is said she fled in disguise to France to hide her shame and her humiliation. Such was the tragic ending to Lady Jean’s first romance, which gave her such a distrust of man and such a distaste for matrimony that for thirty years she vowed she would listen to no avowal of love, however tempting.

During the long period, while youth was slipping from her, Lady Jean appears to have lived alone at Drumsheugh House, near Edinburgh, where she made herself highly popular by her affability, admired for her gifts and graces of mind, and courted for her rank and her lavish hospitality—paying occasional visits to her brother, the Duke of Douglas, whose devotion to her was only equalled by the alarm his eccentric behaviour and his mad fits of jealousy and temper inspired in her. That the Duke, who is described as “a person of the most wretched intellect, proud, ignorant, and silly, passionate, spiteful and unforgiving,” was scarcely sane is proved by many a story, one alone of which is sufficient to prove that his mind must have been unbalanced. Once when Captain Ker, a distant cousin, was a guest at the castle, he ventured to remonstrate with his host on allowing his servants, especially one called Stockbrigg, to rule over him; whereupon

“the poor Duke,” to quote Woodrow, “who for many years had been crazed in his brain, told this familiar, who persuaded him that such an insult could only be wiped out in blood. On which the Duke proceeded to Ker’s room and stabbed him as he was sleeping.”

It is little wonder that Lady Jean declined to live with a brother who was thus a slave to his own servants and to a temper so insane; but although their lives were led apart, and although, among many other mad delusions, the Duke was convinced that his sister had applied for a warrant to “confine him as a madman and she to sit down on the estate and take possession of it,” he was generous enough to make her a liberal allowance, and to promise that, if she married and had children, “they would heir his estate.”



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Such was the state of affairs at the time this story really opens. Lady Jean had carried her aversion to men and matrimony to middle-age, happy enough in her independence and extravagance; while the Duke, still unwed, remained a prey to his jealousies, his morbid fancies and his insensate rages; and it is at this time that Colonel Stewart, the “villain of the play,” makes his appearance on the stage.

Ten years earlier, it is true, John Stewart, of Grandtully, had tried to repair his shattered fortunes by making love to Lady Jean, who, although then a woman of nearly forty, was still handsome enough, as he confessed later, to “captivate my heart at the first sight of her.” She was, moreover (and this was much more to the point), a considerable heiress, with the vast Douglas estates as good as assured to her. But to the handsome adventurer Lady Jean turned a deaf ear, as to all her other suitors; and the “Colonel,” who had never won any army rank higher than that of a subaltern, had to return ignominiously to the Continent, where for another ten years he picked up a precarious living at the gaming-tables, by borrowing or by any other low expedient that opportunity provided to his scheming brain. The Duke of Douglas, who cordially detested this down-at-heels cousin, called him “one of the worst of men—a papist, a Jacobite, a gamester, a villain”—and his career certainly seems to justify this sweeping and scathing description.

Such was the man who now reappeared to put his fate again to the test—and this time with such success that, to quote his own words,

“very soon after I had an obliging message from Lady Jean telling me that, very soon after my leaving Scotland, she came to know she had done me an injustice, but she would acknowledge it publicly if I chose. *Enfin*, I was allowed to visit her as formerly, and in about three months after she honoured me with her hand.”

Was ever wooing and winning so strange, so inexplicable? After refusing some of the greatest alliances in the land, after turning her back on at least half-a-dozen coronets, this wilful and wayward woman gives her hand to the least desirable of all her legion of suitors—a man broken in fortune and of notorious ill-fame: swashbuckler, gambler and defaulter; a man, moreover, who was on the verge of old-age, for he would never see his sixtieth birthday again. The Colonel’s motive is manifest. He had much to gain and nothing to lose by this incongruous union. But what could have been Lady Jean’s motive; and does the sequel furnish a clue to it? She was deeply in debt, thanks to her long career of extravagance; and, to crown her misfortune, her brother threatened to withdraw her annuity. But on the other hand she was still, although nearly fifty, a good-looking woman, “appearing,” we are told, “at least fifteen years younger than she really was”; and thus might well have looked for a eligible suitor; while her marriage to a pauper could but add to her financial embarrassment. There remained the prospect of her brother’s estates, which would almost surely fall to her children if she had any, if only to keep them out of the hands of the Hamiltons, whom the Duke detested. And this

consideration may have determined her in favour of this eleventh hour marriage, with its possibilities, however small, of thus qualifying for a great inheritance.



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Thus it was, whatever may be the solution of the mystery, that, one August day in 1746, Lady Jean was led to the altar by her aged pauper lover, and a few days later the happy pair landed at Rotterdam, with a retinue consisting of a Mrs Hewit (Lady Jean's maid) and a couple of female servants, leaving her ladyship's creditors to wrangle over the belongings she had left behind at Edinburgh.

From Rheims, to which town the wedding party journeyed, Lady Jean wrote to her man of business, Mr Haldane:—

“It is mighty certain that my anticipations were never in the marrying way; and had I not at last been absolutely certain that my brother was resolved never to marry, I never should have once thought of doing it; but since this was his determined, unalterable resolution, I judged it fit to overcome a natural disinclination and backwardness, and to put myself in the way of doing something for a family not the worst in Scotland; and, therefore, gave my hand to Mr Stewart, the consequence of which has proved more happy than I could well have expected.”

Such was the unenthusiastic letter Lady Jean wrote on her honeymoon, assigning as her motive for the marriage a wish “to do something for her family,” which could scarcely be other than to provide heirs to the Douglas lands—an ambition which to the most sanguine lady of her age must have seemed sufficiently doubtful of realisation.

Then began a wandering life for the grotesque pair. Rheims, Utrecht, Geneva, Aix-la-Chapelle, Liege, and many another Continental town appear in turn on their erratic itinerary, the Colonel travelling as Lady Jean's *maitre d'hotel*, and never avowed by her as her husband; and at every place of halting my lady finds fresh victims for her clever tongue and ingratiating charm of manner, who, in return for her smiles and flatteries, keep her purse supplied. Now it is young Lord Blantyre who succumbs to her wiles, and follows her from place to place like a shadow, drawing large sums from his mother to “lend to my Lady Jean, who is at a loss by not receiving letters which were to bring her remittances.” Now it is Mr Hay, Mr Dalrymple, or some other susceptible admirer who obliges her by a temporary loan, and is amply rewarded by learning from her lips that he is “the man alive I would choose to be most obliged by.” Thus, by a system of adroit flatteries, Lady Jean keeps the family exchequer so well replenished that she is able to take about with her a retinue consisting of two maids and a man-cook, in addition to the indispensable Mrs Hewit; and to ride in her carriage, while her husband stakes his golden louis on the green cloth and drinks costly wines.

