

LADIES FAIR AND FRAIL  
SKETCHES OF THE DEMI-MONDE  
DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



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LADIES FAIR AND FRAIL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE STORY OF A BEAUTIFUL  
DUCHESS. BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE  
LIFE AND TIMES OF ELIZABETH GUNNING,  
DUCHESS OF HAMILTON AND ARGYLL. *With*  
*6 Beautiful Photogravure Portraits*

"There are few more romantic stories in English history than that of Elizabeth Gunning."—*Westminster Gazette*.

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SOME DISTINGUISHED VICTIMS  
OF THE SCAFFOLD.





*J. Reynolds pinx.*

*E. Fischer fecit.*

Miss Kitty Fischer  
in the Character of Cleopatra.



21 12/21

# LADIES

## FAIR AND FRAIL

SKETCHES OF THE DEMI-MONDE

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY HORACE BLEACKLEY ❧ ❧ ❧

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS ❧

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD  
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMIX

*Turnbull & Spears, Printers, Edinburgh*

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H1 B5

## PREFACE

**W**HENEVER an attempt is made to write the biography of an individual who was merely notorious without attaining first-rate historical importance the charitable protest invariably appears:—"Why disturb his ashes? Let the poor creature rest peaceably in the grave!" In the case, however, of the heroines of this book the objection seems superfluous, as there can be no doubt that if their permission had been sought in their lifetime every one of them would have given an eager consent; and were it possible for news of the living world to reach the sunny plains it is certain that each fair shade would be gratified to know that she was remembered by posterity.

Moreover, none of these ladies have been allowed to rest in peace; from time to time their ashes have been disturbed most ruthlessly. In countless works on painting and engraving the reproductions of their portraits occupy a prominent place, and the art critic who usually is a most slovenly historian has described their characters and adventures with woeful inaccuracy. An age of specialism demands rather

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more precision, and since the lover of prints and the student of the picture gallery is displaying a keener interest in the masterpieces of Gainsborough and Reynolds, of M'Ardeil and John Raphael Smith, it is essential to make new additions to our National Biographies.

In many instances the lives of these frail ladies are interwoven with the careers of more notable personages. The name of Fanny Murray is writ large in a chapter in the history of John Wilkes; the fortunes of Nancy Parsons were identified in the closest manner with one of the Ministries of her time; the portraits of Kitty Fisher will not allow us to forget that she was a favourite model of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Sometimes a special interest of another kind is attached to the fair wanton. No critic of the French Revolution can afford to neglect the memoirs of Grace Dalrymple Eliot, nor should the student of criminology overlook the case of Miss Kennedy and her precious brothers. Though these facts might not be in themselves a sufficient reason for the appearance of elaborate monographs it cannot be denied that they increase the value of such essays.

It is the fashion to deride what has been called the "New Biography," but it should not be forgotten that when the large coverts are exhausted one can only beat the copses and the hedgerows. The fields of the specialist are

## Preface

becoming impoverished, and in order to produce a crop it is necessary to apportion the ground more narrowly. If one makes a blade of grass grow where none grew before one should not be blamed because one does not raise as plentiful a harvest as those who have been established upon more favourable soil. It is good to have brought forth new fruit at all.

In former works the present writer has explored some of the less-frequented by-paths of the eighteenth century. With the object of depicting certain phases of society, he wrote the biography of a lady of quality, and in order to add another chapter to the history of crime, he skimmed the cream of the Newgate Calendar—if such an expression may be allowed—in a compendium of famous malefactors. In pursuance of the same task, he has now sketched the careers of six of the most celebrated courtesans of the Georgian era. Since only three volumes have been undertaken during a seven years' study of this particular period, the author cannot be accused of hasty production.

For the most part the reception of the previous monographs by the press and the public has been most generous, and in this respect the kindness of the book-lover and the reviewer must be acknowledged with the deepest gratitude. Still the result has been somewhat disappointing. In these fast-moving days it appears to matter little

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whether a biography is a conscientious or a perfunctory piece of work, and the rapid craftsman is most sure of recognition. More important still, the stream of this class of literature has swamped the market, and it is no longer worth while to attempt such compositions.

Although the present writer cannot look forward to continuing his task, he does not regret his labours in the lighter fields of historical research. To the best of his ability he has endeavoured to tell the truth, and he trusts that some historian of the future, who will do for the social history what Lecky has done for the political and constitutional history of the eighteenth century, will find instruction in his pages.

HORACE BLEACKLEY.

FOX OAK, HERSHAM,  
SURREY.

The author wishes to acknowledge his obligations to the following persons: To Mr Albert Matthews, Boston, Massachusetts, for supplying the details of Kitty Fisher's marriage in Scotland; to the Rev. Arnold Mayhew, The Hut, Benenden, for making inquiries from the old residents of the parish; to Mr H. H. Ball, for

## Preface

research work in the British Museum ; to Mr Robert Beattie, for his labours among the Edinburgh records ; to the Hon. James Home, who, with his usual kindness, has communicated portions of the unpublished journal of Lady Mary Coke ; to Mr A. Francis Steuart, of Edinburgh, for useful advice ; to Mr Frederic Whyte for his kindness in reading the proofs of this book ; to the Hon. Hew Dalrymple, for information about the Dalrymple family ; and to the Rev. Hugh Menjies, of Dysart, the Rev. T. Campbell, of Dumfries, the Rev. C. R. M'Kee, of Malpas, the Rev. S. C. Saunders, of Watlington, and the Rev. H. B. Chapel, of Dunmow, for their courteous responses to inquiries.

Permission to reproduce the picture of Nancy Parsons, by Gainsborough, has been granted by the owner, Mr Charles Wertheimer, to whom the author desires to express his sincere thanks.





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112

I  
FANNY MURRAY







11 Northend Place

J.M. Stoddart fecit

Miss Fanny Murray.

These sportive Loves inviting seem to say,

Behold this Face, and gaze your heart away

1750



## FANNY MURRAY

### I

**I**N the summer of 1741 a little girl who earned her living by selling flowers was a familiar figure in the streets of Bath.

Sometimes she would stand with her basket in the Abbey Yard to intercept the fine ladies as they passed along in close chairs for their early morning bathe, doing good business, since it was the fashion to enter the water nosegay in hand. A little later she might be seen plying her trade outside Simpson's Rooms in the Grove as the company arrived for the concert breakfast; or in the afternoon she would take up her position in the Borough Walks to offer her wares to those who came to drink tea at Mr Wiltshire's Assembly House. She was a mere child, being only twelve years old, the daughter of a musician called Rudman—a familiar name in the Bath Abbey registers—and her father and mother were both dead. Already she gave promise of great beauty, and the beaux of Bath, attracted by her merry brown eyes, her rosy cheeks, and her soft, regular features, were lavish in their patronage of her flowers. Still,

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little Fanny Rudman was a good and modest girl, and for a long time she remained unspoilt by admiration.

Presently a gallant more unscrupulous than the rest cast his evil eye upon her, a devil-may-care roysterer, named Jack Spencer, the favourite grandson of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, a man in the prime of life, who had inherited some of the virtues and all of the vices of his Churchill ancestors. Each week a fresh tale was told of his reckless pranks, and though perhaps he did not exhibit himself naked in public as often as was alleged, he seems to have been one of the most incorrigible tricksters of his day. In his attitude towards women he was wholly unscrupulous, being a heartless rake, and in spite of the tender youth of the little nosegay girl, he determined that she should become his mistress. Poor Fanny's virtue was soon conquered. The child was bewildered by the blandishments of the man of the world. A few tawdry gifts, some earnest promises, and then, flattered by his notice and amazed at his preference, she became his victim. In a little while she had reason to repent her fault. Before many weeks had passed the Hon. Jack Spencer grew weary of his conquest, and left her without a penny, to earn her living again by selling nosegays.

Whilst the unhappy Fanny, who was scarcely

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old enough to know the difference between right and wrong, was lamenting her evil fate, another tempter began to whisper in her ear. No girl that has strayed from the paths of virtue can be more worthy of forgiveness than an orphan child not yet in her teens, poor, lonely, and ignorant, who has been corrupted by a man old enough to be her father. There was less excuse for the next lapse of the little flower-seller, but considering that she was a mark for every rake in her native city, being notorious as a discarded mistress, it is not surprising that she sought the first refuge that was offered to her. For a second time it was her misfortune to fall into the hands of a false lover, one Captain Ned Harvey, a stalwart, coarse-featured warrior, who was destined to gain much glory in the French wars. Indeed, since, with a soldier's inconstancy, he "kissed and rode away," it was supposed by some that he had been the original betrayer, whereas he merely took the place of the fickle Spencer. Thus, at the age of twelve, poor little Fanny Rudman had discovered that her worst enemy was man.

At this juncture an event occurred which raised her into a position of dignity and affluence. One day an elderly beau of three-score years and six, who had seen her in the company of her former lovers, solicited an interview with the pretty child, and without much superfluous sentiment proposed bluntly that she should come to

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live with him as his mistress. It was almost equivalent to a royal command, for the peremptory old gentleman was none other than Richard Nash himself, the world-renowned "King of Bath." From infancy Fanny must have revered the pompous figure, and gazed with awe upon the white hat, black wig, and scarlet countenance that flamed through the town like the colours of the German ensign. To her childish fancy this splendid Master of Ceremonies, whose word was law to the first nobility, seemed an absolute monarch. In her wildest dreams she could imagine no greater glory than to share his throne, and so she accepted the honour which he proposed to confer upon her with gratitude and humility.

For the next two years she remained under the protection of Beau Nash, and although it cannot be said that she reigned as Queen of Bath, nevertheless she had soon become a celebrity. According to her biographer, the Master of Ceremonies grew much attached to his youthful mistress, making her lavish presents, and taking care that she should dress in a manner befitting her high estate. Being a loyal and grateful soul, Fanny repaid this generosity by strict fidelity, and proved a bright, merry companion, too ingenuous to seek further conquests, too happy to wish to change her situation. Her intellect was not great, her education had

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been much neglected, but being docile and tractable, she soon learnt the ways of decent society, while her high spirits and good nature never seemed to vary. An admirer has described her truly as "a fine gay girl, a blooming, laughing, dimpled beauty," and with such advantages there was no need for her to be clever. An attractive sketch made of her when she was fourteen years old runs as follows:—"Fanny's person, which already began to testify marks of womanhood, was extremely beautiful; her face a perfect oval, with eyes that conversed love, and every other feature in agreeable symmetry. Her dimpled cheek alone might have captivated, if a smile that gave it existence did not display such other charms as shared the conquest. Her teeth regular, small and perfectly white, coral lips and chestnut hair soon attracted the eyes of every one. . . . It is true she was but of the middle size, and, though inclined to be plump, she had delicacy enough in her shape to make it agreeable."

About this time the beaux of Bath became more persistent in their pursuit of her, and her elderly protector, who was fast approaching the allotted span, began to grow jealous. Whether or not she proved unfaithful is uncertain. Perhaps the suspicious doubts of her patron were baseless, or perhaps, infatuated by some handsome gallant, she succumbed to a momentary

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temptation. It may be that, corrupted by the vicious existence of the past two years, the spirit of the courtesan already was strong within her. Whatever was the cause of the separation, it is certain that her friendship with Richard Nash terminated before the end of 1743. Then, fearing, no doubt, the resentment of the monarch of Bath, she bade farewell to her native city and came up to London.



## II

**I**N the first scene of Hogarth's history of "The Harlot's Progress" a spruce old lady, with an evil leer upon her aquiline features, is accosting a young girl who has just alighted from the York coach at the Bell Inn in Wood Street, Cheapside. Such a drama was of daily occurrence when Fanny Rudman first set foot in the metropolis, for although the notorious Mother Needham, whom Hogarth has shown to us as she pursued her miserable trade, was dead and buried, there were scores of similar harpies, male and female, ever on the watch to entice the guileless country-women into their infamous homes. No other fate could happen to a fallen girl such as Fanny; indeed, it is probable that she flew to meet her destiny eagerly, without needing the solicitations of the procuress, taking up her abode in one of the shameful houses that flourished in the Flesh Market. Times without number the squalid life of those of the lost sisterhood, who were confined in such dens of iniquity, has been described with graphic detail. Besides being the slaves of brutish patrons, forced to drink and toy with every lout who reeled into the house at any

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hour of the day or night, they were bound soul and body to their employer, who appropriated the bulk of their earnings in return for board and lodging. Even the clothes upon their back—the tawdry finery of the harlot—were hired from the procuress or tally-woman, and the unhappy girl who failed to pay the exorbitant sum demanded for the loan of these faded garments was hurried without mercy into the Fleet or Marshalsea prisons. Those who fell out of favour with the bucks of the town, and who in consequence found themselves unable to bribe the watch, were soon dragged before the magistrate and sent to beat hemp in Blackfriars Bridewell. At the best they were used more shamefully than women of the harem; at the worst they were left to rot in the dungeon. A task-mistress like the wicked Mrs Needham regarded her myrmidons as mere cattle.

In the year 1743, when Fanny came to London, no lady of “Mrs Warren’s Profession” occupied the pre-eminent position that had been held by the celebrated harridan of Hogarth’s picture. Soon, however, two adequate successors appeared on the scene. Long years of debauchery had wrecked the charms of Betsy Careless, who a little while ago, under the protection of a riotous young barrister named Robert Henley, the future Earl of Northington, Lord Chancellor of England, had dominated the

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joyous neighbourhood of Covent Garden, being acknowledged the gayest and most handsome woman of the town. So, in a few months, when her glass told plainly that her reign was finished, she became the mistress of a house of vice on the outskirts of the market, over which she ruled, battenning on the profits of her shameful traffic, until drink and extravagance brought her to the poorhouse. Another, more iniquitous even than she, set up her brazen sign during the same period in the north-east corner of the Piazza, close to the playhouse, the inimitable Mrs Jane Douglas, also immortalised in Hogarth's canvas, where she is depicted as a smug, plump hypocrite, who murmurs a prayer and quaffs a dram with the same breath, the original of Mother Cole, the sanctimonious old bawd of Foote's comedy. Yet some have less to their credit, for this dame invented the mob-cap.

By some means or other Fanny Rudman managed in a short time to be independent of seraglios, like those governed by Mothers Needham and Douglas, and, having assumed the name of Fanny Murray, took lodgings in her own name. Though she thus became her own mistress, the new existence was scarcely less grimy than the old, and it was many a long month before she emerged from obscurity to become the belle of Covent Garden. In those

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early days she was forced to attend with the rest at all the low taverns that were clustered around the theatre. Once more we are indebted to Hogarth for a glimpse of this phase of life. In the picture called "Morning" we see a crowd of drunken rioters pouring forth from Tom King's Coffee-House, a wooden shanty that stood on the fringe of the market opposite Tavistock Row, the rendezvous of the spendthrifts and strumpets of the town, which flourished long after its first proprietor had gone to perdition, and his more famous sister Moll had retired with her ill-gotten gains to the seclusion of Tavistock Hill. Night after night the unfortunate Fanny must have witnessed a similar scene of "confusion, drunkenness, and stupidity," as she sat at Bob Derry's among the most abandoned of the frail sisterhood, a shameless crowd with painted cheeks and Indian-inked eyebrows, decked out with earrings and necklaces of red and green glass, who filled this fœtid tavern from sunset to sunrise. Occasionally, when she ventured to call at the Cyder Cellar, close by in Maiden Lane, she would meet a rather more respectable company, for some of the fine women of "The Garden" came hither, and many a witty fellow like Ned Shuter, the actor, or George Stevens, the writer, made it their resort. At other times, in the days of her noviciate, she was obliged to frequent the meanest dens in the Market, and

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a visit even to the Turk's Head Bagnio, in Bow Street, which lives to fame as the house where Councillor Silvertongue assassinated the husband whom he had wronged in "Marriage à la Mode," would have appeared an undoubted honour.

At last her youth and beauty were recognised by the rakes of Covent Garden. When she first began to rise in the social scale, she would be permitted to enter the exclusive portals of the Rose Tavern in Russell Street, a hostelry celebrated for its hot suppers, where some of the nobility of England and their female friends used to get drunk every night. In the third scene of "The Rake's Progress," Hogarth has represented a festive gathering at this famous inn, revealing a spectacle that scarcely could have been excelled at Tom King's or Bob Derry's. For we perceive that one of the ladies is picking the pocket of her tipsy squire, another is squirting wine in the face of a rival, and a third, in a drunken frolic, is setting fire to a map upon the wall; but at the same time it is evident from their dress and appearance that they are the aristocracy of the demi-monde, specially selected, no doubt, by the tavern porter, Leathercote, to entertain a distinguished patron. Possibly the youthful Fanny may have been the heroine of an adventure which occurred at The Castle, another Covent Garden hostelry, which

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was also the resort of the rich and noble, where the food and wine were of the best. One evening a tipsy gallant, enraptured by the charms of a celebrated *fille de joie*, snatched off her shoe, and filling it with champagne, drank a bumper to her health. "Then, to carry the compliment still further," so runs the tale, "he ordered the shoe itself to be dressed and served up for supper. The cook set himself seriously to work upon it. He pulled the upper part, which was of damask, into fine shreds and tossed it up in a ragout, minced the sole, cut the wooden heel into very fine slices, fried them in butter, and placed them round the dish for garnish."

As a matter of course, Fanny Murray soon found her way to The Shakespeare's Head, which was regarded as the Mecca of the courtesan, for Jack Harris, the chief waiter, as base a fellow as the redoubtable Leathercote, arranged the *petites affaires* of all the principal women in the town, and it was an honour to figure in his list. Until Sam Derrick plagiarised the idea many years afterwards, and printed a yearly guide-book which he called "Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies," this catalogue of frail beauties remained unpublished, being merely an inventory kept by the waiter at "The Shakespeare" for the sake of reference. According to her biographer it was not until Fanny Murray had been four years in London

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that she gained a place in this famous list, where she is described as "a fine brown girl, rising nineteen next season, perfectly sound in wind and limb." Jack Harris conducted his business on the lines of Tattersall's.

### III

**W**HEN the flower-girl of Bath was only seventeen years old she was already famous. During the summer of 1746 society was much amused by a sprightly poem written by Horace Walpole, called "The Beauties," a eulogy of some of the most lovely women in the land, such as Lady Caroline Fitzroy, Lady Sophia Fermor, Mrs George Pitt, and Miss Chudleigh. Nearly everyone approved of the poet's selection, but Richard Rigby made a jocular protest, and declared that he had chosen a set of belles far handsomer than any of those mentioned by the master of Strawberry Hill. Further than this, the jovial "Bloomsbury Dick" insisted that no list of fair ladies could be complete unless it included the name of Fanny Murray! The beauty of Bath had suddenly emerged from the obscurity of Covent Garden. All the wild nobles in the town were enraptured with her fresh young charms, and considered her robust spirits and spontaneous gaiety a delightful contrast to the bibulous clamour of most of the girls who frequented the Rose or the Shakespeare's Head. Whenever she walked abroad a troop



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of gallants crowded around her, and soon her broad-brimmed Rubens hat was as familiar to the promenaders in the Mall as the countenance of the king. Such a favourite did she become that the wits declared "it was a vice not to be acquainted with Fanny; it was a crime not to toast her at every meal." Certainly none of Walpole's beauties had more admirers than the Covent Garden lady who sprang into celebrity while his poem was in the press.

The *chronique scandaleuse* has preserved the names of some of her patrons in these early days. Foremost among them was the inevitable John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, a young man of twenty-seven, as persevering and laborious in matters of gallantry as in affairs of state, a sad prodigal, but a fascinating person, in spite of his coarse, heavy features and uncouth appearance. A youth five years younger than the wicked earl soon became his rival in the competition for Fanny's smiles, a lieutenant-colonel of twenty-two named Joseph Yorke, who recently had been helping "Butcher" Cumberland to chastise the Scottish rebels, for, being the son of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, his promotion had come rapidly. The gentle Henry Gould, a plodding if not a brilliant barrister, was another of her favourite companions, a man who, when elevated to the bench many years afterwards, gained the reputation

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of being a humane judge, a rare distinction in the days of Tyburn gallows.

However, in a short time Fanny was monopolised, more or less, by Sir Richard Atkins of Clapham, a prosperous baronet, but a person of little consequence, who was merely known to fame as the brother of Mrs George Pitt, one of the most beautiful women in the kingdom. Owing to his height and leanness, and an excessive stoop, Sam Foote dubbed him "the Waggoner's Whip"; and when his liaison with the new toast had become notorious, the same jester invented the additional nickname of "Supple Dick." Hereditary ill-health seems to have affected his character, and his youth too may be pleaded as an excuse for his infatuation, since he had only just reached his majority when he saw the irresistible Fanny for the first time. During the rest of his short life he remained her devoted admirer, and though their intercourse was broken by quarrels, yet, sooner or later, they always became friends once more. Apparently most of the dissensions were caused by the inconstancy of Sir Richard, who was a lion among the ladies, and gave his inamorata good reason for jealousy times without number; while she, though true to him as long as he was loyal to her, never failed to pay him back in his own coin. In spite of these constant interruptions in their friendship, the girl had no cause to

## Fanny Murray

complain of the generosity of her baronet, who was believed to supply the greater portion of her income for several years.

Many anecdotes were told of his liberality, and the story of the bank-note sandwich, which was repeated in every tavern and club-house in London, has been preserved for all time in a letter of Horace Walpole. One morning Fanny was sitting at breakfast with Sir Richard Atkins, when, to stop her oft-repeated tale of poverty, he drew out his pocket-book and presented her with twenty pounds. It was in the early days of their friendship—the autumn of 1748—and the nineteen-year-old Fanny, now at the pinnacle of her fame, could afford to take liberties. Laughing contemptuously, she clapped the bank-note between two slices of bread and butter, and, protesting that it was not sufficient to make her a breakfast, began to munch it in saucy derision. “Damn your twenty pounds,” she cried, according to Walpole; “what does that signify?” At this period there were repeated rumours that she would become Lady Atkins, and the young baronet was so much in love that the wedding seemed highly probable. “These are very bad times for the female quality,” said Lord Chesterfield with polite scorn, “it being the fashion for young fellows not only to deal with, but to marry, common w——.” Nevertheless, the wedding did not take place. Miss Murray, like her for-

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midable rival, Lucy Cooper,<sup>1</sup> who some years previously had quarrelled with another dotting baronet, does not appear to have been a skilful tactician.

During the interruptions in her friendship with Sir Richard Atkins she came into contact with many eccentric characters. One of these, who was styled Handsome Tracy,<sup>2</sup> a beau of the first water, had been the hero of an adventure that was the talk of the town. Meeting a pretty girl in the Park, he insisted upon escorting her home, when he discovered that, instead of being the daughter of a decent tradesman, as her attire seemed to indicate, her mother was a washer-woman, who eked out a living by selling butter and eggs. However, after a night's reflection he found himself as madly in love as ever, and during the course of the day he paid another visit to his charmer. The old woman received him politely, offered him dinner, and listened patiently to his proposals, but the girl, professing to be greatly shocked, gave a flat refusal to his offers of protection. Between them the pair kept Beau Tracy drinking in their hovel until twelve o'clock at night, when, all his prudence having oozed away, he hiccuped a resolve to marry his pretty Susan before daybreak. So,

<sup>1</sup> Lucy Cooper, or Cowper, the *chère amie* of Sir Orlando Bridgeman and Charles Churchill. She died on the 18th of October 1772.

<sup>2</sup> See *Notes and Queries*, 10 S., ix. 188.

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like the Duke of Hamilton and the beautiful Miss Gunning, they set off to Keith's Chapel in Curzon Street, where the knot was tied before the bridegroom had time to recover the full use of his senses. It would have been well for Fanny Murray, who became very intimate with Robert Tracy after he had grown tired of his "egg-girl," if she had possessed a little of the prudence of the sagacious Susannah Owens.

Another of Fanny's acquaintances, who cut a great dash in the season of 1749, was a man of large matrimonial experience, one Captain Plaistow, in reality a penniless adventurer, but esteemed a man of substance. In the course of twelve months he is said to have married a dozen or more wives at the Fleet or Mayfair, all women of fortune, and, according to subsequent report, "he took care to pass no more than the honeymoon with any of them." On one occasion, before these outrages had been discovered, Fanny was able to save him from being arrested for debt. Just as he was leaving Marylebone Gardens, a number of catchpolls pounced upon him and hurried him into a coach that was waiting at the gate. In another moment he would have been borne off to Newgate; but the beauty of Bath happened to be driving past, and seeing the predicament of her friend, stopped her carriage alongside the first. Before the bailiffs could interfere the captain had

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slipped from one coach into the other, and drove off with Fanny to a place of safety. Then, aware that his numerous crimes could be concealed no longer, he took the first opportunity of leaving the country.

About the same time she met the notorious James Maclean, known as "the gentleman highwayman," who is said to have led her out to dance at an assembly in York. Deceived like many others by his flashy gentility, she listened to his polite speeches, and it was arranged that he should wait upon her when she returned to town. However, the appointment was never kept, for in the meantime Maclean had been arrested on a charge of highway robbery, and sentenced to death. History does not relate whether Fanny, like Lady Caroline Petersham and Miss Ashe, went to console the fallen hero as he lay in Newgate.

It was only on occasions that it was her luck to associate with adventurers like Plaistow and Maclean. For the most part her acquaintances were persons of rank and position. We read that Lord Waldegrave, who married the proud and beautiful Maria Walpole, was appointed arbitrator in a dispute between Fanny Murray and one of his friends during the summer of 1752. In the course of the next year Sir John Hill, the prince of pamphleteers, eulogised her charms in *The Inspector*, while in the last

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month of 1754 a writer in *The Connoisseur* spoke of her as still leading the fashion. All this time she continued to coquette and quarrel with Sir Richard Atkins, who, in spite of their constant squabbles, never ceased to regard her as his chief sultana. During one of the periods of truce he arranged to take her on a yachting tour to the Mediterranean, in company with Sir Francis Blake Delaval and Miss La Roche, a couple who were bound together by similar ties. A sloop was built at the expense of the two baronets, a ball was given to celebrate its launching, and a few convivial souls, such as Sam Foote, Jemmy Worsdale, and Zachary Moore were invited to accompany the expedition. Then, on the 10th of June 1756, an event occurred which put an end to the cruise, for Sir Richard Atkins was attacked by fever, and died after an illness of a few days.

This was a sad loss to Fanny Murray. Although she was only twenty-seven years old, she had been "upon the town" for more than a decade, and the gallants were growing tired of her. No one came forward to supply the place of the deceased baronet, and she owed money to all the tradesmen, when, not being able to pay her debts, she was arrested and carried to a sponging-house. In this predicament her thoughts turned to the illustrious family of her first lover. It was not long since the son of

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Jack Spencer had been married to Miss Margaret Poyntz, and the splendour of the wedding had rivalled a royal pageant. Unlike his father, the bridegroom was a kind and honourable man, while the young wife was one of the best and sweetest ladies in the land. It seemed to Fanny that this youthful couple, in the midst of their great wealth and happiness, would lend a sympathetic ear to her tale of distress. So she wrote to Mr Spencer, and told him how she had been led astray when she used to sell nosegays in Bath as a child, and thus had been driven to a life of sin, which had brought her to ruin. Shocked at this account of his father's baseness, the kind-hearted young squire ordered his steward to investigate the story, and having discovered that it was true, he hastened to make atonement. An allowance of £200 a year for life was settled upon Fanny, and she was liberated from the bailiff's clutches. Nor did the generosity of her benefactor end here. In the course of his inquiries about the unfortunate woman, he ascertained that one of the principal actors at Drury Lane, a handsome Scotsman of good family, named David Ross, had a great admiration for her, so with skilful tact the good-natured Spencer undertook the task of match-maker. The manner of the negotiations is unknown, but when the player learnt that the charming Fanny possessed a substantial income and was resolved



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to turn over a new leaf, he hesitated no longer. Being a genial *bon vivant*, in whom epicurism was a ruling passion, the fortune was an irresistible bait, and since he was a clever judge of character, he perceived that he would gain a good as well as a beautiful wife. Thus, all his scruples having been removed, he made his declaration to her in due form.

On the day of the wedding, when bride and bridegroom had arrived at church and were waiting for the ceremony to begin, the clergyman came forward and begged Fanny to allow him to speak with her in private. Having taken her into the vestry, he warned her, as one of her friends has related, "delicately but solemnly that marriage was an awful and a sacred tie, and that unless she had determined to forsake all others and cleave only to her husband, she would plunge herself into dreadful guilt by entering into the married state." The penitent woman did not resent the advice of the good man. With deep emotion she answered that she was going to lead a new life, and hoped to atone for her past sins. So, after a few words of encouragement, he led her into the church, and proceeded with the ceremony.

Thus the celebrated Fanny Murray became the wife of the famous David Ross, and settled down cheerfully to her new duties, darning her husband's stockings and mending his shirts with

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amazing industry, spoiling the good easy man in a hundred ways by her care for his comfort. For the jovial epicure, who made his whole life "a comedy in which," said his friends, "the whole business and plot was eating," needed no encouragement in self-indulgence. Still, notwithstanding his love of ease, he was devoted to his profession, and in the opinion of the ladies was by far the best actor at Drury Lane, excepting, of course, the great manager. Although not yet thirty, he had played all the principal characters both in tragedy and comedy, and it was a common remark that, being a gentleman in real life, unlike many of his rivals, he had no difficulty in acting the part of a fine gentleman on the stage. At the close of the season 1757, when he terminated his contract with David Garrick, another engagement was offered to him immediately by Mr Rich, of Covent Garden. With Fanny's income joined to her husband's salary, the Ross household was a prosperous one. From the first she proved a model wife, and although everyone watched her conduct with keen suspicion, no one could detect the slightest impropriety. Henceforth not a breath of scandal tarnished her name.

Now and then she was pained by the printed allusions to her past life. Thus, in December 1758, a volume appeared which purported to relate the "Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss

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Fanny Murray," and although the book was more decorous than most works of the kind, it must have come as a heavy blow to the dignity of the elegant David Ross. Again, in "The Meretriciad," which was published in September 1761, Captain Edward Thompson thus apostrophised the ex-courtesan :—

So Murray rose, but Lord how long ago ?  
When Bath was young and Nash an infant Beau :  
Soar'd from her basket, to a Chariot-fame,  
And lives this moment with the best good name.

There were many other allusions which, like those mentioned, caused much annoyance to the actor and his wife.

#### IV

**A**T the beginning of the winter of 1763, twenty years after Fanny Murray had come to town, a political crisis, brought about by the ubiquitous John Wilkes, made her name a household word once more. It was a sequel to "Squinting Jacky's" passage-of-arms with the Government in the preceding April, on the 23rd of which month he had published, from the office of Mr George Kearsley of Ludgate Hill, No. 45 of his paper, *The North Briton*, attacking the King's Speech in unmeasured terms. Although the angry ministers failed to inflict an adequate punishment upon the offender, since Chief Justice Pratt ordered his release on the ground of his privilege as a member of Parliament after he had been imprisoned only a week in the Tower, two circumstances had arisen out of the prosecution which hastened the revenge of his enemies. For Wilkes, made more greatly daring in consequence of his victory, set up a private printing press at his house in Great George Street, while the Government discovered some documents at the office of his late publisher, showing that their *bête noire* was composing an indecent book. Such

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indeed was "An Essay on Woman," a ribald paraphrase of Pope's "Essay on Man," written many years before, when the beauty of Bath was the toast of the hour, and commencing with the invocation "Awake my Fanny," for Miss Murray had been the heroine of the poem. At last the ministers seemed to have a chance of punishing their dangerous foe, and Philip Carteret Webb, the solicitor of the Treasury, was instructed to spare no pains to secure a copy of the impious work.

It was a delicate task, as all the servants of Wilkes had an affection for their master, but the painstaking Webb, who, in spite of the odium which the affair brought upon him, was merely doing his duty, carried out the orders of his superiors with quick dexterity. By the help of spies it was discovered that one of Wilkes' printers was on friendly terms with some of his fellow-craftsmen employed by William Fadan, the publisher, who happened to be an intimate acquaintance of the Rev. John Kidgell, the chaplain of Lord March. With little difficulty the parson was persuaded to secure the co-operation of the friendly publisher, who made an ally of his foreman, and in the month of July a few pages of the obscene poem had found their way to Fadan's workshop, whence they came into the hands of Mr Kidgell. It was not until the end of September that Wilkes, on his return from a

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short visit to Paris, began to suspect that his printers had been tampered with, and believing that Michael Currey, whom he had employed to strike off twelve impressions of part of "An Essay on Woman," had betrayed his trust, he dismissed him at a moment's notice. Hitherto the man seems to have been more careless than disloyal, but now in the heat of his resentment he handed over several more proof sheets of indecent poetry to Fadan and Kidgell. These, along with the first instalment, were placed by the clergyman in the hands of his patron, Lord March, who laid them before Philip Carteret, Webb, and the Secretaries of State.

Still the Government had not obtained the complete poem, which existed in manuscript, but only [a fourth part had been struck off at the Great George Street press. Apparently George Kearsley, who seems to have been commissioned in the previous autumn to print the work, was unable to undertake the task, and Wilkes, too, could not find time to type more than three or four sheets. Thus, after all his pains, Mr Webb discovered that the obscene "publication" consisted merely of unpublished fragments. However, he had been fortunate enough to secure a proof of the frontispiece, "engraved curiously on copper," bearing the title of the poem, and a phallic design, under which appeared the motto, *Σωτήρ κόσμου*, and the announcement that there was "A

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Commentary by the Rev. Dr Warburton." This title-page was followed by six pages headed "Advertisement by the Editor" and four pages entitled "The Design," in which, according to Mr Kidgell, "every degree of decency is renounced." Of the actual "Essay on Woman," which was inscribed to Miss Fanny Murray, there were only three loose proof sheets (about a fourth of the whole) all printed in red, a parody of the "Essay on Man," as far as it went almost line for line. In addition there were ribald travesties of Pope's "Universal Prayer" and "The Dying Christian to his Soul"; also a paraphrase of "Veni Creator," styled "The Maid's Prayer." Such was the booty acquired by the ministers, an impious piece of work without doubt, but one that could not be styled "a publication" by any pretence, as it was still incomplete, and was to have been limited to twelve copies for private distribution among familiar friends.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the reluctance of Lord Chancellor Northington, a jovial reprobate who, mindful of the days when he used to riot around Covent Garden with charming Betsy Careless, was loth to hold Wilkes responsible for the sins of his youth, the Government determined to use the obscene poem as a pretext for prosecuting this enemy. On the 15th of November, when Parlia-

<sup>1</sup> See *Notes and Queries*, 10 S., ix. 442.

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ment met, Lord Sandwich, the new Secretary of State, rose in the House of Lords to complain of a printed paper entitled "An Essay on Woman," with notes to which the name of Right Rev. Dr Warburton, Lord Bishop of Gloucester, were affixed, and declared that such use of a peer's name was a gross breach of privilege. Assuming an air of virtuous indignation, the laborious young earl stigmatised the work as a scandalous profanation of the Holy Scriptures, and stated that Mr Wilkes had "violated the most sacred ties of religion as well as decency." Most of the noble lords who listened to the speech were delighted that their enemy had written a book, thus giving them an opportunity of reprisals, but every one of them was amazed at the effrontery of the Secretary of State, or amused at his hypocrisy. For it was common knowledge that Lord Sandwich had aided and abetted the man whom he now impeached in many of his most scandalous debauches, having joined with him in all the orgies at Medmenham Abbey, where the members of a profligate club calling themselves the monks of St Francis used to offer sacrifice to Venus and Bacchus, and having been also for the past two years a fellow member of the "Sublime Society of Beef Steaks," at whose meetings he had listened with much enjoyment to the verses which he now condemned. Moreover, all knew that Fanny Murray, the heroine of the poem,



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had once been his mistress. Thus many distinguished peers smiled openly at the cant of his speech, and his friend Lord Le Despencer, the founder of the Medmenham monks, whispered audibly to his neighbour that he had never before heard the Devil preaching.

Two of the lords, however, showed no signs of amusement. Honest, hot-headed Warburton, the learned prelate whose edition of Pope had been ridiculed, sprang to his feet, ablaze with anger, and after solemnly repudiating both the poem and the notes, declared that they were worthy of Satan. "Nay," he added, after a pause, "I beg the Devil's pardon, for he is incapable of writing it." The good Baron Lyttelton also saw no humour in the proceedings, and when some passages from the work were read aloud, he interposed and begged that they should hear no more. After the speeches of Sandwich and Warburton the peers soon made up their minds. It was resolved, "That a printed paper entitled 'An Essay on Woman,' with notes, and another paper entitled 'The Veni Creator paraphrased,' highly reflecting upon a member of this House, is a manifest Breach of Privilege thereof; and is a most scandalous, obscene, and impious libel; a gross Profanation of many Parts of the Holy Scriptures; and a most wicked and blasphemous attempt to ridicule and vilify the person of our

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Blessed Saviour.”<sup>1</sup> Then, after the examination of certain witnesses, the matter was adjourned for further consideration.

Once more the slippery Wilkes escaped from the net woven for him by his enemies. On the following day he fought a duel in Hyde Park with a fellow member of Parliament, named Samuel Martin, who, in anticipation of the encounter, had been practising assiduously with a pistol for a long time. Badly wounded in the side by his opponent's second shot, the champion of liberty lay in a precarious condition for several weeks, and although the House of Lords continued to discuss his “obscene and impious libel” almost every day, the case against him could make no progress till he was heard in his defence. Finally, when he was almost convalescent, the House of Commons, impatient for his attendance in answer to its summons, sent doctors to examine his condition; so taking the hint, he left secretly for Canterbury on the 24th of December, and crossed to Calais on the following afternoon. Being thus baulked of their prey, his persecutors did the best they could under the circumstances. On the 19th of January he was expelled from the House of Commons; on the 24th of the same month the House of Lords decided that he was the author and publisher of “An Essay on Woman,” and

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Lords*, xxx. 415.

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ordered that he should be taken into custody by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod; on the 21st of February he was found guilty in the Court of King's Bench before Lord Mansfield of printing the obscene poem and of republishing No. 45 of *The North Briton*, and as he did not appear to receive sentence he was declared an outlaw on the 1st of November.

Meanwhile a swifter punishment had overtaken two of his principal enemies. A few days after the indictment in the Upper House the wily Kidgell published "A Genuine and Succinct Narrative" in order to show that his share in the transaction had been just and honourable, but the false, indecent, and hypocritical pamphlet blasted his reputation for ever. A still more appropriate fate had overtaken the Earl of Sandwich. On the 22nd of November 1763, while everyone was laughing at his effrontery in accusing Wilkes of impropriety, "The Beggar's Opera" was performed at Covent Garden, and when Mr Beard, who played the part of Macheath, the highwayman, exclaimed, "That Jemmy Twitcher should peach me, I own is surprising," the whole house shook with merriment, and henceforth the name of Lord Sandwich was forgotten and that of "Jemmy Twitcher" took its place. It was not that the people of England considered that Wilkes was justified in printing an obscene poem, but they were satisfied that he

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had no intention of publishing it, and they perceived that the conduct of his persecutors was an outrage against the liberty of the subject.

Much trouble has been taken by various critics to prove that John Wilkes was not the author of "An Essay on Woman." To the present writer the question seems an immaterial one. The guilt of setting up the type and correcting the proofs, which was brought home to the great patriot, appears quite as repulsive as the actual composition of the poem. In the life of the champion of liberty there is enough of nobility to condone an offence which must have been committed, if committed at all, when he had only just reached his majority. On the other hand, he was thirty-six years old when the verses were printed at the Great George Street press. Still, his admirers are justified in striving to acquit him of the dual misdemeanour, and it must be confessed that they have made out a good case. Except for the fact that he never repudiated the authorship, and on three occasions seemed to acknowledge that he had written the poem, there is no evidence against him, and it is probable that he acted as he did in order to shield the memory of the dead, or to save a living friend from punishment. In any case he can only have been part author, for Thomas Potter seems at least to have been a collaborator, and it is strong argument in his favour that a great

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number of well-informed contemporaries believed him to be not guilty. On the whole, conjecture will be best employed in explaining why Wilkes should have interrupted his warfare with the Government to waste his time in printing a stupid and indecent parody.

**N**O sympathy ever has been expressed for the poor woman whose sordid past was dragged from oblivion by the fierce commotion of this *cause célèbre*.

There can be no doubt that Fanny was deeply pained by the incident. Since her wedding day she had striven to blot out the recollection of her former state from the mind of her husband, trusting that in time the image of the good wife would extinguish all other memories. It was her ambition to show that she was worthy of bearing his name. Now the spectre of the forgotten courtesan had come to haunt her. Everyone knew that she had been the heroine of an "obscene and impious" poem; all the spurious editions of "An Essay on Woman" were inscribed to her. When she appeared with her husband in public places she was conscious once more that every eye was bent upon her, while the passers-by whispered to one another, "That is the celebrated Fanny Murray." She knew, too, that David Ross had to endure again the sly glances and furtive smiles of his fellow-actors, which he had braved willingly for her sake in the days of their honey-

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moon ; and as she sat alone in the evening while he was at the theatre she could see in her mind's eye the stir among the audience as he came upon the stage, and hear the buzz of curiosity, well aware that this was the nightly welcome of the man who had married the heroine of the " Essay on Woman."

Naturally these incidents disturbed the harmony of the Ross household, and though she bore all his bursts of petulance with cheerful patience, the player by degrees began to regard his wife with less respect. Her conduct was blameless, and he had absolute confidence in her loyalty, but he was unable to forget that she had been a notorious courtesan. In this phase of mind he became careless of his own moral obligations. Since she had been no better than she should be, it seemed to him that it mattered little whether he remained faithful to her or not, and that any lapse on his part would merely put them on the same plane. A wicked little danseuse at the theatre caught his eye, and the liaison became so manifest that Fanny could not help perceiving that she had a rival. Considering her past history, it would have caused no surprise if she, too, had broken her marriage vow. In spite of the dissipations of her youth, she was comely to look upon—still the same merry dimpled lady who had munched the bank-note sandwich. But she did not retaliate ; she

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did not even punish her husband with tears and reproaches. On the contrary, she strove to win him back by love and kindness, remaining always the most meek and devoted of wives. Had she never met the base Jack Spencer, we may be sure that Fanny would have become the blameless helpmate of some good citizen of Bath.

As the years rolled on David Ross began to lose some of his popularity as an actor. Ever since he had won renown he had been remarkable for indolence and gluttony. The graceful figure which playgoers used to admire grew fat and unwieldy, and his handsome features became coarse and expressionless. Long ago Charles Churchill had pointed out his transgressions in the "Rosciad":

Ross (a misfortune which we often meet)  
Was fast asleep at dear Statira's feet ;  
Statira, with her hero to agree,  
Stood on her feet as fast asleep as he.

In those early days he was inferior to none when he chose to exert himself, but even then he was too apt to meander through a part listlessly and without animation. As he grew older his indolence increased, and though his fine voice lost none of its power, it was evident that in all other respects he had deteriorated. Unluckily for himself he possessed a host of convivial friends,



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at whose carousals he was a welcome guest, for he had a rare fund of humour and was an admirable raconteur. Many of these companions were old schoolfellows whom he had known at Westminster, men of wealth and position, who had remained loyal to their comrade through all his ups and downs. For Ross had experienced many vicissitudes. After being brought up in luxury, with the expectation of an ample fortune, his proud old father disinherited him because he went on to the stage, and he was cut off with the proverbial shilling, to be paid on his birthday "to remind him of his misfortune in being born."

At the end of May 1767, after ten years' service, Ross quitted Covent Garden. A new adventure, in which there seemed less need of exertion, had caught his fancy. With the aid of a little influence he prevailed upon "the gentlemen proprietors" of the Edinburgh theatre to transfer their patent for the sum of £1100, and on the 9th of December he commenced his career as manager by appearing in his favourite part in the tragedy of "Essex," a prologue that excited the scorn of Goldsmith and Johnson being written for the occasion by James Boswell. Encouraged by the applause of Scottish audiences, the sanguine patentee determined to build himself a royal theatre to supersede the old playhouse in Canongate, and selected a favour-

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able site at the north end of the New Bridge. The capital was soon subscribed, and the work commenced. A period of prosperity seemed to have come to the house of Ross.

In the following year Fanny, too, achieved a great triumph. On the 10th of October the most magnificent masked ball that had been seen in London was given at the Opera House in the Haymarket by the King of Denmark, the husband of Caroline Matilda, sister of George III., a pleasure-loving young monarch, who, weary of his wife—"elle est si blonde" he used to complain—had come on a visit to England. Besides a crowd of royalties, the flower of the nobility was present, and they all had striven to excel one another in the splendour of their costumes. But the lady who received as much admiration as any was one who appeared as "Night" in a simple dress of thin black silk, studded with silver stars, with a dark cloud of gauze which fell from a crescent moon fastened in her hair. It was Mrs David Ross, favoured by some acquaintance with an invitation, for the company was not very select, and although forty years of age, she was hailed as one of the belles of the ball. Each of the papers mentioned her costume, and in the picture of the masquerade in the *Gentleman's Magazine* her portrait appeared in the foreground.

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When Ross's new theatre was almost finished an event happened which affected the prospects of the first season very seriously, for the New Bridge suddenly collapsed on the 3rd of August 1769, and he found himself cut off from the town. Soon after this evil omen the playhouse was opened, but misfortune continued to dog the footsteps of the patentee. Until the broken archways were repaired the audience found it difficult to reach the theatre. No doubt, also, the thrifty Scots resented the raising of prices, for now three shillings was charged for admission to the Pit and Boxes, two shillings to the Gallery, and a shilling to the Upper Gallery. Still, bad management was the principal cause of the failure. A third-rate company had been engaged, and Ross was too lazy to act himself more often than he was obliged. On one occasion an amateur, who had a "broad Scotch" accent, but did not ask for any wages, was allowed to appear as Hastings in "Jane Shore." Before the fellow had spoken many lines he was hissed off the stage, and the prompter, in dismay, sent to the manager's house on Castle Hill to beg him to come and finish the part himself. Ross, however, was enjoying a convivial evening, and rather than desert his bottle he gave orders to cut out all Hastings' act and begin the next one. It was said of him that he was seen more often at the Fish Market, the cheapness of which

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delighted him, than at the theatre. Day by day he grew more slothful and unwieldy, and the Scottish playgoers became more dissatisfied with him. A quarrel with his friend Bland, who had assisted him to acquire the patent of the theatre, helped to extinguish his popularity. The profits of his first season at the old playhouse in the Canongate had enabled Ross to refund the sum of £700 which he had borrowed from this man, but although there was some partnership agreement between them, he refused to pay anything more. In revenge the angry Bland retaliated with a lampoon, a set of scurrilous verses called "The Edinburgh Rosciad," in which he attacked the corpulent manager with unbridled ferocity.

See where he moves, a ponderous beast,  
Drenched with the syrups of the east ;  
Like Behemoth he rolls along  
The mightiest monarch of the throng.  
Concealed in flesh his features lie,  
And microscopic search defy :  
In short, to sum his utmost skill  
You'll find him *vox praeterea nil*.

Fanny was bitterly angry that her husband should have been held up to ridicule, and perceiving with feminine intuition that the poem would do serious harm, she immediately offered a reward of twenty pounds on her own behalf to anyone who would name the author. Her appre-

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hensions were justified. Everyone was amused by the verses, and it became the fashion to regard poor Ross as a vain and pretentious charlatan. But the satirist was never discovered, for although Bland was suspected his guilt could not be proved.

At the close of a disastrous season Ross was glad to shake the dust of Edinburgh from his feet, and let his theatre to Sam Foote at a rental of £500. This sum, however, is said to have returned only 5 per cent. on the whole capital, and there remained no fund to repay the numerous debts that he had incurred. Thus, although he managed to set aside the terms of his father's will and compelled his relations, who made an unsuccessful appeal from the Scottish court to the House of Lords, to hand over £6000, he continued to be involved in financial difficulties until the end of his days. As he grew older he became more extravagant, squandering his money in lavish entertainments, and lest he should have the fatigue of taking exercise he kept an elegant town coach. For a brief spell he made an effort to regain a leading position on the stage, and, encouraged by the applause of the public, who gave their old favourite a royal welcome upon his re-appearance at Covent Garden as "Essex," on the 10th of October 1770, he continued to play many of his favourite parts with all his old ability. In addition to his

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weight of flesh he became troubled with gout, and often failed to fulfil his engagements. On one of these occasions George Colman stopped his salary, but though vain and querulous in small matters, Ross bore the deduction with perfect good humour. "I am glad it did not come some years ago," he observed silyly, remembering that the Covent Garden manager when a needy barrister had sponged upon him without mercy, "or Mr Colman would have been in want of many a good dinner." During the next two or three years his name appeared in the bills with a certain amount of regularity, but in January 1774 he grew dissatisfied with his engagement and made an urgent but unsuccessful appeal to Garrick to allow him to return to Drury Lane. His day was over, and although he continued to perform at Covent Garden until February 1777, he merely lagged superfluous on the stage, a useless veteran long before his time.

In these latter days David Ross began to appreciate the true worth of his good wife, and she, when confident of his approval, needed nothing more to complete her happiness. After her triumph at the King of Denmark's masquerade he seems to have been jealous of the smallest slights that were offered to her, and was always ready to take anyone to task who appeared to treat her in a cavalier manner.

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“You have never asked Mrs Ross to view your beautiful spot,” he told Colman on one occasion, and “Know me, know my wife,” seems to have been his motto at all times. In spite, too, of his convivial disposition he became more fond of home life, and after his return from Scotland, when his wicked little danseuse ceased to charm him, Fanny had no cause to complain of his infidelity.

The flight of years passed lightly over the head of the famous beauty, and her features always retained much of their youthful charm. A young doctor named John Taylor, who used to come to her house to play backgammon with her husband, noticed how delighted she was to think that she had changed so little. Once she showed him “a miniature of a lady of exquisite beauty,” and asked him if he knew the original, and when he told her that it was a portrait of herself, she showed plainly that the compliment gave her the greatest pleasure. It was the only manner in which she wished to remember the Fanny Murray of the past. Little more than twelve months after his retirement from the London stage David Ross suffered the greatest misfortune of his adventurous career. On the 1st of April 1778 his faithful wife died at their home in Cecil Street, in the Strand.<sup>1</sup> Her age was forty-nine, and she had been married more than twenty years.

<sup>1</sup> One of the newspapers gives the date as April 6th.

## VI

**A**LTHOUGH Fanny Murray had not the wit of Kitty Fisher, or the intellect of Nancy Parsons—the two queens of the gay world whose reigns succeeded her own—she managed to eclipse all the frail beauties of her time. Between the years 1746-1754 no one appears to have challenged her supremacy. It was as a fresh, high-spirited country girl that she first won the heart of the town, and, although many others were as handsome as she was, none possessed her lightness of heart or equable temperament. One might depend upon finding her always merry and good-humoured. It was this happy disposition that enabled her to bear the trials of her married life, and that made her the patient domestic drudge of David Ross for almost a quarter of a century. There is overwhelming evidence to show that she never swerved in her loyalty to her husband. Her devotion to him became proverbial; scandal never mentioned her name; she was above suspicion. Undoubtedly she failed to reform him or to guide him rightly, but few women could have protected the careless actor from the conse-



## Fanny Murray

quence of his indolence and indiscretions, and poor Fanny was not clever enough for such a task. Light be the turf of her tomb. For the sins of her youth, which were thrust upon her by wicked men, she offered the atonement of twenty righteous years. Long before her death the tears of the recording angel must have blotted her name from his book.



II

KITTY FISHER



## KITTY FISHER

### I

**D**URING the year 1758 many new reputations were established in England. Our soldiers had earned renown in the swamps of Bengal and on the plains of Ohio, our seamen won glory upon the shores of America and along the coasts of France. A score of valiant names had become household words in the lips of a grateful populace. Yet the celebrity of none of these heroes could eclipse the fame of a girl of nineteen, who first gained notoriety in this wonderful year.

“You must come to town to see Kitty Fisher,” wrote Tom Bowlby, a festive man about town, to a friend in Derbyshire, “the most pretty, extravagant, wicked little w—— that ever flourished; you may have seen her, but she was nothing till this winter.”

Alas for the sins of society! Kitty Fisher was a notorious courtesan, but all the men admired, and many of the women envied her.

From a physical point of view there was reason for the universal admiration, since she

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was a beautiful girl. Though slight, her figure was moulded in graceful curves, and her limbs possessed the roundness and elasticity of perfect health. Her ripe, provoking lips and saucy tilted nose gave her face an expression of roguery, but when she chose the look would soften, and a glance of childish innocence stole into her grey-blue eyes. Dainty to the finger tips, she was always attired with consummate taste, and no woman was more clever in choosing a gown to suit her style of beauty.

Even had she been wholly plain her cavaliers would have been numerous, for her wit and high spirits made her a fascinating companion. One who should have known speaks of her as "the essence of small talk and the magazine of contemporary anecdote . . . it was impossible to be dull in her company." Since she was endowed by nature with a distinct personality, her bon-mots and repartees had an uncommon zest, and were quoted in the club rooms as frequently as the sallies of Foote, the player. In spite of her lowly origin she had assumed the ease and politeness of a high-bred gentlewoman, and although she could be as wild a madcap as any in the company of devil-may-care admirers, her sprightliness was never tinged with vulgarity. Whatever may have been the defects of her moral character, there can be no doubt that Kitty Fisher was a clever and captivating little lady.

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The grave and decorous *Public Advertiser*, the premier newspaper of the day, did not deem it beneath the dignity of its position to print a eulogy of her charms, for the shrewd editor was well aware that anything relating to the fashionable Thais of the hour would find a host of readers. Thus, a space was given to the following effusion, written by Mr Thomas Wilkes, the conventionality of the theme being condoned by the attractiveness of the subject :—

Fair Venus, who oft among Mortals goes ambling,  
Was lost t'other day ; and she somewhere went rambling ;  
It put all the Gods to their trumps, to find out,  
Her Dress, her Disguise, her Engagement or Route.  
Apollo and Cupid, who seldom unite  
(Love and Reason being different as Darkness and Light) ;  
Soon jointly agreed to go search for the dame,  
At high Noon, to the Mall of St. James's they came.  
I have found her, says Cupid, see yonder, look there ;  
'Tis my Mother, I know her Deportment and Air ;  
Look again, said Apollo, you blundering calf,  
Your Mother was never so handsome by half,  
Look a little more sharply, repining you'll own,  
Such beauty can be Kitty Fisher's alone.

None but an age of lax morality would have tolerated such homage to a lady of easy virtue, and at the time of the Seven Years' War the metropolis was not squeamish in these matters. Marital fidelity was expected only of the wife, while her lord and master might indulge his taste for variety without incurring any great social stigma. In their letters to one another

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men of rank and position mentioned the infidelities of their fellows with careless indifference, and openly discussed the idiosyncracies of each other's mistresses. Among Kitty Fisher's admirers the husbands were almost as numerous as the widowers and bachelors.

It had long been the fashion to select some beautiful *traviata* for special homage, making her the toast of club-land, and the fair wanton became, in consequence, the pet of the dissolute portion of the nobility. Betsy Careless, Lucy Cooper, and Fanny Murray each in turn had been "the prevailing Thais," and although all of these had enjoyed great celebrity, none of them created the furore that was caused by Miss Fisher. Some of her predecessors may have rivalled her in beauty, or possessed an equal share of "wit and gentle manners," but there was another reason why Kitty captivated the hearts of the beaux. For she was a skilful horsewoman, and it was a common spectacle to see her "at high noon" galloping along "the Mall of St James" on a spirited charger. One of the secrets of her success lay in the fact that she lived a healthy out-of-door life. Unlike most of her sex she was not content with a stately promenade once a day in order "to take the air." Essentially an alfresco nymph, she frequented the parks and tea gardens from morning till night.



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One balmy day in the early spring she was riding in Hyde Park with her companion, Miss Sumners, and two devoted cavaliers. It was the 12th of March 1759, an unlucky month in Kitty Fisher's calendar. Mounted on a frisky piebald (the gift, perhaps, of Lord Falmouth, an elderly patron, who was famous as a breeder of these horses), and attired in a stylish black riding-habit, she took her morning gallop over the soft turf along the banks of the Serpentine, laughing and chatting with her friends. Scarcely two years had elapsed since she sat in the saddle for the first time, but genial Dick Berenger, the author of "A New System of Horsemanship," had been her instructor, and she was able to control her steed with ease and elegance. Having ridden round by Kensington Gardens, the party turned back, and passing through the gate facing the lodge at the top of Constitution Hill, they proceeded at a slow canter down the Green Park. It was "high noon," and the Mall was thronged, as usual, with a fashionable company.

As Kitty came prancing towards the palings of St James's Park, a file of soldiers, wheeling abruptly to the right, startled her horse, which, flinging up its head, bolted down the road. Seeing a woman in danger two or three gentlemen rushed in the path to intercept the runaway, and as the piebald, thus checked in its

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course, stopped suddenly and reared backwards, the rider, losing her nerve, gave a cry of fright and was thrown heavily to the ground. In a moment one of the young officers who accompanied her sprang from the saddle and raised her in his arms. Poor Kitty was sobbing piteously. The white, tear-stained face of the beautiful equestrienne, the slim, girlish form in the black habit, which appeared so neat and modest in contrast with the gorgeous uniform of her cavalier, touched the heart of every spectator. An anxious crowd pressed around, and inquired eagerly if the lady was injured. Suddenly the sobs ceased, and, like a child who finds herself more frightened than hurt, the girl burst into a fit of merry laughter. A sigh of relief rose from the spectators.

In a few moments, while officious hands were dusting the riding-habit, a superb chair, with painted panels and gilded window frames, brought hither from some place near at hand where it had been stationed by appointment, pushed a way through the crowd. With a laughing adieu to her companions, the fallen horsewoman flung herself into it, and was borne off down the Mall. For an instant there was silence. Then a murmur arose as a hurried whisper passed through the assemblage: "It is Kitty Fisher, the famous Kitty Fisher!" Presently, some plain, bluff citizen asserted his

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right to freedom of speech, and, with upraised staff, gave voice to his indignation against the courtesan.

“D—— my B——d,” he cried, aloud, “if this is not too much. Who would be honest when they may live in this state by turning ——? Why, ’tis enough to debauch half the women in London.”

It was a common reproach against Kitty—being written in verse as well as in prose—that more of her own sex were seduced from the paths of virtue by her display of luxury than had been corrupted by all the rakes in the town; but the easy moralists who argued thus seemed to forget that had there been no demand there would have been no supply, and that the market-place would be empty were there no purchasers.

Beyond a few bruises Kitty Fisher suffered no ill effect from her fall, but the incident made as much noise as if she had broken her neck. Soon the story of the accident was in everybody’s mouth, and the streets re-echoed with the song of “Kitty Fell.” All the newspapers printed an account of her tumble, that in the *Gazetteer* being half a column in length, a picturesque description, which was reprinted in the form of a Broadside with a wood-cut at top showing two men carrying a Sedan chair. It bore the attractive title: “Horse and Away to St James’s Park; or a Trip for the Noon-Tide

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air. Who rides Fastest, Miss Kitty Fisher or her Gay Gallant?" But the most pleasant reference to the affair was seen in the March number of the *Universal Magazine*, which celebrated the event in a set of verses.

"ON K—— F——'S FALLING FROM HER HORSE."

Dear Kitty, had thy only fall  
Been that thou met'st with in the Mall,  
Thou had'st deserved our pity ;  
But long before that luckless day,  
With equal justice might we say,  
Alas ! poor fallen Kitty !

Then, whilst you may, dear girl, be wise,  
And though time now in pleasure flies  
Consider of hereafter ;  
For know, the wretch that courts thee now,  
When age has furrowed o'er thy brow,  
Shall change his sighs to laughter.

Reform thy manners, change thy ways :  
For Virtue's sake, to merit praise  
Be all thy honest strife :  
So shall the world with pleasure say,  
"She tasted folly for a day,  
And then grew wise for life."

Apparently Kitty was vexed at the publicity given to her escapade. Perhaps she endured a good deal of chaff from her young gallants, and felt that her horsemanship had been called into question. Moreover, in a few days she

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suffered a worse affront at the hands of the printer, for on the 27th of March a small hand-book was published at the popular price of three shillings, entitled, "The Juvenile Adventures of Miss Kitty F——r," and a second volume was promised for the following Tuesday. On the spur of the moment the indignant beauty sat down at her writing desk and dashed off a protest to the newspapers, which appeared two days later in the advertisement columns of the *Public Advertiser*. It ran as follows:—

TO ERR IS A BLEMISH INTAILED UPON MORTALITY, and Indiscretions seldom or never escape from Censure; the more heavy, as the Character is more remarkable: and doubled, nay, trebled by the World, if the Progress of that Character is marked by success; then Malice shoots against it all her Stings, the Snakes of Envy are let loose; to the Humane and Generous Heart then must the Injured appeal, and certain Relief will be found in Impartial Honour. Miss Fisher is forced to sue to that Jurisdiction to protect her from the Baseness of little Scribblers, and scurvy Malevolence; she has been abused in public papers, exposed in Print shops, and, to wind up the Whole, some Wretches, mean, ignorant, and venal, would impose upon the public, by daring to pretend to publish her Memoirs. She hopes to prevent the success of their Endeavours by thus publicly declaring

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that nothing of that sort has the slightest  
Foundation in Truth, C. FISHER.

Naturally, this ill-advised outburst increased the hilarity of the scoffers, whilst it failed also in its object, for Volume II. of "Miss Kitty Fisher's Juvenile Adventures" was published as promised on Tuesday, the 3rd of April. Taking advantage of his opportunity the author inserted the following parody of the advertisement in the *Public Advertiser*, which must have inflamed the anger of his victim a hundred-fold:—

"To her immortality is a blemish intailed upon women, and however indiscreet their conduct they should be secured from censure. . . . Though malice may shoot against them all their stings, and even the snakes of envy be let loose, true and impartial honour will ever to their champion and protector. It is that jurisdiction which is to secure Miss Kitty against all attacks of puny scriblers and pocky malevolence. She had been disabused in the public papers, apposed in print shops and . . . some mean ignorant wretches would dispose of her in public by DARING TO PRETEND TO DARE (though they have not yet dared or pretended anything) about her Memoirs. In order to prevent the expected success of their daring pretences she hereby publicly declares that there cannot be the slightest foundation for publishing her Memoirs,

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which have been kept so extremely secret that even she herself is unacquainted with them."

It was natural that Kitty should be annoyed, for the so-called "Juvenile Adventures"—a ribald history written in the guise of a Spanish story with fictitious names and localities—were grossly indecent, and contained few elements of truth. However, when the press notices appeared she must have been somewhat pacified, as the critics handled her biographer even more severely than he had treated her. "Miserable, lying, obscene trash . . . foolish, false, and preposterous," declared the *Monthly*; "a wretched production, entirely destitute of invention, humour, or even knowledge of what is commonly reported of its infamous subject," remarked the *Critical Review*. There was another reason why she should feel satisfaction, for her protest against the publication won the sympathy of the public, and the disgusting book had a small sale.

## II

**S**INCE no credible biography was ever published, and as Kitty herself was loath to speak openly of the days of her innocence little is known of her early career. It is believed that she was born in Soho, where her father John Fischer, a German by birth and a Lutheran by religion, pursued the trade of a silver-chaser, and in all probability she came into the world in the year 1738. Until the newspapers had taught the public to misspell her cognomen she was always known as Miss Fischer—Kitty Fischer—her christian name being Catherine Maria. Legend has suggested that her indulgent parents gave her a high-class education, but we may only be sure that it was adequate to her position.

A story of her girlhood shows her kindness of heart. Whilst paying a visit to Paddington, a rural suburb much patronised by the jaded Londoner during the summer months, she chanced to lodge in the same house with a delicate boy named Henderson, who had been brought hither for change of air. He was a youth of great promise, apprenticed to Mr Clee, "the ingenious engraver of Oxenden Street,"



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and he had fallen into a decline. Touched by his sufferings, and full of compassion for his widowed mother, the good-natured Kitty took an interest in the poor lad. It was a brief friendship. One day she heard him coughing violently, and knowing that he was alone she rushed to his assistance. Upon entering his room a glance told her that the attack was serious, and while she was trying to soothe him he died in her arms. Years afterwards the great actor, John Henderson, used to tell the tale, for though so much infamy was attached to her name, he remembered that Kitty Fisher had been a kind friend to his dead brother.

At an early age Kitty was apprenticed to a milliner. Her parents were poor, and it was necessary that she should earn her own livelihood. No more dangerous calling could have been chosen for a young girl. A pretty woman who served behind a milliner's counter was regarded as the natural prey of the rake and procuress. Before long poor Kitty had been singled out as "a new face," and many gay sparks dropped into the shop on the pretence of buying a ribbon or a pair of gloves in order to chat with her. One of these new acquaintances proved more persistent than the rest, and soon, alas, she began to have a liking for her admirer. He was an ensign in the army, Anthony George

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Martin by name, the natural son of an English merchant by a Portuguese mistress, and his handsome features and fresh rosy face had earned for him the nickname of "The Military Cupid." Selfish, unscrupulous, and accustomed to success, he set his heart upon the conquest of the fair milliner. While she listened to his avowals and contrasted her poverty with his splendour the devil came to tempt her. It was in her power to exchange the drudgery of the shop for a life of luxury ; instead of a dull, friendless existence she could pass her days in the companionship of the man she loved. This alternative was irresistible, and poor Kitty fell a victim to the seducer. Dazzled by his presents and content with his protestations she surrendered her honour and took up her abode in his lodgings. For a little while she was as happy and radiant as a young bride. Then, all too soon, the ensign was ordered abroad on active service, and the menage came to an end. Parsimony being one of his vices, it was supposed that the young soldier welcomed the separation, but it has been suggested that his finances were insufficient to support a mistress. There was no consolation for the unhappy Kitty. Since she was sincerely attached to her lover the parting gave her the deepest sorrow, and her affection for the betrayer remained unchanged.



*J. Reynolds pins!*

*Miss Kitty Fischer,*

*Painted for. Mrs. King opposite Foster Lane & West. Street.*



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Scarcely had her brief romance been shattered than a fresh patron began to solicit the fallen girl. Love seemed to have vanished from her existence ; she had paid the penalty of her frailty, and having discovered the hollowness of man's promises she was guided solely by material motives. In accepting the proposals of Thomas Medlycott, the heir of a Somersetshire land-owner, she secured the protection of a man who was more disposed to gratify her extravagant fancies than the penurious Mr Martin. Although his resources were not inexhaustible the pursuit of pleasure seemed the one object of his existence, and such was his reputation for gallantry that no lady seen in his company could fail to win the attention of the gay world. A few years previously he had amused the town by his pursuit of the vivacious Maria Gunning, who had rejected his suit in order to become Lady Coventry, while recently he had been a great friend of lively Peg Woffington. Even his own kith and kin were obliged to confess that Tom Medlycott was a sad dog.

Under the auspices of this accomplished rake Kitty began to appear in all public places. The vanities of the town had captivated her heart, and the character of the simple girl suffered an inevitable change. With the utmost eagerness she courted all the distractions of her new life, seeking an anodyne for the pangs of conscience

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in a whirl of pleasure. Soon she became a familiar figure in the boxes of the theatre; her face was often seen at the Ridotto in the Opera House, where masqueraders could appear in fancy dress undisguised by the delusive mask. Night after night she joined the fashionable throng that flocked to the concerts in the Rotunda at Ranelagh, and took supper in one of the boxes that encircled the vast apartment or ascended the gallery overhead to watch the company promenading below, observing with an eager eye the stars and orders that distinguished the great nobles. Day after day, under the escort of Mr Medlycott, she paraded the leafy walks of Islington Spa or took tea at Marylebone Gardens, attired in the first fashion, an easy negligee clinging around her trim figure, and a butterfly cap upon her close curls, or else showing her ankles in the audacious short sack and full-dress hoop and wearing a straw hat with up-turned brim and waving ribbons. Display was now her ruling passion, adulation the breath of life.

It had never been her intention to remain faithful to her new associate. She had accepted the liaison with no feelings of love, and she knew enough of mankind to be aware that her protector entertained no sentiment with regard to herself. Directly a more desirable suitor should appear she was prepared to wave an adieu to the

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licentious Medlycott. In due course she had found the admirer, a florid young seaman named Augustus Keppel of the house of Albemarle, an officer of repute in the service, who was now making timid attempts to persuade Parliament to reprove Admiral Byng, at whose court-martial and condemnation he had acted as one of the judges. Captain Keppel held a higher social position than Thomas Medlycott, and his connections were more influential. This was a sufficient reason why he should find favour in Kitty's eyes, and she was soon off with the old love and on with the new.

Presently, her ambition was more fully realised. It was whispered that Admiral Lord Anson had been captivated by her charms, that General Ligonier was one of her warmest admirers. Thus, she was reputed to enjoy the patronage of the foremost sailor and the most popular soldier in Great Britain. Her name grew familiar to the beaux of clubland, and curiosity was piqued when it was known that she was an exclusive young lady who would accept no present and grant no interview without a formal introduction. Her sallies were repeated in the coffee-houses; a hundred heads were turned each day when she walked in the Mall. Then under the tutelage of Dick Berenger she began to appear on horseback, and her fame was spread through the metropolis. Kitty Fisher had become a celebrity;

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the most pretty, extravagant, wicked, little wanton that ever flourished, by merit raised to her bad eminence. Thus it was that her fall in the park caused as much excitement as if she had been a princess.



### III

**O**N Monday, the 9th of April, about three weeks after the accident in the Mall, Kitty paid her first visit to the studio of Mr Joshua Reynolds in Newport Street. The great artist had received a commission to paint her portrait from Sir Charles Bingham, a bachelor baronet, who afterwards became the Earl of Lucan. No doubt the girl was delighted at this fresh tribute to her charms, but she can scarcely have realised that her fame was being preserved for countless ages, and that all who gazed upon her picture would be curious to learn the story of her life. With unerring fancy the great master represented the syren sitting in a balcony, decked out in tasteful finery, waiting like Juliet for a lover whose letter of assignation lies open before her. Again, a little later, in a life-like study as successful as the first, he depicted her as Cleopatra, with a crown upon her hair, in the act of dropping the pearl into a cup of vinegar. Both these portraits were reproduced in mezzotint, and re-engraved again and again, for now that she was in the hands of clever artists she had no objection to be "exposed in print-shops" all over the town.

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About this time there were rumours that she was going to make a splendid marriage, and when she paid a visit to Hinton St George during the Easter recess it was considered probable that Lord Poulett would become her husband. To bury herself in the wilds of Somersetshire seemed suspicious, for all the world had posted to Newmarket races, and it was expected that she would attend, as a mascot to Mr Barry's mare, styled Kitty Fisher in her honour, which was entered for a fifty pound prize. It was the fashion for owners to call their racehorses by her name, and several bay mares and black fillies were christened Kitty Fisher in this year. Both at Newmarket and at Hinton luck seemed against her, for the race was won by another horse, and she failed to capture the beautiful seat in the west country, the earl proving more sagacious than was popularly supposed. A few months previously a similar rumour had been circulated freely, and Lord Pembroke was regarded as the peer who was going to provide her coronet. Since this susceptible noble was the keenest of horsemen it was thought natural that he should select a countess who would make a fearless rider to hounds. Only part of the story seems to have been true. It appears that the lady, with characteristic assurance, asked the earl point-blank to marry her, and such was his infatuation that

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he hesitated a long time before refusing her request. Finally, the matter was compromised, and according to tea-table gossip Kitty received an allowance of a thousand a year, with a thousand pounds down "for present decorations."

Her celebrity was now so great that it had reached the ear of royalty. One afternoon—probably on Sunday, the day of fashionable promenade—she was strolling in Kensington Gardens when the young Prince of Wales chanced to walk past with the nine-year-old Duke of Cumberland, and the little boy, who must have seen her here frequently, at once whispered her name to his brother.

"What — what — who is she?" asked the Prince, in a mischievous mood, wishing to test the lad's knowledge.

"A Miss," replied the small Henry Frederick.

"Why, are not all girls Misses?" pursued Prince George.

"Oh, but a particular sort of Miss," answered the boy, "a Miss that sells oranges."

"Is there any harm in selling oranges?" demanded the Prince, who ought to have been shocked at his small brother's precocity, for at that time every orange-girl was no better than she should be.

"Oh, but they are not such oranges as you buy," replied the young Duke, with proper respect for the Prince's reputation, "I believe

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they are the sort that my brother Edward buys.”

Sad to relate, this small Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland, soon became as reckless a scamp as his brother, Edward of York, whose habits he had summarised so correctly.

Sometimes Kitty's notoriety caused her much discomfort in public places, for at the sound of her name an impertinent crowd would gather in a moment. During this summer there was an example of the annoyance to which she had to submit, when the beautiful Countess of Coventry was mobbed one Sunday evening in St James's Park. A presumptuous young cit, named Joseph Vivian, come west in search of adventure, accosted the sprightly countess with rude familiarity under the impression that she was "a lady of the town," and because she received his advances in silent contempt he incited the crowd to howl and jeer at her. At all times Kitty Fisher was in danger of a similar ordeal. Then, should she venture to walk unattended in places that made a boast of their respectability, such as the New Tunbridge Wells at Islington, there was always a risk that some of the company might object to her presence, and that the proprietor would request her to withdraw. At a Vauxhall fête the mob pursued her as persistently as it used to pursue the Miss Gunnings a few years before, and when she and her party sought the seclusion

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of one of the open-air boxes a crowd of spectators stood at the entrance, watching eagerly while she ate her supper. Even at the more exclusive Ranelagh she was the victim of an unpleasant experience. On a certain evening one of the frail sisterhood, named Polly Davis, happened to meet a peer to whom she was attached strolling around the Rotunda with Kitty. In a moment, the jealous dame, whose hot Cambrian blood was inflamed by the sight of a rival, flew to attack the guilty pair. A blow from her small hand raised a cloud of powder from the nobleman's wig, and she was fastening her fingers in Kitty's head-dress when the onlookers dragged her away. Thus, in a hundred petty annoyances did Kitty Fisher pay for her great popularity.

Still, there was little danger that she would suffer the greatest humiliation that could befall her unfortunate class. The plates of Hogarth indicate that Molly Hackabout was not molested by the magistrate and his men until she had sunk into poverty. The gilded Cyprian had no reason to fear the constable while she was able to flaunt along St James's Street in her painted chair. It was the poor unfortunate that was dragged from her garret, and sent down the Strand to beat hemp at Bridewell. The one was the pet of dissolute peers, the other had no friend but the footpad or the tavern bully.