Even such an astute man of the world as Lord Crawford she makes her devoted slave, ready at any moment to place his purse and services at her disposal, to the extent of breaking the news of her marriage to the Duke, her brother, and begging for his approval and favour; a task which must have gone considerably against the grain with the proud Scotsman.



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“I can assure your Grace,” his lordship writes, “she does great honour to the family wherever she appears, and is respected and beloved by all that have the honour of her acquaintance. She certainly merits all the affectionate marks of an only brother to an only sister.”

This appeal, eloquent as it was, only seemed to fan the anger of the Duke, who, as he read it, declared to the Parish minister who was present: “Why, the woman is mad.... I once thought, if there was a virtuous woman in the world, my sister Jeanie was one; but now I am going to say a thing that I should not say of my own sister—I believe she is no better than ...; and that I believe there is not a virtuous woman in the world.”

At the very time—so inconsistent was this singular woman—that Lord Crawford, at her request, was breaking the news of her marriage to her brother, she was repudiating it indignantly to every person she met. To Lady Wigton, she declared with tears that it was an “infamous story raised by Miss Molly Kerr, her cousin, in order to prejudice her brother against her, and that it had been so effectual that he had stopped her pension”; and she begged Lady Wigton “when she went to England to contradict it.”

But this nomadic, hand-to-mouth life could not go on indefinitely. The supply of dupes began to show signs of failing, and in her extremity she wrote urgent letters to friends in England and Scotland for supplies; she even borrowed from a poor Scottish minister almost the last penny he had. A crisis was rapidly approaching which there was no way of escaping—*unless* the birth of a child might soften her brother’s heart, and, perchance, re-open the vista of a great inheritance in the years to come. Such speculations must have occurred to Lady Jean at this critical stage of her fortunes; but whether what quickly followed was a coincidence, or, as so many asserted, a fraudulent plot to give effect to her ambition, it would need a much cleverer and more confident man than I to say. At any rate, from this failure of her purse and of her hopes of propitiating the Duke began all those mysterious suggestions and circumstances, of which so much was made in the trial of future years, and which heralded the birth of the desired heir—or “to make assurance doubly sure,” in Lady Jean’s case—heirs.

As the expected event drew near it became important to go to Paris in order to have the advantage of the best medical assistance, especially since Lady Jean was assured that the doctors of Rheims, where she was then living, were “as ignorant as brutes.” And so to the French capital she journeyed with her retinue, through three sultry July days, in a public diligence devoid of springs. How trying such a journey must have been to a lady in her condition is evidenced by the fact that, during the three days, she spent forty-one hours on the road, reaching Paris on the 4th of July. Just six days later her ladyship, to quote a letter written by Mrs Hewit, “produced two lovely boys,” one of whom was so weak and puny that the doctor “begged it might be sent to the country as soon as possible.”



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So far the story seems clear and plausible, assuming that a lady, in such a delicate state of health, could bear the fatigues of so long and trying a journey as that from Rheims to Paris. But from this stage the mystery, which it took so many wise heads to penetrate in future years, begins to thicken. Although the children were said to have been born on the 10th of July it was not until eleven days later that Mrs Hewit imparted the news to the two maids who had been left behind at Rheims, in the letter from which I have quoted. Further, although the Colonel wrote to six different people on the 10th not one of his letters contains any reference to such an interesting event, which should, one would think, have excluded all other topics from a father's pen.

Moreover, although the Colonel and his wife were, as the house-books proved, staying on the 10th of July at the hotel of a M. Godefroi, neither the landlord nor his wife had any knowledge that a birth had taken place, or was even expected; and it was beyond question that the lady left the house on the 13th, three days after the alleged event, without exciting any suspicion as to what had so mysteriously taken place.

On the 13th, the Colonel and his lady, accompanied by Mrs Hewit, declared that they went for a few days to the house of a Madame la Brune, a nurse—but no child, M. and *Mme.* Godefroi swore, accompanied them; and on the 18th of July, eight days after the accouchement, they made their appearance at Michele's Hotel (still without a solitary infant to show), where Madame was already so far recovered that she spent the days in jaunting about Paris and making trips to Versailles.

At Michele's the story they told was that the infants were so delicate that they had been sent into the country to nurse; and yet none had seen them go. But before the parents had been a day in their new quarters the Colonel, after hours of absence, appeared with a child—a puny infant, but still unmistakably genuine. Thus one of the twins was accounted for. The other, they declared, was still more delicate and must be left in the country.

It was quite certain that the children had not been born either at Godefroi's or Michele's Hotel. As for the intermediate place of lodging, the most diligent later enquiries failed to discover either Madame la Brune or the house in which she was supposed to live in the Faubourg St Germain. Moreover, was it a coincidence that on the very day on which the Colonel at Michele's with one of the alleged children, it was proved that a "foreign gentleman," exactly answering his description, had purchased, for three gold louis, a fortnight-old baby from its peasant-parents, called Mignon, in a Paris slum?

To add further to the confusion, both Colonel Stewart and Mrs Hewit, in later years, declared in the most positive manner, first that the children had been born at Michele's, and secondly at Madame la Brune's, in defiance of the facts that on the 10th of July, the alleged date of birth, the mother was beyond any doubt staying at Godefroi's hotel, that no such person as Madame la Brune apparently existed, and that the only visible child at Michele's was a fortnight old.



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On the 7th of August Lady Jean wrote to inform her brother, the Duke, that she had been blessed with “two boys,” one of which she begged his permission to call by his name—a letter which only had the effect of rousing His Grace’s “high passion and displeasure,” with a threat to stop her annuity. For sixteen months the second and more delicate infant was left with his country nurse, the mother never once taking the trouble to visit it; and then the Colonel and his wife made a mysterious journey to Paris, returning with another child, who, they alleged, was the weakling of the twins. Was it again a coincidence that, at the very time when the second child made his appearance, another infant was purchased from its parents in Paris by a “strange monsieur” who, if not the Colonel, was at least his double? And was it not strange that this late arrival should appear to be several months older than his more robust brother, as the purchased child was?

At last, provided with two children, and having exhausted their credit on the Continent, Lady Jean and her husband turned their faces homeward, prepared to carry the war into the enemy’s camp. Arrived in London they set to work to win as many influential friends and supporters as possible; and this Lady Jean, with her plausible tongue, succeeded in doing. Ladies Shaw and Eglinton, the Duke of Queensberry, Lord Lindores, Solicitor-General Murray (later, Lord Mansfield), and many another high-placed personage vowed that they believed her story and pledged their support. Mr Pelham proved such a good friend to her that he procured from the King a pension of £300 a year, which she sorely needed; for, at the time, her husband was a prisoner for debt “within the Rules” of the King’s Bench.

Even Lady Jean’s enemies could not resist a tribute of admiration for the courage with which, during this time, she fought her uphill fight against poverty and opposition. Her affection for her children and her loyalty to her good-for-nothing husband were touching in the extreme; and, if not quite sincere, were most cleverly simulated.

To all her appeals the Duke still remained obdurate, vowing he would have nothing to do either with his sister or the two “nunnery children” which she wanted to impose on him. In spite of her Royal pension Lady Jean only succeeded in getting deeper and deeper involved in debt, until it became clear that some decisive step must be taken to repair her fortunes. Then it was that, at last, she screwed up her courage to pay the dreaded visit to her brother, in the hope that the sight of her children and the pathos of her personal pleading might soften his heart.

One January day in 1753, one of the Duke’s servants says,



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“she looked in at the little gate as I was passing through the court. She called and I went to her, when she told me she was come to wait on the Duke with her children. I proposed to open the gate and carry in her Ladyship; but she said she would not go in till I acquainted his Grace.”

The Duke, however, after consulting with his minion Stockbrigg, who still ruled the castle and its lord alike, sent word that he refused to see his sister; and the broken-hearted woman walked sadly away. To a letter in which she begged “to speak but a few moments to your Grace, and if I don’t, to your own conviction, clear up my injured innocence, inflict what punishment you please upon me,” he returned no answer.

Trouble now began to fall thickly on Lady Jean. Her delicate child, Sholto, died after a brief illness. She was distracted with grief, and cried out in her deep distress: “O Sholto! Sholto! my son Sholto! if I could but have died for you!” This last blow of fate seems to have completely crushed her. A few months later, she gave up her gallant and hopeless struggle, but only with her life. Calling her remaining son to her bedside she said, with streaming eyes: “May God bless you, my dear son; and, above all, make you a worthy and honest man; for riches, I despise them. Take a sword, and you may one day become as great a hero as some of your ancestors.” Then, but a few moments before drawing her last breath, she said to those around her: “As one who is soon to appear in the presence of Almighty God, to whom I must answer, I declare that the two children were born of my body.” Thus passed “beyond these voices” a woman, who, whatever her faults, carried a brave heart through sorrows and trials which might well have crushed the proudest spirit.

Lady Jean’s death probably did more to advance her son’s cause than all her scheming and courage during life. Influential friends flocked to the motherless boy, whose misfortunes made such an appeal to sympathy and protection. His father succeeded to the family baronetcy and became a man of some substance. His uncle, the Duke, took to wife, at sixty-two, his cousin, “Peggy Douglas, of Mains,” a lady of strong character who had long vowed that “she would be Duchess of Douglas or never marry”; and in Duchess “Peggy” Archibald found his most stalwart champion, who gave her husband no peace until the Duke, after long vacillation, and many maudlin moods, in which he would consign the “brat” to perdition one day and shed tears over his pathetic plight the next, was won over to her side. To such good purpose did the Duchess use her influence that when her husband the Duke died, in 1761, Colonel (now Sir John) Stewart was able to write to his elder son by his first marriage:

“DEAR JACK,—I have not had time till now to acquaint you of the Duke of Douglas’s death, and that he has left your brother Archie his whole estate.”



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Thus did Lady Jean triumph eight years after her scheming brain was stilled in death.

The rest of this singular story must be told in few words, although its history covers many years, and would require a volume to do adequate justice to it. Within a few months of the Duke's death the curtain was rung up on the great Douglas Case, which for seven long years was to be the chief topic of discussion and dispute throughout Great Britain. Archibald's title to the Douglas lands was contested by the Duke of Hamilton and the Earl of Selkirk, the former claiming as heir-male, the latter under settlements made by the Duke's father. Clever brains were set to work to solve the tangle in which the birth of the mysterious twins was involved. Emissaries were sent to France to collect evidence on one side and the other; notably Andrew Stewart, tutor to the young Duke of Hamilton, who seems to have been a perfect sleuth-hound of detective skill; and it was not until 1768 that the Scottish Court of Session gave its verdict, by the Lord-President's casting-vote (seven judges voting for and seven against) against Lady Jean's son.

"The judges," we are told, "took up no less than eight days in delivering their opinions upon the cause; and at last, by the President's casting-vote, they pronounced solemn judgment in favour of the plaintiffs."

Meanwhile (four years earlier) Sir John Stewart had followed his wife to the grave, declaring, just before his death:

"I do solemnly swear before God, as stepping into Eternity, that Lady Jean Douglas, my lawful spouse, did in the year 1748, bring into the world two sons, Archibald and Sholto; and I firmly believe the children were mine, as I am sure they were hers. Of the two sons, Archibald is the only one in life now."

But Archibald Douglas was not long to remain out of his estates. On appeal to the House of Lords, the decree of the Scottish Court was reversed, and the victory of Lady Jean's son was final and complete.

Of his later career it remains only to say that he entered Parliament and was created a Peer; and that he conducted himself in his exalted position with a dignity worthy of the parentage he had established. But, although he became the father of eight sons, four of whom succeeded him in the title, no grandson came to inherit his honours and estates; and to-day the Douglas lands, for which Lady Jean schemed and fought and laid down her life, have the Earl of Home for lord.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAYPOLE DUCHESS



For many a century, ever since her history emerged from the mists of antiquity, Germany never lacked a Schulenburg to grace her Courts, to lead her armies, or to wear the mitre in her churches. They held their haughty heads high among the greatest subjects of her emperors; their family-tree bristled with marshals and generals, bishops and ambassadors; and they waxed so strong and so numerous that they came to be distinguished as "Black Schulenburgs" and "White Schulenburgs," as our own Douglasses were "black" and "red."



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But not one of all the glittering array of its dignitaries raised the family name to such an eminence—a bad eminence—as one of its plainest daughters, Ehrengard Melusina von der Schulenburg (to give her full, imposing name), who lived not only to wear the coronet of a Duchess of England, but to be “as much a Queen as ever there was in England.”

Fraulein Ehrengard and her brother, who, as Count Mathias von der Schulenburg, was to win fame as the finest general in Europe of his day, were cradled and reared at the ancestral castle of Emden, in Saxony. The Schulenburg women were never famed for beauty; but Ehrengard was, by common consent, the “ugly duckling” of the family—abnormally tall, angular, awkward, and plain-featured, one of the last girls in Germany equipped for conquest in the field of love.

When she reached her sixteenth birthday, Ehrengard’s parents were glad to pack her off to the Court of Herrenhausen, where the family influence procured for her the post of maid-of-honour to the Electress Sophia of Hanover. At any rate she was provided for—an important matter, for the Schulenburgs were as poor as they were proud—and she was too unattractive to get into mischief. But it is the unexpected that often happens; and no sooner had the Elector’s son and heir, George, set eyes on the ungainly maid-of-honour than he promptly fell head over ears in love with her, to the amazement of the entire Court, and to the disgust of his mother, and of his newly-made bride, Sophia Dorothea of Zell. To George—an awkward, sullen young man of loutish manners and loose morals—the gaunt girl, with her plain, sallow face, was a vision of beauty. She appealed in some curious way to the animal in him; and before she had been many weeks at Herrenhausen she was his avowed mistress—one of many.