It was inevitable that the name of Kitty

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Fisher should be associated with many apocryphal stories. When virtuous gentlewomen, who resented the infatuation of their menkind, discussed her frailties at the tea-table, they were eager to embellish every piece of gossip, however ridiculous. It was asserted that a gay coterie at White's club levied a subscription among themselves in order to indulge her extravagances. Since folly had decreed that a man of spirit could best gain reputation among his fellows by being known as a friend of the reigning courtesan these frubbles aspired to make Kitty Fisher their exclusive toast, and were determined that she should continue to outshine all the rest in splendour. Some said that they had assigned to her merely a percentage of their winnings at play; others declared that she received an annual allowance, and in consequence had managed to squander twelve thousand guineas in less than twelve months. Yet although the traditions of her wild extravagance may seem incredible, there was probably a modicum of truth in many of these curious anecdotes. It is possible that in a wilful moment, wishing to surpass the feat of Fanny Murray, she made a sandwich of a hundred pound bank note and clapped it between her white teeth. Nor is it beyond the bounds of probability that a foolish admirer made a burnt offering in her honour by kindling a punch bowl with a note of equal value. Certainly, at this

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period no lady in the land displayed more magnificence. Her gowns and head-gear were deemed the model of elegance ; her dress sparkled with jewels ; her stately coach drawn by four grey horses, the gift of some wealthy idolator, was the most splendid in London.

All sorts of stories, far more preposterous than the tale of the subscription fund at White's, were told of her rapacity. One of these, which occasioned great merriment in society, had Edward, Duke of York, as its hero, the hare-brained scapegrace prince, whose proclivities had been aptly criticised by his little brother. It was alleged that his Royal Highness, who was in the habit of pursuing every pretty woman, solicited a tête-à-tête with Kitty, and was asked to take tea at her house in New Norfolk Street. He accepted the invitation gladly, and since he was the most loquacious of talkers, while the volubility of his hostess was proverbial, the conversation must have been supported on both sides with equal spirit. On his departure he left a note for fifty guineas upon the table, believing no doubt that he had made an adequate display of munificence ; but Kitty, who had expected to receive a far more princely gift from the brother of the Heir Apparent, was so disgusted that she gave orders to her servants not to admit Edward of York into the house again. They used to tell a hundred strange tales about the officious little

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prince, who amused every one with his incessant chatter and his bushy white eye-brows.

The diminutive Lord Montfort, whose small stature gave rise to endless witticisms, was the hero of another jocose story. Happening to call one evening at the house in New Norfolk Street he found Kitty in full dress, patched and powdered, ready for the opera. Usually she would have denied herself to a visitor at such an hour, but as he was a lavish patron she consented to grant him a short interview. The little nobleman perceived that he had arrived at an inappropriate moment, and was about to withdraw when a step was heard upon the stairs. It was Lord Sandwich, whose box Kitty was to share that night, come to take her off in his coach. She was most anxious that her two friends should not meet. Like many folks she was not proud of her acquaintance with Lord Montfort, and she was uncertain how Lord Sandwich, with whom she was anxious to stand well, would regard the rencounter. Escape through the door was impossible ; there was no curtain or cupboard in which the visitor might conceal himself. With quick presence of mind the girl raised one of the corners of her hoop-petticoat, which stretched out in huge oval panniers on either side of her waist, and commanded the tiny baron to slip underneath. Scarcely had he concealed himself when the Earl



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of Sandwich entered the apartment, and was received by Kitty with her usual ease and politeness. After chatting for a few moments upon commonplace topics she begged his lordship to excuse her while she went for her cloak. Then, with a whisper to the fugitive to "stick close," she swept from the room and deposited the little man in the adjoining boudoir. Thus, like Sir Robert Strange, when a Highland rebel, Lord Montfort is said to have escaped detection by taking refuge beneath a lady's skirt.

Another anecdote had no less a personage than the Great Commoner as its hero. During a review in Hyde Park some mischievous courtiers, who had espied Kitty Fisher a short distance away, suggested to George the Second that it would be a good joke to introduce her to Mr Pitt. His Majesty nodded approval, and in a little while, looking towards the beauty, he demanded her name.

"Oh, sir," replied Lord Ligonier, "it is the Duchess of N——, a foreign lady, whom the Secretary should know."

"Well, well," replied the mischievous King, "present him."

In obedience to this royal command the statesman allowed himself to be led away by his fellow peer, who, as soon as they had come up to the lady, announced without more ado: "This is Mr Secretary Pitt—Miss Kitty Fisher."

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The Great Commoner was not in the least embarrassed. Removing his hat, with a gracious bow he advanced towards the astonished girl, and told her how sorry he was that he had not the honour of knowing her when he was a young man.

“For then, Madam,” he continued, “I should have the hope of succeeding in your affections, but old and infirm as you now see me I have no other way of avoiding the force of such beauty but by flying from it.”

And with this gallant speech he hobbled away.

“So you soon dispatched him, Kitty,” cried some of the jesters who had followed to see how the plot would succeed.

“Not I, indeed,” she retorted, “he went off of his own accord to my very great regret, for I have never had such handsome things said of me by the youngest of you.”

Far less probable is the cruel story that an infatuated young nobleman made her a present of his wife’s jewels, which she wore at the play, sitting on the same seat as the plundered countess, who, recognising her property, was so humiliated that she returned home in tears. Equally outrageous is the legend which declares that she persuaded an enamoured peer to give her a riding-dress of a wonderful pattern, similar to one that his wife was wearing. Kitty had too much taste to need to copy anyone, and her

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jewellery was as magnificent as that of any lady in the land. Moreover, as a glance at the good-tempered face that looks down from her portrait is enough to show, she was not ill-natured, and there is sufficient evidence of her kindness of heart. The few stories that made her appear spiteful or vindictive were always the concoctions of Grub Street.

During the summer of 1763 an event happened which brought the name of Kitty Fisher into the newspapers once more. Since the year of George the Third's accession, when magazines and journals were full of notices and advertisements of the numerous pamphlets that were written about her, the public press had said little of her adventures. This time one of her servants was the talk of the town. Towards the end of June, Matthew Dodd, the proud coachman who used to drive the sumptuous chariot with the four beautiful greys, was arrested on a capital charge. A few days before he had assaulted Miss Anne Dutnall, the daughter of a Surrey farmer, and being brought to trial at the Croydon Assizes on the 30th of the next month, he was condemned to die, for the evidence of the complainant, "a very sensible, modest, well-behaved girl of nineteen, whose case was very affecting," seemed to prove his guilt beyond question. Nevertheless, popular feeling was strongly in favour of the prisoner, since it was

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believed that the story of the assault had been exaggerated, and even if it was all true the offence did not merit the punishment of death. However, the efforts to gain a pardon were fruitless, and at ten o'clock on the morning of Friday, the 19th of August, the unhappy Matthew Dodd was led from the New Gaol to pay the penalty of his crime. An angry mob had surrounded the prison, and when the convict was placed in the cart such a fierce attempt was made to effect a rescue that the jailors were compelled to take him back again to his cell. As soon as possible an express message was sent to the Secretary of State, asking for military assistance, but it was not until six o'clock in the evening that a company of infantry arrived from the Tower. Then, at last, it was deemed safe to proceed with the execution, and under an escort of 150 soldiers with fixed bayonets the cortege set out for Kennington Common. When the culprit appeared at the gate of the prison his composure was shaken by the piercing shrieks that burst from his poor wife, who had been waiting all day to catch a last glimpse of her husband, and the incident inflamed the anger of the crowd still more. Yet, the show of force was sufficient to keep order, and at half-past seven o'clock in the evening Matthew Dodd was hanging from the gallows. King George III., invariably stern in his attitude towards capital

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punishment, was vastly indignant at the interference with the course of justice, sending for Mr Grenville as soon as he heard of the riot, although it was Sunday night, and urged him to take steps to "restrain the licentiousness of the times." Apparently, the unfortunate coachman owed some of his popularity to his connection with the beautiful courtesan, while it is not improbable that she, out of pity for her poor Matthew, had worked upon the feelings of the people by distributing bribes. If such were the case her attempt at a rescue approached nearer to success than such endeavours usually do.

One evening in the following month, while Kitty was walking in one of the public gardens, a voice at her side exclaimed fervently, in broken English, "I love you!" Raising her eyes she beheld a smartly-dressed foreigner, who was regarding her with intense admiration. Tall, robust and handsome, in a dark mephistophelean style, he possessed the manner of a well-bred gentleman with a grace and aplomb that seemed to mark him as a person of consequence. Indeed this Chevalier Casanova de Seingalt had reason to rate himself highly, for he had been caressed in many a court of Europe, and genius told him that the story of his life would surpass some of the famous legends of romance. Tickled by his unceremonious address Kitty could not help laughing

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in his face, and then to atone for her rudeness she entered into conversation with the stranger. It happened that a duke was to attend her to the ball that evening, but she became so interested in her new acquaintance, that she stayed chatting to him for a long time. Although charmed by her beauty and amiability, the critical Casanova was displeased by her voice. Being unfamiliar with the English tongue, it sounded harsh and sibilant to his sensitive Italian ear, and as "she prattled like a magpie, the hissing almost made him giddy." After her departure he learnt the tale of the bank-note sandwich, but having struggled against the woes of impecuniosity all his life, he was horrified at the foolish waste, remarking that only a banker could appreciate the joke. "I wonder whether he thanked her for the gift," was his cynical comment. Thirty years later, when the broken-down adventurer was composing his wonderful *Memoires*, he remembered his interview with the beautiful "Miss Kety," and drew a bright sketch of the little lady.

#### IV

**A**LTHOUGH it was scarcely six years since she sprang into fame, the cult of Miss Fisher had now passed out of fashion. Weary of a life of turmoil, she seems to have sought retirement, and soon after the accession of George III. she had shown some inclination to turn over a new leaf. The dainty poem in the *Universal Magazine*, which lamented her fall, was not the only good advice that she received from the didactic scribe. A few months later "An Odd Letter on a most Interesting Subject" had been addressed to her, in which she was exhorted to seek "conjugal endearment and maternal tenderness," and even Captain Thompson, the Cyprian bard, advised her to change her mode of life.

Kitty, repent, a settlement procure,  
Retire and keep the bailiffs from the door.  
Put up with wrinkles, and pray paint no more.

Possibly these admonitions had their effect. In a little while she abdicated her throne, and for many years lived in comparative seclusion with a young gentleman of the name of Chetwynd, passing as Mrs Brown, his housekeeper,

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for the sake of appearances. Since his health was shattered and he was almost bankrupt, it was thought strange that she should choose such a companion, but charity may conclude that she had been influenced by pity. At last, the long-expected separation took place. When the doctors discovered that young Chetwynd was attacked by consumption, he was sent to a warmer climate, but his case was hopeless, and in a little while the news came that he had died at Montpellier in the south of France.

Soon afterwards Kitty made the acquaintance of John Norris, junior, the son of a Kentish landowner, who in 1762 had been returned as member of parliament for Rye, a Sussex borough which his father and grandfather had represented in succession. Hitherto she had never lost her affection for Martin, the betrayer, and even when at the summit of her glory she would desert the greatest noble in the land to be in his company. Now the infatuation was over, and for the first time in her life she met a man with whom, in spite of all his defects, she had fallen honestly in love.

This John Norris, in whom Kitty Fisher had found her affinity, was a year or two younger than herself. His grandfather, Sir John Norris, Vice-Admiral of England, had been a stout British sailor, and the hero of a hundred stub-



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born fights, a rugged old sea-dog known as "Foul-weather Jack," while his father, who was compelled by ill-health to retire from parliament, had succeeded to the family estate of Hemsted in Kent, where he lived the life of a country squire in a stately Elizabethan mansion. Sprung from an old Lancashire stock the house of Norris was held in high regard throughout the hop country, and since the days of the famous old admiral had given many brave captains to the service, who had worthily upheld the traditions of their race. Unhappily, Kitty's admirer had proved degenerate. Although his election for the borough of Rye was followed by his appointment to the governorship of Deal Castle, it was evident that he possessed neither industry nor ambition. Devoted to the pleasures of the metropolis, and the slave of a passion for play, he was soon plunged deep in debt. Then, while his friends were lamenting these follies they were horrified to hear that the recreant heir had formed a liaison with the notorious Kitty Fisher. It seemed the crowning-point of his ruin.

A still worse calamity was to follow. Early in November in the year 1766 it was discovered that young John Norris was married to his mistress. The wonderful news spread rapidly through club-land; the announcement appeared in all the newspapers; high-born dames, like the

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Lady Mary Coke, tossed their heads in great disgust on hearing that a gentleman of fortune was wedded to a woman of the town. The ceremony had taken place on the 25th of October at Trinity Church, Haddington, in Scotland, whither the devoted pair may have fled in order to avoid the interference of the bridegroom's relatives. Apparently this caution was justified, for his family seem to have refused to accept the situation even though they knew that the knot was tied, and when the reckless heir returned to London, having spent his honeymoon in posting back to town, he found that the validity of the Scotch marriage had been challenged already. However, he was undismayed by opposition. As he had made his bed so he chose to lie, and lest there was any informality about his wedding he resolved to go through the ceremony for a second time. On the second of December he applied to the Vicar General's office in the province of Canterbury for a special licence from the Archbishop, so that, in order to put an end to all doubts, he might be married "in strict conformity to the laws of England."<sup>1</sup> Two days

<sup>1</sup> In the register of the marriage between John Norris and Catherine Maria Fisher at Trinity Church, Haddington, the name of John Pollard appears as a witness, and he signed also the register of their marriage at St George's, Hanover Square. One John Pollard applied for and obtained a licence from the Bishop of London to marry Sarah Louisa Fischer, a minor, daughter of Anne Fischer, widow, of the parish of St George, Hanover Square, on the 20th of March 1766, and the marriage took place

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later, on a Thursday morning, John Norris stood with his gentle bride before the altar at St George's, Hanover Square. This second wedding, like the first, was a quiet one. As Kitty passed down the aisle upon the arm of her young husband, radiant and happy, there was no crowd of friends to smile upon her triumph. No curious multitude surged around the church porch to watch her step into her carriage. The erstwhile siren, to whom universal flattery had been the breath of life, now shrank from ostentation, content that her ambition was realised, and that she could look the whole world in the face as an honest woman.

Now that all further opposition was useless, the father of the bridegroom seems to have made up his mind that it would be bad policy to refuse to recognise his daughter-in-law. Possibly he was appeased by the discovery that Kitty was devotedly attached to her spendthrift husband, and had determined to wean him from the old bad ways. Already under her influence he had become prudent and economical. Since at St George's two days later. Mr Albert Matthews of Hotel Oxford, Boston, Mass., the clever antiquary to whom I am indebted for the information respecting the Scottish marriage, suggests very plausibly that Sarah Fischer was Kitty's younger sister, and the fact that both women belonged to the same London parish strengthens his belief. If he is correct, the name of Kitty's mother was Anne, not Kate, as stated in "The Juvenile Adventures."

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she was now a humble penitent it may have seemed to John Norris, senior, that his dissolute son might best be reclaimed by his charming wife. For the young man was madly in love with her in spite of all the errors of her past. Thus, soon after the wedding, the newly-married pair were allowed to pay a visit to Hemsted Park, the spacious manor in the south-east of Kent, which the old Admiral had purchased half a century before. It is a fifty-mile journey from London, past Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, and Cranbrook, to the southern extremity of the Weald, where, perched high on the upland slopes, the mansion overlooks the little village of Benenden. At that period, before the hand of the vandal had fallen upon its roof, it was a picturesque red-brick pile with two projecting wings; the one on the left being fronted with handsome octagonal towers, while the circular latticed windows of the other showed that in former times it had served as a chapel. A lofty wall, broken here and there by iron railings, enclosed the garden, and the house itself was encircled by a moat, fed by a hill-side spring. The open downs spread far on every side, while away in the east the waters of the straits of Dover lay flashing in the sunlight.

In this beautiful home Kitty enjoyed complete happiness for the first time. The lady of the manor with a devoted husband! It was better,

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a thousand times, than the glittering sinful days when the great metropolis bowed down before her. She revelled in the free country life, far away from the bitter memories of the capital. All day long she was in the saddle, pursuing her ruling passion with a fresh ardour. John Norris had presented a spirited coal-black mare as a wedding gift to his bride, and mounted on this frisky Kitty—for it was called by her name—the happy wife used to accompany her husband from morning till night in long rides over the estate. The village folk regarded the dashing horsewoman in silent wonder, marvelling at the ease and grace with which she cleared the obstacles in her path, for Kitty and her mistress needed no gate to be opened, leaping over the tallest hedge and the broadest ditch without a trace of fear. In a little while, also, the whole country-side had grown to love young Mrs Norris, for she became the lady bountiful of the parish, ever ready to listen to a tale of distress, always eager to bestow charity when it was deserved. To the simple cottagers she appeared the best and sweetest gentlewoman in the land.

Yet she must have known that this great happiness must soon end. As the winter advanced, the hollow cough, which had troubled her for many weeks, grew deeper and more painful; the hectic flush in her cheeks burnt

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more brightly. In spite of exercise and fresh air, poor Kitty began to lose strength day by day. Some of her friends, who remembered that she used to touch her cheeks with more than a *souffçon* of white, shook their heads sagely, and whispered that, like Lady Fortrose and the Countess of Coventry, she was the victim of lead-poisoning. It was an idle supposition. The disease had another cause. It is the pace that kills, and Kitty Fisher was paying the penalty of the evil-liver. It was evident that she had fallen into a decline.

In an agony of distress the afflicted husband sought the advice of physicians, who, as usual, recommended an immediate visit to the Bristol Hotwells, for the waters and the air of Clifton-on-the-Downs were regarded as beneficial in the early stages of consumption. The malady, however, made rapid progress, and when it was decided to take the long journey to the west, the sufferer had become much worse. Poor Kitty knew that she was going to die, but was patient and resigned. Since her marriage she had shown the most deep and earnest piety, finding solace in religion, hoping to obtain pardon for her sins. At last, early in March, in bleak and stormy weather, she set out with her husband to Bristol, a three-days' coach-ride from London, for an invalid could not make the journey of a hundred and twenty miles over

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rough country roads in a shorter time without great fatigue. Although everything was done to ensure her comfort, the effort proved too much for her strength. On Monday evening, the 9th of March, when her post-chaise drew up before the Three Tuns at Bath, an old tavern of high repute in Stall Street, those who saw the faded beauty in the glare of the lanterns as she was helped indoors perceived that she was sick unto death. Soon it was whispered through the house that the famous Kitty Fisher, who had just arrived on her way to the Hotwells, was taken seriously ill. A little later it was known that she was dying. Before the morning she had become unconscious, and about the hour of noon, with her husband's arms around her, she passed quietly to her rest. She was in her twenty-ninth year, and she had been married less than five months.

To John Norris it seemed the end of all things. His one thought was to pay idolatry to the poor little figure that lay motionless in the darkened room. A fierce longing possessed him to look upon her again as he had seen her before disease had laid a hand upon her bright young beauty. To the women who came to perform the last offices, he gave the order to bring out her most handsome gown, and let her wear it instead of the dreadful shroud.

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Thus, attired in her costliest finery, with satin ribbons and sparkling jewels, Kitty Fisher was prepared for the tomb, lying in her coffin decked out as for a ball. Those who desired were allowed to see her as she lay in state, for the bereaved husband wished that all should come and worship, as he did, at the shrine of her beauty, seeking with mute, pathetic fervour to make the whole world a partner in his sorrow. It was a piteous spectacle, memorised by one who may have gazed upon it :—

Alas ! what boast hath blooming youth,  
Since thus Florella lies ;  
Paleness o'er her damask cheek,  
And closed her beauteous eyes.  
If fade those glories of her face,  
Ah, why such frailty trust ;  
When virtue still its sweetness keeps,  
And blossoms in the dust.

Thirteen days later, on Monday, the 23rd of March 1767, the body of Catherine Maria Norris was laid to rest within the family vault in the chancel of the parish church at Benenden, and the poor villagers, looking on with mournful eyes as she was carried to the tomb, felt that they had never possessed a better friend than this bright and beautiful lady, who had come among them for such a short space like a winter flower.



**T**O the moralist there is much food for reflection in the story of Kitty Fisher. The poor milliner tempted by a gay Lothario, the fall from virtue, and the sinful reign as a queen of beauty ; then penitence and reparation, a short hour of domestic happiness, and the early grave. Trite enough, perhaps, in fiction, but an unfamiliar tale in real life, a tale, too, that the sternest may hear with pity and forbearance. Although her sins were as scarlet, the last few weeks of her life have done much to blot out the memory of her transgressions. In holy writ we hear of less atonement that has wrought a greater pardon.

To the student of the English master-painters the personality of Kitty Fisher must have a curious interest, for her portraits are among the most bright and fanciful of Sir Joshua's handiwork. Besides the picture of Cleopatra and the picture of the lady in the balcony, with which engravings have made us all familiar, the great artist painted her in three other postures. There is a dainty portrait, in profile, with a parrot on her forefinger ; she appears upon a second canvas with powdered locks and a

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butterfly cap; while a third shows her sitting on a sofa holding a dove in her hands. Consequently each biographer of Reynolds has something to say about her, and she has been rescued from the oblivion that must fall to the lot of all of her class whose beauty is not immortalised by the work of genius.

To the historian the life of Kitty Fisher displays a curious picture of bygone morality, revealing the manners and customs of a robust age, before mankind had learned to hide their frailties from one another, when society went naked and was not ashamed. It was a period of hard living and plain speaking, when the seventh commandment was the least respected of all the ten, when "Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies" was sold openly in public places, and a bagnio stood in every street. It was a period when the favourite courtesan was esteemed a popular celebrity, advertised by paragraphs in the newspapers, discussed in the salons of the nobility, and patronised frankly by princes of the blood. Like most human creatures, Kitty Fisher was a product of her age.

It is curious to note how completely she eclipsed the rest of the frail sisterhood during her brief reign. From 1758 until 1763 her supremacy was absolute. There were many formidable competitors, but they never became rivals. Dashing Miss Hermitage, who borrowed



*L. de la Tour*

*Mrs. Adley 1780*



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her cognomen from Lord Deloraine, and whose connection with the Tripoline ambassador gave her great notoriety, was as keen and reckless a horsewoman, but had not the charm of Kitty Fisher. Nimble Nancy Dawson, who danced into the affections of all playgoers to the tune of "Here we go round the Mulberry Bush," had not wit enough to take advantage of a unique opportunity. Gentle Annie Elliot, in spite of her talents as an actress, did not possess the tact and magnetism that mark a ruler of men. The lovely Nelly O'Brien, although the favourite model of Sir Joshua Reynolds, was comparatively unknown in the world of gallantry. The Igmires, Garricks, Vanes, and Herveys, who flourished during the same period, were transitory beauties, and do not appear to have caused Kitty a single sleepless night. Not only was she, in the words of Tom Taylor, "the most celebrated Traviata of her time," but probably she was the most famous that her country has ever seen. Emma Hamilton and "Perdita" Robinson owed their celebrity to the weakness of a hero and the folly of a prince. Kitty Fisher, however, stood alone and incomparable, the recipient of no reflected glory.



III

NANCY PARSONS







*Thomas Gainsborough, R.A., paint.*

NANCY PARSONS

*From the original picture in the possession of Charles Wertheimer, Esq.*



## NANCY PARSONS

### I

**O**N the 16th of April 1768 the opera *La Schiava*, composed by Signor Niccoli Piccini, was performed at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket.

It was Saturday night, the favourite evening for going to the play, and Vanbrugh's gorgeous house was crowded with a fashionable company.

An unwonted excitement seemed to pervade the vast audience; no one appeared to be absorbed by the music or interested in the stage; all eyes were fixed upon a handsome young noble who sat in one of the lower boxes beside a beautiful woman with the features of a Madonna and large soulful eyes. It was the Duke of Grafton, Prime Minister of England, and the lady was his famous mistress, the stately Nancy Parsons.

Though unaccustomed to resent a mere breach of morality, society on this occasion was shocked. The most hardened reprobate felt that the conduct of the First Lord of the Treasury had created a dangerous precedent. It was usual for men who held high office to cast a decent veil over their peccadilloes, or, at all events, they were not in the habit of flaunting their vices in public

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places. Moreover, the occasion magnified the offence. The pit and boxes, which the managers of the Opera House had "put together," charging the same price for both, were filled with peers and peeresses. Royalty had honoured the entertainment with its presence, and the homely features of Queen Charlotte smiled upon the scene. The Duchess of Grafton herself, a *grand dame* of elegant figure, was seated a few yards distant from her husband. All agreed that the Prime Minister should not have chosen such a time and place for this exhibition of his infidelity.

Judging from the expression of his florid, cleanly-chiselled face, the young duke was quite indifferent to public opinion. All through the evening he never stirred from the side of Miss Parsons, giving her his sole attention, chatting to her all the time. No one could doubt his fondness. Four years ago, when their friendship began, he had preferred to separate from his wife rather than surrender his mistress, and since that time she had been his confidant and companion. Of late, a period of absence had increased his passion. Nancy had just returned from a three months' sojourn in France, whence, so gossip alleged, she had been brought home by the duke's factotum, Horatio Palmer, in one of the King's yachts. Some even hinted at a lover's quarrel, but whether this was so or not

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the Prime Minister was overjoyed to have her back again, and quite enough in love to throw discretion to the winds in order to gratify her by escorting her to the opera.

Notwithstanding the debasing experiences of her past life, Nancy Parsons was a refined and modest woman. Her placid temper was seldom ruffled, her demeanour was always gentle and kind. In spite of her frailty she was very religious, being constant in her attendance at church. A coarse word hurt her like a blow. Some said that her father, a Bond Street tailor in prosperous circumstances, had given her a good education, at Paris and elsewhere, and even if this was a fable there was no doubt that she was highly cultured, while her conversation showed that she possessed a remarkable intellect. Her lofty brow, her serene glance, and grave, thoughtful aspect enhanced the impression of a saint-like beauty whose life had been passed in the seclusion of the cloister. Unhallowed though their union, it is to the credit of the fox-hunting, turf-loving Augustus Henry, Duke of Grafton, that he had been fascinated by the charm of this clever and attractive lady.

Friends pleaded his domestic unhappiness as the excuse for the connection. Shortly after he came of age he had married Anne Liddell, the only daughter of Lord Ravensworth, one of the finest of fine ladies, endowed with all the qualifi-

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cations that win social power. However, it was soon plain that the union must end in disaster. Five years after the wedding Sir Horace Mann, who met them in Florence, perceived that they were drifting apart. Each possessed a hasty temper, both were engrossed in separate pursuits. Upon their return from Italy the breach widened. The duchess, who had become an inveterate gambler, spent most of her time at loo and hazard. The duke disliked these amusements, being devoted to the turf and to the chase. Often, when he came home from the House of Lords, where he was regarded already as a rising statesman, he found a great many servants in the hall, and on inquiry learnt from the porter that her Grace had a card party upstairs. On which occasions he would call roughly for his *valet de chambre* and take candles and go into his library, or he would quit the house in a passion. It was said that his wife's gambling debts were costing him enormous sums. Her friends expostulated with her in vain; the anger of her husband had no effect upon her. She even declared that her affection for him was gone.

In the autumn of 1763 the duke entered into the liaison with Miss Nancy Parsons, and when the news of his infidelity reached the ears of the duchess some months later she insisted upon the dismissal of his favourite or threatened to leave him, being confident that, now the grievance was

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on her side, she could dictate her own terms. It was an error. The duke, who, however great his faults, had been in the first instance more sinned against than sinning, cared for his wife no longer, and, eager to regain his freedom, proposed terms of separation with the greatest politeness and good temper. Her pride would not permit her to sue for peace; even yet she imagined that if she held out she would gain the victory. However, her husband was inflexible, and she was allowed no chance of drawing back. Taking all the blame on himself, he granted her an allowance of £3000 a year, and gave her the custody of their two younger children. They parted in September 1764, and on the 11th of January of the following year the articles of agreement were signed, since which time they had lived separate lives, and the duke had found consolation with the amiable Miss Parsons. Society, well aware of these circumstances, had been pleased hitherto to condone his faults until he forfeited its indulgence by his audacity in attending his mistress to the opera.

As Nancy looked around the spacious theatre, with its vast columns and gilded cornices, she must have been more than feminine had she been displeased at the notice that was taken of her. As her gaze wandered up and down the tiers of boxes her glance must have met that of many a great man or noble lady

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fixed upon her in curious scrutiny. Probably, she noticed a gawky peer, bent almost double-fold with a coarse, fleshy face, and heavy pouches beneath his fugitive eyes, who, though age had seamed both their faces, appeared devoted to the lame little wife who sat by his side ; and, while she must have recognised Lord Temple, her duke's enemy, and his countess, the authoress of many sprightly *vers de société*, she can never have fathomed the depth of his hostility, or a year later she might have realised that the hand which penned those bitter invectives against her duke and herself, above the signature of "Junius," was guided often enough by this implacable earl. Then, as she looked towards Queen Charlotte's box she may have caught a glimpse of the radiant face of Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton, one of the ladies in waiting, and she must have felt a thrill of admiration as she called to mind that a few days ago this courageous woman had refused to illuminate her house at the bidding of those Wilkes rioters who were causing her duke's government so much embarrassment. Possibly, too she may have encountered the curious stare of Caroline, Countess of Harrington, her duke's sister, a buxom dame with the clear-cut features of the Fitzroys, long since past her prime ; or she might have met the happy glance of talented Lady Diana Beauclerk, newly married to the man she loved, and who now



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that the miserable past had been forgotten, was enjoying the present with a feverish avidity, as though conscious that her felicity would not last. Perhaps, amidst the crowd of gentlemen in the pit she perceived the good-humoured face of young Lord Upper Ossory, who already, and her duke was getting to know of it, had become far too familiar with the lonely Duchess of Grafton. Whichever way she looked Nancy found the eyes of the noblest in the land turned in her direction.

It had been the same when she entered the Opera House in time for the rise of the curtain at half-past six. It was the same when, at the close of the performance, she passed through the wide corridors and down the broad staircase upon the duke's arm. The glittering crowd of ladies and gentlemen stared in amazement at the spectacle of a Prime Minister calling for his mistress's carriage, and attending her to the door. It seemed to all that Messrs Vincent and Gordon, the able managers of the King's Theatre, who would allow no person to be admitted behind the scenes or into the orchestra, who were as strenuous in their reforms as the great Garrick himself, should have adopted some means to prevent such a grievous scandal. This was the opinion of "libertine men as well as prudish women," but four months later in the same Opera House a different scene was

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witnessed. The Ridotto in August—a fancy dress ball at which the dancers were unmasked—drew together a large and fashionable crowd, and, when the Duke of Grafton appeared in company with Miss Parsons, men of all ranks, under the impression that there was no surer method of gaining the Minister than by conciliating the mistress, vied with one another in paying court to her. All the evening she was surrounded by a mob of flatterers. It was allowed that she was queen of the ball. There can be no doubt that at this period she was one of the most powerful ladies in the land.

## II

**T**HE Duke of Grafton's liaison had first become notorious in the late summer of 1764, while he was arranging terms of separation with his duchess, when he invited Nancy to pay a visit to Wakefield Lodge, near Stony Stratford, his official residence, as Hereditary Ranger of Whittlebury Forest. She was then known as Mrs Haughton, claiming to be the grass-widow of a West Indian merchant, and although she always continued to use this title it was believed that she had no legal right to it. At all events the connection had been a most unfortunate one for poor Annabella Parsons, as Captain Haughton, after inducing her to accompany him to Jamaica, had treated her so cruelly that she had run away from him, taking ship to America, and thence to England. On her arrival in London all her money was exhausted. With poverty knocking at the door she soon fell into evil ways, and, finding that her face was her fortune, she passed from one patron to another until finally the Duke of Grafton had come across her path. She was not the cause of his domestic fiasco; the mischief had been done before she knew him; but, having found his ideal

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of the perfect woman, he resolved at all hazards to keep her by his side.

Delighted at the prospect of a visit to the charming woodland seat, Nancy prepared for her journey to Wakefield Lodge, and anxious to appear before her new friend in proper style, she ordered an elegant new post-chaise to be made for her, with her arms—the arms of the widow Haughton—emblazoned on the panels. The time was short, and the coach-builder told her that although the carriage could be finished, it was doubtful whether the paint would be dry enough to allow her to use it without risk of damage. Being inexperienced in these matters she would listen to no excuses, and urged the man to execute her order without further protest. The appointed day arrived, the new post-chaise drove up at her door—a little late indeed, but as smart and sumptuous as any duchess might wish—and Nancy set out upon her sixty miles drive to Northamptonshire. The afternoon was far advanced, and she was able to make only a short stage, halting for the night at the Bull in Dunstable, which she reached in time for supper. When the tired and hungry lady had hurried indoors the ostlers set to work to clean her carriage, and as it was dark they did not notice that the task required any special care. On the next morning they were horrified, and so was Nancy when she prepared to resume her journey,

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for her beautiful new post-chaise had lost all its splendour. The Haughton arms had disappeared, the paint lay upon the panels in horrible patches. As the coach-builder had foreseen it was not dry enough to stand washing. It was a long time before the duke and his festive friends would allow Miss Parsons to forget her first order for a carriage. The story must have amused their enemy when he heard of it, as probably he did very soon, for Lord Temple lived at Stowe, not five miles away from Wakefield Lodge.

During the next four years Nancy's influence over her admirer continued its steady growth. She became a familiar figure at every important race-meeting, going with the duke to Ascot, Newmarket, and other gatherings, where she always occupied the front seat of his coach, and was introduced to all his men friends. At his town houses, in Bond Street, and in Grosvenor Square, she presided at the head of his table, acting the part of hostess with perfect assurance, and amazing the company by her ascendancy over their noble host. For whenever he gave vent to a lusty oath, which was not an uncommon incident, she never failed to reprove him with a mild word or a gentle look of reproach, whereupon he would beg her pardon submissively for swearing in her presence. In the eyes of his guests the Duke of Grafton

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behaved as if he had been an uxorious dotard of four-score married to a girl of eighteen. There was some reason for his infatuation. With all his faults he was at heart a good fellow, who had been mated with an unsympathetic wife; and now, thanks to the tact and affection of a charming woman, he was happier than he had ever been before, in spite of the cares of statesmanship that had begun to press so heavily upon him.

Soon after the memorable meeting at the Opera House, it began to be rumoured that Nancy Parsons had made large investments in public stock with the proceeds of bribes which she received from successful competitors for places and pensions. Although she appears to have been solicitous on behalf of her own relatives, obtaining a lucrative civil appointment at Boston for one of her brothers, the more serious charges were never proved, and probably owed their origin to the fact that every aspirant to office made frantic efforts to win her good opinion. Whenever a venal politician gained advancement each envious rival whispered that it was due to the influence of Miss Parsons. Thus, Thomas Bradshaw, formerly clerk in the War Office, who in the eyes of the Opposition was one of the meanest creatures in the pay of the government, was regarded as her protégé. The ubiquitous Jeremiah Dyson—"Mungo here,

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Mungo there, Mungo everywhere"—was thought to have turned "rat" because he perceived that the mistress of the Prime Minister would prove more sensible of his merits than his late associates. When the duke had an electioneering dispute with Lord Hertford, she was supposed to have added fuel to the flame, spurred on by her sycophant John Ranby, Master of the Royal College of Surgeons, whose son-in-law was the defeated candidate, and piqued because the earl, as Lord Chamberlain, had chosen the Duchess of Grafton to be chief mourner at the funeral of Princess Louisa. Even when the duke found some employment for "Sir" Richard Perrot, a pseudo-baronet and fraudulent adventurer, whose petition to the Prince of Wales from the county of Flint aroused a burst of ridicule a year or two later, it was alleged that the rogue was recommended by Miss Parsons because his mistress, Isabella Wilkinson, the rope-dancer of Sadler's Wells, had amused her by a performance on the musical glasses. The truth is that the Duke of Grafton's government became more unpopular day by day, and the most absurd stories to the discredit of the Prime Minister or his favourite were received with general delight.

None except a statesman of the highest rank could have grappled successfully with the difficulties that had assailed the cabinet. From the first the Duke of Grafton had been influenced

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by patriotic motives, accepting office sore against his will in order that Pitt might come into power, when the Great Commoner had failed to form an administration owing to the defection of Lord Temple. Yet, in three or four months, the statesman, whose policy he had hoped to carry out, was lying on a bed of sickness, inaccessible to every one of his colleagues, who had to bear the burden of his great name without the aid of his great spirit, and who lost the prestige of his authority at the moment when they were called to face the problem of conciliating the American colonies, while upholding the authority of the motherland. The most united cabinet would have been shaken by the loss of such a chieftain, but Grafton's ministry was a heterogeneous collection, "a tessellated pavement without cement," sneered Burke, "here a bit of black stone, and there a bit of white, . . . a very curious show, but utterly unsafe to touch and unsure to stand on." An even more serious embarrassment than the loss of Chatham was caused by the return of Wilkes, with the brand of outlawry still upon him; convicted, but not yet sentenced, for having republished that "scandalous and seditious libel," the *North Briton*, No. 45, and for printing and publishing the "obscene and impious libel," entitled "An Essay on Woman." For, disappointed that the ministry did not grant his petition for a pardon, and mistrusting the Duke



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of Grafton's assurance that he would not be molested, he boldly declared war against the authorities, and got himself elected as member of parliament by the freeholders of Middlesex. Upon his imprisonment for the old offences, and his subsequent rejection by the House of Commons, the people who had made him their idol hailed him as the victim of government persecution, and believed that the ministers were entirely responsible for the verdict of a court of justice and the tyranny of the Lower House. Most damaging of all were the attacks of an anonymous scribe, whose denunciations filled the columns of the leading newspaper all through the year 1769; who smote the ministers between the joints of their harness, showing no pity, trampling upon the tenderest affections, and who aroused all the coarsest passions of the great middle class, just as Wilkes had stirred up the fury of the mob. With the New Year came the crash. Chatham, long since resigned, and on terms of friendship with Lord Temple, turned upon his former colleagues, and accusing the ministry of tyranny in the colonies and oppression at home, had rent it in twain. Thus, the Duke of Grafton was forced to give up the seals, not reluctantly and with quiet dignity, an unfortunate politician whose courage and patriotism deserved better success. America, Wilkes, and "Junius" had been arrayed against him, and few

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could have prevailed in the face of such fearful odds.

It was believed that the Prime Minister would have retired long before if Nancy Parsons had not entreated him to remain in office, assuring him that his honour was at stake, and that at all hazards he must remain loyal to Lord Chatham. "She had the sense to see this," says a well-informed writer, "and she had the integrity to tell him so." It would have been better if she had been able to persuade him that since he had sacrificed so much in obedience to public duty he should sacrifice more, and that no statesman who was willing to postpone a Cabinet Council for the sake of a fox hunt or a race meeting could hope to maintain unity amongst his colleagues. Still better had she cured him of his "lounging" attitude towards affairs of State, and had taught him to make a practical use of those enlightened opinions which he was known to advocate. For a lack of purpose and an inability to enforce his convictions were the two principal reasons of his failure as a minister. Although the liaison with Annabella Parsons was only a contributory cause of weakness it gave a terrible handle to his enemies. The truculent "Junius" launched his thunderbolts without mercy upon the devoted pair, harping mockingly upon Nancy's age, for she was no longer in the bloom of youth.

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“The Prime Minister of Great Britain, in a rural retirement and in the arms of faded beauty, has lost all memory of his sovereign, his country, and himself.”

“Did not the Duke of Grafton frequently lead his mistress into public, and even place her at the head of his table, as if he had pulled down an ancient temple of Venus, and could bury all decency and shame under its ruins?”

“It is not that he kept a mistress at home, but that he constantly attended her abroad. It is not the private indulgence, but the public insult of which I complain. The name of Miss Parsons would hardly have been known if the First Lord of the Treasury had not led her in triumph through the Opera House, even in the presence of the Queen. When we see a man act in this manner we may admit the shameless depravity of his heart, but what are we to think of his understanding?”

On another occasion the audacious foeman shaped his satire into rhyme, making the duke and his mistress the subject of the verses, “Harry and Nan, an Elegy in the manner of Tibullus,” which were printed in Almon’s “Political Register” of June 1768, six spiteful stanza, of which the first only can be quoted:—

Can Apollo resist, or a poet refuse,  
When Harry and Nancy solicit the Muse?

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A statesman, who makes the whole nation his care,  
And a nymph, who is almost as chaste as she's fair.

At last, the long friendship came to an end. On the 31st of March 1769 it was announced in the newspapers that the Prime Minister had parted from his mistress. Possibly he thought it his duty to conciliate public opinion; possibly the deep religious sentiment that affected the latter portion of his career was beginning to influence his conduct. More probably, he already had determined to seek "chaster connections," and having met a woman who he thought would prove a good wife, was resolved to tempt providence a second time. He was now free to do so. On the 26th of the month his marriage with the Duchess of Grafton had been dissolved by Act of Parliament, the successful libel, which resulted in a divorce from bed and board, having been given into Doctor's Commons during the previous November. Good-humoured, young Lord Upper Ossory had been the cause of the trouble, his pity for the lonely lady making him the victim of her wiles, but he acted a manly part, leading her to the altar at Kingston Church three days after the verdict of the House of Lords. The duke had no inclination to imitate the example by marrying his mistress, but one cannot say the same of poor Nancy. Since she had known that a divorce would take place the shining mirage of

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a ducal coronet often must have dazzled her eyes.

The separation of "Harry and Nan" caused the greatest astonishment. Many persons had been bold enough to wager that eventually she would become the Duchess of Grafton. Only a few days previously a popular magazine had extolled her enviable position. "Annabella is the happiest of her sex, attached to the most amiable man of the age, whose rank and influence raise her, in point of power, beyond many queens of the earth. Caressed by the highest, courted and adulated by all, her merit and shining abilities receive that applause that is justly due to them." Now all this splendour was gone, and the cruel fate of the cast-off mistress had overtaken her. Being generous and just in all his dealings, notwithstanding the calumnies of "Junius," the Duke of Grafton tried to soften the blow, which conscience had compelled him to inflict upon her. An allowance was promised, some said only £300 a year, others said £800, a third estimate declared it to be an annuity of £900. According to "Junius," the Prime Minister "proposed to continue united to her on some platonic terms of friendship, which she rejected with contempt." According to the newspapers he granted the pension on condition that she should live abroad. The details were concealed from the public, who only knew that

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a provision had been offered to the discarded mistress, and that the liaison was terminated. Although a couple of letters, which were alleged to have passed between the pair after the separation, were published broadcast in a short time, they threw little light upon the transaction, and were not regarded as genuine. It was clear that no reunion would take place. Before the end of May it was known that the Duke of Grafton was betrothed to Miss Elizabeth Wrottesley, daughter of the Dean of Worcester, and on the 24th of June 1769 the marriage was celebrated at Euston Park.

### III

**I**F the *chronique scandaleuse* tells the truth—and there are reasons to trust its veracity—the deserted Nancy, who was in sad distress at being thrown from her high estate, sought to blot out the memory of her former lover in a feverish search for universal admiration. Although her heart was wounded, her pride had been hurt more deeply, but the bitter experiences of the past had made her less exacting in her view of life. As soon as it was known that the celebrated lady had left her old home there was no lack of courtiers. It was inevitable that the gossips should associate her name with that of Lord March, for this indomitable gallant, whose quiet persistency and gentle cunning would suffer no rebuff, had been a most intimate friend in by-gone days. Rumour whispered also that a man of finer calibre was attracted by her culture and intelligence—a frail genius with sallow cheeks and a soft voice, who loved liberty with all his honest soul and devoted his life to the good of his countrymen, the Nottingham baronet, Sir George Savile, a man likely enough to feel sympathy for a poor woman upon whom fortune had frowned. It is certain,

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however, that later in the year, towards September or thereabouts, she had chosen one admirer from the crowd of aspirants, Thomas Panton by name, brother of the Duchess of Ancaster, a jovial, full-blooded sportsman, who had been taught to drink by Charles Churchill, and had learnt the art of flirtation from Sophia Baddeley. Such a friendship could not last. The pair had little in common. He was not her intellectual equal; she had none of the devilry of his usual associates. Before long Miss Parsons and the "Sporting Rover" had shaken hands amicably and said good-bye.

Towards the end of February, 1770, the cynics once more were making merry at her expense, for a new amour had been announced in the daily papers. Nancy was appropriated by another duke, a youth of twenty-five, and much was said of her fondness for strawberry leaves, and her power over the stripling. Hitherto, he had won fame only upon the cricket field, where his raven locks and "milk-white vest" had begun to allure a crowd of feminine spectators to the new pastime, but he was believed to possess good sense and sound ambition. In the opinion of his friends, John Frederick, 3rd Duke of Dorset, was likely to prove one of the most illustrious sons of the house of Sackville. Strong and active, with sharp, intelligent features and keen black eyes, he was a man of much charm,



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and, if not handsome, there was no more graceful figure in the world of sport. Having earned considerable reputation in the circles of gallantry his preference for Nancy Parsons did not cause any great surprise. On the contrary, there were many apologists. Among these, a clerical gentleman, named Frederick Barlow, who a little later compiled a "Complete British Peerage," was able to find a satisfactory excuse for him. "This nobleman, who possesses many distinguished virtues, is, nevertheless, not entirely exempted from those frailties which human flesh is heir to," wrote the parson. "However, his conduct, even in his foibles, admits of almost an entire palliation; for being a bachelor, it is but natural to suppose that a young peer of his grace's warmth of constitution and natural vigour must find some solace in the arms of beauty." No allowance was made for Nancy, who incurred the hatred of every matron who had a marriageable daughter. The sole excuse ever fashioned into words took shape in a bon-mot uttered by Samuel Foote, a bon-mot as lame as the player himself, the contemporary popularity of which is a proof that wit must be the most transitory of all human accomplishments. A gentleman happened to remark in the St James's Coffee House that Nancy Parsons must be an abandoned woman. "Oh," quoth the witty Sam, "there is nothing in it.

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You know she has the benefit of clergy on her side."

In a little while it became known that the Duke of Dorset and his mistress had set out upon a continental tour with the intention of staying abroad for two or three years. This abduction of a youthful nobleman excited the anger of some of his peers more fiercely against the famous syren. All the cheap sneers at her age, which "Junius" had employed so savagely, were repeated over again, and it was prophesied that she would need the help of crutches before her return. So, when the young duke upon his first appearance in the Court of Versailles, gazed at Madame du Barry with a look of surprise and murmured, "Good Heavens, why her bloom is quite past," the story was carried from lip to lip with intense joy, and he was reminded that his own mistress had been long out of her teens. Indeed, the Lady Mary Coke, who was always very cross when she spoke of these "women of the town," declared that Nancy Parsons was forty at least, but according to a newspaper paragraph, which probably erred on the side of leniency, she was only twenty-seven. While the young peer and his companion remained in Paris, she is said to have endeared herself to him by her constancy, for in spite of the advantageous offers which she received from wealthy admirers she never wavered for a moment in her allegiance to him.

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After leaving the French capital they journeyed to Rome, where they met Dr Charles Burney, whom the duke insisted upon entertaining every evening, inviting all the best singers and actors in order to amuse him. But while the gentle composer, who was travelling in search of materials for his "History of Music," was gratified by his Grace's kindness and condescension, he did not mention the duke's "female companion" when he wrote to tell his friend, David Garrick, of the hospitality he had received. For Doctor Burney had a houseful of young daughters, and would not deign to notice such an alliance. Soon after their arrival in the Eternal City a plot was hatched by a Venetian noble, who had failed to persuade Nancy to listen to his avowals of love, to carry her off from a masqued ball, and if the *chronique scandaleuse* that tells the story is to be trusted, she was rescued by her protector in the nick of time, when her abductors were forcing her into a carriage. So great was the duke's devotion that as time went on many persons feared that she would succeed in persuading him to marry her. Indeed, during the month of August 1771, fashionable circles were much perturbed by the report of their wedding. No one was more amazed and disgusted than Lady Mary Coke, who, since she heard the news from the governess of the royal children, believed it was true, and

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who expressed the general opinion of society when she declared scornfully, "he deserves no pity, but for his family I really grieve." Nevertheless the rumour was false, and in spite of its repetition by the newspapers those who knew him best were confident that the Duke of Dorset was too cautious to make such a grievous blunder.

Although Nancy Parsons continued to be "the head of his establishment" after their return to England there were signs that the friendship would not endure much longer. It was thought that the infidelity of the impressionable duke was the cause of the first quarrel, but soon there were whispers that he too had good reason to be jealous. The Earl of Shelburne, yclept "Malagrida," a statesman of some genius but a sad dog in his younger days, as Fanny Abington and other fair ones could bear witness, began to show a great partiality for Nancy, and though their intercourse may have been but a renewal of the platonic friendship that had existed between them when the earl was a member of the ill-fated Grafton ministry it aroused the anger of the "Noble Cricketer." Henceforth he seemed to have lost faith in her loyalty, and early in the June of 1773 Lady Mary Coke was able to declare with a sigh of satisfaction "the Duke of Dorset has certainly parted with his mistress." Another charmer, as remarkable in character as

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Miss Parsons herself, had won his affections—a tall, elegant woman known as Mrs Elizabeth Armistead, who had become famous as a member of Mrs Goadby's establishment in Marlborough Street. To this lady, who possessed both intelligence and refinement, in spite of her lowly origin (for she was the daughter of a Methodist shoemaker), the Duke remained faithful for upwards of three years. Then a strange thing happened. The ruthless Dorset persuaded the pretty young Countess of Derby, who had been the sweetheart of his boyhood, to break her marriage vows, and the earl, her husband, having driven the faithless wife from his door, sought consolation in the society of Mrs Armistead. An amazing interchange indeed, but the deserted Nancy, who, in spite of all her errors, never wished for revenge, cannot have exulted over the sad drama.

#### IV

**O**N Wednesday the 12th of June 1776, the *Morning Post*, which, under the rule of Parson Bate, had become the chief repository of scandal, caused a mild astonishment among its readers by the publication of the following paragraph :—

It is said Lord Viscount M——d was married on Monday last to Mrs H——n, the late very celebrated Nancy Pars—s.

There was no difficulty in filling up the blank, for most people knew that it was meant to indicate Charles, 2nd Viscount Maynard, of Easton Lodge, Essex, whose family had been founded by a secretary of Lord Burleigh in the reign of Elizabeth. At this period the young nobleman was only twenty-five years of age, mild and simple in speech and very reserved in manner, who could draw a creditable sketch of a horse, but was supposed to have no other accomplishments. Possibly his degree of simplicity was exaggerated, and his remark about the House of Commons, "Is that going on still?" showed, perhaps, less of naïveté than lack of faith in the toleration of his countrymen. At all events he was reputed to have squandered a large fortune in a search for experience, and a

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cynic remarked that a youth who had corrupted so much female innocence would be very properly employed in leading Nancy Parsons to the paths of virtue. Although the *Morning Post* appears to have had no doubt of the accuracy of its information, and gleefully reported the remark of "a certain *fille de joie*," who accused the new Lady Maynard of being "like a smuggler, the enemy of the fair trader," the rumour of her marriage was denied by Horace Walpole in a letter to Lady Upper Ossory, ex-Duchess of Grafton, on the 20th of June. "It is a pity," he added with a sly dig at the beautiful Elizabeth Gunning, recently created a baroness in her own right, "she deserves a peerage as much as most that have got them lately." However, about the middle of the following month "the accomplished" Mrs Edward Boscawen, widow of the famous admiral, informed her gossip, Mrs Delany, a dear old lady who, with all her piety, loved a bit of scandal—that Lord Maynard had acknowledged to his sister that Nancy Parsons was his wife. Oddly enough, Lady Mary Coke received the blow with unwonted stoicism, contenting herself with exaggerating the age of the bride and minimising that of the bridegroom by a couple of years. Yet the discrepancy was great enough without over-estimation, for while Lord Maynard reached his twenty-fifth birthday on the 9th of August, it was the general opinion that the

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viscountess had passed the sunny side of forty. A couplet written about her three summers previously was often requoted as an explanation of the ill-assorted marriage :—

'Tis not her charms, 'tis her ingenious mind,  
That did a Grafton doth a Dorset bind.

No one doubted that Lord Maynard had chosen a wife whose intellect would compensate for his own mental deficiency.

Nancy was too shrewd to take up her abode at Easton Lodge, although it was a fine old Tudor mansion situated in a beautiful park, for she foresaw that she would become the victim of a social taboo, which her husband was neither rich nor influential enough to overcome. However, her previous experiences led her to hope that she would receive more of the considerations due to her rank across the channel, and she expected after a sufficient display of matrimonial excellence, which at home would scarcely win her the Dunmow fitch, to be able to conciliate her travelling country folk as easily as the foreigner. Thus, she decided to commence her married life on the Continent, pursuing the same tour that she had made in company with the meretricious Dorset, believing that the boundless adulation vouchsafed to the mistress could not be denied to a peeress of the realm. In a measure the result was satisfactory, and encouraged by the



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success of a sojourn in Rome she ventured upon a visit to Naples, where the Anglophile King and Queen always gave a warm welcome to English tourists. This journey, which took place in the autumn of the year following her marriage, turned out to be premature. With few exceptions the British colony declined to recognise her; the wife of the British envoy refused to present her at court. "Nobody visits her," wrote Sir William Hamilton to Charles Greville, but the cautious diplomat did not tell his nephew that the young husband, believing him responsible for the ostracism of his lady, wished to challenge him to a duel. It was King Ferdinand, however, who hindered the presentation, for although the Queen was willing to permit it, he had shown unwonted fastidiousness. When Lord Maynard, whose habitual quietude had given place to fierce impatience in consequence of the treatment which his wife had received, sought an interview with his Majesty, and requested that she might attend the court, he was met with a distinct refusal.

A glimpse of Neapolitan life at this period reveals the true Nancy Parsons—a calm dignified lady, whose patience was unruffled in the face of insult, whose indomitable will would allow no obstacle to turn her from her purpose. In a little while her quiet persistence began to win a few friends, one of the kindest being the fascin-

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ating Madame Santo Marco who was a great favourite with the Queen notwithstanding the fact that she was suspected of trying to make a conquest of the King. Some of the Englishmen also took pity upon the pariah, and when Lord Tylney, who was famous for his generosity, gave a splendid ball he did not forget to send an invitation to Lady Maynard; and although the majority of the guests avoided her, and she remained apart from the general company in one corner of the room, it was noticed that she did not lack a little coterie of her own. This was a small triumph, but it was her ambition to conciliate her country-women, and she strove unceasingly to induce a few of them to call upon her, observing pathetically to the friends whom she desired to use their good offices, "Is there no room for Penitence?" All the time she continued to take what little part in social life her own sex were unable to forbid, and whether or not her aim was selfish it was a wise course to show her husband that her courage and self-respect were undiminished. Sometimes she used to attend the wild boar hunt at Astoni, whither the whole English colony was accustomed to flock, to watch the uncouth Ferdinand spear the herds of hogs which were driven past him by the beaters from the woods—a sad spectacle of butchery, but a rendezvous of fashion. Yet on these occasions, while all the rest of the company

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formed a merry group around the gracious Queen, the ostracised Nancy sat apart with her husband and a few kind friends, and though shunned by everyone else, appeared wholly unconcerned by the cold and disdainful glances that were cast upon her—"None but herself," remarked a spectator, "could have supported such a disagreeable situation."

Nevertheless, she was encouraged by the small successes of her first season in Naples, and returned thither the following winter. Already there were signs that the social taboo was being relaxed in other places. At Florence she had been entertained by Sir Horace Mann, not alone but along with a general company, and the Countess of Berkeley, although cold and disdainful, had at least submitted to her society. A few weeks later a strange rumour reached England, for it was reported that "poor simple Lord Maynard" had shot himself soon after his arrival at Naples. Hardly was the intelligence found to be incorrect than another astonishing piece of news was circulated in London society, and English tourists learnt with surprise that King Ferdinand had withdrawn his mandate, for he had not only permitted the Queen to receive Lady Maynard, but was showing her many special marks of favour. An odd incident occasioned the change. Recently sickness had broken out at the court, the Prince of Marino

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being attacked by fever, and when the doctors had failed to benefit the patient, Lord Maynard came forward, at the instigation of the fascinating Madame Santo Marco, and with a few doses of a preparation of antimony, known as James's Powders, effected a complete cure. In an instant, much to his surprise, the modest young peer became the hero of Neapolitan society. The boisterous Ferdinand hugged him to his breast, the amiable Queen invited Nancy to pay her a visit, the nobility vied with one another in showering invitations upon the pair. In the face of such popularity the English visitors were obliged to relent. The prim and precise Sir William Hamilton hastened to make amends, and the entire British Colony called upon Lady Maynard. Of them all Lady Berkeley alone, vexed no doubt that the humble person whom she had patronised at the table of Sir Horace Mann should be so greatly exalted, remained obdurate, and persuaded the Countess of Oxford to adopt the same policy. In such strange manner was Nancy's perseverance at last rewarded. Thanks to James's Powders, which have never removed a complaint half so rapidly as they had removed the prejudice against her, she had gained an assured position in Continental society. One half of her ambition was realized.

It was in January 1779 that Nancy won her Neapolitan triumph. During the next four years

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she did not loom very largely before the public eye. Even the lawsuit, which a Mrs Sormany brought against her in the spring of 1782, failed to attract much attention. Apparently she was one of the subscribers to the new Opera House, occupying box No. 48, but she was able to make little headway against the strong tide of British prejudice. Naturally her sister peeresses could not forget that she had been "The Duke of Grafton's Mrs Haughton, the Duke of Dorset's Mrs Haughton, everybody's Mrs Haughton."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as a result of his youthful extravagances, Lord Maynard's income seems to have been seriously diminished, and it was impossible for him to reside permanently at his ancestral home, which had to be let to strangers. Altogether, Nancy had little reason to be satisfied with her life in England.

Early in the year 1784 London society began to talk once more of Lady Maynard. Another duke appeared to have fallen in love with her, a boy of eighteen, who was now in the midst of his foreign travels, a fortunate youth who, owing to a long minority, would succeed to the most princely rent-rolé in the land. Folks believed that the flirtation had been going on

<sup>1</sup> Walpole writes the name "Horton." It appears better to adopt the spelling of the tract published in 1769, "Memoirs of the Amours . . . of . . . Duke of Grafton with Miss Parsons," for its orthography is confirmed by Thomas Bradshaw, who is probably correct.

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for some months, and the pair were still touring the Continent together, while in spite of the fact that Nancy was drawing near her fiftieth birthday scandal said all manner of evil things about their relationship. It was Francis, 5th Duke of Bedford, that had been thus bewitched, a most amiable young man like his ill-fated father, rather shy perhaps, and, if the truth was told, inclined to be niggardly, yet owing most of his faults to the inexperience of youth. He had not long since been emancipated from the clutches of an officious grandmother, and his friends regarded him as just the sort of person to fall a victim to the wiles of clever Lady Maynard. Everyone blamed the Rev. Mr Morris for not taking more care of his pupil.

Nancy's explanation gave a different meaning to the friendship. If her earnest protests are entitled to credit, their intercourse—in its early days, at all events—was wholly platonic. "The Duke of Bedford is so shy that he appears unhappy in society," she told an acquaintance, who had won her confidence. "He is so reserved that he used to get into a corner. There is no doubt that he would have fallen into low company, who would have taught him to game and drink, and would have kept him among themselves. Now he is at his ease," she meant to imply, "thanks to my care of him," and

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she proceeded to assure her listener that *now* also "his behaviour is suitable to his rank." With quaint naïveté she revealed a motive for her conduct which is credible enough. "It is also a convenience to us," she confessed, this *menage à trois* with a princely Duke, "for we are enabled to appear more suitable to our situation than we could otherwise do!" Still, "she wished by no means to create misunderstandings in families"—the tirades of the old grandmother duchess no doubt had reached her ears, but she was not prepared to sacrifice such a valuable friendship merely to appease the idle gossips—"she had seen the several unpleasant consequences of distressed circumstances," said she, "and was resolved to avoid them." A world-wise combative unscrupulous lady was this perennial Nancy. No wonder the confidant remarked, "her sayings and deep understandings are dangerous."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the laughter of society and the ridicule of newspapers the friendship, which probably was an innocent one, continued unabated for many years longer. It was not until the following summer that Lord Maynard, who had left the travellers on the Continent, was called upon to take charge of his wife in Paris so as to allow the duke an opportunity of playing a flying visit to England. Soon

<sup>1</sup> Hardwicke MSS., 35, 258, pp. 90, 91, 138.

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afterwards she joined her young squire in London, and led him off on another tour through France, which lasted until he was obliged to return home soon after attaining his majority on the 11th of August 1786. About this period he appears to have had a passage at arms with his sturdy old grandmother, who lives to fame as the first patron of the beautiful Miss Gunnings, for the Dowager duchess, apprehensive lest Lady Nancy should be installed as mistress of Woburn, refused to turn out until the heir had come into legal possession of his estates. All through the next year Lord Maynard and his wife were the constant companions of the young duke, and in the autumn he became their tenant at Easton Lodge, which previously had been rented as a hunting box by Lord Cathcart and Lord Lincoln in turn. During the winter Nancy made a trip abroad—she was seriously ill at Lyons for a long time—and the affections of the Duke of Bedford, who was temporarily infatuated by the famous Mrs Hill, seem to have declined, but when his old friend returned to England during the summer of 1789, for a little while he appeared to be as devoted to her as ever. The association, however, was doomed. New interests began to absorb his Grace. Political obligations and the care of his vast possessions occupied his time, and another clever lady, one



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Madame de Buffon, who was estranged temporarily from her patron, the Duc d'Orléans, usurped the place that Lady Maynard had held so long.

During the last portion of her life Nancy lived mostly on the Continent, whither she retired early in the Spring of 1792, taking refuge for many years with her friends at Naples. Here she continued to enjoy the favour of the King and Queen, and the latter was said to have become so fond of her that she invited her to all her private parties and "consulted her on all matters of taste." At her previous visits she had "reconciled her Majesty to English fashions," apparently preceding Lady Hamilton as the royal confidant. A quarrel with her husband now saddened her life. When her beauty faded the fickle Lord Maynard seems to have grown tired of her, and transferred his affections to a figurante of the French opera, named Madame Derville, who afterwards became somewhat notorious as a London courtesan. In the year 1797, while Nancy was living in Naples, it is reported that her husband used to correspond with her frequently, but they had long been separated. During the summer of 1802 she paid a visit to England, but there is no record that she met Lord Maynard, and after a few months she returned to Switzerland, "with the intention," so one of the newspapers

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alleged, "of passing the remainder of her life abroad."

For many years she lived in the country near Paris, "a religious penitent," like poor Kitty Fisher, occupied in good works and striving to atone for the sins of the past by charity to the sick and poor. All the peasantry loved the kind-hearted old lady, all the clergy revered her piety and pitied her loneliness. According to one statement her death took place in the year 1808, but this appears to have been untrue, for another account declares that she survived until after the Congress of Vienna, dying at the advanced age of fourscore during the winter of 1814. An Englishwoman, who was living in France at the time, has left a vivid description of the scene when she was carried to the grave. "The bishop of the diocese had ordered that all due honour should be rendered to the piety and good works of the deceased. The funeral sermon was preached by the Protestant president, in the pulpit of a Catholic Church, to a numerous Catholic auditory, the Catholic clergy attending the service. The corpse was laid in the tomb with mingled rites; the lighted tapers and the Catholic dirge, the prayers of the Genevan Church and the tears of the mourning peasantry. You have heard of the object of this blended ceremonial. She was an English lady of some renown about the middle of the last century.

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Her misfortunes and her errors (for which the tears that were shed by the poor over her grave are a proof that she had atoned) have been recorded by the celebrated Junius under the name of Miss Anne or Nancy Parsons."

WHEN Horace Walpole informed Lord Hertford that Nancy Parsons was "one of the commonest creatures in London," it is obvious that he was indignant because she had supplanted his "charming Duchess" of Grafton. Like many other things said by the great letter-writer in his haste, this assertion is wholly untrue. Even were there not sufficient evidence to prove that she was a cultured and attractive lady it is apparent that the Dukes of Grafton, Dorset, and Bedford—all of whom, though not conspicuous for genius, possessed far more than ordinary intelligence and good taste—would not have made her mistress of their household for many years had she been the type of person that Walpole has described. All that we can learn of her indicates that she was one of the most talented and fascinating women who ever assumed the scarlet robe of the courtesan. Of her early career nothing authentic is known. According to the *Town and Country Magazine*, a well-informed authority in these matters, she was "of good family but small fortune, and had always moved in polite life." In two other

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contemporary monographs it is stated that she was "the daughter of a master tailor in Bond Street who, though not rich, lived comfortably," but the parish rate books do not corroborate this assertion. A scurrilous pamphlet, called the "Female Jockey Club," declares that she was educated in the hospitable kitchen of the famous Mother Welch in Cleveland Row, Mrs Welch, like her rivals Charlotte Hayes of King's Place and "the great" Goadby of Marlborough Street, being one of the leading members of "Mrs Warren's Profession." Probably this description refers to her style of life after her separation from Captain Haughton and before her connection with the Duke of Grafton, when, to use Mrs Boscawen's euphemism, "this Circe was well known" by many a vicious buck and blood of London. Still, however base her origin and however squalid her experiences, her personal character escaped contamination.

About the time that Nancy Parsons was advanced to fame by the pen of "Junius," and by the patronage of a Prime Minister, a change had come over the world of gallantry. There was no queen of the demi-monde who stood on that bad eminence which had been occupied in turn by Fanny Murray, Lucy Cooper, and Kitty Fisher. The first was the patient wife of self-indulgent Ross, the second was the inmate of a sponging-house or living in poverty at Turnham

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Green, the last was lying beneath the chancel of Benenden Church. The reign of their successors, too, was soon over. In a little while all had been claimed by death, Nancy Dawson in June 1767, Nelly O'Brien in March 1768, Annie Elliot in May 1769. A dissipated young nobleman aspired no longer to win the favour of such as these, and it had ceased to be the mode to make a *fille de joie* a universal toast. Now the man of spirit flaunted his own mistress and a score of famous liaisons, dating from this time or a little later, indicate a variation from the previous custom. Lord Sandwich and Martha Ray, Lord Seaforth and Harriet Powell, Lord Egremont and Mdlle. Duthé—these are among the most famous alliances of that period. Apart from the fact that the change betokened a slight improvement in the morals of the nation it was salutary in another respect, for the patron often married his paramour. During the first decade of the reign of George III. the example of a virtuous monarch was beginning to influence the conduct of his subjects, and but for the loss of his popularity there can be no doubt that he would have effected a great transformation. Unfortunately, there came a swift change for the worse. The King fell in national esteem, the evil lives of his brothers effaced the noble pattern which he had made. The appearance of the Prime Minister at the Opera House with

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his mistress seems to indicate a turning-point, showing that morality had begun its backward march ; the long epoch of infidelity followed ; and the age of Kitty Fisher was reproduced in the age of Dally the Tall and the Bird of Paradise.

Apparently, Nancy Parsons was one of the first of her kind to profit by the improvement just indicated. After her acquaintance with Grafton she never experienced the ignominy of the courtesan. To such an extent did she mollify the position of the kept mistress that her marriage with the duke was regarded as a probable contingency, and if his divorce had taken place two or three years earlier she might have become a duchess. It was the same during her connection with the Duke of Dorset. From first to last it was her ambition to raise herself to an honourable position by a legal alliance with one of the great men with whom she associated. In this respect she is entitled to some deference. Abandoned though she was she never became wholly wanton ; she was a faithful mistress just as she proved a faithful wife. Although a more virtuous age may shrink with horror from the chronicle of her numerous liaisons, it must needs confess that if all ladies fair and frail had been endowed with the same regard for propriety, the eighteenth century would have been free from many of its vices.





IV

KITTY KENNEDY





*Sir Joshua Reynolds 'Pmr.'*

*T. Watson fecit*

Published by the Author, at the Strand, 1771. Price 10s. 6d. Sold by all the Booksellers in Great Britain.

MISS KENNEDY  
*(The doubtful portrait)*



## KITTY KENNEDY

### I

**A**T the beginning of the year 1770 Kitty Kennedy was one of the most famous frail ladies in London. When at home—which was seldom—she lived in Newman Street, off the Oxford Road, with her father, who had been an auctioneer's clerk, but was now retired from business. Old Matthew Kennedy was an Irishman by birth, and although poor he is said to have been honest, yet, nevertheless, either from necessity or indifference, he had tolerated the dishonour of his daughter. Shrinking from a life of poverty the girl lent an ear to the voice of the tempter at a very early age, and upon her appearance in the world of gallantry her beauty and mirth won the admiration of many distinguished noblemen. An impression of her personal charms may be obtained from the description of a journalist:—"Miss Kennedy is above the middle size, but very genteel: she is uncommonly fair, has fine expressive eyes, and remarkably beautiful hair." The eulogy might have added that she was a light-hearted

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Irish girl, winsome and soft of speech, with the "come hither in the eye" that most of her pretty countrywomen appear to possess.

Kitty had two brothers of whom she was very fond, and when she gained a position of affluence her first thought was to lend them a helping hand. At that time old Kennedy was working at his trade, while young Patrick and young Matthew were waiters at an alehouse. By paying a premium, which was provided by their sister, both sons became apprenticed to the auctioneer who employed their father, and soon the elder, who was a dashing fellow, was fortunate enough to marry his master's daughter. Not long afterwards the auctioneer died, and the lucky Patrick Kennedy stepped into his shoes, becoming partner in the business with his mother-in-law, who kept the shop in the Strand, while the young man and his brother Matthew ranged the town with a little hammer in their pockets. They were wild, harum-scarum Irishmen, with little talent or inclination for hard work, but, as the result no doubt of their ale-house experiences, extremely fond of strong liquor. Unfortunately, they were now their own masters, for their father left the business on the death of his old employer, and lived on a pension contributed by his daughter, who kept the home for him in Newman Street.

For the most part, Kitty's admirers belonged

## Kitty Kennedy

to the Selwyn coterie—though the famous wit himself appears to have been a Platonic friend—and thus she ruled over the hearts of some of the greatest nobles in the land. Scandal declared that a little time previously Frederick, Earl of Carlisle, a graceful poet and the best dressed man in town, had not sighed in vain for her favours; but now, to her regret, this brilliant peer was beginning to avoid her company, since he had turned over a new leaf in contemplation of his early marriage. Still, among her list of acquaintances there were several husbands not so scrupulous, such as James, Earl of Fife, a canny, middle-aged Scot, who knew the value of a bawbee as well as any of his countrymen, but by no means niggardly in his dealings with a pretty woman. Of late, also, a couple of desolate widowers had sought consolation in the society of the lively Irish girl: one, a peer of her native land, Henry, Viscount Palmerston, only thirty years of age, who was just commencing a most remarkable career of gallantry that was to last until he took another wife; the other, Henry, Earl of Suffolk, a nobleman of much ambition, loud-voiced and brazen-faced, with all the other qualifications of the politician, but as great a patron of frail ladies as any of his contemporaries. Yet, of all Kitty's friends the two most constant and the two she liked best were Lord Robert Spencer, brother of the Duke

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of Marlborough, and Mr John St John, the brother of Viscount Bolingbroke.

Owing to her acquaintance with the latter gentleman, she was often confused by ill-informed people with another frail lady. About two years ago the famous Polly Jones had been the *chère amie* of Lord Bolingbroke, and whether it was that she once had borne the name of Kennedy or whether her features resembled those of Kitty, the ignorant *bourgeoisie*, knowing little of the secrets of polite society, persisted in mistaking the mistresses of the two brothers. Since the ladies belonged to the same set, it is probable that they were acquainted with one another, but they were not related in any degree, and resided in different parts of the town. Miss Jones, who was a near neighbour of George Selwyn in Chesterfield Street, hitherto had been more conspicuous than John St John's Miss Kennedy. A few months previously she had been engaged in a quarrel with Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland, the scape-grace brother of King George III., whom she accused in the newspapers of selling the furniture that he had given her in order to replenish his exhausted exchequer; and having humiliated the profligate prince, she brought an action at law against one of the gentlemen of his suite, claiming £3000 under a bond that she had received from him. Owing to the evidence of Lord Bolingbroke,





( *Hy. - Jem.* )

Printed and Sold by R. DODD, at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London.



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who had forgiven her for deserting him, she managed to win her case; but the triumph was short-lived, for, a month later, the decision was reversed by the Court of Chancery. Miss Jones was a very pretty woman, but it is doubtful whether the amiable Kitty was flattered by being mistaken so often for this combative lady.

It must have pleased her less to be confused with another frailty who bore her name, and consequently was sometimes supposed to be a relation. This was the "celebrated" Poll Kennedy, of Great Russell Street, more famous for fleecing her admirers than any woman in town, with whom the light-footed Nancy Dawson had been living when their house in Manchester Buildings, Westminster, was destroyed by fire nine summers previously. Since that time Polly's reputation had continued to increase, and as she was now well advanced in years—though handsome still in a buxom fashion—she had managed to put away, as one of the volumes of "Harris's List" assured its readers, "a very snug annuity." When Nancy Dawson died, the bereaved Ned Shuter, the droll comedian of whom a hundred facetious anecdotes are told, allowed Polly Kennedy to keep house with him, and endured her peculations with his usual good humour. It was whispered, also, that the Rev. William Dodd, one of the King's chaplains, had

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been in the habit of paying her an occasional visit ; but, as the eloquent doctor had founded Magdalen House, where fallen women were taught the principles of virtue, the cynics allowed that it was natural he should seek converts ; while, in order to show the inconsistency of the story, some declared that it was not Polly herself, but Polly's maid, who had attracted his attention. Kitty, however, who did not associate often with mere commoners, unless, indeed, they sprang from a noble house, looked down upon the mistresses of actors and clergymen.

There was a second Polly Kennedy, "a fine, tall, genteel girl," who lived in Piercy Street, and used to frequent Lovejoy's in the Piazza, which, before it was burnt to the ground along with the Bedford Arms, held the same position as those two other famous establishments in "The Garden" recently kept by Jane Douglas and Bess Weatherby. This second Polly Kennedy was much younger than the first, being a mere novice, who did not attract attention until two or three years later, when, naturally, she was sometimes mistaken for the other two ladies who bore the same surname. Although such blunders were never committed by persons of consequence, it was a great annoyance to the elegant Kitty to be so often confused with inferior people.

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According to a popular magazine Lord Robert Spencer first saw Miss Kennedy of Newman Street at Vauxhall Gardens. "Bob" was a loyal member of the large Selwyn coterie, and though his intimacy with Lord Bolingbroke was affected when that peer's marriage with his sister proved so disastrous, he seems to have remained on friendly terms with the brothers St John. Before his acquaintance with Kitty Kennedy he had distinguished himself by stealing Miss Hermitage from the Tripoline ambassador, and then became the rival of Lord March in the affections of Signora Zamperini. There were few race meetings that he failed to attend, and he was known as a fine shot and a dashing rider to hounds. The other favoured admirer, whom Kitty preferred in many respects to Lord "Bob," was the grave and sober John St John, a younger brother of Lord Bolingbroke, a plodding barrister and a sedulous member of parliament, with some of the ambition but none of the ability of his great uncle. He lived in Lincoln's Inn, and had not yet given up hope of attaining eminence in his profession, and of making his mark in the House of Commons. His enemies accused him of being dull, but admitted that he was harmless; and the Selwyn clique, who spoke of him as "our poor counsellor," do not appear to have had a high opinion of his powers. Nevertheless, by some means or other he had found favour in

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Kitty's eyes, and she was a frequent visitor at his chambers.