“Just look at that mawkin,” the Electress Sophia once exclaimed to Lady Suffolk, who was a guest at the Hanoverian Court, “and think of her being my son’s mistress!” But to any other than his mother, George’s taste in women had long ceased to cause surprise. The ugly and gross appealed to a taste which such beauty and refinement as his young wife possessed left untouched. He had markedly demonstrated this perverseness of fancy already by showering his favours on the Baroness von Kielmansegg—who was reputed to be his natural sister, by the way—a lady so ugly that, as a child, Horace Walpole shrieked at sight of her.

She had, he recalls,

“two fierce black eyes, large and rolling, beneath two lofty arched eyebrows; two acres of cheeks spread with crimson; an ocean of neck that overflowed and was not distinguished from the lower part of her body, and no part of it restrained by stays. No wonder,” he adds, “that a child dreaded such an ogress!”

Such were the two chief favourites of this unnatural heir to the throne of Hanover, who, by a curious turn of Fortune’s wheel, was to wear the English



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crown as the first of the Georges. In the company of these ogresses and of a brace of Turkish attendants, George loved to pass his time in beer-guzzling and debauchery, while his beautiful and insulted wife sought solace in that ill-starred intrigue with Koenigsmarck, which was to lead to his tragic death and her own thirty years' imprisonment in the Schloss Ahlden, where she, who ought to have been England's Queen, ate her heart out in loneliness and sorrow.

To George his wife's intrigue was a welcome excuse for getting rid of her—a licence for unfettered indulgence in his low tastes; and the tragedy of her eclipse but added zest and emphasis to his unfettered enjoyment of life. In the hands of Von der Schulenburg the weak-minded, self-indulgent Prince was as clay in the hands of the potter. She moulded him as she willed, for she was as crafty and diplomatic as she was ill-favoured. Madame Kielmansegg was relegated to the shade, while she stood in the full limelight. She bore two daughters to her Royal lover—daughters who were called her “nieces,” although the fiction deceived nobody—and as the years passed, each adding, if possible, to her unattractiveness, her hold on the Prince became still stronger.

Thirty years passed thus at the Herrenhausen Court, when the death of Queen Anne made “the high and mighty Prince George, Elector of Hanover, rightful King of Great Britain, France and Ireland.” The sluggish sensual life of the Hanoverian Court was at an end. George was summoned to a great throne, and no King ever accepted a crown with such reluctance and ill-grace. He would, and he would not. For three weeks the English envoys tried every artifice to induce him to accept his new and exalted *role*—and finally they succeeded.

But even then he had not counted on the “fair” Ehrengard. She refused point-blank to go with him to that “odious England,” where chopping off heads seemed to be a favourite pastime. She was quite happy in Hanover, and there she meant to stay. She fumed and raged, ran about the Palace gardens, embracing her dearly-loved trees and clinging hysterically to the marble statues, declaring that she could not and would not desert them. And thus George left her, to start on his unwelcome pilgrimage to England.

Madame von Kielmansegg, however, was of another mind. If her great rival would not go, she would; and after giving the Elector a day's start, she raced after him, caught him up, and, to her delight, was welcomed with open arms. The moment Von der Schulenburg heard of the trick “that Kielmansegg woman” had played on her, she, too, packed her trunks, and, taking her “nieces” with her, also set out in hot pursuit of her Royal lover and tool, and overtook him just as he was on the point of embarking for England.



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George was now happy and reconciled to his fate, for his retinue was complete. And what a retinue! When the King landed at Greenwich with his grotesque assortment of Ministers, his hideous Turks, his two mistresses—one a gaunt giant, the other rolling in billows of fat—and his “nieces,” the crowds thronging the landing-place and streets greeted the “menagerie” with jeers and shouts of laughter. They nicknamed Schulenburg the “Maypole,” and Kielmansegg the “Elephant,” and pursued the cavalcade with strident mockeries and insults.

“Goot peoples, vy you abuse us?” asked the Maypole, protruding her gaunt head and shoulders through the carriage window. “Ve only gom for all your goots.” “And for all our chattels, too, —— you!” came the stinging retort from a wag in the crowd.

But Schulenburg soon realised that she could afford to smile and shrug her scraggy shoulders at the insolence of those “horrid Engleesh.” She found herself in a land of Goshen, where there were many rich plums to be gathered by far-reaching and unscrupulous hands such as hers. If she could not love the enemy, she could at least plunder them; and this she set to work to do with a good will, while the plastic George looked on and smiled encouragement. There were pensions, appointments, patents—boons of all kinds to be trafficked in; and who had a greater right to act as intermediary than herself, the King’s *chere amie* and right hand?

She sold everything that was saleable. As Walpole says, “She would have sold the King’s honour at a shilling advance to the best bidder.” From Bolingbroke’s family she took £20,000 in three sums—one for a Peerage, another for a pardon, and the third for a fat post in the Customs. Gold poured in a ceaseless and glittering stream into her coffers. She refused no bribe—if it was big enough—and was ready to sell anything, from a Dukedom to a Bishopric, if her price was forthcoming. She made George procure her a pension of £7,500 a year (ten times as much as had long contented her well in Hanover); and when valuable posts fell vacant she induced him to leave them vacant and to give her the revenues.

Not content with filling her capacious pockets, she sighed for coronets—and got them in showers. Four Irish Peerages, from Baroness of Dundalk to Duchess of Munster, were flung into her lap. And yet she was not happy. She must have English coronets, and the best of them. So George made her Baroness of Glastonbury, Countess of Feversham, and Duchess of Kendal. And, to crown her ambition for such baubles, he induced the pliant German Emperor to make her a Princess—of Eberstein. Thus, with coffers overflowing with ill-gotten gold, her towering head graced with a dazzling variety of coronets, this grim idol of a King, who at sixty was as much her slave as in the twenties, was the proudest woman in England, patronising our own Duchesses, and snubbing Peeresses of less degree. She might be a “maypole”—hated and unattractive—but at least she towered high above all the fairest and most blue-blooded beauties of her “Consort’s” Court.



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When the South Sea Bubble rose to dazzle all eyes with its iridescent splendours, it was she more than any other who blew it. She was the witch behind the scenes of the South Sea and many another bubble Company, whether its object was to “carry on a thing that will turn to the advantage of the concerned,” “the breeding and providing for natural children,” or “for planting mulberries in Chelsea Park to breed silk-worms.”