Owing to a recent event, at the beginning of the year 1770, Miss Kennedy had become one of the most unhappy young women in London. On the previous 24th of December a messenger came to the house in Newman Street late at night with the news that her dissolute brothers, Patrick and Matthew, had been concerned in a quarrel with the watch and were lodged in the Round House. Old Mr Kennedy proceeded at once to the prison in the hope of bailing them out, but on his arrival he learnt to his dismay that his two sons had committed a cowardly murder. Such was the doleful intelligence that reached Kitty at the residence of Lord Robert Spencer on Christmas morning.

## II

**A** DRUNKEN brawl had brought Patrick and Matthew Kennedy to ruin. Late in the afternoon of Sunday, the 24th of December, they set out with two of their friends, Mick MacMahon and Jack Evans, a pair of young scamps as rough and reckless as themselves, in order to spend a festive evening. Towards dusk the four youths turned into a public house in Wood Street, Westminster, along with an acquaintance named Grant, and taking possession of the parlour they strove to see which could consume the most liquor. Even the seasoned publican was amazed at their capacity. After tossing off two and a half pints of brandy and a huge pot of beer, they called for punch—in order to celebrate Christmas eve in the approved fashion—and drank four half-crown bowls one after the other. Unhappily, the Irishman usually shows the worst side of his character when Bacchus controls his actions; and the brothers Kennedy became rude and quarrelsome as soon as they were intoxicated. Rushing into the tap-room they began to wrestle with the landlord and his assistants, and at last they became so

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obstreperous that they were ejected from the house. One of the five, probably MacMahon, carried off a heavy kitchen poker. The keen air of the winter's night quickened their frenzy, and out in the Old Palace Yard they continued their drunken frolic to the terror of all whom they met. About nine o'clock they reeled along towards Westminster Bridge. A young fellow was coming from the Surrey side, and two of them rushed at him with tipsy cries. Thinking they were robbers the man shouted for help, and John Bigby, a night watchman who happened to be on the bridge at that moment, came running to his assistance. A scuffle followed, in the midst of which the other drunkards arrived on the scene. One of them struck a fierce blow with the poker, and poor Bigby fell to the ground, senseless and bleeding. He was carried to the Westminster Hospital, where he died an hour later.

Three of the ruffians were arrested with little difficulty. Patrick, who had remained on the spot too dazed and stupid to make his escape, was pointed out to the constables by some of the crowd as the man in the green coat whom they had seen struggling with Bigby, and while he was being led off in custody some of his comrades made a clumsy attempt at a rescue. This led to the capture of Matthew and another, and they were all taken to the Round House in St Martin's



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Lane, where the unhappy parent saw his sons an hour or two later. On the following morning — Christmas Day — the two Kennedys were brought before Sir John Fielding, and committed to Tothillfields Bridewell on the charge of murder. Strangely enough, the kitchen poker, the most damning evidence against them, was brought to the magistrate by their distracted father, who had received it from one of their drunken companions.

On a Friday, the 23rd of February, 1770, Patrick and Matthew Kennedy, Michael Mac-Mahon and John Evans were put to the bar at the Old Bailey, charged with the wilful murder of John Bigby. Their friend Grant, who had been with them on the fatal night, was not included in the indictment. It was manifest that one of the four youths had struck the blow that killed the watchman; it was doubtful which of them did it. None exonerated and none accused another. Probably none were sober enough at the time to remember what happened. The testimony of George Mallard, the Wood Street publican, showed that the young men were mad with drink when expelled from his house; from the evidence of many others their movements were traced from Old Palace Yard to Westminster Bridge, and it was proved that they were struggling with the watchman when he received the wound that cost him his life. Yet

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one witness only, George Bracegirdle by name, was able to swear that he recognised the person who dealt the fatal blow. "One of the men came up with something in his hand," he declared. "Matthew Kennedy," he continued, pointing to the trembling youth in the dock, while a shudder ran through the crowded court, "took it out of his hand and knocked Bigby down."

In their defence each of the prisoners denied all knowledge of the fatality. Since it was thought fit and proper in those robust times that anyone accused of murder should speak for himself, counsel was not allowed to address the court in their behalf. On the whole, their witnesses appear to have been as credible as those of the prosecution. One James Culverton, a carpenter, swore positively that he saw a fellow in dark-coloured clothes, a much bigger man than any of the prisoners, strike the watchman and fell him to the ground. The faithful John St John also gave evidence, and alleged in his grave impressive manner that Bracegirdle had visited him at his chambers in Lincoln's Inn and promised not to give evidence at the trial if he were paid a sum of money. Some time previously this same Bracegirdle declared the "poor counsellor" had solicited a bribe from "a relation of the Kennedys, whom he (St John) knew," and this delicate reference to the notorious Kitty

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caused a general smile. Apparently, the judge was unmoved by the witnesses for the defence. In his address to the jury he pointed out that since all four prisoners had been concerned in the murder they were equally guilty in the eyes of the law, but he allowed that if the actual crime could be brought home to any one of them then "justice ought to fall on him who gave the actual blow." From the first a conviction seemed inevitable. It was only doubtful which of the young men would be selected for punishment. The unsupported testimony of Bracegirdle was by no means conclusive, and thus, as it appeared uncertain whether Matthew Kennedy had struck the watchman, and as it was possible that Patrick, who was very like his brother in face and figure, had done the deed, the puzzled jurymen with eighteenth century thoroughness returned a verdict of Guilty against both of them, and acquitted their two friends. So, after a trial of eight hours, the unhappy Kennedys were condemned to be hanged on the following Monday, and their bodies to be afterwards anatomized, while the crowd of well-dressed ladies who had been attracted to the trial sobbed bitterly at the spectacle of two handsome young men in such a sorry plight.

Hitherto, the tale of the tragedy had been mean and odious, but henceforth it was ennobled by the presence of a sister's love. Though

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grief-stricken at the result of the trial, Kitty did not lose heart, and without a moment's delay she strove to save her brothers from the gallows. The time was terribly short. The young men had received their sentence on Friday night, and unless mercy should intervene they would be led to Tyburn on Monday morning. Naturally, in the first place the unhappy girl turned to Lord Robert Spencer, and if the press-man is to be credited, she overcame his reluctance to meddle in the affair by a threat of leaving him for ever. At first, we are told, the young nobleman would not promise to use his influence on behalf of the unfortunate brothers, since he foresaw that the amour which he had concealed from his relatives would become thereby the talk of the town, but when the spirited beauty packed her boxes and ordered her coach he agreed to ask his brother, the Duke of Marlborough, to beg a pardon from the King.

John St John needed less persuasion. When Kitty implored him to test the integrity of the venal Bracegirdle, and afterwards to appear as a witness at the trial, he had consented without demur, for of late she had forsaken him for the dashing Lord "Bob," and he was overjoyed to find that his charming mistress had not deserted him altogether. Unlike the rest of her admirers, this grave young barrister was influenced by true affection, and had he met her in the days of

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her innocence it is probable that she would have become his wife. Directly the verdict was pronounced he promised her that he would leave no stone unturned to secure a reprieve, and believing that the genial Selwyn would prove the best collaborator he pressed him into his service. For if it were known that the witty George, who loved the spectacle of an execution, was content to forego the hanging of the Kennedys, the world must conclude that they were indeed innocent! Meanwhile the efforts of Lord Robert Spencer proved successful, for when the Duke of Marlborough asked the King to respite the brothers until further inquiries were made his Majesty, after some demur, was pleased to grant the request.

### III

**T**HE order of reprieve for Patrick Kennedy reached Newgate prison on Sunday night, but the message made no mention of Matthew, who was believed to have struck the murderous blow. Accordingly, on the Monday morning the unhappy young man was told that he must die. Soon after nine o'clock he was brought from his cell into the Press Yard, where his irons were knocked off, his arms bound with cords, and the halter tied round his breast. Outside in the Old Bailey a great crowd had assembled to watch the procession start for Tyburn. In Newgate Street, down Snow Hill, and as far as Holborne were dense masses of spectators, waiting to see the famous criminal as he passed to his doom. A murmur of pity arose as the youth appeared at the gate of the prison. The jailors led him down the steps, the Sheriff walked to his coach, and the city marshal formed his constables into line. Then, just as the convict was about to step into the cart, there was a cry of "pardon," and a messenger-from the Secretary of State's office pushed his way through the cheering crowd. At the last moment

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it had been decided to respite Matthew Kennedy for a week.

When the Duke of Marlborough presented the petition to the King he assured his Majesty that the friends of the prisoners had discovered some new evidence, which must have brought about an acquittal if heard at the trial. It was alleged that Mick MacMahon had acknowledged, soon after the murder, that it was he who struck poor Bigby with the poker, and three witnesses were ready to swear that he made this confession in their presence. Yet, although these statements influenced the King to postpone the execution, his ministers were less impressionable, and after examining this "new evidence" they came to the conclusion that justice must take its course. Thus, on Saturday night, five days after the first reprieve, an order was sent to the keeper of Newgate to deliver the younger Kennedy to the hangman on the following Monday. So, the miserable wretch went through the fearful ordeal once more. For a second time he listened to the condemned sermon; once more he passed a Sabbath in prayer with the Ordinary; again he attended chapel on the fatal morning to take the last Sacrament. Then, about eight o'clock, while he was expecting each moment to hear the step of the executioner, a messenger arrived post haste from Lord Rochfort, the Secretary of

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State, with the news that a fresh respite had been granted. Worn out with fear and suspense the poor youth fell into a state of collapse, and for a long while his condition was serious.

This time it was the faithful St John, aided by his friend Selwyn, who balked the hangman of his prey. Though all seemed lost, the tears of the broken-hearted Kitty had spurred them to make one last effort at the eleventh hour. On Sunday morning they met James Sheridine, the foreman, and five other jurymen, at the Queen's Head in Holles Street, whose landlord kept an excellent cellar, and persuaded them to sign a paper to the effect that "if three credible witnesses had been brought at the trial, who had sworn that MacMahon confessed he struck the blow, we should have disbelieved the single witness who deposed that Matthew Kennedy gave the blow." With this document in their hands the two friends waited upon Lord Rochfort, who, being attached to a sprightly young lady named Polly Green, could sympathise with John St John's devotion to Kitty Kennedy, and in spite of the previous decision, the adroit Selwyn, after a short interview, had little difficulty in persuading the Secretary to promise "under his hand" that the two brothers should receive a pardon. In due course a respite for Matthew was sent to Newgate—which would



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have arrived earlier if the messenger, in his haste, had not fallen down and broken his knee-cap—and a petition setting forth the facts of the case was presented to King George. After the protest of the jurymen had been considered it was allowed that the verdict had been unsatisfactory, and on the 20th of March it was announced that the brothers Kennedy had received his Majesty's pardon "on condition that they are transported for life." At last, the anxious Kitty could smile once more.

Her triumph was short. When the Recorder's report was laid before the Council on the 11th of April the name of the Kennedys appeared in the list of those condemned to death, and by some means or other Matthew was not excluded from the fatal roll when it was sent to the prison. Horace Walpole believed that Lord Mansfield had prevailed upon his fellow councillors to make an example of the young man, but whether this was so or not the unhappy youth was ordered for execution a third time. Without a moment's delay the sturdy Selwyn, who possessed a fierce bull-dog tenacity when he had set his mind to accomplish a certain object, sought an interview with the King, and having assured the bewildered monarch that Lord Rochfort "under his hand" had granted a pardon, he obtained a renewal of the promise. Thus, late on the following night, when the

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miserable Matthew was lying in his cell overwhelmed with despair, Mr Akerman, the humane keeper of the prison, came to tell him that it was his Majesty's pleasure that his life should be spared after all. It seemed now that he had escaped from the clutches of Jack Ketch, for in a few days he was put on board a convict ship in the Thames bound for Maryland, while Patrick remained in Newgate until it was decided whither he should be transported.

Even the horrors of the prison from which he had escaped paled before the horrors of the vessel which was to carry Matthew Kennedy across the Atlantic. Along with fifty other wretches he was thrust into a compartment in the hold, not more than sixteen feet square, fastened to a bench with a collar round his neck, and chained to five loathsome creatures, who, like himself, had escaped the gallows. In this dreadful plight, without air and in semi-darkness, he seemed doomed to pass the long stormy voyage; but just as the vessel was about to sail from Blackwall he was rescued from his terrible dungeon. One morning the captain of the vessel received a visit from Lord Fife, who, seeing that Spencer and St John were doing so much in Kitty's service, had been spurred to make an effort to win her smiles, and knowing what sort of accommodation would be given to her brother if he was herded with the other

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convicts, had spent fifteen guineas in buying him a free passage. Captain Macdougall welcomed his lordship hat in hand, and proud of the honour of propitiating a Scottish nobleman, who happened to have been a generous patron to some of his own people in the land o' cakes, was only too eager to do all that was asked of him. Accordingly, the lucky Matthew was unchained and brought on deck, his irons were knocked off, a sum of money and a comfortable cabin were given to him; and then leaving the young Irish lad completely happy, the gallant Duff went away to tell Miss Kennedy of all that he had accomplished.

On this same day, the 28th of April, an event occurred which brought the brothers beneath the shadow of the gallows once more. Ever since the final reprieve an attorney, named Stamford, who acted for the watchman's widow at the trial, had been endeavouring to raise funds in order to put into force an almost obsolete process of law, which would sweep aside even the King's pardon. As a matter of course he soon came into touch with the "Bill of Rights Society," a Cave of Adullam, founded by Serjeant Glynn, Sir Francis Delaval and other extremists, with the object of propagating the gospel according to John Wilkes; and as the society had plenty of money, Parson Horne, its leading spirit, who loved litigation as fondly as a

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lawyer's clerk, was delighted to take up the case against the Kennedys. So Anne Bigby was instructed to lodge an appeal against the murderers of her husband, and at the very moment that Lord Fife was telling the happy Kitty of his achievements her brother Patrick was again placed in the dock at the Old Bailey in consequence of the widow's petition, and was remanded to take his trial at the next session. On the following Monday a warrant was issued to bring back Matthew from the convict ship.

There had been some difficulty in obtaining this warrant. When application was made in court, the Recorder of London, who disapproved of the anti-ministerial frenzy of the "Bill of Rights Society," declared that he had no power to order the re-arrest of the younger Kennedy; whereupon Lord Mayor Beckford "made a spirited answer," and told the recalcitrant James Eyre that he would sign the document himself. Then, having dispatched an officer with the warrant, he ordered Mr Akerman to detain the elder brother in Newgate, and assured the court that "no murderer should escape from justice as long as he lived." The convict ship had weighed anchor and sailed down the river, but by travelling post haste to Deal the officer intercepted the vessel in the Downs, and while the unhappy Matthew was gazing upon the coast of Kent, as

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he believed, for the last time, a boat put out from the shore, and he found that he must return to London for a new trial. On the 4th of May he was lodged in Maidstone gaol, to await the decision of the authorities.

#### IV

**A**LTHOUGH her friends assured her that the widow Bigby could not possibly succeed in the appeal, which was one of the most difficult processes of law, the resolute Kitty would allow nothing to be left to chance, and prepared to resume her weary struggle as vigorously as before. The sight of beauty in tears melted the hearts of her admirers. All rivalry was forgotten, and Fife, Palmerston, Spencer, and the rest joined together in raising a fund to buy off the prosecution. When the sum of £500 had been collected, St John, who was appointed the emissary of the party, sought an interview with the widow, and offered her the money on condition that she should withdraw her appeal. It was useless. On the advice of the "Bill of Rights Society" the poor woman refused the tempting bribe, and the friends of the Kennedys perceived that Parson Horne and his allies were determined to fight the battle to the bitter end.

If the *chronique scandaleuse* is to be trusted, the unhappy Kitty was responsible for a small domestic quarrel about this period. One of the old admirers to whom she appealed in her

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distress was the newly married Lord Carlisle, the elegant beau with the green ribbon, who was one of the chief ornaments of the British court. From some cause or another the young earl was unable to avoid an interview, and in order to get rid of the persistent visitor he assured her that he would do his best for her unhappy brothers. It was scarcely two months since he had been a bridegroom, and the tête-à-tête was quite innocent; but when his countess discovered that a notorious courtesan had called upon her husband, she concluded that there must be a liaison. At length, after much difficulty, she is said to have been pacified, but Lord Carlisle was obliged to promise that he would have nothing more to do with Miss Kennedy or her relations.

The affair had now assumed a political aspect. On one side was the "Bill of Rights Society" and the adherents of Wilkes; on the other was Kitty's clique and all the friends of the Government. Naturally, much odium fell upon the King and the ministers for granting the reprieve. "The mercy of a chaste and pious prince," wrote "Junius," with his usual savageness, "has been extended cheerfully to a wilful murderer because that murderer is the brother of a common prostitute"; and every extremist cried that another gross miscarriage of justice had been perpetrated, like the recent pardon of M'Quirk, the special constable, who had cracked the skull of an

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honest rioter. Nevertheless, George III. seems to have acted under the impression that the verdict was unsatisfactory, and as he cannot have had any sympathy with the frail Kitty, it is clear that if he erred at all it was for the sake of mercy. Doubtless, the Secretary of State, judged from the standard of that Draconic age, had been too ready to oblige his friends, but the indiscretion brought ample punishment, for he had the ignominy of seeing a government decision challenged in a court of law. Although these considerations may have been of no avail in checking popular clamour, other causes helped to turn the tide of public opinion. Since Matthew Kennedy had experienced the horrors of death on three occasions, while the shadow of the rope still rested on the heads of both brothers, it was thought by many people that they had expiated their crime, and the conduct of Parson Horne in clamouring for their blood seemed brutal and irrational. Moreover, the pathetic exhibition of a sister's love, sinful though that sister was known to be, had touched the heart of many a sturdy lover of liberty, and thus the well-wishers of the Kennedys were more numerous than the supporters of the Bills of Rights. The cheers with which the Old Bailey mob had hailed the first reprieve showed the trend of popular sentiment.

If some astute attorney had pointed out the



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way, the unfortunate brothers could have triumphed over their enemies immediately their pardon had been challenged. Although the heir-at-law of the slain man was allowed by the ancient code to lodge an appeal for a re-trial of the person who had been acquitted of the murder, yet at the same time the accused was entitled to demand trial by "wager of battle." The statute was obsolete and forgotten, but had never been repealed. Consequently, either of the Kennedys might have quashed the indictment by throwing down his glove and challenging the appellant to decide the issue with cudgels, and if the latter had refused to fight or had been vanquished, the appellee would have been set at liberty. Fifty years later, to the amazement of the whole nation, one Abraham Thornton, a Warwickshire labourer, managed to avoid a second trial for murder by taking advantage of this ancient statute, but it seems to have been overlooked on the present occasion. A piece of ill-luck for the Irish brothers, whom nothing would have gratified more than a bout with single-sticks.

On the 25th of May the younger Kennedy was brought to the bar of the Court of King's Bench in Westminster Hall, and remanded till the next term. According to the newspapers, he was in double chains, wore a blue coat with a handkerchief around his neck, and looked deeply

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dejected. No doubt his sister had sent all her friends to watch the proceedings, for Lord Robert Spencer, Lord Palmerston, and "several other persons of distinction" were among the spectators. Apparently, there was a flaw in the indictment, since three days later both the brothers were arraigned on a fresh appeal, and even when they were brought before Lord Mansfield to take their trial, on the 15th of June, it appeared that "the plaintiff had pleaded Oyer on the appeal and not in the Bill," which legal subtlety compelled the case to be adjourned *sine die*. Still, in spite of all objections, the prosecution persevered with their task, and on the 4th of July the Kennedys were taken once more to Westminster Hall, when their trial was fixed for the following November.

All this time they were detained in the King's Bench Prison, which, overcrowded as it was, must have been a welcome change after the dismal cells of Newgate. Though the shadow of death hung over them, they seemed as gay and reckless as ever, confident that they would escape from the dreadful fate with which they were menaced. The devoted Kitty came to see them frequently, and cheered them with the news that her friends were using every effort to save them. So famous had they become that many people visited the prison to look at them, and while they were polite enough to the public, their quick

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Irish temper resented the curiosity of their fellow-prisoners.

“We will not be stared at like wild beastesses,” was their favourite expression. “We are unfortunate jintlemen, who have done nothing to be ashamed of.”

With “Sir” Richard Perrot, “Baronet,” of Flint-petition fame, who was now an inmate of the same gaol, they struck up a great friendship, finding the plausible rogue a congenial spirit. Most of their time was passed at the drinking bar, or in the Fives’ Court. On one occasion, Matthew is said to have defeated two men at fives with his irons on, and the report adds, “he beat them at swearing quite hollow.” Often enough they grew unruly, picking quarrels without provocation, and as time went on they became so pugnacious that the Governor was obliged to give them separate quarters. A newspaper paragraph declared that they were the terror of their fellow-prisoners. *Arcades ambo* is an appropriate description of the brothers Kennedy, and many better men have been hanged, before and since, without exciting any compassion.

At length the day of their trial arrived. On a Tuesday, the 6th of November, they were placed again at the bar of the Court of King’s Bench, and Serjeant Glynn, the champion of the “Bill of Rights Society” moved that “the

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merits of the appeal brought by Anne Rigby might be entered into." Then Mr Wallace, counsel for the prisoners, with his tongue in his cheek, for he knew how the land lay, demanded that the appellant should appear to make good her charges against the defendants. The name of Anne Rigby was called, but she did not appear. Once more the crier pronounced her name, but there was no response. To the surprise of all, it was found that she was not present, and thus she was non-suited. The poor woman, weary of the long struggle, had been induced to keep out of the way by a bribe. A short time before the indefatigable St John had found her in a weak moment, and offered her the sum of £350. At first she refused to receive the money, declaring that it was the price of her husband's blood; but in a little while she was persuaded to hold up her apron and allowed the gold to be swept into her lap.

Although all the proceedings against the Kennedys now came to an end they were kept waiting in the King's Bench prison for some months longer, and it was not until the 9th of April in the following year that they were removed to Newgate. Four days later they were placed in the dock at the Old Bailey to hear their fate. Matthew was told that he had received the King's pardon on condition that he was transported for life; Patrick was reminded that he



KITTY KENNEDY AND LORD ROBERT SPENCER  
*From the "Town and Country Magazine"*



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had been respited during his Majesty's pleasure, and afterwards pardoned on condition that he was transported for fourteen years. Once more these terms were offered to them and accepted, and sentence was passed accordingly. With the help of Kitty's friends it is said that a commission in a foreign regiment had been obtained for both of them. Thus, the two reprobates made their exit from the stage of history, where for twelve months they had played such a riotous part. Evidently the younger brother did not reach the colonies after all, as three years later he was seen in gaol at Calais, a prisoner for debt.

In one respect the case of the Kennedys had an important result. Previously King George the Third had performed many acts of clemency, but henceforth he seems to have refused on principle to reprieve a criminal unless the Council advised a pardon. There can be no doubt that he was much displeased on this occasion by the methods and motives of the friends of the prisoners, besides being deeply humiliated that his decision should be over-ruled by an appeal to a court of law. Yet, as time went on, it is unfortunate that his influence was not used occasionally on the side of mercy, for the indifference of the monarch helped to steel the hearts of legislators as well as judges. On the other hand, if he had continued to show as much

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willingness to save the life of a convict as he had displayed during the first ten years of his reign, it is probable that the Draconic code of the Georgian era would have been modified, as completely as Romilly wished to modify it later, before the close of the eighteenth century.

Apart from the romance that a long struggle between life and death must always create, the case has no other importance. Since it was not proved that the brothers Kennedy were more guilty than their two associates, there appears to have been no reason to single them out for punishment, but as all four were concerned in a cruel murder, it would not have been unjust to have hanged every one of them. In the whole story there is but one bright page, and the only person, save perhaps the King, with whom it is possible to sympathise, is the brave sister, who fought such a good fight for those she loved.



NATURALLY, this *cause célèbre* elevated Kitty to the highest pinnacle of renown in all gay and gallant circles. Everyone knew her now as "the celebrated Miss Kennedy," and the Pollies of that name were relegated for all time to an inferior position. Folkes confounded her no longer with the litigious Miss Jones; among ladies of easy virtue she was an acknowledged queen. In the month following Anne Bigby's appeal the coping-stone was placed upon her fame by the appearance of her portrait and biography among the "Histories of the Tête-à-têtes" in the *Town and Country Magazine*. The spirit of the age, alas, favoured her success, since, as it has been shown, the good example of the King had ceased to influence the morals of the nobility. With the liaison of the Duke of Cumberland and Lady Grosvenor, which occurred in the previous year, the long period of matrimonial infidelity may be said to have commenced, and while less than a dozen divorces had been granted in the previous decade almost three score took place during the next twenty years. These were the halcyon days of ladies fair and frail.



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were expelled from the Rotunda, and, when Captain Scott of the Guards led a famous damsel named Betsy Cox into the cotillon, the Master of Ceremonies refused to allow her to dance. A duel would have ensued on the spot, but the angry soldier was assured by his friends that Mr Donnellan was acting *ex officio*, and, after a little trouble, he was persuaded to overlook the affront.

“If you turn out every woman who is no better than she should be,” he cried, scornfully, “your company will soon be reduced to a handful.”

Obviously, the sarcasm was directed against ladies of fashion, but it might have been interpreted literally, since, in spite of all the efforts of the management, three of the principal “lady abbesses,” Mesdames Hayes, Mitchell, and Ferguson, were present with their respective “nunneries.” Although Kitty seems to have been unmolested, her first visit to the Pantheon must have been an exciting experience.

Soon afterwards she suffered a sad bereavement. Early in February her father died at the house in Newman Street, and was buried on the 16th of the month at the Marylebone Parish Church, where he used to worship. It was stated in his obituary notice that he was formerly a broker and auctioneer, the fact that he held a subordinate position being ignored, but beyond

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all doubt he owed everything to Kitty, who appears to have been a most devoted daughter. Later in the year there was a rumour that she had become Mrs John St John, and fashionable circles were much perturbed until the news was contradicted.

“I have heard,” wrote “the accomplished” Mrs Boscawen to her gossip, Mrs Delany, “that Mr John St John (forbid it honour) is married to a certain Poll Kennedy, much too well known.”

Yet the talented lady was not only taking Kitty's name in vain, but her information was untrue. Although he was so fond of her the “poor counsellor” was a prudent person, and realised that he could not maintain such an extravagant wife.

In the summer of 1773 a more wonderful paragraph appeared in the newspapers, for it was announced that the Hon. Mr Byron, brother of Lord Byron, had married the celebrated Miss Kennedy of Newman Street. The report was partially incorrect, for although the bridegroom was not so closely allied to the said baron as gossip alleged, it was quite true that Kitty at last had become a bride. Her wedding was celebrated at the Church of Marylebone on the 16th of August “by licence,” and according to the register her husband, whose full name was Robert Stratford Byron, lived in the same

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parish. Perhaps she was piqued at the phlegmatic attitude of her faithful St John, or possibly with characteristic fickleness she fancied that she had fallen in love. More probably, like most frail ladies, she was unable to resist the temptation of becoming "an honest woman." Whatever her sentiments were, it seems to have been a marriage of affection as far as her husband was concerned. On the 3rd of September he fought a duel in Hyde Park with a certain Mr B—— of the City, who had spoken of Mrs Byron in a disrespectful manner; while a few weeks later, when she was taken ill in a theatre and carried out in a swoon, it was evident that he was in deep distress.

Henceforth Kitty retired into private life and for a long while little or nothing was heard of her. Directly her marriage was announced a serious-minded journalist expressed the hope that she would make as good a wife as Mrs Ross—the matrimonial fidelity of Fanny Murray having passed into a proverb—and for some time, at all events, the wish was verified. However, six years later she had returned once more to the faithful St John. What had become of Mr Robert Stratford Byron is unknown. It is certain that there had been no divorce, so unless the husband was dead there must have been a separation. At this time poor Kitty was in bad health.

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“Miss Kennedy, who now weighs thirty-three stone,” runs one of Lord Carlisle’s jocular letters to George Selwyn, “is thought by St John to be in a consumption.”

The apprehension was well founded, and she only survived for two years longer, tended to the last by her one faithful friend. Writing to Castle Howard on the 20th of November 1781, William Fawkener thus referred to her death :—

“The Kennedy died last week, and John St John is gone out of town, I hear, in great affliction : it is one of the luckiest events that could have happened for him, as she was a great expense to him, which he could but ill afford : there never was anything like his good nature and attention to her.”

Before he left London the kind-hearted St John paid the last token of respect to the unfortunate woman, for on the 18th of November he followed her remains to their resting-place in St Marylebone churchyard.

Miss Kennedy is an elusive personage, which, considering her great celebrity, is surprising, as one naturally expects that contemporary records will throw much light upon her character and disposition. For although in 1770 no woman of the town enjoyed the prestige of a Fanny Murray or a Kitty Fisher, none of them were more renowned than the lady of Newman Street. It was soon after the death of sweet Nelly

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O'Brien—the most beautiful if not the most famous of all the courtesans of the 18th century—that Kitty became one of the leaders of the demi-monde, and she retained the position until the day of her marriage. The courtesan was beginning to emerge from the cloud that had fallen upon her for a short time during the comparatively virtuous days of the sixties. This was the time when giddy Nan Catley was at her zenith, when spendthrift Baddeley had reached the height of her fame, when the youthful Clara Hayward had begun to conquer all hearts with her dainty ways. Nevertheless, from the year 1769 till the year 1773 Miss Kennedy remained as great a favourite with the bucks and bloods as any of these pretty actresses.

In spite of the lack of details it is possible to form an impression of the real woman. It is evident that she was very handsome, and possessed an infinite charm of manner. No doubt her *souffron* of brogue was as fascinating as that of Nelly O'Brien. We have seen that her courage and perseverance were of a high order. All that is known of her reveals that most irresistible form of womanhood—a warm-hearted impulsive Irish beauty. It has been recorded that she was most exacting in her behaviour towards her admirers, and having a full share of feminine vanity she held a very high opinion of her charms. Towards the close of her life, also,

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when ill-health had stolen the bloom from her cheeks, she is said to have displayed great skill in the use of cosmetics. It has been asserted that she had a fund of naughty sorties, and rejoiced in any joke that contained a *double entente*. Yet these are the only disparaging criticisms that have come down to us. Undoubtedly, she possessed all the faults of women of her kind, but she must have been endowed with many good qualities or the fealty of the faithful St John would not have endured until the end of her life.



V

GRACE DALRYMPLE ELIOT  
(DALLY THE TALL)





*W. C. Hoit -*  
*engraved from the original by John Deane from a painting by J. M. W. Turner*

GRACE DALRYMPLE ELIOT  
*From a mezzotint by John Deane after a painting by Gainsborough*



# GRACE DALRYMPLE ELIOT

(DALLY THE TALL)

## I

**A**PPARENTLY there is some justification for the claim to kinship with a noble house which Grace Dalrymple Eliot has made on behalf of her ancestors. There seems to be little doubt that her great-grandfather, John Dalrymple, the proprietor of Waterside in Nithsdale, was allied to the Lords of Stair, and his son Robert, who was enrolled as a Writer to the Signet in 1722, acted as the law agent of the family.<sup>1</sup> This Robert Dalrymple — the grandfather of the famous Grace—appears to have prospered in his profession. Thirteen years after he had set up as an attorney in Edinburgh, he was able to purchase the estate of Dreghorn in the parish of Colinton, about two and a half miles from the capital, but later in his life he sold the property,

<sup>1</sup> There were two Robert Dalrymples, both Writers to the Signet, and oddly enough both died in the year 1765. One was the son of Sir James Dalrymple of Borthwick; the other was the son of John Dalrymple of Waterside. It is the latter who was Mrs Eliot's grandfather.

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and retired to Priestwoodside, Annefield, in his native county of Dumfriesshire. Possibly, extravagant habits or loss of clients affected his prosperity, for he left little fortune to his children. According to one account, his eldest son Hugh was "bred to the army," but retired in disgust after serving for some time without gaining preferment, and it is not at all improbable that the youth, in the first instance, adopted the same profession as his brother-in-law, John Pitcairn, a keen soldier, who married his sister Elizabeth. In any case, however, Hugh Dalrymple was soon engaged in another calling, for on the 4th of July 1752 his name appeared in the list of members of the Edinburgh bar. About two years later his wife gave birth to a daughter, who became the celebrated Mrs Grace Eliot.

Before long the young lawyer managed to convince the Edinburgh attorneys of his abilities, and built up a considerable practice. Very wisely he travelled on circuit through the southwest country, where Dumfries was one of the principal centres, for here he had the advantage of family influence, since his father had now left Dreghorn Castle and come to Annefield, and his uncle and cousins were still living at Waterside in the valley of the Nith. Unfortunately he possessed little strength of character and his success was of short duration. At that period

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the Scottish lawyer was quite as prone as any of his contemporaries to the passion for wine and women, and amidst legal circles in Edinburgh there were some of the most riotous debauchees in the land. In a short time it was notorious that Hugh Dalrymple had become as dissipated and extravagant as any of his associates, while, unlike many of these cool, level-headed rakes, who in spite of their youthful sins were destined to win fame and riches, he showed no discretion in his debauchery. For some years his wife tolerated his misconduct, but finally a quarrel took place, and there was a separation. She returned to her father's home, while he, broken in fortune and reputation, went up to London.

It is said that the final breach was caused by the discovery of a liaison which occurred while the advocate was away on circuit. During his visits to Dumfries he was attracted by the charms of a married lady, who proved only too ready to respond to his solicitations. Clandestine meetings were frequent, some taking place at midnight, and it was whispered that the amorous barrister ascended to the chamber of his mistress by means of a rope ladder. At last all was discovered, and Hugh Dalrymple found himself a ruined man. The country-side was scandalised that a son of a member of the Kirk Session should have been detected in a low amour on his

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native heath. Menaced with an action for "crim. con." by the outraged husband, and ostracised by all his God-fearing clients, the unhappy man was obliged to take refuge in flight. The hope that he would be able to pursue his profession in England led him to the metropolis.

Although he did not succeed in becoming a member of the English bar he gained a considerable reputation as a poet. In the year 1759 he was much praised for an elegy entitled "Woodstock," written in the vein and metre that every plagiarist of Gray thought necessary to adopt, while four years later he made an effort to gain the favour of Lord Bute by a trenchant attack upon the enemies of the government. This second poem, "Rodondo," was a satire after the manner of "Hudibras," in which the writer trounced Messrs Wilkes and Churchill with great severity for their abuse of the Scottish nation. Even the Great Commoner received a full measure of ridicule, for he was made the hero of the poem, being depicted as a "State Juggler" without principle, to whom a pension and a peerage had been the object of his political career. In spite of the extravagance of the verses, their evidence of prejudice, and frequent vulgarity, the little book caused much amusement even to the admirers of the great Pitt. During the spring of 1763 everyone was laughing over "Rodondo," and all allowed that



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the young Scotsman had a pretty wit. Nevertheless, Lord Bute made no attempt to reward his champion. Apparently he had heard of the Dumfries adventure, for when pressed to find a place for Hugh Dalrymple he is said to have objected to his moral character.

A couple of years later, if newspaper chronology be accepted, the unfortunate Mrs Dalrymple, whose maiden name was Grisel Brown, died of a broken heart; and her daughter Grace, who had now reached her eleventh birthday, was sent by her father to a convent school in Flanders. Here she remained until she was sixteen, when Hugh Dalrymple, who had sprung into notoriety again by publishing a third canto of "Rodondo," which was more ribald even than its predecessors, brought her home to England. In London she had many relatives, both on her father's as well as on her mother's side, and she was not in want of introductions to middle-class society. Grace had become an attractive girl. In the fulsome language of a contemporary, she was "as rosy as Hebe and as graceful as Venus." Another pen declared that "her complexion was clear as the clouds of a May morning and tinged with the roseate blush of Aurora; her disposition was lively, and her temper mild and engaging." Most people allowed that she was handsome, but her figure was more remarkable than the beauty of her features, for she was

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uncommonly tall, being far above the ordinary stature of women. Still she was built on slender lines, with nothing coarse in a single limb, a healthy, vivacious Scottish lassie.

Among the admirers who pursued the graceful débutante during her first season, the most persistent of all was a prosperous little physician named John Eliot. He, too, had been born in North Britain, hailing from Peebles, the son of a roistering Writer to the Signet, and he had been in turn an apothecary in the Haymarket, and a surgeon's mate in the royal navy. Luck had followed him throughout his career, for after gaining a rich share of prize-money he had set up in practice for himself, and had secured a wealthy and influential clientele. In spite of an ungainly person and harsh ill-favoured features he was popular with women, and although he was twice her age the pretty Miss Dalrymple was attracted by his clever conversation and polite address. Probably in the first instance he made her acquaintance at the house of his friend Dr William Pitcairn, the brother of her uncle Major John Pitcairn of the Marines,<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> John Pitcairn (1722-1775) was the son of the Rev. David Pitcairn, minister of Dysart, Fife. It is said that he fired the first shot in the American War of Independence. He was killed at the battle of Lexington, and is usually spoken of in contemporary records as "the gallant Major Pitcairn," but it was not often remembered that he was the uncle of the famous Mrs Eliot.

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as he was rich and famous the worldly-wise author of "Rodondo" shut his eyes to the disparity of years, and allowed him to make an offer of marriage to his daughter.