Every day of this wild, insane gamble, which wrecked thousands of homes, and filled hundreds of suicides' graves, brought its stream of gold to her exchequer; and when the bubbles burst in havoc and ruin she smiled and counted her gains, turning a deaf ear to the storm of execration that raged against her outside the palace walls. She knew that she had played her cards so skilfully that all the popular rage was impotent to harm her. Only one of her many puppets—Knight, the Treasurer of the South Sea Company—could be the means of doing her harm. If he were arrested and told all he knew, impeachment would probably follow, with a sentence of imprisonment and banishment. But the crafty German was much too old a bird to be caught in that way. She packed Knight off to Antwerp; and, through the influence of her friend, the German Empress, the States of Brabant refused to give him up to his fate.

The Duchess of Kendal was now at the zenith of her power and splendour. While Sophia Dorothea, the true Queen of England, was pining away in solitude in distant Ahlden, the German “Maypole” was Queen in all but name, ruling alike her senile paramour and the nation with a tactful, if iron hand. It is said that she was actually themorganatic wife of George, that the ceremony had been performed by no less a dignitary than the Archbishop of York; but, whether this was so or not, it is certain that this “old and forbidding skeleton of a giantess” was more England's Queen than any other Consort of the Georges.

She was present at every consultation between the King and his Ministers—indeed the conferences were invariably held in her own apartments, every day from five till eight. She understood and humoured every whim of her Royal partner with infinite tactfulness, to the extent even of encouraging his amours with young and attractive women, while she herself, to emphasise her platonic relations with him, affected an extravagant piety, attending as many as seven Lutheran services every Sunday. The only rival she had ever feared—and hated—Madame Kielmansegg, had long passed out of power, and as Countess of Darlington was too much absorbed in pandering to her mountain of flesh, and filling her pockets, to spare a regret for the Royal lover she had lost.

When George, on hearing of the death of his unhappy wife, Sophia Dorothea, set out on his last journey to Hanover, his only companion was the Duchess of Kendal, the woman to whose grim fascinations he had been loyal for more than forty years; and it was she who closed his eyes in the Palace of Osnabrueck, in which he had drawn his first breath sixty-seven years earlier.



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A French fortune-teller had warned him that “he would not survive his wife a year”; and, as he neared Osnabrueck, the home of his brother, the Prince Bishop, his fatal illness overtook him.

“When he arrived at Ippenburen, he was quite lethargic; his hand fell down as if lifeless, and his tongue hung out of his mouth. He gave, however, signs enough of life by continually crying out, as well as he could articulate, ‘Osnabrueck!’ ‘Osnabrueck!’”

As night fell the sweating horses galloped into Osnabrueck; an hour later George died in his brother’s arms, less than twelve months after his wife had drawn her last breath in her fortress-prison of Ahlden.

The Duchess of Kendal was disconsolate.

“She beat her breasts and tore her hair, and, separating herself from the English ladies in her train, took the road to Brunswick, where she remained in close seclusion about three months.”

Returning to England, to the only solace left to her—her money-bags—she spent the last seventeen years of her life alternating between her villas at Twickenham and Isleworth. George had promised her that if she survived him, and if it were possible, he would revisit her from the spirit world.

“When,” to quote Walpole again, “one day a large raven flew into one of the windows of her villa at Isleworth, she was persuaded that it was the soul of the departed monarch, and received and treated it with all the respect and tenderness of duty, till the Royal bird or she took their last flight.”

Thus, shorn of all her powers and splendour, in obscurity, and hoarding her ill-gotten gold, died the most remarkable woman who has ever figured in the British Peerage. Her vast fortune was divided between her two “nieces,” one of whom, created by her father, George, Countess of Walsingham, became the wife of that polished courtier and heartless man of the world, Philip, fourth Earl of Chesterfield.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ROMANCE OF FAMILY TREES

Such are a few of the scenes which arrest the eyes as the panorama of our aristocracy passes before them; but it would require a library of volumes to do anything like adequate justice to the infinite variety of the dramas it presents. There is for instance a whole realm of romance in the origins of our noble families whose proud palaces are often reared on the most ignoble of foundations; and whose family trees flaunt, with

questionable pride, many a spurious branch, while burying from view the humble roots from which they derive their lordly growth.

Although Cobden's assertion that "the British aristocracy was cradled behind city counters" errs on the side of exaggeration, there is no doubt that in the veins of scores of the proudest English peers runs the blood of ancestors who served customers in City shops.

When, a couple of centuries ago, John Baring, son of the Bremen Lutheran parson, Dr Franz Baring, opened his small cloth manufactory on the outskirts of Exeter, his most extravagant ambition was to build up a business which he could hand over to his sons, and to provide a few comforts for his old age; if any one had told him that he was laying the foundations of four families which should hold their heads proudly among the highest in the land he would no doubt have laughed aloud.



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Yet John Baring lived to see his only daughter wedded to John Dunning, who made a Baroness of her. Of his four sons, Francis was created a Baronet by William Pitt, and found a wife in the cousin and co-heir of his Grace of Canterbury. The second son of this union, Alexander, was raised to the Peerage as Baron Ashburton, won a millionaire bride in the daughter of Senator Bingham, of Philadelphia, and, from the immense scale of his financial operations, was ranked by the Duc de Richelieu as “one of the six great powers of Europe”—England, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia being the other five. Sir Francis’s eldest grandson, after serving in the exalted offices of Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Lord of the Admiralty, was created Baron Northbrook, a peerage which his son raised to an earldom; a second grandson qualified for a coronet as Baron Revelstoke; and a third is known to-day as Earl Cromer, the maker of modern Egypt, with half an alphabet of high dignities after his name.

At least three dukes (Northumberland, Leeds, and Bedford) count among their forefathers many a humble tradesman. Glancing down the pedigree of his Grace of Northumberland, we find among his direct ancestors such names as these, William le Smythesonne, of Thornton Watlous, husbandman; William Smitheson, of Newsham, husbandman; Ralph Smithson, tenant farmer; and Anthony Smithson, yeoman. It was this Anthony whose son, Hugh, left the paternal farm to serve behind the counter of Ralph and William Robinson, London haberdashers, and thus to take the first step of that successful career which made him a Baronet and a man of wealth. From Hugh, the London 'prentice sprang in the fourth generation, that other Hugh who won the hand of Lady Elizabeth Seymour, and with it the vast estates and historic name of Percy.

Some years before Hugh Smithson, the farmer’s son, set foot in London streets, Edward Osborne left the modest family roof at Ashford, in Kent, to serve his apprenticeship to, and sit at the board of, William Hewitt, a merchant of Philpot Lane, who shortly after moved his belongings to a more fashionable home on London Bridge. One day it chanced that while his only daughter, the fair “Mistress Anne,” was hanging her favourite bird outside the parlour window she lost her balance and fell into the river, then racing in high tide under the arches of the bridge. Fortunately for Mistress Anne the young apprentice saw the accident; quick as thought he threw off his shoes and surcoat, and, plunging into the swollen waters, caught the maiden by her hair as she was being swept away, and with difficulty dragged her to a passing barge, on which both found safety.



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There was only one proper sequence to this romantic incident; Mistress Anne lost her heart to her gallant rescuer, the grateful parents smiled on his wooing, and one fine August morning, not many months later, the wedding-bells of St Magnus Church were spreading far and wide the news that young Osborne had found a bride in one of the fairest and richest heiresses of London town. In due time Osborne became, as his father-in-law had been before him, Lord Mayor of London; the son of this romantic alliance was knighted for prowess in battle; Edward Osborne's grandson was made a Baronet; and his great-grandson, Sir Thomas, added to the family dignities by becoming in turn, Baron, Viscount, Earl and Marquis, and, finally, Duke of Leeds. Thus only two generations separated the 'prentice lad of Philpot Lane from his descendant of the strawberry-leaves, the first of a long and still unbroken line of English dukes, whose blood has mingled with that of many noble families.

The noble house of Ripon has its origin in Yorkshire tradesmen who carried on business in York, some of whom were Lord Mayors of that city two or three centuries ago. These early Robinsons added to their fortune and enriched their blood by alliances with some of the oldest families in the north of England—such as the Metcalfes of Nappa and the Redmaynes of Fulford—and slowly but surely laid the foundation of one of the wealthiest and most distinguished of great English houses. For four generations the head of the family was a Cabinet Minister, while one of them was Prime Minister of England.

The Marquises of Bath derive descent from one John o' th' Inne, who was, probably, a worthy publican of Church Stretton, and who was descended in the seventh generation from William de Bottefeld, an under-forester of Shropshire in the thirteenth century; while, through his mother, the late Marquis of Salisbury derived a strain of 'prentice blood from Sir Christopher Gascoigne, the first Lord Mayor of London to live in the Mansion House.

Until a few years ago there might be seen in the main street of the village of Appletrewick, in Yorkshire, a single-storey cottage, little better than a hovel, which was the cradle of the noble family of Craven. It was from this humble home that William Craven, the young son of a husbandman, fared forth one day in the carrier's cart to seek fortune in far-away London town. Like many another boy who has taken a stout heart and an empty pocket to the Metropolis as his sole capital, he fought his way to wealth; and before he died he was addressed as "My lord," in his character of London's chief magistrate. The eldest son of this peasant boy won fame as a soldier, became the confidential friend of his Sovereign, and was created in turn a Baron, a Viscount, and Earl of Craven. He died unwed, and all his wealth and dignities passed to a kinsman who, like himself, traced his descent from the peasant stock of Appletrewick.



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The Earls of Denbigh have for ancestor one Godfrey Fielding, who served his apprenticeship in London city, made a fortune as a Milk Street mercer, and was Lord Mayor when Henry VI. was King. Five years later, we may note in passing, London had for chief magistrate Godfrey Boleyn, whose great-grand-daughter wore the crown of England as Queen Elizabeth.

The present Earl of Warwick, whose title was once associated with such names as Plantagenet, Neville, Newburgh, and Beauchamp, has in his veins a liberal strain of 'prentice blood. The founder of the family fortunes was William Greville, citizen and woolstapler of London, who died five centuries ago, after amassing considerable wealth; while another ancestor was Sir Samuel Dashwood, vintner, who as Lord Mayor entertained Queen Anne at the Guildhall in 1702, and found a husband for his daughter in the fifth Lord Broke.

The father of the noble house of Dudley was William Ward, the son of poor Staffordshire parents, who was apprenticed to a goldsmith and made a fortune as a London jeweller.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century Nottingham had among its citizens a respectable draper named John Smith, who, it is said, made himself useful to his farmer customers, in the intervals of selling tapes and dress materials to their wives, by helping them with their accounts. John lived and died an honest draper, and never aspired to be anything else; but his descendants were more ambitious. From drapers they blossomed into bankers and Members of Parliament; and in 1796 George III. departed for once from his rule never to raise a man of business to the Peerage, by converting Robert Smith into Baron Carrington. His successor abandoned the patronymic Smith for his title-name; and the present-day representative of John Smith, the Nottingham draper is Charles Robert Wynn Carrington, first Earl Carrington, P.C., G.C.M.G., and joint Hereditary Lord Chamberlain of England.

When William Capel left the humble paternal roof at Stoke Nayland, in Suffolk, to see what fortune and a brave heart could do for him in London, it certainly never occurred to him that his name would be handed down through the centuries by a line of Earls, Viscounts, and Barons. Fortune had indeed strange experiences in store for the Suffolk youth; for, while she made a Knight and Lord Mayor of him, she consigned him on a life sentence to the Tower for resisting the extortions of the mercenary Henry VII. Sir William's son won his knightly spurs on French battlefields, wedded a daughter of the ancient house of Roos of Belvoir, and became the ancestor of the Barons Capel, Viscounts Malden, and Earls of Essex.

The Earls of Radnor owe their rank and wealth to the enterprise which led young Laurence des Bouveries from his native Flanders to a commercial life at Canterbury in the days of Queen Bess. From this humble Flemish apprentice sprang a line of Turkey merchants, each of whom in turn added his contribution to the family dignities and riches, until Sir Jacob, the third Baronet, blossomed into a double-barrelled peer as Lord

Longford and Viscount Folkestone. Not the least, by any means, of the descendants of Laurence des Bouveries was Canon Pusey, the great theologian, who was grandson of the first Lord Folkestone.



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Lord Harewood springs from a stock of merchants who accumulated great wealth in the eighteenth century; and Lord Jersey owes much of his riches to Francis Child, the industrious apprentice who, in Stuart days, married the daughter of his master, William Wheeler, the goldsmith, who lived one door west of Temple Bar.

Other peers who count London apprentices among their ancestors are Lord Aveland and Viscount Downe, both descendants of Gilbert Heathcote, whose commercial success was crowned by the Lord Mayoralty in 1711; the Marquis of Bath, a descendant of Lord Mayor Heyward, whose sixteen children are all portrayed in his monument in St Alphege Church, London Wall; and also of Richard Gresham, mercer, who waxed rich from the spoils of the monasteries, and whose son was founder of the Royal Exchange. The Earl of Eldon owes his existence to that runaway exploit which linked the lives of John Scott, the Newcastle tradesman's son, and Miss Surtees, the banker's daughter.