It is improbable that Grace had any real affection for her suitor, but she obeyed the wishes of her father and promised to become Dr Eliot's wife. Young as she was she realised that it was a desirable match. Her disposition was epicurean, and she longed to escape from the irksome poverty in which her youth had been spent. The prospect of a fine house and the temptation of a town coach tickled her vanity, and she did not pause to consider whether she was in love. In every respect the girl was Hugh Dalrymple's own daughter. The same careless optimism controlled her actions, the same love of pleasure had influenced the development of her character. To this extent it was not an uncommon temperament, but in other phases it was somewhat unusual. Although her naïveté and artlessness, which appeared so charming, were spontaneous and unassumed, her candour was often based upon mendacity, and she spoke a falsehood guilelessly and without scruple, having little discrimination between deception and truth. In more ways than one her nature had been fashioned in extremes.

At last the necessary arrangements were com-

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pleted, and on Saturday, the 19th of October 1771, the well-satisfied Hugh Dalrymple handed his daughter into a wedding-coach at the door of his home in Berners Street, and drove with her to St Pancras Church, where the marriage was solemnised. In appearance the happy pair were an ill-assorted couple. The tall and graceful bride towered above the diminutive bridegroom, whose coarse features seemed more commonplace in the presence of her fresh young charms. Eighteen years separated their ages, not an impassable gulf, but accentuated in this instance by the youth of the wife, for although her husband was not more than thirty-five she had barely reached her seventeenth birthday. Those who knew them must have perceived a far graver objection to the union, for it was evident that the two were utterly dissimilar in tastes and disposition.

Hugh Dalrymple, however, appears to have been troubled by no qualms of conscience. Soon after the wedding he sailed for the West Indies, for his services as a pamphleteer had been rewarded, and he had been appointed to the position of Attorney-General of Grenada. His tenure of office, however, was a short one. Worn out by the dissipations of his youth, his constitution was unable to withstand the heat of the climate, and in less than three years the clever, vicious man was lying in his grave. In

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the public prints his death is recorded as having taken place on the 8th of March 1774.<sup>1</sup> Probably to the last he believed that his daughter was well and happily married.

<sup>1</sup> Or the 9th of March.

## II

**B**EING deeply in love with his handsome wife, the little doctor proved an indulgent husband. To please her he removed from the parish of St Clement Danes, and took a villa in the fashionable suburb of Knightsbridge. A carriage was always at her disposal, and she received a generous allowance for millinery and dress. Whenever Mr Eliot's professional engagements prevented him from accompanying her to a ball or theatre, he was glad to allow a friend to act as her escort, for he appeared devoid of jealousy, and was delighted that she should be admired. Month by month his practice and reputation continued to increase, while Mrs Eliot, aided by her good looks and vivacity, made considerable progress in the social scale. Men of rank and position began to notice her, and she became a fashionable beauty. In the course of the next year the uxorious doctor, who seemed to grow more attached to his wife every day, was gratified by the birth of a child. At this period, as one of her biographers has remarked, "everyone pronounced Mrs Eliot to be one of the happiest women in the metropolis."

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Presently, there came a change. As the doctor grew more absorbed in his profession, his interest in home-life seemed to diminish. Being somewhat of a charlatan, with little medical knowledge, his work became a severe mental strain, and encroached more and more upon his hours of leisure. It was not long before the pleasure-loving Grace began to think that she was being neglected. While always ready to dine or sup with congenial spirits or with an influential friend, the doctor did not share her taste for the amusements of the Pantheon or Opera-House, and appeared, indeed, to dislike all the diversions in which she delighted. By nature he was a solemn and laborious person, and she resented his grave, bed-side manner, which, although it won the confidence of patients, was a sore trial to a young wife. A husband who was immersed in business for three parts of the day, and who was as dull and dogmatic as a pedagogue when he came home, seemed to Grace a dreary companion in comparison with the lively gallants whom she met abroad. Having a bright and sunny disposition, she could not exist without laughter and lightness of heart. Consequently the pair were constantly at variance.

Unlike her husband, Mrs Eliot had changed little since her marriage. Even her girlish simplicity seemed unaltered, and she prattled

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in the same artless way, heedless of the consequence or value of her words. It is improbable that she was spoilt by indulgence, or had become vitiated by the contact with Vanity Fair. The feverish blood of Hugh Dalrymple flowed in her veins, and she needed but the occasion to reveal her nature. Just as some women are "born married," so was she a courtesan at heart from her birth—not wholly through wantonness and sensuality, but because she loved adventure and aspired to dominate mankind. Yet, she had no lack of intellect, light and ingenuous though she seemed, being shrewd beyond her years, and her natural sagacity had been fostered by a liberal education. Doubtless, if she had been mated with a congenial husband, her natural good sense might have curbed her temerarious disposition, but under the circumstances it was inevitable that she should fill a lurid page in the scandalous chronicles of her time.

Possibly she may have suspected that the doctor had no great reverence for his marriage vows. It was well known that, like a true son of the riotous Writer to the Signet, he had wallowed deeply in the mire, and when Grace became aware that many of his patients were disreputable sirens, such as Sophia Baddeley, it is not improbable that she imagined his heart was as inconstant as her own. At all events, the breach between them quickly grew



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wider, and rumour began to hint that the youthful Mrs Eliot was no better than she should be. Indeed, it was suggested that everyone of the cavaliers whom the complacent physician permitted to attend her to rout and masquerade could boast of her favours. These ugly stories reached the ears of Dr Eliot about the date of Hugh Dalrymple's death. Apparently he had been suspicious for a long time, and although he continued to hide his resentment from his wife, he set a watch upon her movements.

One evening in the April of 1774, while her husband was away from home, Mrs Eliot ordered her servant to call a hackney coach, and saying that she was going to visit a lady friend in Spring Gardens, she drove hurriedly into town. Having been told to play the spy upon his mistress, if she should leave the house during Dr Eliot's absence, the man followed on foot, keeping the vehicle in view until it halted in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden. Here the guilty wife alighted, and, dismissing the driver, she walked down Bulleyn Court into the Strand, with William Constable, the watchful footman, still at her heels. Another coach was waiting in the roadway, in which a gentleman was seated, whom the servant recognised as a young Irish peer who for a long time had been known as one of Mrs Eliot's warmest

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admirers. Grace stepped hastily into the carriage, which drove off into the darkness along a circuitous route half way round the town, until it stopped at the door of a certain notorious Mrs Jane Price, in Berkeley Row. During the whole journey William Constable followed like a sleuth-hound, and arrived in time to see his mistress enter the house upon her lover's arm. A fellow-servant now joined him, and the two compared their watches. It was half-past nine o'clock.

The young peer, who had overcome Mrs Eliot's virtue, was Arthur Annesley, Viscount Valentia, a common-place nobleman of handsome person and meretricious habits. A few years previously he had gained great notoriety, owing to his legitimacy being contested, when his claim to the honours of his father was investigated by the House of Lords. In the end the Irish titles were awarded to him, but after a tedious inquiry he was denied the right to succeed to the earldom of Anglesey on the ground that his parents were not legally married at the time of his birth. Many persons regarded this verdict as an act of providence, for there had been grave doubts whether the late Lord Anglesey himself was entitled to the earldom, and he had treated a nephew who claimed to be the lawful heir in a barbarous fashion, actually selling the boy as a slave to an American planter.

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Thus, poetic justice was thought to have exacted retribution from his son. Since his marriage with Lucy Lyttelton, the daughter of the good Lord Lyttelton, young Valentia had managed to check his amorous tendencies until he became infatuated with Mrs Eliot, who, meeting him more than half way, extinguished all his affection for his own plain wife. Little persuasion was needed in order to induce her to accompany him to the house in Berkeley Row.

For upwards of two hours the relentless spies remained on guard outside. At last, Lord Valentia reappeared with his companion, and drove away in the hackney coach which had been called for them. Before they had gone very far the conscience-stricken Grace, who continued to cast uneasy glances through the window, fancied that she could perceive the figure of a pursuer, and feeling instinctively that she was being watched, she insisted upon returning to their trysting-place. So they went back to Mrs Price's house, and Grace, trembling and tearful, said that she was very much frightened, and must go home in a chair. By such constant doubtings and turnings, as on her carefully-planned journey from home, she hoped to baffle any possible pursuit. It was long after midnight when she reached Knightsbridge.

A month later, when her husband, with slow Scottish caution, had collected overwhelming

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evidence of her infidelity, she found herself driven from home. Lord Valentia could hold out little hope that he would be able to marry her, since he knew that his wife would not prove so complacent as to seek a divorce in order to give him the chance of making his mistress an honest woman. Such a deplorable situation had never come within the scope of Grace's reckonings, and before the end of May, when her amorous adventures were the topic of the moment, it was commonly reported that the guilty pair had quarrelled already. In the course of the next month she wrote to Dr Eliot—if journalistic gossip be true—advising him to shoot his rival, so that he would be sent to “a little spot on Oxford Road,” and she would be “rid of two rogues.” Another version of the current belief says that her letter ran thus:—“I should be the happiest woman in the world if you and Lord Valentia were both dead.”

It was supposed that the influence of relatives was used in vain to persuade the doctor to forgive her, and it was reported also that some members of her family managed to induce her, for a time at all events, to break off the intercourse with her paramour. For some months she appears to have lived in the country, but towards the end of the year she had resumed her liaison with Lord Valentia, while her husband was taking steps to apply to the Ecclesiastical

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Courts for a divorce. However, early in 1775, there came a final rupture with her lover, whom she could never forgive for being a married man, and the fascinating Grace commenced her long career as a demirep of fashion.

### III

**I**N the *Morning Post* of the 27th of January 1776 there appeared a description of one of the numerous masquerades at the Pantheon in Oxford Street, and as usual "the free and easy" portion of the company was mentioned in the report. Among these were several handsome women, whose names were familiar to everyone. The "laughter-loving" Clara Hayward, as the newspapers were fond of styling her, had risen to fame half-a-dozen years before, when she appeared as Calista in "The Fair Penitent" at Foote's Theatre in the Haymarket, where she had shown sufficient ability to secure an engagement at Drury Lane; and now having left the stage she had become a more or less inconstant mistress of Evelyn Meadows, the favourite nephew and presumptive heir of the eccentric Duchess of Kingston. The graceful Harriet Powell, equally frail and famous, whose winsome face was portrayed in many a mezzotint, had spent her early youth as an inmate of Mrs Hayes's disreputable establishment in King's Place, but now at last she had become faithful to one man, and was keeping house with Lord Seaforth, the creator of a famous regiment.



CHARLOTTE SPENCER





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Charlotte Spencer, a refined and elegant girl, whose juvenile experiences had been just as deplorable, was the favourite of the newly-married Duke of Devonshire, being thus the successful rival of the most charming duchess in England. Betsy Cox, a strapping young woman with a fine contralto voice, who was fond of appearing at the masquerades in male attire, had leapt into notoriety during the week that the Pantheon was opened by dancing in the cotillon, notwithstanding the interdict of the Master of Ceremonies. Sarah Hudson, who like her friend Miss Cox had lived for many years with a certain infamous Mother Banks in Curzon Street, was also a very popular dame with the young noblemen who patronised the Pantheon masquerades.

All these had been celebrated for several years, but at last another queen of the demi-monde had arisen, whose pre-eminence was now recognised by the paragraph writers of the press. Thus, on this 27th of January the *Morning Post* noted also the appearance of "the sentimental Mrs Eliot arm-in-arm with Lord Cholmondeley," and although the pair remained masked during the whole evening, they seem to have excited more interest than any other couple in the rooms. Since her quarrel with Lord Valentia, the fickle Grace, alas! had become more flagrantly immoral. Ease and luxury were

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essential to her happiness, and when one amour failed to satisfy her greed, she had no hesitation in coming forward shamelessly into the marketplace. That she should have been regarded as a formidable rival to Clara Hayward and Charlotte Spencer indicates to what depths she had sunk. An amour with a rich young coxcomb named William Bird, who a year or two later became famous as the paramour of Lady Percy, had followed the separation from her first lover, and since then she had secured a devoted admirer in the stalwart Lord Cholmondeley. The waggish journalist, who, a month before, gravely announced her appearance on the stage as the heroine in "The Fair Penitent," evidently fancied that he had uttered a good jest. At this period, the newspapers were filled with allusions to the courtesan, for the times seemed to have lost every vestige of modesty, and the press was inspired by the spirit of the age.

In all her love affairs Grace was now eminently practical. Having sacrificed a comfortable home owing to the susceptibility of her heart, she resolved never again to be the victim of sentiment, and in the true spirit of the courtesan every one of her amours was influenced by the main chance. Hoping to retrieve her position by making a brilliant match, she had broken off the connection with Lord Valentia, and had forsaken William Bird in favour of Lord

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Cholmondeley. It was the general belief that her aspirations would be realised, for the latter nobleman, who was regarded as one of the most eligible bachelors in the House of Lords, had become her devoted slave. Being a huge ungainly youth of great physical strength, he had long been the favourite butt of the satirists, who styled him the "Athletic Peer," and sometimes "Lord Tallboy," while in the course of the next year he acquired the additional nickname of "Lord Torpedo." Everyone agreed with Horace Walpole, his great-uncle, that he was a decent fellow at heart, and with the exception of a predilection towards unchaste attachments, he was perfectly harmless. Indeed, it was his excessive amiability that caused his friends to fear that he would fall a victim to the wiles of the fascinating Grace.

There was much reason for this apprehension, since Dr Eliot, after considerable difficulty, had fulfilled the conditions that were necessary in order to satisfy parliament that he was entitled to a divorce, having found, like every wronged husband in those days, that the law moved in a cumbrous fashion. In the first place, he had been obliged to obtain a judgment in the King's Bench against Lord Valentia from criminal conversation with his wife, and until this was done the ecclesiastical courts refused to grant a separation *a mensa et thoro*. Finally, on the 23rd

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of February 1776, Dr Bettesworth of Doctor's Commons pronounced sentence in his favour, and three days afterwards his petition was presented to the House of Lords. The result was a foregone conclusion, and on the 21st of March Grace Dalrymple found herself a free woman.<sup>1</sup> Already a newspaper paragraph had made the premature announcement that she was engaged to be married to Lord Cholmondeley.

Two months later Grace's delight in her newly-found liberty was somewhat impaired by the news that Dr Eliot had received the honour of knighthood, owing to the good offices of his friend and patient Madame Schwellenberg, the German favourite who ruled the Queen. Although she hoped to become a peeress before very long, the divorced lady was disappointed that she had so narrowly missed a title, on the principle that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, while the fact that her husband was gaining social success caused her much humiliation. In a short time also she had a greater reason for vexation, since she realised that Lord Cholmondeley was unwilling to make her his countess. It was manifest that he was as deeply infatuated as ever, in spite of the rumours that he was growing tired of her, for

<sup>1</sup> Dr Eliot gave his wife an allowance of £200 a year after their divorce, and he left instructions in his will that this annuity should be continued. He died on the 7th of November 1786.

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during the whole summer he never left her side, accompanying her to Margate, and entertaining her at his residence in Roehampton and at his house in Piccadilly. His generosity too knew no bounds, and Grace's splendid carriage and pair and her blue and silver liveries were the envy of all the frail sisterhood. Still, she could not persuade him to marry her.

For three and a half years their friendship continued without a break. From time to time there were rumours that she would become Lady Cholmondeley, and the critical pressmen noticed with interest that she "sporting a coronet" on the panels of her coach. Indeed, it was alleged that his lordship, at the instigation of indignant relatives, forbade her to use his cypher or his liveries, and exchanged her gorgeous chariot with a pair of dashing greys for one of "plain Melbourne brown." Possibly the story is a fable, for in every other instance he was ready to gratify her vanity and encourage her extravagance. Since it was the ambition of each famous beauty to hand down her picture to posterity, she did not rest content until Gainsborough had painted her portrait, which appeared in the Academy as No. 114 in April 1778, and was reproduced in mezzotint by John Dean in the following year. Likewise, she was one of the first among the demi-mondaines to have her own box at the Opera, setting a fashion in this

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respect that was speedily followed by others of her kind. Not even the Duchess of Devonshire or the Countess of Derby excelled her in the magnificence of their costumes, and a vivid blue seems to have been her favourite shade, which, as she was shrewd enough to know, harmonised with the colour of her eyes. It was often rumoured that she had become a mother, and although such an event was never publicly acknowledged by the parents, it was generally believed that a child was born three months after her picture was exhibited at Somerset House.

At last the young nobleman began to grow weary of the long-established menage, and in May 1779 the inevitable rupture occurred, whereupon the indomitable Grace set off to Paris in search of new adventures. The cause of the quarrel was thus explained by an imaginative journalist :—

The separation between Lord C——y and his beloved Miss D——le was occasioned by the warmth with which the latter urged the promise of marriage said to have been made to her by her noble lover. His lordship hesitated, and she flew into a paroxysm of rage, ordered post-horses, drove off instantly to Dover, and crossed the water to seek an asylum in a cloister.

It was true enough that she had gone to France; it was not true that she had any intention of taking refuge in a nunnery. Which of the Parisian grandes had solicited her visit is uncertain. Armand, Duc de Lauzun, the most



( Miss Fitz William )





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persistent admirer of English ladies—a base fellow who boasted and lied about his conquests—had gone to fight for the American colonists, taking with him the gentle Miss Fitzwilliams,<sup>1</sup> a famous new beauty from King's Place; while the Duc de Fitzjames, although he soon became one of Mrs Eliot's patrons, was then pursuing the wanton widow of the late Lord Barrymore. Opinion differed as to whether the Comte d'Artois, the handsome young brother of King Louis, or the Duc de Chartres, son of the Duc d'Orléans, was the first to offer Grace a home in Paris. In spite of the quarrel between the two nations over the American war, the French were still infatuated with all things British, and the horses and jockeys, the garments, and the mistresses of their princes and nobles were imported from England.

Another Englishwoman, who had broken her marriage vows, happened to be living in Paris at this time—a certain Mrs William Gooch, *née* Elizabeth Villa-Real, recently notorious on account of a liaison with Rauzzini, the musician, and as she was well born and bred, being, in fact, a wealthy heiress, the fastidious Grace, always most particular with regard to her feminine associates, struck up a warm friendship with her. Jealousy, however, soon put an end to the intimacy, for Mrs Eliot became annoyed

<sup>1</sup> Or Fitzwilliam.

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because the Duc de Fitzjames, a great noble who was descended from James the Second's son, the Duke of Berwick, began to show an evident preference for Mrs Gooch. Yet she might well have spared one admirer, since the highest in the land were paying court to her. Day after day she drove down the Allée de Longchamp, in the Bois de Boulogne, before the eyes of the whole nobility, in an open carriage with the Comte d'Artois, and when the affection of that fickle prince had cooled, the Duc de Chartres was eager to take his place.

For two years Grace remained happy and content with her fortunes until, about the middle of April 1781, her old flame, Lord Cholmondeley, paid one of his frequent visits to Paris. It was denied that he had any intention of reclaiming her, and it was reported that another lady bore him company, but his arrival seems to have changed her plans. About the same time the Duc de Chartres gave her some cause of offence, and, seizing the pretext in her usual fearless way, she returned immediately to London, where she arrived on the 7th of June. A few days later George Selwyn remarked contemptuously in a letter to his gossip, Lord Carlisle, that he had seen her "in a vis-a-vis with that idiot Lord Cholmondeley," who had deserted his recent inamorata, Mrs Robinson, for his old love. Not content with this achievement, the ambitious

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Grace sought to gain "the exalted position," which had been occupied a short time since by poor Perdita. In a few weeks she managed to catch the eye of the Prince of Wales, who, having resigned the actress to his friend, Lord Malden, early in the year, and being tired also of Mrs Armistead, was sighing for fresh conquests. This new amour was conducted with much secrecy. Although many curious idlers were on the watch, the royal equipage was never seen to drive up to the door of Mrs Eliot's house at Tyburn Turnpike, while some of the newspapers even alleged that she had failed in her endeavours to captivate the Prince, and was about to return in disgust to her friends in Paris. It was at this period that she acquired the nickname—derived from her patronymic and occasioned by her lofty stature—of "Dally the Tall," which was elaborated into "Dally the Maypole" and "Dally the Colossus." She was now twenty-seven, and, as shown by the second portrait,<sup>1</sup> which Gainsborough painted in this summer, her comeliness had remained untarnished during the last ten years of sin and folly. Many, however, did not admire her, calling her gawky; and the clever and winsome Lady Craven, who was herself the most wanton of wives, had exclaimed ironically, when Grace was pointed out to her at Ranelagh Gardens, "Oh, Lord,

<sup>1</sup> A bust portrait in the possession of the Duke of Portland.

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I know that figure—that is Glumdalclitch of ‘Gulliver’s Travels.’”

Although at first Prince George was very fond of her, Grace does not appear to have fascinated him as the forsaken Perdita had done, and in a few months it was evident that their friendship was on the wane. Chance then came to her aid, for during the autumn she found herself *enceinte*, and taking advantage of the opportunity of establishing her influence over her royal lover she declared that he would be the father of her child. With characteristic naïveté she insisted that her connection with the Duc de Chartres had ended long ago and that Lord Cholmondeley also had deserted her, and she appealed to the Prince, as her only friend and protector, not to desert her in the hour of her need. With all his faults George was a good-natured soul, and he pitied the poor woman and was quite ready to believe what she told him. During the first month of the new year it was understood that he had admitted his responsibility, and the *Morning Post* announced that Dally the Tall expected to become “the most exalted of illegitimate mothers” at the beginning of April.

The prophecy was a shrewd one. On the 30th of March 1782 Grace gave birth to a daughter, and all the town waited eagerly for some sign that the royal father had acknowledged the child as his own. It was the popular impres-

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sion that the Prince was puzzled how to act. He was only twenty years of age, with little experience as yet of feminine artifice, but in the present instance he had good reason to be sceptical. Unfortunately for Mrs Eliot's pretensions her infant was exceedingly dark, while all the royal family were unmistakably blonde, and when the baby was first shown to him the young Prince is reported to have exclaimed: "To convince me that this is my girl they must first prove that black is white." In the end every one, except Grace, agreed that the parentage must remain a matter of doubt, and the friends of the Heir-Apparent declared that Charles Wyndham, the brother of Lord Egremont, claimed to be the father of the child. However, the mother herself refused to be convinced, and when her little Georgina Augusta Frederica was christened at St Marylebone Church, on the 30th of July, it was recorded in the register of baptism that she was "the daughter of His Royal Highness George, Prince of Wales." To this emphatic declaration the easy-going Heir-Apparent never troubled to offer any objection, and although it failed to convince him he always took a fatherly interest in the welfare of the little girl.

During the next four years the notorious Dally the Tall lived alternately in London and Paris, shining as a star of the first magnitude in both capitals, one of the most brilliant and popular

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among the fashionable "impures." Warned by his previous experiences, the Prince of Wales resisted all her blandishments, and the world of gallantry looked on with amusement at her unsuccessful attempts to regain his favour. With such ridicule were her pretensions regarded that it was said by the cynics that she was in the habit of "whitening the brows of her royal infant," and when a report was spread that George had made a provision for the child some of the newspapers hinted plainly that Mrs Eliot had no claim upon his generosity. After her adventure with the Prince she remained attached to her devoted Wyndham, until Lord Cholmondeley, who had grown tired of a brief amour with the ubiquitous Mrs Armistead, invited her to come and live with him again, promising at the same time to be a father to her child. Grace accepted his offer, and, although she soon returned to her friends in Paris, leaving him to console himself with a certain Madame de St Alban, "perhaps the most bewitching impure in Europe," the little Georgina Augusta Frederica continued to live with him, and was brought up and educated as if she had been his own daughter. By which arrangement Lord Cholmondeley had the pleasure of gratifying the Prince of Wales.

In the course of time Grace drifted back to her old admirer, the Duc de Chartres, who

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appears to have taken her away to France, at the end of his visit to London, in the summer of 1784. The duke often made a journey to England, for he loved the turf and the chase, and would have exchanged his princely rank for the life of an English country gentleman. In dress also his Anglomania was evident, and his favourite costume consisted of the boots, breeches, and riding-coat of the British buck, while only his buttons, upon which were painted a series of indecent pictures, proclaimed the foreigner. Nothing could have been less attractive than his personal appearance. An hereditary taint, augmented by his own debaucheries, had covered his face with pimples, his eyes were dull and fish-like, and his features coarse and expressionless. In spite of his unwieldy bulk he could ride well and danced gracefully, but beyond these he had no accomplishments, being wholly uneducated and dull by nature. Since the time when, as a mere boy, his father had given him the fifteen-year-old Mademoiselle Duthé for his mistress the whole of his life had been spent in shameless immorality, and there was not a more idle and selfish voluptuary in all France. By neglect and infidelity he had broken his wife's heart. Yet, in the opinion of Grace Dalrymple, he was generous and amiable, "with the best temper in the world," but no other virtues were ever claimed for him.

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From first to last the royal duke seems to have held his English mistress in very slender chains and in the following season she was once more in London, amazing the town with the splendour of her carriages and the gorgeousness of her attire. At length, her long and intermittent association with Lord Cholmondeley had ended, and it is said that she was much annoyed to find that her place was occupied permanently by Madame de St Alban. During this summer she became very friendly with her former rival Mrs Armistead, who after living on intimate terms with so many lesser members of the Whig party, had lately achieved her greatest success by an alliance with Charles Fox himself—an alliance that in due course led to the holy state of matrimony. Among Grace's other acquaintances was the divorced wife of Sir Richard Worseley, and for a short time also the Countess Grosvenor, two ladies who had lived the same sort of life as herself ever since they had been put away by their husbands. All through her gay career Dally the Tall was fond of forming little coteries of the aristocratic members of the frail sisterhood.

Towards the end of 1786 Grace returned to France. In the previous year her patron, the Duc de Chartres, owing to the death of his father, had become Duc d'Orléans, and he appears to have grown sufficiently attached to



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her about this period to provide her with a permanent home in Paris. Although there were many rivals she was a special favourite, and along with Madame de Buffon she reigned as the principal sultana of the Palais Royal. For a space of ten years scarcely any news of her came to England. During the whole course of the Revolution she remained in the French capital, or its environs, and for a long time her friends at home were ignorant of her fate. Once only in these terrible times did the English public receive any intelligence of the famous courtesan who had been such a brilliant figure in London life, when on the 26th of September 1793, the following paragraph appeared in the *World* newspaper :—

Mrs Elliot, the former favourite of Lord Cholmondeley is in the most deplorable state of poverty in France.

Then, being a friend of Orléans, every one imagined that she had fallen a victim to the Reign of Terror.

#### IV

**T**HE story of her experiences during these momentous years has been told by Grace Dalrymple in a graphic narrative, which she called the "Journal of My Life during the French Revolution." Unfortunately, the account is untrustworthy, for she was unable to resist the temptation of posing as a heroine, and her pages are full of mis-statements and exaggeration. Yet, the book reveals much of the character of the authoress, and although she cannot be regarded as a sober historian she gives a vivid impression of the period.

One portion of the "Journal" has helped to modify the verdict which many writers have passed upon the Duc d'Orléans. In making an apology for her friend, Grace must have been aware that she was hazarding an unpopular opinion, and she can have been influenced by no hope of reward in trying to vindicate his memory. Moreover, her statements in this respect are reasonable, and her conclusions are corroborated by the course of events during the early part of the Revolution. In her opinion the Duc d'Orléans was no base conspirator, eager to wade

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to the throne through the blood of his king, but a weak and amiable voluptuary led astray by designing associates and borne helplessly along by the fierce tide that overwhelmed his country. Undoubtedly his hatred of the court and his love of British freedom made him anxious for a constitutional reform, but Grace protests that he had no part in the revolt that kindled the flames of anarchy.

On Sunday, the 12th of July in the year 1789, when all Paris was thrown into consternation by the dismissal of Necker, the popular minister, whom the King had banished on the previous day, while everyone believed that the royal troops would march from Versailles upon the city to put an end to the conflict between the monarchy and the National Assembly of the people by force of arms, the Duc d'Orléans was spending a pleasant holiday with Grace Dalrymple at his chateau of Raincy in the forest of Bondy. While Camille Desmoulins was standing on a table in the gardens of the Palais Royal, with fierce words and wild gestures, telling the excited mob that the German and Swiss guards were coming to massacre the patriots and urging them to seize arms for their defence, Philippe d'Orléans was toying with his mistress or angling for carp, unaware that the Parisian insurgents had assumed the green cockade as a signal for rebellion. In the evening

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of this memorable day when he returned to Paris the inevitable encounter between the people and the military had taken place. The capital was in the power of the mob and the revolution had begun. On the following morning, while the enraged populace were erecting barricades in the streets and pillaging the storehouses for guns and pikes the Duc d'Orléans, at that time the idol of the people, set off to Versailles to offer his services to the King, but Louis, who perhaps believed the unfounded rumour that the duke had bribed the guards to revolt, commanded him to leave the palace. Next day, the incidents of the previous forty-eight hours had borne their fruit, and the long struggle between the monarch and his people culminated in the destruction of the Bastille. Yet, as Grace has protested and history endorses her belief, Orléans was not responsible for any of these events.

Although the duke became more hostile to the court after his rebuff at Versailles on the 13th of July, being as his mistress admits "at open war with the King," he had no desire to ascend the throne. Such an ambition was quite foreign to his temperament, and he made no use of the innumerable opportunities of advancing his claims, for three months after the fall of the Bastille he paid a visit to England which lasted from October until the following July, while in the next year he did not seize the chance of proclaiming himself

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king at the time of Louis' flight to Varennes. It was the zeal of his friends and the hate of his enemies that caused him to be regarded as a pretender to the crown. As Grace remarks truly he was "the most unfit man that ever existed to be set up as chief of a great faction," since the moderate soon deserted such an unstable leader leaving him in the hands of extremists who flocked eagerly to the standard of one whose policy they could control. Thus, Orléans became a mere figurehead, having no power over his own party, who used his name as a menace to the court. He was simply an idle man of pleasure, without ambition, and undoubtedly he spoke with sincerity when he told his mistress that he "would gladly change his lot and all his fortune for a small estate in England."

A number of other accusations which have been made against him by his enemies have been shown by Grace to be wholly without foundation. Thus, he had no share in the second great outrage of the Revolution, when the same mob, which had overwhelmed the Bastille three months previously, marched to Versailles with a crowd of women at its head and compelled the royal family to come to the capital. Nor was he responsible for the invasion of the Tuileries by Santerre's rabble two years later, for he was then with the army on the frontier, and although he

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returned to Paris before the overthrow of the monarchy on the 10th of August 1792 he did not influence the final insurrection which drove the king from his throne. Afterwards, when all power passed to the Jacobins he could only struggle for his own preservation, accepting the title of Citoyen Egalité and voting for the execution of Louis since the alternative was death. Long before his own ruin this proud and courtly grand seigneur of the old regime must have deplored the day on which he had first meddled in politics, and when his turn came to make atonement he met his fate like a hero with head upraised and a smile upon his lips. Perhaps of all the folk that had been dependent upon his bounty none regretted him more deeply than Grace Dalrymple, and she at least has handed down to posterity one of the most favourable estimates of his character.

While these stirring events were being enacted Mrs Eliot was living for the greater part of the time in the Rue de Miroménil off the Faubourg St Honoré, not far from Parc Monceau, the duke's summer palace, or in her villa at Meudon on the outskirts of the city. According to her account she was sitting at breakfast with her protector on the 14th of July 1789 when the roar of canon burst forth, and the news arrived that the storming of the Bastille had begun. After the royal family had been brought from Versailles

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to Paris in the following October she exchanged messages with the unhappy Queen, and during the next year Marie Antoinette sent her on a special mission to Brussels, which she had visited for a short time before in order to promote the election of the Duc d'Orléans to the dukedom of Brabant. On that torrid day in June in 1791 when the King and Queen were led back in triumph from Varennes, after their luckless flight for freedom, Grace was standing in the Champs Elysées, and saw the royal coach pass by amidst a mob of smoking, swearing soldiers. While she was dressing on the 10th of August 1792 she heard the sound of cannonading which heralded the attack upon the palace and the slaughter of the Swiss guards. During the September massacres of the same year she was still in Paris, but departed to her house at Meudon in terror and disgust in January 1793 lest she "should breathe the same air as the King's murderers." Then, on the 6th of April while paying a visit to the capital she heard of the arrest of the Duc d'Orléans, and for the first time her own life was in jeopardy.

Throughout her narrative, except in the case of dates that were too familiar to mistake, Grace is inaccurate in her chronology, but in spite of this lapse of memory she may have witnessed many of the events which she described. Yet, the long arm of coincidence is frequently displayed in

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her story, and knowing her talent for exaggeration we need not marvel that she was always present at the most dramatic scenes. One who desired to display a series of the lurid pictures of the Revolution could not do better than follow her selection. Three of the four most haunting tragedies of the epoch came before her eyes. When homicidal mania first seized the populace and old Foulon fell a victim to their fury, being accused of saying that grass was good enough food for the people, Grace beheld the severed head of the poor official carried on a pole through the streets. In like manner she saw the mob bearing along the body of the Princesse de Lamballe, whom they had butchered at the gate of her prison, and whose head they were taking to the Temple in order to show their handiwork to the Queen. On the day of the King's execution she heard the gun that announced the fall of the guillotine, and having climbed the hill at Meudon, which commanded a distant view of the Place Louis Quinze, she met a workman returning from the scene of the tragedy, holding a handkerchief stained with the royal blood. If she had not been in prison at the time of Marie Antoinette's death one may assume that she would have given some vivid impression of the spectacle. Dally the Tall liked to tell her stories in the first person.

Of all the anecdotes in the book, one of the



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most remarkable is the description of the adventures of the Marquis of Champcenetz, who, as Governor of the Tuileries, was called upon to defend the palace against the attack of the mob on the 10th of August after the King and Queen had fled for protection to the Assembly. When the Swiss regiment was annihilated, and all hope of prolonging the struggle had vanished, he made his escape through a window and lay concealed among the heap of dead in the garden until nightfall. There he was found by a friendly National Guard who lent him his coat, and in this disguise he managed to reach the English Embassy. Lord Gower, however, dare not take him in, and after obtaining a suit of clothes he was forced to seek some other refuge. As a last resource he called at the house of an English widow, named Mrs Meyler, who gave him shelter until the 2nd of September, when, fearing that her guest would be discovered as domiciliary visits were being paid in every section of Paris, she applied to her friend Mrs Eliot to help her in her difficulty.

Grace came to the rescue and agreed to conceal the unfortunate man in her villa at Meudon. When night had come a cabriolet was ordered, and bidding adieu to the hospitable Mrs Meyler, Champcenetz and his new hostess drove off to the Barrière de Vaugirard, the nearest way out of Paris. Here to their consternation they

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learnt that all the gates were closed, and no one was permitted to leave the city. To add to Grace's embarrassment her companion was weak with fever and paralysed with fear, and she expected every moment that he would be recognised by some of the patrols in the streets. After trying in vain to escape by another barrier they drove back to the Boulevards where they dismissed their carriage, intending, as a forlorn hope, to walk to Parc Monceau and implore the Duc d'Orléans to grant an asylum to the fugitive. As they drew near the Faubourg St Honoré it occurred to Grace that it would be safer to take Champcenetz to her own house than run the risk of being arrested in the streets, so leaving him in an unoccupied building close at hand she went on ahead in order that her Jacobin cook, whose fidelity was doubtful, might be sent away on some errand. Scarcely had she reached home when the marquis, who had been driven in terror from his hiding place by the sound of the patrol marching down the road, came knocking at her gate and showed himself to the servants. The Jacobin cook, however, proved more amenable than Grace had anticipated, and after calling him "a nasty aristocrat," and telling him that a scaffold had been ready for him all day she promised not to betray him. Still, the situation was full of peril, for a strict system of surveillance had been established, and the municipal

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officers were making a house-to-house visit through the city in search of suspects.

After some deliberation Grace contrived a hiding-place for her unfortunate guest. Her bed lay in an alcove, and by pulling out two of the mattresses further than the others a space was made by the side of the wall into which the fugitive was able to creep. When he had been stowed away in this suffocating retreat Grace decided to undress and get into the bed herself, hoping in this manner to allay suspicion. It was fortunate that her plans were carried out so promptly. Before long the guards arrived to search the premises, and having examined every part of the house they burst into her room. To her dismay they ordered her to get up at once and very wisely she made no demur. Telling them that the prospect of their visit had terrified her very much, she declared that now she saw "how considerate and kind and good" they were, she would be delighted to show them over the house herself. With gentle tact she hinted that they must be fatigued by their labours and offered them wine, liqueurs, and some cold pie. The cajolery of the courtesan won the day. They began to crack jokes with her, and although they searched the rest of the room thoroughly they did not compel her to rise, and made a very cursory examination of the bed. Soon afterwards they took their departure with-

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out discovering their quarry, whereupon Grace became hysterical as the result of her protracted ordeal, and Champcenetz was found half smothered beneath the mattresses.

Happily, the poor royalist had now encountered the worst of his trials. Two days later Grace persuaded the Duc d'Orléans to assist him to leave the country, and on the 6th of September, when the barriers were opened, he obtained a seat in a mail-cart bound for Boulogne, whence in due course he escaped to England.

Whatever may be thought of the first portion of her story there can be no doubt that Grace's account of her adventures, after the arrest of her protector on the 6th of April 1793, is largely mingled with romance. The narrative declares that she was arrested in the month of May, and sent to the prison of St Pelagie, "a most deplorable, dirty, uncomfortable hole." With apparent sincerity, she tells how she was eating a "miserable supper of ham, eggs, and dirty water," when she caught sight of her old friend Armand de Lauzun, now Duc de Biron, the base libertine who boasted of his loves. Yet such an encounter was impossible, for Biron did not arrive at St Pelagie until the 29th of July. In like manner she describes her conversation with Madame du Barry, although the old mistress of Louis XV., who was not arrested until the 22nd of September, cannot have been her fellow

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prisoner. A still more serious charge of falsehood lies at her door since she was never confined at St Pelagie for a day!

The second prison in which she claims to have been detained was the Recollects at Versailles. It was here, she says, that she occupied the same room as an old English doctor named Richard Gem, the grand uncle of William Huskisson, the Secretary to the Embassy. In her "Journal," Grace depicts him as a calm unemotional philosopher, who, although nearly eighty years of age, used to get out of bed every morning at four o'clock, and "after uncovering the wood fire," studied Locke and Helvetius by candle-light. Yet, only three years later, while her memory was fresh, she told Lord Malmesbury that they were allowed neither fuel nor lights, and she described the self-possessed physician as being terrified to death, and weeping the whole time. It is a fact that she shared an apartment with Dr Gem in a prison at Versailles, but no reliance can be placed in the contradictory accounts of her experiences. It is also untrue that she was removed from the Recollects to the Grue de Plessis, for, as in the case of St Pelagie, her name does not appear in the register of that gaol.

But the most mendacious portion of her story is that which relates her adventures in the dungeons of the Carmelites. There is a harrow-

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ing description of the last parting between Custine *fi/s* and his pretty wife, which Grace says she witnessed with her own eyes, and yet the young man never was an inmate of the prison, and Delphine Custine was not brought hither until two months after the execution of her husband. It may seem, perhaps, a small mistake when she declares that she and Hoche were sent to the Carmelites on the same day, and found Madame Beauharnais already there, whereas the lady did not arrive until ten days after the General, but this is not the only inaccuracy in her account of the future Empress. According to Grace's narrative, Josephine had been in prison for some time when her husband also was sent to the Carmelites, and the "Journal" describes the embarrassing encounter of the pair who are said to have lived apart for some years. There is not a word of truth in these statements. As a matter of fact the reconciliation between the Vicomte de Beauharnais and his wife had taken place long before, and when he was imprisoned she visited him constantly until her own arrest five or six weeks later. It is not strange that Grace Dalrymple should make these blunders, for she never was a prisoner at the Carmelites, and her stories of its inmates are either imaginary, or else were related to her by a friend!

Unfortunately, little is known of Mrs Eliot's

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life in Paris during the revolution, except what she has told us herself. For ten years, from 1786 until 1796, she occupied the house in the Rue de Miroménil, and we know that she had a villa also at Meudon, in the Arrondissement of Versailles, during the same period. Here she was detained in the Maison d'Arrêt after the fall of Orléans, and for three months at least she had old Richard Gem as a companion. Her pet dogs were permitted to live in her room. The length of her confinement is unknown, but she had become a prisoner as early as December 1793, and she was not released until the 4th of October in the following year.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Archives Nationales* at Paris.

**T**WO years later Lord Malmesbury was sent over to France by the English government to try to negotiate terms of peace. In former days he had often met Mrs Eliot at Twickenham while she was under the protection of Lord Cholmondeley, and he appears to have been delighted to find his old acquaintance safe and well. At all events he paid her much attention, and since his wife was not there to protest, he had no hesitation in accepting an invitation to supper or to dinner whenever Grace asked him to her house. Once again she was in prosperous circumstances, and her guests admired the excellence of her cuisine, but whether her affluence was the result of past thrift or recent accumulations will always remain a matter of doubt. At other times Lord Malmesbury used to go long walks with her, for the cheery diplomat was never tired of listening to her highly-coloured tales of the Revolution and her curious anecdotes of the Duc d'Orléans. Although forty years of age she was a handsome woman still, and as light-hearted as ever.

Since her release from prison Grace had been



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anxious to return to England, for she longed to see her favourite daughter, and she resolved to seize the first opportunity of crossing the channel. No doubt she solicited Lord Malmesbury to obtain a pass-port for her, but she did not manage to persuade him to take her with him when he left Paris at the end of his mission. However, a few months later, a certain diplomatic agent, who appears to have been none other than Henry Swinburne, allowed her to accompany him to London where she arrived early in January in the year 1798. The visit seems to have been a sad one for the poor exile. Her old friend "the Athletic Peer" was now a married man, and there was an impassable gulf between herself and her daughter, who was living still with Lord Cholmondeley, a beautiful and accomplished girl of sixteen, known as Miss Seymour, in whose welfare the Prince of Wales continued to show a fatherly interest. There was no place for the unhappy mother, and very wisely she allowed her child to pass out of her life rather than drag her down to her own level. It was believed also that the Heir Apparent was even more displeased by Grace's arrival than the Cholmondeley family, and according to the gossip of the clubs he took some trouble to induce her to go back to Paris. Little persuasion was needed, as life in England no longer had any charm for her. Twelve years had elapsed since

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she left her native country, and another generation had arisen to whom the once paramount Dally the Tall was a stranger. Before two months had elapsed she made up her mind to return to her adopted land, and early in March she departed once more to Paris. A paragraph in the *Morning Herald* referred to her thus:—

Mrs E——tt, *ci-devant* Miss D——le, who lately returned from France to England, is said to have since received a settlement of four to five hundred a year from a young gentleman of high rank on condition that she shall for the future reside out of the kingdom. This establishment has taken place in consequence of an amorous attachment that formerly existed between them, and which the gentleman, being now married, is desirous of concealing from his amiable spouse.

On her arrival in France poor Grace received an even worse reception than in England, for she was at once arrested on suspicion by the municipal authorities at Calais and conducted under military guard to St Omers. No doubt her imprisonment was short, since it cannot have been difficult to prove that she was no British spy, and in any case the influence of Mesdames Tallien and Josephine Beauharnais Buonaparte, who were her intimate friends, although she did not share their captivity at the Carmelites, must have secured her release.

The rest of Grace's life is veiled in mystery, which the comments of the editor of her "Journal" have helped to deepen. Perhaps she

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returned again to England in 1801 (though it cannot have been with Lord Malmesbury), and possibly she remained in her native land until the restoration of the Bourbons. It is unlikely that the Prince renewed his friendship with her, and it is still more improbable that she wrote her story of the French Revolution, "at the express desire of King George the Third," who was not in the habit of taking an interest in the mistresses of his sons. Apparently all these statements were due to the imaginative Mrs Meyler, from whom Grace seems to have borrowed her wonderful anecdotes of the French prisons. However, it is not incredible that a little girl was living with her soon after her release from prison, but the statement that this was an adopted child is open to doubt, for she is said to have had at least three natural children and one of her sobriquets was "Dally the prolific." It is certainly true that the last years of her life were spent at Ville d'Avray, near Paris, and she died here on the 16th of May 1823, having almost reached the allotted span.

There can be no doubt that Grace Dalrymple was a clever woman. Her book shows that she had inherited some of her father's talents. Although often sketchy the descriptions throughout her narrative are full of life, and her impressions of actual people are vivid and convincing. Whether true or false it is the

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story of a gifted writer and presents a spirited picture of the period. Grace indeed was a lady of culture and we can well believe the contemporary assurance that she was one of the most brilliant talkers of her day. It is evident, also, that she possessed much of the courage of which she appears to have been so proud. A coward would have fled from Paris in terror while escape was possible. Only a resolute woman would have ventured to return to France when all Europe was in arms against the republic. In like manner she showed her bravery in asserting the birth-right of her child, though the Prince of Wales and his clique were striving to thwart her wishes, and there is ample proof that she was not afraid of a passage of arms with any of the French grandees. Throughout her life she kept a stout heart and everyone knew that Dally the Tall was not easily intimidated.

Little else that is favourable can be said of her character. The "Journal," certainly, seems to reveal a generous, warm-hearted, and loyal disposition, but since it is manifest that she had not the slightest regard for truth we cannot be sure that she has depicted her real personality. There was nothing in her career to condone the flagrant immorality of her conduct. Unlike Kitty Fisher she was no unsophisticated girl seduced into a life of sin, but a well-educated

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woman who cast aside her virtue in pure wantonness. Nor was she driven into vice through poverty as Fanny Murray had been, for her fall took place when she was the pampered wife of a rich man. Unlike Nancy Parsons, whose fidelity to a paramour became proverbial, she made no honest endeavour to retrieve her position, and it was owing to her inconstancy that Lord Cholmondeley, who was in love with her for so many years, did not venture to marry her. Nature intended her to be a courtesan, and she revelled in the power and the risk and the freedom of her adventurous life.

There is no uncertainty with regard to the position of Dally the Tall in the ranks of ladies fair and frail. During ten of the most immoral years of the eighteenth century she reigned supreme among women of her class. Even the celebrated Elizabeth Armistead, with whom so many illustrious persons were connected, never achieved the wide-spread fame of Hugh Dalrymple's daughter. For a brief space "Perdita" Robinson, by reason of her ostentatious liaison with the Prince of Wales, seems to have appealed more forcibly to popular imagination, but there is little in common between her career and that of Mrs Eliot. Of her other competitors only Gertrude Mahon, known as "the Bird of Paradise," who also was of gentle birth, can be considered a rival, and may be said

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to have shared occasionally her tawdry throne. All the rest lay far beneath her. Dally the Tall, like Kitty Fisher before her, was acknowledged as the queen of the demi-monde. This notoriety was not due, as in the case of Nancy Parsons, to her association with distinguished men. Even her friendship with the Heir Apparent brought her little reputation, since it was regarded by the well-informed as the transitory whim of a versatile prince. Nor did she owe much to her beauty, which was by no means superlative, although it is certain that her stately figure helped to arouse and stimulate public curiosity. In some measure she earned her fame, like so many of her kind, by her profuse extravagance, her dress and equipages, her jewelry and her establishments being fit for a princess, but she owed most of her celebrity to her audacious courage, which, as all were aware, did not quail before the highest in the land. The world seems to have known, and it gained the information from the daily press, that whoever paid the piper, Grace always insisted upon calling the tune.

VI

GERTRUDE MAHON  
(THE BIRD OF PARADISE)







GERTRUDE MAHON



## GERTRUDE MAHON

(THE BIRD OF PARADISE)

### I

**D**URING the autumn of 1768 there was much excitement in the little house in Poland Street, where Mr Burney, the eminent professor of music, lived with his clever daughters, for the girls were keenly interested in a romance of which their cousin Charles was the hero. A young lady of fashion had fallen in love with him, a beautiful girl of sixteen, and so great was her infatuation that she had taken advantage of leap-year to tell him of her attachment. Poor Charles was only a humble music-master, while Miss Gertrude Tilson was the daughter of a peeress, but, forgetting all distinctions of rank, she wrote an avowal of her passion on her glove, which she dropt for him to pick up. It was a startling sequel to a pianoforte lesson, and the youthful teacher was much embarrassed by the indiscretion of his fair pupil.

Few young men could have withstood the solicitations of such a temptress. She was a tiny little person, but her shape displayed every

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feminine charm, and there was a swift grace in each motion of the dainty figure. A mass of raven hair clustered round her pink cheeks, and a pair of large black eyes lighted up her sweet childish features with the radiance of womanhood. When Charles Burney stooped to pick up the tell-tale glove, while the Lilliputian beauty glided from the room with a rosy blush and a sidelong glance, he could not have been blamed had he flung himself at her feet and confessed that he reciprocated her passion. Besides her physical charms the young lady possessed other qualities that should have attracted him, being an accomplished musician with a melodious voice, and, most important of all to a poor man, she was reputed to have an ample fortune.

Great as was the temptation the music-master lost neither his head nor his heart. It was easy for him to act with discretion since he had no great opinion of Miss Tilson's character, perceiving instinctively that she was a vain, shallow person, unthinkable as a wife for him. The message on the glove received no response, all her sighs and coquetry were in vain, and Charles Rousseau Burney behaved as though he were unconscious of her intentions. Nevertheless, the tiny Gertrude, although thwarted in her unmaidenly wooing, was in no way abashed. With the help of a friend she secured an introduction to Miss Hetty Burney, the eldest of

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the Poland Street family, and declared to the astonished girl that she was in love with her cousin, imagining, perhaps, that such publicity might bring her reluctant swain to his knees. There was much irony in this confession, for Charles and Hetty were drifting closer together every day, and were soon to discover that destiny had decreed that they should become man and wife. Naturally, under the circumstances, Miss Burney could do nothing to advance the suit of her love-lorn confidant, but she told the news to her sisters, and the observant Fanny, who was beginning to compile some wonderful memoirs, took care to set down the incident in her diary.

Gertrude Tilson was the spoilt child of incompetent parents, both of whom had been married previous to their union. Eighteen years ago the unexpected wedding of her father and the widowed Countess of Kerry had been the talk of a summer season in Dublin. Sprung from an old Hibernian stock that boasted Lord Strafford's chaplain as its founder, James Tilson was a gay and popular Irishman who hailed from Pallis in King's County, and had been employed in the consular service. Immediately after his marriage he commenced to squander his money in building a spacious mansion near Malpas in Cheshire, to which he gave the name of Bolesworth Castle, exercising his taste for the Gothic

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in a fairly successful manner, and showing much skill in laying out his grounds. Here Gertrude, who was born on the 15th of April 1752, spent her first eleven years, living a healthy country life among her ponies and her dogs. At the end of this period her father obtained an appointment as consul at Cadiz, and taking the advantage of the opportunity to curtail his expenditure, he sold his country seat to Mr John Crewe. After settling his affairs he left his wife and daughter in London, and set sail to the Spanish seaport, but he died suddenly in the summer of 1764, having held office for barely twelve months.

Although Miss Tilson had been brought up in too extravagant a fashion by her father, she found a far less capable guardian in her mother, who was a devoted parent but an irrational companion, being utterly devoid of all force of character. Long ago when the stout old Lord Kerry was told that his heir had married this insipid lady—a daughter of the Earl of Cavan—he had exclaimed with prophetic pathos:—“The house of Lixnaw is no more!”<sup>1</sup>—and his foresight had been justified, as the son, born two years after the wedding, and who soon became Earl of Kerry upon the successive deaths of his father and grandfather, proved as weak and foolish as his mother. Everyone was surprised when the uninteresting dowager, after a short

<sup>1</sup> “*Life of Lord Shelburne.*” E. Fitzmaurice, i. 4.

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widowhood, succeeded in captivating the clever and lively James Tilson, and when the little Gertrude was born, there were many fears that she would become as degenerate as her half-brother, the twelve-year-old peer.

At the time of her flirtation with Charles Burney, the precocious child was living with her mother in Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square. It was an enervating artificial atmosphere for a young girl, but it had been her lot since the death of her father four years ago. A glance within the drawing-room was enough to intimate to the visitor that Lady Kerry was engrossed with trivialities all day long. A well-filled aviary stood against the wall, a cage hung in each window, and the mistress of the house, who kept the key of her chest of bird-seed, pampered her feathered pets as zealously as she had spoilt her children. At the entrance of a stranger, a pair of fluffy lap-dogs named Myra and Minnel would spring yelping from their satin-lined baskets, or Cupid, a favourite little barbet would raise a sleepy growl in his arm-chair. Most probably the countess dowager would be found upon the settee with her maid Davis fussing around her, frantically busy with some scheme of needle-work, the sofa strewn with muffs and tippetts, with embroidered lappets and borders for aprons. "A nest of working drawers" stood close at hand, and a large tambour-frame was always

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ready for use. Throughout the room there were evidences of Lady Kerry's amazing industry. The "Chinese Temple" was filled with paper flowers of her own making, for in this respect she was as assiduous as Mrs Delany herself. Each set of chairs was covered with worsted or chenille upholstery wrought by her hands. Even the "French robe," which she wore on special occasions, owed its gorgeous trimmings to the same busy fingers. Although Gertrude, Countess of Kerry had endeavoured to be an exemplary mother, her birds, her lap-dogs, and her fancy-work were the ruling passions of her life.

Six months before Miss Tilson had cast her restless eyes upon the music-master, her degenerate half-brother, the Earl of Kerry, had fallen in love with a married woman, named Mrs Daly, many years older than himself. The amour resulted in the divorce of the lady, who possessed a life interest in a considerable fortune, and as soon as she was free the young peer made her his wife. In England as well as in Ireland a great deal of scandal was caused by the adventure, and in spite of his rank and riches the foolish nobleman found that he "had his way to fight to get into good company," in which attempt he did not meet with invariable success. It was an evil object-lesson for the coquettish Gertrude, and unfortunate for her in



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other ways since her brother was now of little help to her socially.

In spite of this drawback, Miss Tilson was launched upon London life during her seventeenth year, and attracted much attention. Everyone declared that the tiny creature, with her shapely figure, brilliant complexion, and piquant features, was "the dearest little doll or plaything" that had ever been seen. All eyes were directed towards her as soon as she entered a room. Like her poor vain mother, she loved bright colours, and her caps and gowns were of the most vivid hues, which few except herself would have ventured to wear. At every rout or assembly, she was surrounded by a crowd of admiring beaux, and her relatives had good reason to hope that she would capture a man of rank and fortune for a husband. The expectation was reasonable, for, although not a great heiress, she had inherited £3000 from her father and would receive a comfortable income on the death of Lady Kerry. Gertrude, however, did not appear ambitious to make a great match. As long as she gained the admiration of the opposite sex she did not seem to care what manner of man offered her homage. If the correct definition of a coquette is one who "tries to please" she was a past-mistress in coquetry, for she had a smile for every one. By nature, she was a meretricious little person

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whose heart was free to all mankind, and it was just the same to her, whether the swain of the moment was a music-master or a peer of the realm. It is doubtful whether the stoicism of Charles Burney caused her a single sigh.

Towards the end of her second season she made the acquaintance of a dapper young Irishman, named Gilbreath Mahon, an obvious adventurer though in her opinion a most agreeable individual, since he possessed "a genteel person, insinuating manners, and a polite address." It was said that he saw her for the first time in church when, perceiving that she did not resent his shameless ogling, he pursued her as she walked home. Having ascertained that she was a girl of fortune and confident that she liked his appearance, he wrote a letter full of seductive flattery and asked to be allowed to present himself. At the stolen interviews which followed, she discovered that her new friend could sing divinely and fiddled as well as he sang, and with music as a common bond between them, the intercourse prospered amazingly.<sup>1</sup> Ere long he had made her an offer of marriage, which she accepted gladly without troubling to investigate the antecedents of her suitor.

A few inquiries would have elicited startling facts, for she would have learnt that Mr Mahon

<sup>1</sup> It is not improbable that Mahon was engaged by Lady Kerry to give her daughter music lessons.

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was a notorious gamester without a shilling in the world except what he won by play. In early life he had earned his living as a musician, but finding the dice-box more profitable than the violin he passed his time at the fashionable watering-places where there was no lack of pigeons to pluck all the year round. Both Dick England, the bully, and Captain Brereton, the duellist, were his intimate friends, but neither of them had earned a higher reputation as a successful gambler than "little Gilly" Mahon. The love-sick Gertrude, however, did not trouble her pretty head about these things. Her suitor had caught her fancy, and she was determined not to lose him. It was certain that Lady Kerry, who was as proud as she was invertebrate, would never accept a son-in-law who had neither wealth nor lineage. An elopement seemed the only alternative. Accordingly the girl was quite ready to consent to a runaway marriage.

## II

**O**NE day in October 1769 Gertrude departed from her monotonous home, leaving behind a letter of explanation for her mother, and joining Gilbreath Mahon at an appointed trysting-place she drove off to Dover as fast as a chaise and four could take them. Unluckily for the enterprise the devoted pair had under-rated the sagacity of Lady Kerry, who, having taken council with her friends, learnt that a justice of the peace might be able to recover her lost daughter. With as little delay as possible an application was made to Sir John Fielding, and in a few hours two Bow Street runners were dispatched in chase of the fugitives. Not anticipating any pursuit the lovers were in no hurry to cross the channel, but rested at Dover waiting for a suitable vessel, when to their dismay the thief-takers arrived at their hotel. All their dreams of happiness were shattered; their plans seemed to be hopelessly defeated. The unsympathetic officers announced that Miss Tilson must return with them to London, for since she was a minor the law upheld the authority of her mother.

At this juncture the game-craft of little Gilly

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Mahon, which always was most conspicuous when he was playing for heavy stakes, turned the tables in favour of the lovers. Seeming to bow his head to the storm he surrendered peaceably to his captors and confessed himself a beaten man. In consequence of this submission Gertrude was allowed to retire to her bed-room on the plea that she was worn out by her long journey, while the young Irishman who seemed bent upon drowning his sorrows in drink remained downstairs in custody of the runners. Presently, under the influence of their prisoner's gay spirits and flow of anecdote the men of Bow Street began to relax their severity until at length they were persuaded to join in his carousal. Glass after glass was emptied and filled while they roared with laughter at his witty sallies, and all thought of the fugitive heiress upstairs faded from their minds. Meanwhile, the simple stratagem which the wily Mahon had prepared was carried out with the greatest ease. A ladder placed against the window of Gertrude's room by his trusty man-servant enabled her to reach the ground without the knowledge of her custodians, and under the escort of the same servant she walked to the harbour where she secured a passage in a vessel that was about to sail on the turn of the tide. It was not long before her lover had joined her, for his intemperance had been merely assumed and by limiting

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his potations he managed to drink both of his companions under the table. When the officers came to their senses they found that their captives had set sail for France.

Vowing vengeance for the trick that had been played upon them, the two runners put to sea in the next packet that left Dover, and, assisted by a favourable wind, they reached Calais almost as soon as Gilly Mahon and his sweetheart. The race was now a close and exciting one, and a false move on the part of either the hare or the hounds would decide whether the fugitives could shake off their pursuers or whether the disconsolate Gertrude would be torn from her lover's arms. The thief-takers, however, made no mistake. Without a moment's delay they sought out the Intendant, and, showing their credentials, they asked for his assistance. After hearing their story, which seemed to suggest the offer of a rich reward by the guardians of the eloping heiress, the French Official decided to use his authority. Search was made for the young couple, who were discovered in the nick of time just as they were about to step into their post-chaise, and they were at once put under arrest. Then, in order to make her imprisonment as pleasant as possible, the lady was lodged in a convent until further instructions could be received from her relations

Undismayed by these arbitrary proceedings

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the alert Mahon sought the advice of a lawyer, who suggested a petition to the King. A statement of the case was prepared, and the attorney set off to Paris to lay the document before the ministers. The answer was swift, and, from a lover's point of view, all that could be desired. An injunction was sent to the authorities at Calais to release Miss Tilson without delay, and the Bow Street runners were ordered to leave the kingdom. Some said that the story actually reached the ears of Louis, who replied at once, "Let the young people go together"; and the great Duc de Choiseul forwarded a letter of apology to Gilbreath Mahon, in which he advised a prosecution of the autocratic Intendant.<sup>1</sup> Liberty, however, was all that the happy pair sought, and they did not trouble to take their revenge. As soon as Gertrude was released from captivity they set out from their inn at Calais amidst the cheers of the crowd, and travelled to Furnes, in Flanders, where they were married on the first of November.

There is reason to believe that Gilly Mahon was deeply in love with his pretty bride, fortune-hunter though he was, and the honeymoon appears to have passed in perfect happiness. Notwithstanding his adventurous career he possessed the tastes and manners of a well-bred gentleman, and, with the exception of an

<sup>1</sup> Printed in the *Gents Mag.* (1769), p. 557.

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insatiable passion for games of chance, he was free from all fashionable vices. Now that he had married a woman of means he was prepared to live a decent life and show himself a model husband. Gertrude was a lovable little soul, and he was proud of her beauty and accomplishments. She, for her part, was equally satisfied. Opposition had made her more attached to her good-humoured bridegroom, who kept her always amused with his high spirits and boyish ways. She never tired of listening to his violin or joining in his sweet Irish melodies. While life could be devoted to music and song, no thought of the morrow ever disturbed her rest.

Presently her husband was obliged to explain that they had reached the end of their resources. The proceeds of a run of luck at Newmarket, augmented by Gertrude's pin-money, had provided the funds for their elopement, but little was left when they arrived in London at the close of their honeymoon. Kindly, but firmly, Gilly Mahon told his wife that it was absolutely necessary for her to obtain a settlement from her guardians. His arguments were unanswerable, and the seventeen-year-old bride went to her mother, weeping and penitent, with the doleful news that poverty was staring her in the face. Lady Kerry received her daughter with open arms, overjoyed to look upon her again, eager to



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consent to any terms that would promote her happiness. Upon one point, however, she declined to give way. No entreaties could persuade her to recognise her son-in-law, since pride would not allow her to forgive a penniless adventurer for his audacity in marrying a child of hers. In all other respects she was prepared to make the greatest sacrifice for her daughter, but she refused the most essential, an error of judgment which wiser parents have often made.

The lawyers were now called in, and Gertrude's small fortune was settled upon her, a provision that yielded an income of £150 a year. Naturally, the young couple were greatly disappointed. Little Mrs Mahon realised for the first time what it meant to be the wife of a poor man, while her husband, who had hoped to take up his abode in Lady Kerry's house, began to fear that he had made an improvident marriage. Nevertheless, with his usual optimism, he continued to believe that his mother-in-law would relent, and he endeavoured to conciliate her on every possible occasion. Before the end of the year he had an opportunity of showing his obedience to her wishes. Doubts had arisen with regard to the legality of the Flemish wedding, and circumstances made it imperative that the question should be settled without delay once and for all. Lady Kerry insisted upon another marriage, and her son-in-law was glad to humour her scruples.

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An application was made for a licence to the Bishop of London, and on the 14th of December 1770 Mrs Mahon and her husband went through the ceremony for a second time, at St George's, Hanover Square, just as Kitty Fisher and John Norris had done four years previously. A few weeks later, on the 18th of January 1771, Gertrude had become the mother of a little son, who received the names of Robert Tilson.

In spite of his efforts, poor Gilly Mahon failed to propitiate his wife's relations. Lady Kerry was delighted with her grandson, who became a serious rival to Myra and Cupid, but she would have nothing to do with the father; and although her daughter, whom she had completely forgiven, was with her from morning till night, she refused to allow the husband to enter her house. It was the same with Gertrude's half-brother, Lord Kerry, for none had been more bitterly incensed at the *mésalliance* than he. Her uncles, the Earl of Cavan, and John Tilson, squire of Watlington in Oxfordshire, as well as her aunt, Lady Hester Westenra, adopted a similar attitude. The unhappy Mahon was snubbed and ignored by them all. Hoping for better treatment in Ireland, where his antecedents were not so well known, he took his wife over to Dublin, and made a fresh attempt to gain admittance into polite circles. Here, as in London, he found that Gertrude's people were willing enough to

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lavish hospitality upon her, but they never admitted him to their parties, and took no notice of his advances. Naturally, this behaviour filled him with indignation, and he returned to England a soured man. Henceforth he resolved to go his own way in the world. While his wife was paying visits to her family, he began to drift back into his former habits, and strove to forget his humiliation with the help of the cards and the dice. Former comrades, like Brereton and Dick England, welcomed him effusively, and by degrees the joy of the old adventurous existence came back to him.

The inevitable result followed. Gertrude resented the back-sliding of her husband, without taking into account the provocation that had caused it, and they had many quarrels on the subject. From being the most affectionate of couples they became the most uncongenial, and while she brooded sadly over her folly in marrying a pauper, he lamented his rashness in surrendering his liberty for a mere pittance. When their love commenced to wane, the process was a rapid one. It was not long before she regretted deeply that she had left her mother's comfortable home, and he began to rue the day when he first set eyes on the high-born Miss Tilson.

At the same time Lady Kerry's resolution underwent a change. With maternal intuition

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she perceived that her daughter's whole life was in danger of being ruined beyond repair, and she determined to make a sacrifice of her pride in order to prevent such a catastrophe. Though she deplored the shameful *mésalliance* as deeply as ever, she concluded that it was the wisest policy to make the best of a bad bargain, and acknowledge Mr Mahon as her son-in-law. Unluckily, her decision came too late. The little Irishman, who was tired of the vain and querulous Gertrude, had been smitten by the charms of a certain Miss Russell, the sister of a fellow gamester. Having learnt that the young lady had a small fortune entirely at her own disposal, he resolved to begin life afresh if he could succeed in gaining her affections. The girl proved an easy conquest, and in the month of August 1774, just as Lady Kerry had made up her mind to seek a reconciliation, the news came that Mr Mahon had fled with Miss Russell to the Continent. Apparently Gertrude was not much distressed by her husband's infidelity. For months they had lived a cat and dog life, and she was glad to be relieved from the expense of providing him with board and lodging. Now that she was free to join her mother, she lost no time in exchanging her dull, comfortless apartments for the well-ordered home in Wigmore Street. Surrounded with every luxury once more, pampered and spoilt as extravagantly as in the days

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of her childhood, the memory of the past five years of squalor and degradation faded from her mind like some unpleasant dream. Her baby Robert was a delicious plaything, but recalled no wistful memories of the handsome husband who so short a time ago won her girlish heart.

A year later Gertrude suffered the great sorrow of her life. On the 24th of October 1775 Lady Kerry died at her home in London, full of anxiety to the last for her favourite child, to whom she left the whole of her income, "free from the control of her present or future husband." The capital was to remain in the hands of trustees for the benefit of Mrs Mahon's little boy. Neither of the two children of her first marriage, who were already provided for, received any legacy under the countess's will. To her daughter Anne, the wife of Sir Maurice Fitzgerald, she gave her blessing, and to her son, Lord Kerry, she made "a last request" that he would countenance her dear daughter Gertrude. "I leave to her also my affectionate blessing," added the poor woman, "and I hope that all my relations and friends will treat her with kindness and compassion." Unluckily, the prayer fell upon deaf ears.

### III

**A**LMOST immediately after the death of her mother the lonely Gertrude began to make the acquaintance of many undesirable friends. Little notice was taken of her by Lord Kerry and his elderly wife, a selfish couple who were entirely absorbed in their own affairs, while her half-sisters, Lady Anne Fitzgerald and Miss Elizabeth Tilson both resided in Ireland. Being left to her own devices Mrs Mahon sought the society of congenial companions, lighthearted women, fond of gaiety, men gifted in the art of flattery, associating with any careless spirit to spend a merry hour. All those who loved music were sure of winning her esteem, and she delighted in gathering together a cheerful company to while away an evening in singing glees and catches. Unhappily, these parties became the rendezvous of the most vicious coterie in London, for all were welcome who brought wit or beauty, Among the frequent visitors was a handsome woman whose sweet voice was often joined in a part-song with her hostess, a certain Mrs Dawson, whose name was coupled with "the wicked" Lord Lyttelton, son of the pious peer

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who had been scandalized by the "Essay on Woman." In consequence of this acquaintance Gertrude was often thrown into the society of the immoral nobleman, and ere long he had become an intimate friend. Such an intercourse was enough to tarnish any reputation, and it was not to be expected that a grass widow of moderate means and extravagant habits would escape the aspersions of scandal. Before Lady Kerry had been in her grave for three months it was common gossip that the pretty little Mrs Mahon was no better than she should be.

The newspapers were not slow in taking up the cry, and Gertrude gave them every opportunity to blacken her character. Although she should have been in mourning for her dead mother she appeared in gorgeous finery at every masquerade where she was always seen amidst the most convivial circles in the room. The new year was scarcely a month old when public opinion had come to the conclusion that scandal had not maligned her. At the memorable ball held in the Pantheon on the 27th of January 1776, when Mrs Eliot showed herself for the first time on Lord Cholmondeley's arm, a merry little mask clad in brilliant attire walked by their side during the whole evening, causing them endless laughter with her lively sallies, and those who were acquainted with the habitués of the place had no difficulty in recognising this sprightly

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creature as Mrs Mahon, the latest toast of the gay world. For some time Grace and Gertrude had been inseparable friends, kindred spirits by reason of their matrimonial mishaps, and all who observed their close comradeship agreed in thinking that from the standpoint of virtue there was little to choose between them. Further than this "the Athletic Peer" seemed as devoted to his tiny friend as to his tall one, and the journalists did not scruple to hint that he was on equally good terms with both of them. It was a grievous shock to the pride of the Kerrys and the Tilsons when they heard these rumours, and they must have waited anxiously for further proof.

A few weeks later it became evident that Gertrude was a lost soul. On the 19th of February another masquerade showed her in her true light. It was held at Carlisle House, the tawdry palace in Soho Square, where Thérèse Cornelys had reigned with such splendour a decade before. Society did not crowd to these assemblies now, the blue and yellow satin hangings were long since faded, the masqueraders for the most part belonged to the "free and easy" portion of the community. For a woman to be singled out by the newspapers as a conspicuous figure at such a gathering was a sure indication that she had lost her modesty. Yet, on this occasion, Mrs



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Mahon attracted more attention than any lady there. Dressed as an opera dancer, "a fancy costume as pretty as the wearer," she was acclaimed the belle of the ball, and when she sat down to supper with Mrs Dawson and a few boon companions the little party entertained the whole company till far away into the night by singing duets and madrigals. Next day Lord Kerry might have read in the columns of the *Morning Post* that his sister was observed at a masked ball in Carlisle House, revelling with loose women and their paramours.

During the summer Mrs Mahon became very friendly with Henrietta Countess Grosvenor, a divorced lady, who, though not usually rated among the courtesans, had lived a disreputable life for many years. This intimacy led to an acquaintance with Captain John Turner of the Guards, a jovial little soldier, who was engaged in squandering a fortune of £50,000, which in Gertrude's eyes seemed a most attractive operation. He was the brother of Sir Gregory Page Turner of Blackheath, the *cher ami* of the profligate countess, and before the end of the year the two women and the two men were bound together in the closest alliance. Since the assembly at Carlisle House Gertrude had lost all her respectable friends. Her beauty and her extravagance, her amours, and her vanity were the talk of clubland. Like her ally, Grace Eliot,

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she had gained the foremost position among ladies frail and fair. When it was known that she was keeping house with Captain Turner it is to be feared that many a young beau envied the little guardsman. It was in the autumn of the same year that the public press gave her the title of the "Bird of Paradise." Sobriquets of this description were much in favour at the time, and many of the leading members of the frail sisterhood bore similar nicknames. Thus, Maria Corbyn was styled the "White Crow"; Mrs Irvince was known as the "White Swan"; and poor Sally Wilson, the actress, was called the "Goldfinch," or else the "Water-wagtail" of Covent Garden theatre. Some said that Gertrude's synonym had been given to her because she resided formerly in Paradise Row, but this impression was entirely wrong, for it had arisen in consequence of her love of gay colours. Like the real Bird of Paradise she owed her name to the splendour of her plumage.

Dress had lost much of its Maccaroni eccentricities, and feminine attire had entered upon a picturesque period, which, although spoilt from time to time by some fashionable extravagance, lasted for upwards of twenty years. The hoop had shrunk to moderate dimensions, save at Court, being merely two small panniers which served to drape the festooned polonese, and emphasise the slimness of the waist. The hair

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no longer towered upwards in a lofty dome, and white feathers or dainty turbans were taking the place of the multitudinous trinkets that used to be scattered over the coiffure a few seasons ago. The sacque which was in vogue still on dress occasions, was cut closer to the figure, since the corsage was not now permitted to conceal the shape of the wearer.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the age of the little Bird of Paradise was an ideal one for a woman who had sufficient taste to correct the vagaries of fashion. On the whole it appears that Gertrude, in spite of a predilection for the gaudy, was artistic in her attire, and her gowns at the masked balls were always spoken of in terms of praise. Indeed she was often content with simplicity. At one of the great Ridottos at the Opera House she appeared "in a white muslin dress, dealing love and lavender with becoming grace." Nor was this the only occasion on which she was commended for the modesty of her costume. One evening at Ranelagh she was described as wearing "an elegant and simple dress, the modern cestus around her waist, and her hair of the finest jet combed in ringlets without the least shade of white or red powder." Bright shades were the fashion when she made her first conquest of

<sup>1</sup> This description indicates *the tendency* of the fashions in the year 1776. The old style of hoop and head-dress was frequently to be seen for a season or two longer, as reference to "Darly's Comic Prints" shows clearly.

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the gay world, and considering that her brilliant colouring allowed her to wear them with more impunity than most of her rivals, it was natural that she should make the most of her advantages.

Like nearly all of the unions of its kind the partnership of Captain Turner and Mrs Mahon, which began in the last month of the year 1776, was broken in a little while by a serious quarrel. After a visit to Paris they settled in a spacious house in Blenheim Street, but no sooner had it been announced that the Bird of Paradise was "well matched and elegantly caged" than it was rumoured that the harmony of the nest had been disturbed. The captain considered that his brother Sir Gregory was paying too much attention to his housekeeper, and as Lady Grosvenor shared his suspicions the quadruple alliance between the Turners and their mistresses came to a sudden end. Being fond of her lover Gertrude was much distressed by the fracas, but her pride was deeply hurt and she resolved to seek a fresh mate, which, as the *Morning Post* informed its readers on the 19th of April 1777, she found an easy task:—

The *Bird of Paradise* broke through the upper part of her cage two days ago, flew from her military keeper and perched on the shoulder of Sir John L——d as he was driving his phaeton and four through Knightsbridge, who carried her home to Park Place. The forsaken captain is disconsolate.

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Everybody knew that the charioteer in question was a young baronet, who, although only seventeen years of age, was already famous as one of the best whips in England. To a casual observer his keen bright eye and fresh clear-cut features seemed to show intelligence, but in reality this youthful Sir John Lade had the tastes and habits of an ostler, and his lust and extravagance, which called forth a poem of censure from the great Dr Johnson, were giving much uneasiness to his uncle and guardian, Mr Thrale of Streatham. In the present instance, however, neither his pocket nor his morals suffered to any extent. The Bird of Paradise soon grew weary of the raw-boned stable lad with whom she had nothing in common. Having managed to drag him to Carlisle House one evening, sorely against his will, in order to see if he could behave decently in company, she found him such a dull and uncouth companion that she saw it was as much as her reputation was worth to continue the connection. A few days later, after an absence of three weeks, she was only too glad to return to her lively guardsman.