If George III. during his lengthy reign only raised one business man to the Peerage, later years have provided a very liberal crop of coroneted men of commerce. To mention but a few of them, banking has been honoured—and the Peerage also—by the baronies granted to Lords Aldenham and Avebury; Lords Hindlip, Burton, Iveagh, and Ardilaun owe their wealth and rank to successful brewing; Baron Overtoun was proprietor of large chemical works; Lord Allerton's riches have been drawn from his tan-pits; Lord Armstrong's millions come from the far-famed Elswick engine-works at Newcastle; and Lord Masham's from his mills at Manningham. The Viscounty of Hambleden has sprung from a modest news-shop in the Strand; the Barony of Burnham was cradled in a newspaper office; and Lords Mount-Stephen and Strathcona were shepherd boys seventy years or more ago, before they found their way through commerce to the Roll of Peers.

Although these lowly origins are as firmly established as Holy Writ, and are in most cases as well known to the noble families who trace rank and riches from them as to the expert in genealogy, they are often as carefully excluded from the family tree as the poor and undesirable relation from the doors of their palaces. Not content with a lineage extending over long centuries, and with a score of strains of undoubted blue blood, many of our greatest nobles and oldest gentle families strain after an ancestry which is not theirs, and throw overboard some obscure forefather to find room for a mythical Norman marauder, who in many cases exists nowhere but in the place of honour on their own pedigrees.

“What are pedigrees worth?” asks Professor Freeman. “I turn over a ‘Peerage’ or other book of genealogy, and I find that, when a pedigree professes to be traced back to the times of which I know most in detail, it is all but invariably false. As a rule it is not only false, but impossible. The historical circumstances, when any are introduced, are for the most part not merely fictions, but exactly that kind of fiction which is, in its beginning, deliberate and interested falsehood.”



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This scathing criticism refers to pedigrees which profess to be based on existing records; what shall we say, then, of those family trees which have their ambitious roots in the dark centuries which no ray of genealogical light can possibly pierce? Take, for instance, that amazing pedigree of the Lyte family of Lytes Cary, at the head of which is "Leitus (one of the five captains of Beotia that went to Troye)," whose ancestors came to England first with Brute, "the most noble founder of the Britons." (It is only fair to say that the present representative of this really ancient family, Sir H. Maxwell-Lyte, an expert genealogist, turns his back resolutely on the Beotian captain, and even on Brute himself, and generally lops his family tree in a merciless but most salutary fashion.)

The College of Arms, among many amazing pedigrees, treasures one of a family "whose present representative is sixty-seventh in descent in an unbroken male line from Belinus the Great (Beli Mawr), King of Britain," which actually exhibits the arms of Beli, who, poor man, died long centuries before heraldry was even cradled.

Of families who derive descent from Charlemagne the name is legion; but even such elongated pedigrees are quite contemptible in their brevity compared with others which have at their head no other progenitor than Adam, the father of us all. At Mostyn Hall, we learn, there is a vellum roll, twenty-one feet long, of pedigrees, some of which "are traced back to 'Adam, Son of God,' without any conscious sense of the incongruous"; and these records, we must remember, are in the hand of "a man thoroughly trustworthy as to the matters of his own time." There is in the College of Arms a similar family tree which commences boldly with Adam and the Garden of Eden; and an authority on Welsh pedigrees declares,

"A Welshman whose family was in any position in the sixteenth century can, as a rule, without much trouble find a pedigree thence to Adam; an Englishman who is unable to do the same has a natural tendency to regard all Welsh pedigrees with distrust, not to say contempt."

Mr Horace Round gives some startling examples of flagrant dishonesty, where forgery is only one of the implements used. Take, for example, that shameful story of the "Shipway frauds," which is thus referred to by a clergyman of the parish.

"In the fall of 1896, by an elaborate system of impudent frauds, an unscrupulous attempt was made to claim these monuments for one who was an entire stranger to the parish. An agent from London was employed in a search for a pedigree. He, by fraudulent means, concocted a very plausible story. Genealogies were manufactured, tombs were desecrated, registers were falsified, wills were forged—in a word, various outrages were committed, with many sacred things in this parish and elsewhere. These two figures, as part of the pedigree, were deposited in a niche in the chantry; on either side were huge brass tablets on which were engraven various untruthful and unfounded statements."

In another case Hughenden Church was desecrated to gratify the vanity of a family of Wellesbourne, anxious to trace their descent from the Montforts.



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“They caused a monumental effigy of an imaginary ancestor to be carved in the style of the thirteenth century ...they adapted the plate-armour effigy to their purpose by cutting similar arms on the skirts, and they had three rude effigies fabricated by way of filling up the gaps between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.”

To give but two more out of many cases of similar imposture, the Deardens, many years ago, actually had a family chapel constructed in Rochdale Church with sham effigies, slabs, and brasses to the memory of wholly fictitious ancestors; while in two Scottish churches altar-tombs were placed to the memory of successive apocryphal lairds of Coulthart. Such are the lengths to which a craze for ancestry has carried some unprincipled persons; and there is no doubt that the arts of the forger are still enlisted in the service of people who crave long descent and do not scruple as to the methods by which they attain it.

Happily, however, the mania for ancestors does not often take such extreme and reprehensible forms; its manifestations are usually rather amusing than criminal. A common weakness is, however plebeian and obvious in its origin a surname may be, to dignify it with a Norman or at least French cradle. Thus we are solemnly assured that the Smithsons (a name which bluntly proclaims its own derivation) are “a branch of the baronial family of Scalers, or De Scallariis, which flourished in Aquitaine as long ago as the eighth century.” The first Cooper was not, as the unlearned might imagine, a modest if respectable tradesman of that name—no, he was a member of the great house of De Columbers, one of whom was “Le Cupere, being probably Cup-bearer to the King”; Pindar, the patronymic of the Earls Beauchamp, is, of course, a translation of the Norman Le Bailli, and its bearers are “probably descended from William, a Norman of distinction”; while at least one family of Brownes springs lineally from “Turulph, a companion of Rollo,” founder of the Ducal House of Normandy. After this, one learns with meek resignation that the honourable cognomen Smith is derived from *Smeeth*, “a level plain”; and that some, at least, of the Parker family had for ancestors certain De Lions, who flourished bravely under William the Conqueror.

Another favourite vanity is to glorify a name by the prefix De:

“a particle which has been all but unknown in England since the first half of the fifteenth century, and which has never possessed in Great Britain that nobiliary character which the French nation have chosen to assign to it. De Bathe, De Trafford, and the rest are restorations in the modern Gothic manner.”

It is, we fear, a similar vanity which has displaced such modest surnames as Bear, Hunt, Wilkins, Mullins, Green, and Gossip in favour of De Beauchamp, De Vere, De Winton, De Moleyns, De Freville, and De Rodes.

This ludicrous yearning for a Norman ancestry is responsible for many of the absurdities in the pedigrees of even our most exalted families. Thus it is that we find such statements as this widely circulated, and accepted with a quite childlike credence:



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“This noble family (Grosvenor) is descended from a long train in the male line of illustrious ancestors, who flourished in Normandy with great dignity and grandeur from the time of its first erection into a sovereign Dukedom, A.D. 912, to the Conquest of England. The patriarch of this ancestral house was an uncle of Rollo, the famous Dane....”

And again:

“The blood of the great Hugh Lupus, Duke (*sic*) of Chester, flows in the Grosvenor veins.”

This pleasing fiction still rears its head unabashed in spite of all attempts to destroy it; in its honour the late Duke of Westminster was actually named “Hugh Lupus” at the baptismal font, while his younger brother was labelled Richard “de Aquila”; and yet it is an indisputable fact that the Grosvenor ancestors cannot be carried beyond a Robert de Grosvenor, of Budworth, who lived a good century after the Conquest, and who has no more traceable connection with Rollo than with the Man in the Moon.

The Ducal House of Fife, we are told, “derives from Fyfe Macduff, a chief of great wealth and power, who lived about the year 834, and afforded to Kenneth II., King of Scotland, strong aid against his enemies, the Picts.” The present Duke, however, has the good sense to disclaim any hereditary connection with the old Earls of Fife, and to place at the top of his family tree one Adam Duff, who laid the foundation of the family prosperity in the seventeenth century. The Spencers, it is claimed, spring lineally from the old baronial Despencers, “being a branche issueing from the ancient family and chieffe of the Spencers, of which sometymes were the Earles of Winchester and Glocester, and Barons of Glamorgan and Morgannocke.” This, no doubt, is a very distinguished origin; but, alas! the earliest provable ancestors of this “noble” family were respectable and well-to-do Warwickshire graziers, and the first authentic title on the true pedigree is the knighthood conferred on John Spencer in 1519, less than four centuries ago. Similarly the Russells, Dukes of Bedford, are said to be derived from one Hugh de Russell, or Rossel (who took that name from his estate in Normandy), one of the Conqueror’s attendant barons on his invasion of England. Here, again, facts fail lamentably to support the descent claimed, since the earliest known progenitor of this “great house” was that Henry Russell who was sent to Parliament to represent Weymouth in the fifteenth century, and whose great-grandson blossomed into the first Earl of Bedford. (It may, perhaps, be well to state that, although the pedigrees here criticised are those that have been or are widely accepted, they are not necessarily approved by the families whose descent they profess to give.)



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Another Norman ancestor who must go overboard is the alleged founder of the “noble” house of Bolingbroke—that “William de St John who came to England with the Conqueror as grand master of the artillery and supervisor of the wagons and carriages,” since it can be positively shewn that the St John family first set foot in England a good many years after William I. was safely underground; and with this mythical William must also go that equally nebulous progenitor of the Fortescue family, “who” according to the venerable and almost uniform tradition, “landed in England with his master in the year 1066, and, protecting him with his shield from the blows of an assailant, was graciously dubbed ‘Fortescu,’ the man of the stout shield.” The Stourtons, so the “Peerages” say, were “of considerable rank before the Conquest, and dictated their own terms to the Conqueror”; but, as Canon Jackson, the learned antiquary, truly points out, “of this there is no evidence. The name is found, apparently for the first time, among Wiltshire landowners, in the reign of Edward I., when a Nicholas Stourton held one knight’s fee under the Lovells of Castle Cary.”

The Duke of Norfolk has a family tree of very stately growth, and can well afford to repudiate a good many of the ancestors provided for him by “Peerage” editors. Certainly, if he ever read the following statement he must have smiled aloud:

“The Duke’s proudest boast is that his name of Howard is merely that of an ancestor, Hereward the Wake, whose representative, Sir Hereward Wake, is still in Northamptonshire.”

As a matter of fact, his Grace’s earliest known ancestor was Sir William Howard, “who was a grown man and on the bench in 1293, whose real pedigree is very obscure”; and who, no doubt, would have laughed as heartily as his descendant of to-day at his imaginary derivation from the Conqueror’s stubborn foe of the fens, Hereward the Wake.

In the Fitzwilliam pedigree we encounter another nebulous knight of the Conqueror. “The Fitzwilliams,” we are informed, “date so far back that their record is lost, but Sir William, a knight of the Conqueror’s day, married the daughter of Sir John Elmley,” and so on; and further, that at Milton Hall, Peterborough, one may actually look on an antique scarf which “was presented to a direct ancestor of the Fitzwilliams by William the Conqueror.” The most skilled of our genealogists have sought in vain for an authentic trace of this gallant knight of Conquest days; and Professor Freeman does not hesitate to dismiss the story of his existence as “pure fable.” But if Sir William of Normandy must fall from the family tree, his place is most creditably taken by Godric, a Saxon Thane, who, as a forefather, is at least as respectable as any Norman warrior in William’s train.



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The house of Fitzgerald is credited with an ancestor, one Dominus Otho, "who is supposed to have been of the family of the Gherardini of Florence. This noble passed over into Normandy, and thence, in 1057, into England, where he became so great a favourite with Edward the Confessor that he excited the jealousy of the Saxon Thanes." Dominus Otho must too pass, with many another treasured ancestor, into the crowded genealogical land of the rejected; for the real founder of the Fitzgerald house was Walter, son of "Other," whose name is first met with in Domesday Book in 1086. The Otho story is shown to be "absolute fiction."

In view of such examples of misplaced ingenuity exhibited by the makers of pedigrees for our noble families, one can almost read without a smile that

"there were Heneages at Hainton in the time of King Edwy; they doubtless took part in the revolt which brought Edgar to the throne, and it is not impossible that some of them were in the train of Wulfhere, King of Mercia;"

or that

"Lord Alington comes of a family of ancient lineage, one of his ancestors being Sir Hildebrand de Alington, who was marshal to William the Conqueror at the battle of Hastings;"

though we may know full well that the Sturt pedigree really begins in the seventeenth century, and that the earliest known Heneage lived and died some three centuries before.

But "noble" families have no monopoly of misguided genealogy. "The immense majority of the pedigrees of the landed gentry," says a well-known officer of arms, "cannot, I fear, be characterised as otherwise than utterly worthless. The errors of the 'peerage' are as nothing to the fables which we encounter everywhere;" and the same may be said of many another collection of pedigrees which is a treasured possession in countless British homes.

Some even justly famous men have not been proof against this insidious form of vanity and pretence. Edmund Spenser was ungenerous enough to "dismiss his known ancestry of small Lancashire gentry and plant himself modestly in the shadow of the newly discovered shield of arms of the noble house of Spencer, 'of which I meanest boast myself to be.'" And Lord Tennyson, whose ultimate ascertainable forefather was an eighteenth century Lincolnshire apothecary, was provided with a slightly differenced cadet's version of the arms of Archbishop Tenison, with whom he had no connection whatever.



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