During the remainder of their comradeship, which lasted for eighteen months longer, Gertrude and Captain Turner lived on the best of terms, and had it been possible there is little doubt that they would have been married.

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Unfortunately, it was extremely difficult for a woman to put away her husband, and as Gilly Mahon was in Jamaica it was hopeless to expect that he would seek a divorce. Still, the Bird of Paradise soon grew resigned to the fact that she was unable to try a second matrimonial experiment. It was useless to seek respectability as the doors of decent society were closed to her for ever. It seemed improvident to bind herself to one man since his resources might fail to maintain her in luxury. Indeed, she must have perceived that with her assistance John Turner would have no difficulty in exhausting his fifty thousand pounds.

For the next two seasons the spendthrift pair revelled in all the dissipations of the metropolis, and followed fashion to Brighton and Margate. While the money lasted they denied themselves no self-indulgence. When it came to an end and when Captain Turner was arrested for debt in January 1779 his faithful Gertrude bore him Company to the King's Bench Prison in St George's Fields. It was a dreary contrast to her luxurious home in Blenheim Street, but she bore it cheerfully (for the space of a few weeks) until a masquerade at the Opera House enticed her to the outer world. As a matter of course she did not return again to Southwark. Hearing of her misfortunes the Duke of Queensberry, who as Lord March had been the friend of

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Nancy Parsons and the enemy of John Wilkes, offered to relieve her embarrassments, and since she had forestalled her annuity as usual she was glad to consent to his proposals. Captain Turner was equally fortunate, being soon released from prison, whereupon he set off on a foreign tour, and very wisely did not attempt to resume his association with the extravagant Mrs Mahon. This turning over of new leaves proved a profitable enterprise. Two years later he married a rich heiress, and in the course of time he became a baronet.

Of all the gay ladies of this period Gertrude was unquestionably first favourite with the writers of the press, who, regarding her as a humorous little personage, made her the butt of a hundred facetious paragraphs such as these :—

The *Bird of Paradise* is seen hopping about in rather a disconsolate manner. We fear she has had too much saffron administered in the waters of her cage lately.

The little *Bird of Paradise* is said by some to have been moulting, by others to be laid up with the pip . . .

The *Bird of Paradise* has borrowed the nestling of some other bird to show that she is capable of hatching.

The *Bird of Paradise* appeared at Vauxhall in glittering plumage, her waist not a span round, her stature four feet one inch, with black hair truly Mahomedan, delicately arched eyebrows smooth as mouse skin, and soft pouting lips.

When she was seen bathing at Margate or Brighton it was said that she “wetted her plumes every day”; on many occasions she

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was described as "clucking after a noble chantic-leer" or "feathering her nest with the soft down of a goose"; and upon her imprisonment in the King's Bench it was announced that she was "caged in His Majesty's aviary." Several of her Cyprian associates were alleged to have been "brought up under her wing," while her husband was always spoken of as "the cock-bird." At other times her extravagance was reproved. "The Hen of Paradise," runs one paragraph, "though no larger than a canary, can swallow gold and silver with the facility of an ostrich," and being observed to eat a chicken for supper at a Pantheon masquerade, it was reported that "the Bird of Paradise is metamorphosed into a bird of prey." Such were the specimens of journalistic humour that Gertrude Mahon had to tolerate, but, although they were so disrespectful and absurd, it is likely enough that she regarded them as a good advertisement.

In the autumn of 1780 the rumour that the Bird of Paradise intended to go on the stage aroused considerable interest, and when at last it was announced that she would appear at Covent Garden Theatre on the 12th of December in "The Spanish Fryar," every seat was sold in a few hours. A brilliant crowd filled the house, but although the applause was generous and sincere, most of the spectators went away



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with the conviction that Mrs Mahon would never become a great actress. It was a pathetic sight to watch the little figure on the great stage struggling against physical disadvantages, for the tiny form, the miniature face, and the small voice seemed lost amidst the vastness of the surroundings. Moreover, she appeared to possess no personal magnetism, and displayed no genuine inspiration. Once only was she able to touch the heart of her audience. In her interview with Father Dominic, when he asks her, "Have you forgot your marriage vow?"—her reply, "No, I have too much reason to remember it," seemed so suggestive of her own matrimonial experiences, that the whole house responded with a burst of sympathetic applause.

On the whole the critics spoke favourably of the débutante, who was handicapped obviously by nervousness, but they praised her beauty far more warmly than her acting. "Her figure is of the smallest," said the *Morning Chronicle*, "but her features are regular and pretty and her person is remarkably well turned," and the *Gazetteer*, after commending her personal appearance, went on to observe that "her voice was clear and had something sprightly and agreeable in its tone." The performance was successful enough to warrant a repetition, and on the 18th and again on the 21st of December the Bird of Paradise appeared in "The Spanish

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Fryar," supported as before by John Henderson, Lewis, Quick, Mrs Inchbald, and the rest of an admirable company, On the 14th of February 1781 she played Lady Bell in "Know your Own Mind," and at her Benefit on the 21st of April she took the exacting part of Lady Townley in "The Provoked Husband" to the Lord Townley of William Lewis. Mild praise once more greeted her acting, but the curiosity of the public being appeased, no further interest was taken in the histrionic career of Mrs Mahon, and the management did not offer to renew her engagement.

#### IV

**T**HE Bird of Paradise was now in her twenty-ninth year, at the summit of her fame and at the height of her beauty. Her appearance on the Covent Garden stage had proved a splendid advertisement, and she was almost as great a favourite with the young men of White's as Kitty Fisher had been twenty years ago. One of her principal friends, however, was a member of Boodle's, the fattest, best-tempered and most popular man in London, with an impediment in his speech, a certain Colonel George Boden,<sup>1</sup> who was famous for stammering out witty jests, and whose stout father before him had been honoured by the notice of "Junius." For some time past Gertrude had been living in a fine house at No. 73 Great Portland Street, apparently more prosperous than ever, with a new French yellow coach and silver-plated harness and a wardrobe full of wonderful gowns, in which she outshone for the time being the rest of the Cytherean sisterhood.

Like all other gay ladies it was her ambition to obtain an introduction to the Prince of Wales,

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes spelt Bodens or Bowden.

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who though only nineteen years of age had endured a series of temptations to which St Anthony himself must have succumbed, and throughout the summer she made frantic efforts to attract his attention. Towards the end of the year 1781 poor jovial Boden, who never should have tried to keep pace with the extravagance of the Bird of Paradise, was clapped into Newgate for debt, which left her free to follow her chase of the Heir-Apparent. Being acquainted with Mills, the Prince's barber, she managed to receive notice every day of the royal programme, and this information gave her a manifest advantage over her numerous competitors. Whenever she learnt that George was to attend the Opera she took care to appear in her private box—Number 95—in her most daring toilet, and if she was told that he intended to take an airing in the park she was always there in her last new cabriolet. The Prince had grown tired of Dally the Tall, and it was the popular belief that the hair-dresser hinted to his royal master that he had a client who would amuse him vastly, the pretty little lady with the immense head-gear, who was to be seen so often in the Mall or at the theatre. It happened that George had been fascinated by a blue-eyed milliner of Coventry Street, and it was some time before he would deign to notice the officious Bird of Paradise, but in the end the assiduous Mills, who appears

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to have been in the pay of his fair patron, succeeded in arranging an interview. Some of the prince's boon companions accompanied him when he made his first visit to Great Portland Street, and as Gertrude, who was famous for her *petits soupers*, regaled the party in lavish fashion they were much pleased with their entertainment. It was generally supposed that the illustrious guest enjoyed her hospitality on many subsequent occasions, but no details ever reached the ears of the public. Nevertheless, it was rumoured that his royal highness, less generous even than his late Uncle Edward of York on a similar occasion, neglected to give his hostess the smallest present, and by constant repetition the story came to be regarded as absolutely true.

While she was setting her cap at the Prince, the Bird of Paradise was indulging in another craze that was equally popular among ladies of her kind. Since the introduction of the vis-à-vis driving had become the fashionable amusement, and every woman of spirit aspired to be her own whip. Carriages of all descriptions had increased a hundred-fold, and for the first time in the history of England the whole nation (literally) seemed to run on wheels. It was in the summer of 1782 that Gertrude "launched her small whole-length phaeton," choosing the Hampstead road as her practising ground, and in a short

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time she was able to manage her pair as skilfully as most of her sex. With the London coachmen, who watched the progress of the little charioteer with professional sympathy, she became a great favourite, and they gave her the nick-name of "Lady Hard and Soft."

There were many celebrated drivers in those days among the ranks of ladies fair and frail. One of the first was Agnes Townshend (called Vis-à-vis Townshend by reason of her hobby), a hard-swearing wanton, who drove her phaeton and four all over the country from morning until night. An even more famous coachwoman was "Mrs" Letitia Smith, (a pupil of the late Jack Rann, the highwayman, and the inseparable companion of Sir John Lade), who, after having enjoyed the patronage of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York for several years, eventually became the wife of her doting baronet. Another of these Amazonian whips was Kitty Frederick, the favourite mistress of the Duke of Queensberry, a buxom lady with the keenest sense of humour, of whom it is recorded that, being summoned before a magistrate when at the height of her fame for obtaining goods under false pretences, she pleaded in defence that she was "not of age." The two beautiful Miss Watsons of Berkeley Square, whose charms were said to have enticed the Prince of Wales from



LETITIA, LADY LADE





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the Bird of Paradise,<sup>1</sup> were considered to possess the smartest vis-à-vis in town; and the dashing Mrs Garden of Portland Square was regarded as the most accomplished "female Phaeton" of them all, having driven on one occasion from Grosvenor Gate to Kensington Park in five and a half minutes.

Although most of the new drivers behaved in a considerate manner, a great deal of alarm and irritation was caused by the recklessness of some of them, and since idle amusement, and not utility, had brought about the increase of vehicular traffic, a dangerous class feeling might have arisen, in consequence of this monopoly of the public roads, if a fresh craze had not diverted the attention of society. This was the "balloon mania" of 1784, when the ascents of Blanchard and Lunardi became a fashionable spectacle, and although rank and beauty seldom ventured to accompany the æronauts in their flights, this new and daring diversion made the sport of curricule-driving appear tame and insipid. Thus, fortunately for the national physique, the upper classes for the most part ceased to take their exercise in the vis-à-vis, but returned to horse-back, using their carriages, as before, merely as a means of locomotion. History does not record whether the Bird of Paradise took any interest

<sup>1</sup> The Prince's infatuation for the beautiful equestrienne, Mrs Sophia Hodges, came a little later.

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in "the air-balloon," but she was very fond of the balloon hat, an immense circular erection that suited the style of dressing the hair, which now was worn extremely wide and hung upon the neck in curls.

In the previous spring Gertrude had received a small bequest on the death of her half-sister, Elizabeth Tilson, who left her the income of £3000, with the reversion to her son, Robert Tilson Mahon, now twelve years old. The newspapers were never tired of hinting that, with this legacy joined to the fortune which she had received from Lady Kerry, her nest should be "comfortably lined" for the remainder of her life; but, as a matter of fact, she was always in embarrassed circumstances owing to her extravagant habits. At the same time, also, she was obliged to grant a liberal allowance to her husband, who had returned to England and was making her life unbearable with his importunities. Fortunately for her pocket the unlucky Gilly Mahon was soon removed from her path. Since his arrival in London he had set up once more as a professional gamester, resuming his association with the notorious Dick England, and, hoping to please his quarrelsome comrade, he had endeavoured to pay some polite attentions to his wife. The bully, however, chose to misinterpret his friend's intentions, and vowing that the little musician had been making love to Mrs



(Mrs. Frederick)

*[Faint, illegible text, likely a signature or inscription, possibly including the name 'Frederick' and a date.]*



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England, he seized him one day by the hair and cut off his queue with a sharp knife, close to his head. Not content with this revenge, he sued poor Mahon for a trifling debt, and, calling in the bailiffs, had him locked up in the Fleet prison. There can be no doubt that Gertrude was much relieved when her tiresome spouse was safely under lock and key, and, to celebrate her escape from an endless cause of worry, she set off on a continental trip in the company of a gentleman whom the newspapers designated as young Mr C——t.<sup>1</sup>

About this period she seemed to grow more Bohemian in her tastes, and became less fastidious in the choice of her associates. Just before her visit to France she created much surprise by appearing at Feulliard's dancing-rooms in Queen Street, Golden Square, "a noted Fandango," frequented by a crowd of "grisettes, mantua-makers, officers, including Bow Street ones, and Bond Street loungers." A pretty Miss Greenhill was now her inseparable companion, a lady of the town who lately as the *chère amie* of a notorious roisterer named Jack Roper—dubbed Captain "Toper" in consequence of his bibulous habits—had risen to fame under the pseudonym of "the Greenfinch." Towards the end of 1784 she appears to have resumed her friendship with Mrs Cuyler, who formerly had been one of the

<sup>1</sup> Probably John Calcraft, the younger.

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most exclusive of demi-mondaines, rating herself highly since her father was the colonel of a regiment. For many seasons this lady had been engaged intermittently at Drury Lane or the Haymarket, and apparently it was she who had helped to persuade Mrs Mahon to make her famous debut at Covent Garden theatre. Once more the renewal of her intimacy with her actress-friend turned Gertrude's thoughts towards the stage, for her debts were increasing every day and creditors were growing clamorous.

Knowing that it was useless to perform in London, she entered into negotiations with Richard Daly, the Irish manager, who saw at once that she would prove a splendid attraction, and offered her a ten days engagement on liberal terms. It was in the January of 1785 that she made her first appearance on the Dublin stage, when she played her old part of Elvira, and although her acting left little impression upon her audiences, she managed to fill the theatre every night, for the townsfolk flocked in crowds to see the notorious wanton who sprang from their first nobility. Moreover, the young Irishmen, infatuated by her beauty, made her the toast of the season, and, like Mrs Abington before her, she set the fashion in dress. A hat that bore her name became the rage of Dublin. It is described as having been "of the composite order, partaking of the Gipsy, the

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Lavinia, and the Parachute"—throughout her life the Bird of Paradise was celebrated for her head-gear. But her most remarkable achievement in the Emerald Isle was the conquest of John Fitzgibbon, the future Earl of Clare, Attorney-General of Ireland, a man of splendid abilities with the reputation of succeeding in everything he put his hand to, but fond of a good bottle and a fine horse in spite of his devotion to work. From every point of view, Gertrude had reason to be satisfied with her Hibernian trip, and when she returned to London for the season, it was a common remark that she seemed "in full feather once more."

During the winter, however, she lived in comparative retirement, and henceforth she never resumed the prominent position in the gay world which she had occupied for so long. At the beginning of 1786 she disappeared from town, probably, as it was hinted, to avoid the clutches of the catch-polls, and the Hyde Park loungers looked in vain for the familiar little figure "perched on the high phaeton." Her reign had extended far beyond the allotted span, lasting over a period of eleven years, and although she had not reached her thirty-fourth birthday her beauty was beginning to fade. Still, she did not become a recluse by any means, taking her part in the gaieties of each season at Bath or at Margate, a less bright and sprightly Bird of

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Paradise, perhaps, than of old, but as wicked and void of conscience as ever. We catch a glimpse of her at the former resort in the summer of 1791, living in Lansdowne Road in close friendship with Lady Douglas, still passionately fond of music, attending all the concerts, and taking the greatest interest in theatrical affairs. Later in the year when she had returned to London, where now she ventured to reside occasionally, it was rumoured that she and her congenial companion, Lady Douglas, intended to follow the example of more fashionable dames, and set up "a Greek shop," or, in other words, keep a Pharo table to fleece their visitors. At this period, a new fever for play had swept over the metropolis, and many of the great houses of society remained little better than gambling dens, until a stern judge checked the evil by threatening to place in the pillory some of "the first ladies in the land."

Two years later, in 1793, Mrs Mahon spent the summer at Margate, her favourite watering-place. For the past twenty seasons she had never missed paying an annual visit to the little sea-side town, where her profusion and generosity made her popular with all the inhabitants. There, during the autumn, she gained a great triumph. On the 14th of September she appeared at the Theatre Royal, "a neat and elegant structure after the model of Covent



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Garden," in the character of Lady Teazle in "School for Scandal," and her performance of the finest part in modern comedy seems to have been far better than any of her previous efforts in less ambitious roles. The house was filled to overflowing, the Assembly Rooms were deserted, and everyone in the audience agreed that Sir Peter's contrary young wife had never been impersonated with more charm and vivacity than by the Bird of Paradise.

Henceforth, Gertrude Mahon ceased to attract the notice of the press, and in consequence she faded from the public gaze. Little was heard of her for fifteen years, when, in 1808, the publication of some spurious memoirs of the Duke of Queensberry disclosed her whereabouts, and a new generation, a generation to whom her name was almost unknown, learnt with languid interest that the once incomparable Bird of Paradise, whose age was then fifty-six, was living in the Isle of Man "under the protection of a Hibernian refugee."

**I**N the social history of the eighteenth century there is nothing sadder than the story of Gertrude Mahon. Other fair women have been cast down from a higher estate, yet none have been plunged into a more horrible slough. Some of her equals in birth, like the Ladies Grosvenor, Ligonier, and Worsley, may have had a more stupendous fall, but although ignominy of the worst kind fell to their lot, not one of the three can be said to have sunk as low as the Bird of Paradise. A lady of quality with beauty such as hers, the prospect of wealth and rare musical talent, should have made a happy and brilliant marriage; instead of which she passed her life as the plaything of the ungodly, a painted doll in the Temple of Venus.

There can be no question that the period during which she flourished—the 'seventies and 'eighties—was the most immoral of the century, when the vast increase in wealth was bringing forth unbridled prodigality, and mankind had not been sobered by the terrors of the French Revolution. It was the epoch of matrimonial infidelity, and almost every month an action for



The BIRD of PARADISE.

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Printed by J. G. C. ADAMS, 108, BOWLING

Way, in Waterhouse's Alley, Strand, London.

Published as the Act directs.

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crim. con., or a petition for divorce occupied the attention of the King's Bench or Doctor's Commons. At no other time were so many proud names dragged through the mire, and never before had so many noble ladies strayed from the path of virtue. It is not surprising, therefore, that this vicious era witnessed the apotheosis of the scarlet woman. Day by day the public press chronicled her proceedings, vaunting her praises and making merry over her transgressions. Dishonour was a sure passport to celebrity, and thanks to the license of the newspapers, every frail beauty might live in hope that she would awake one morning to find herself famous. In former days the wanton had to become the talk of the town, like Kitty Fisher or Nancy Parsons, before the journalist deigned to notice her existence, but now the reports of all public assemblies contained a full list of notorious demireps along with the names of the highest nobility. Naturally, scores of these painted ladies were always better known to the public than most of the leaders of society, and there never was a period in which a greater number of women of the town were popular heroines. It would be easy to mention a hundred or more, who in newspaper jargon were "of the first rank."

Yet, in spite of this unholy competition, the Bird of Paradise remained a queen among them

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all, conspicuous amidst rivals as beautiful as herself by reason of her lineage, her abilities as a musician, and a certain theatrical display in all her actions. In the eyes of her contemporaries she appeared to be the embodiment of mischief and mirth, a heedless little sinner who was never disturbed by conscience or tormented by remorse, and though like most popular impressions this was not wholly correct, she appears to have possessed the temperament of the true courtesan in a greater measure than even Dally the Tall. Had honest Charles Burney been gifted with prophetic instinct when he met the coquettish black eyes of the sixteen year old beauty, he might have read the word *meretrix* written deeply upon her soul. Still notwithstanding the natural depravity of her disposition it cannot be said that fate treated her kindly. A foolish mother and a profligate husband are misfortunes sufficient to wreck the career of the most exemplary of women. Nor is it probable that she remained as joyous and *insouciant*e as the world imagined. One, at least, of her Grub Street panegyrists seems to have been struck by the unutterable sadness of her lot, and when noticing her among the most splendid women of the town who frequented the gardens of Bagnigge Wells took the view that she was more sinned against than sinning.

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. . . M—h—n, sweetest Bird of Paradise.  
Unhappy Warbler! to such arts as these  
Must you submit, sadly compelled to please.  
Not such the hope thy early youth believed;  
Not such thy hope, first, flattered, then deceived;  
Not such thy hope when M—h—n first expressed  
The feigned passion of his treacherous breast;  
Not such thy hope when thy fond heart he won,  
When you believed his words and were undone;  
And now reduced to follow what you hate,  
What first seduced you forced to imitate.  
Hence daily visits to St George's Fields  
For that support which ruined T—rn—r yields.<sup>1</sup>

There appears to be no record of Gertrude Mahon after the year 1808. At this date she had long since faded from popular remembrance, and it is doubtful whether the newspapers, which in former times had so much to say about her, would think it worth while to give her an obituary notice. Unless she was the Mrs Mahon, who died at Stockwell in Surrey on the 14th of July 1809 (and there is nothing to indicate that she was), the *Gentleman's Magazine* also passed over her death in silence. In later times she sank entirely into oblivion. Even the quaint mezzotint of her in the "Cyprian Cap," published by Bowles, is popularly believed to be a portrait of Mrs Robinson, while the few

<sup>1</sup> *Bagnigge Wells, a poem, in which are portrayed the characters of the most eminent filles de joye, with Notes illustrative, critical, historical, and explanatory.* Hawkins, 1779.

These verses could not have been written by Charles Churchill, as it is usually alleged, for he died when Mrs Mahon was twelve years old.

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writers who have seen the absurdity of such a supposition make all sorts of strange guesses at her identity.<sup>1</sup> Although as famous in the England of the eighteenth century as *La Belle Otero* is in modern France, the little Bird of Paradise, who "blazed the comet" of many a season, is now absolutely forgotten.

<sup>1</sup> In the collection of Satirical Prints in the British Museum this mezzotint is wrongly placed among the publications of 1772. As the head-dress shows clearly it belongs to a date *circa* 1780. There is a medallion portrait of Gertrude Mahon, the features of which are somewhat similar, in the *Town and Country Magazine*, xiii. 177. According to one of the newspapers, her miniature, "with a dwarfish Cupid in parley at her side with a bandage over his eyes," found a place in the Royal Academy Exhibition at Somerset House in 1783. In another paragraph it is said that her portrait had been painted by Cosway, but whether this statement refers to the Cupid miniature, or to a different picture entirely the present writer is unable to decide.



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(The first volume was published in December 1758, and the second in March 1759. In the flyleaf of the British Museum copy is the autograph "W. Musgrave").

2. *Memoirs of the | celebrated | Miss Fanny Murray. | Interspersed with the | Intrigues and Amours | of several | Eminent Personages. | Founded on real facts | In two volumes | The Second Edition | Dublin: | Printed by S. Smith at Mr Faulkner's | in Essex Street. 1759.*

(This is a reprint of the previous work. Notwithstanding the hostile criticism of Vol. I. in the *Monthly Review*, xix. 580, this book is by no means an "ill-written" specimen of its class. It contains descriptions of the Hon. "Jack" Spencer, father of the first earl; Richard Nash, "King of Bath"; Jack Harris of "Harris's List"; Sir Richard Atkins of Clapham; Capt. Plaistow, the bigamist; Robert Tracy, the beau; and James Maclean, the highwayman; and five of these are said by other authorities to have been connected with Fanny Murray. Although much of its information is obviously spurious, yet some of the facts, such as the accounts of Beau

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Tracy, and Maclean, are not wholly inaccurate, and amidst a great deal of fiction one can discern occasionally a modicum of truth. In this respect it contrasts favourably with most of the pamphlets about Kitty Fisher).

3. *A Humorous Poetical Dialogue* between the once celebrated Miss F—— M—— and the now famed Miss K—— F——. To which is prefixed a Dedication after the manner of Modern Dedications to the venerable Mrs —— of Covent Garden. Thrush 4to. 1s. (May 1760.)

See also "Letters of Horace Walpole" (Toynbee), ii. 213, 246, v. 394; "Letters of Lady Jane Coke," p. 14; "The Bedford Correspondence," ii. 114; "Memoirs of Charles Lee Lewis," iii. 71, iv. 195-6; "Records of My Life" (John Taylor), i. 362-6; "The Garrick Correspondence," ii. 335; "The Rosciad" (Charles Churchill) (Aldine edition), i. 31; "Memoirs of the Colman Family" (R. B. Peake), i. 264-5; "Sketches and Characters" (Philip Thicknesse), p. 140; "Theatrical Biography" (1772), ii. 29-31; "Life of Lord Hardwicke" (George Harris), iii. 159; "Life and Character of Philip, Earl of Hardwicke" (R. Cooksey), 102-3; "The Court of Cupid" (E. Thompson), p. 43; "New Foundling Hospital for Wit," v. 14; "Vis-a-Vis of Berkeley Square," p. 11-12; "The Dramatic Mirror" (T. Gilliland), ii. 956; "Thespian Dictionary," under "Ross"; "History of the Scottish Stage" (J. C. Dibdin), pp. 145-8, 151-3, 210-11; "The Inspector" (John Hill), ii. 300; "The Connoisseur," No. 46; *Gentlemen's Magazine* (1768), 450; (1790) ii. 865; *Town and Country Magazine*, i. 361, vi. 513, ix. 597, 599, x. 223, 455, xi. 457, xiii. 177, 569, xvi. 123, 233, xviii. 209; *Scots Magazine*, lii. pp. 465-6; "British Mezzotint Portraits" (J. Chaloner Smith), 675, 731, 884, 1022; "Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits" (Henry Bromley), p. 444; Mr C. Wentworth Dilke in *Notes and Queries*, 2 S., iv. 41-2; and also 6 S., ii. 486, and 7 S., xii. 307, 470; "Catalogue of Satirical Prints," iv. 595-6. Occasionally Fanny Murray is

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mentioned in contemporary newspapers, and the announcement of her death appears in many of them.

There is an excellent monograph of David Ross, written by the late Mr Joseph Knight, in the *Dic. Nat. Biog.*, and nearly all the numerous theatrical memoirs give some account of him. His career can also be traced month by month in the newspapers and magazines. In October 1772 he was appointed "by His Majesty" as Master of the Revels in Scotland with a salary of £100 a year. Dibdin's "History of the Scottish Stage" gives the most complete narrative of his theatrical adventures in Edinburgh.

By far the best description of Wilkes' "Essay on Woman" will be found in the late Henry Spencer Ashbee's "Index Librorum Prohibitorum," pp. 198-236. See also the same author's "Centuria Librorum Absconditorum," p. xiv.; "Journals of the House of Lords," xxx. pp. 415-17, 420-2, 426, 437, 444, 446, 458, 459; "The North Briton" (1772), iv. 120-8, 132; "Correspondence of John Wilkes" (J. Almon), i. 140-1, 153, 155, 156-62; ii. 8, 9, 10, 11, 49 71-2; "Memoirs of George the Third" (H. Walpole) (1894 ed.), i. 245-9; "Biographical Essays" (John Foster), ii. 275-6; "Life of Wilkes" (P. Fitzgerald), i. 197-205; *Notes and Queries*, 2 S., iv. 1-2, 41-2 (C. W. Dilke), 10 S., ix. 442.

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7. *Miss Kitty F——R's Miscellany*. To which is added a Dramatic Sermon. Printed for H. Ranger, near Temple Bar. 8vo., 1s. (May 1760.)
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(Most of these tracts are noticed at full length in the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*.)

During the years 1758-1760 many paragraphs relating to Kitty Fisher will be found in the newspapers, such as the *Public Advertiser*, the *Gazetteer*, the *London Chronicle*, and the *Whitehall Evening Post*. There are innumerable references also in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Universal Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, the *Town and Country Magazine*, the *Westminster Magazine*, and the *European Magazine*, which, when collated, help to throw some light upon her career. Occasionally she is mentioned in contemporary memoirs and biographies, but in this respect an exhaustive search has proved disappointing, and the only authorities of this class that I am able to cite are "Letters of Horace Walpole" (Toynbee), iv. 267, v. 34; "George Selwyn and His Contemporaries" (J. H. Jesse; Bickers) ii. 81; Castle Howard MS. in "Hist. MSS. Com.," 15 Rep. Appx., Pt. VI., p. 570; "Diary of Madame d'Arblay" (Dobson), i. 84; "Grenville Papers," i. 297, ii. 192; "Elizabeth Montagu" (E. J. Climensson), ii. 160; "Records of My Life" (John Taylor), i. 51; "Journal of Lady Mary Coke," i. 101; "Memoires of Casanova" (1871), vi. 34-5; "Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald," i. 300-1; "Life and Opinions of George Hanger," i. 136; "Life of John Henderson," pp. 5-6; "Courts of Europe" (Henry Swinburne), ii. 43; "Hist. MSS. Com.," 9th Rep. Appx., p. 402; "The New Foundling Hospital for Wit," i. 171; "The Vis-a-vis of Berkeley Square," pp. 10-11.

Captain Edward Thompson has a great deal to say about Kitty in his doggrel collection, "The Court of Cupid," i. 12-18, 34, 91, ii. 130, and much interesting information will be found in *Notes and Queries*, 1. S., viii. 440; 2 S., iii. 348; 3 S., viii. 81, 155, x. 375; 4 S., v. 319, 410; 10 S., ix. 50, 98, 197, 236, 337, 471. Local tradition in the parish of Benenden endorses the facts related by "G. W. J." and "W. W. S."

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in the 3rd series, but whether or nor the former has been influenced by the latter I am unable to decide.

There is also a scholarly paragraph about Kitty Fisher, written by Mr F. G. Stephens in the "Catalogue of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum." Div. 1. Satires, Vol. III., Pt. ii. p. 1244.

The marriage to John Norris, Junr., is recorded in the Register of Marriages at Trinity Church, Haddingdon, N.B., on the 25th of October 1766, and again in the Register of St George's, Hanover Square, on the 4th of December of the same year. John Norris made a declaration before the Surrogate at the "Vicar General's Office in the Province of Canterbury" on the 2nd of December 1766, when he applied for the Archbishop's Licence.

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From the year 1769 until the year 1802 the newspapers refer constantly to Nancy Parsons, and during the ribald days of the *Morning Post* and the *Morning Herald* especially (1776-1796), her name often appears in print. Among the



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periodical publications the inevitable *Town and Country Magazine* gives most information about her; and though its details are not always above suspicion its broad facts usually are near the truth. In spite of Sheridan's pleasantry in the first scene of "School for Scandal" it is evident that the "Tête-à-tête Histories" contained in this Magazine are for the most part wonderfully veracious. On the other hand the contemporary pamphlets, cited above, appear to be stupid "catch-pennies"—as George Selwyn described one of them—and most of their statements should be regarded with suspicion.

Although the references to Nancy Parsons, in contemporary memoirs, both before and after her marriage to Lord Maynard, are not as numerous as one would expect considering her celebrity, they probably exceed the references to Kitty Fisher. Among these may be mentioned Walpole's "Letters" (Toynbee), vi. 115-116, vii. 211, viii. 103, ix. 376, x. 367, 389, xiii. 399, 405-6; Walpole's "Memoirs of the Reign of George the Third," iii. 180; Jesse's "George Selwyn," iii. 72; "Hist. MSS. Com.," 15 Rep. Appx., Pt. vi. 230, 234, 248, 649, 650; "Letters of Mrs Delany," v. 237, 400; "The Grenville Papers," iii. ccxix-ccxxi., iv. 275, 276, 277, 298, 299, 348; "Journal of Lady Mary Coke," ii. 244, 245, iii. 445; "Courts of Europe" (Henry Swinburne), i. 13, 204, 205, 206, 237; "Narrative of Events in France" (Helen Williams), 135-136; Alfred Morrison MSS., i. 50, 62; "Autobiography of Augustus Henry, Duke of Grafton," 211; Hardwicke MSS., 35, 258, pp. 90, 91, 138 (a valuable document penned by one of Nancy's acquaintances); "The Jockey Club" (Charles Pigott), i. 9, 10, ii. 18; "The Female Jockey Club" (Charles Pigott), pp. 76, 77; *Town and Country Magazine*, i. 114, 181, iii. 179, 289, iv. 402, viii. 513, ix. 10, 570, 599, xi. 134, xiii. 625; "A Book for a Rainy Day" (J. T. Smith), p. 79; "Letters of Junius" (ed. J. Wade), i. 148, 152, 162, 166, ii. 172, 173, 185; "Life of Sir Richard Perrot"; Barlow's "English Peerage," i. 86-7, 222; *The Matrimonial Magazine* (1775), p. 235; *The Freeholder's Magazine*, i. 247; "The Torpedo," p. 15;

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"The Abbey of Kirkhampton," p. 119; "New Foundling Hospital for Wit," iv. 113-114, 180, v. 254; *Rambler's Magazine*, ii. 238, iii. 120, 205, 207, 279, 280. Some of these latter documents do not inspire confidence, but often enough the meanest pamphlet is valuable in showing the trend of contemporary thought, while heterogenous facts when pieced together sometimes form a consistent whole.

The several caricatures of Nancy Parsons are fully described in the "Catalogue of Satirical Prints in the British Museum," Vol. IV., pp. 502, 530-532, 564-565, 574-575, 581-582. A full history of the separation and divorce of the Duke and Duchess of Grafton, to which reference is made so often in Jesse's "George Selwyn and his Contemporaries," and Walpole's "Letters," will be found in "Trials for Adultery" (S. Bladon), 1780, Vol. IV.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF KITTY KENNEDY

*Public Advertiser*, May 28, June 27, 1770; Feb. 5 and 19, 1772. *Middlesex Journal*, Feb. 6, 1772; Aug. 24-26; Oct. 23-26, 1773. *London Evening Post*, Sept. 2-4, 1773. *Craftsman*, Sept. 4, 1773.

*Town and Country Magazine*, ii. 289-92, iii. 346, v. 447, viii. 180, 237; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1773), p. 413; *Westminster Magazine* (1773), p. 468; *Freeholder's Magazine*, ii. 200; *Universal Magazine* (1770), i. 136-9; *The Whisperer*, April 28, 1770.

See also "George Selwyn and his Contemporaries" (J. H. Jesse; Bickers), iii. 17, iv. 165; "Hist. MSS. Com.," 15 Rep. Appx., Pt. vi. 533; "Letters of Mrs Delany," iv. 463; "Mems. of George the Third" (Horace Walpole), iv. 110; "The Letters of Junius" (Wade), i. 302; "The Letters of Junius" (Woodfall) (1814), ii. 153; "Memoirs, Anecdotes, Facts, and Opinions" (Lætitia Hawkins), ii. 4; "Catalogue of

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Engraved British Portraits" (H. Bromley), 439; Registers of the Parish Church of St Marlebone; "New Foundling Hospital for Wit," v. 255; "Nocturnal Revels, or the History of King's Place," ii. 233\* (a curious work, which throws much light upon the seamy side of the period). "Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies for 1773," 68, 93; "British Mezzotint Portraits" (J. C. Smith), p. 1558; "Life of Reynolds" (C. R. Leslie and Tom Taylor), i. 394-8 (unreliable). "Cat. of Satirical Prints in the British Museum," iv. 630-1, 687-8; "Sir Joshua Reynolds" (W. Armstrong), 90-1; *Notes and Queries*, 10 S., vii. 344-5, ix. 97.

A full account of the proceedings against Patrick and Mathew Kennedy will be found in the newspapers from Dec. 1769-April 1771. See also "Memoirs of John Horne Tooke" (A. Stephens), i. 185-8; *Annual Register* (1770), 103, 106, 118, 161, and the magazines for the period.

Robert Stratford Byram (*sic*) applied for a special licence to marry Catharine Kennedy at the Vicar-General's office on 16th August 1773. The bride is said to have been twenty-two years old.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF GRACE DALRYMPLE ELIOT

*Journal | of my Life during | The French Revolution. | By  
Grace Dalrymple Elliott | London: | Richard Bentley  
| 1859.*

The MS. of this book was sold to the publishers by Mrs Eliot's granddaughter, Georgina Augusta Frederica Bentinck—the only child of Lady Charles Bentinck, *née* Georgina Augusta Frederica Eliot—who is supposed to have received it from her mother. According to the register of St Marylebone Church, Georgina Eliot (afterwards Seymour) was the offspring of Dally the Tall by the Prince of Wales, and she was married at Chester in 1808 to Lord Charles William Bentinck, a son of the 3rd Duke of Portland. The

## Ladies Fair and Frail

“Journal” has been criticised, more or less adversely, in the following works :—“Le Couvent des Carmes” (Alex. Sorel), pp. 267-9; “Historie de Mme. du Barry” (Charles Vatel), iii. 206-7; “Le Duc de Lauzun et la Cour de Marie Antoinette” (Gaston Maugras), pp. 380-1, 383, 392, 468-73; “Englishmen in the French Revolution” (J. G. Alger), pp. 30, 146-7, 351; “Dictionary of National Biography” (J. G. Alger), xvii. 268-9. A new edition of this interesting book, edited, alas, in a very uncritical manner, has been published recently by Messrs Sisley & Co.

In the *Archives Nationales* at Paris, there are three documents relating to Veuve Georgina Dalriddle Elliot, viz., (1) deed of residence at Paris in the Rue de Miroménil, (2) deed of residence in a country house at Meudon, (3) Autograph letter to the Comité de Surveillance, dated 10 Nivose I.

Contemporary newspapers are full of allusions to Mrs Eliot, and make it possible to follow her career almost month by month for many years. The first paragraph about her, as far as the present writer has been able to ascertain, occurs in June 1774, and the last in March 1798. No other frail lady, save Mrs Mahon, “the Bird of Paradise,” was mentioned so often by the journalist.

A short biography appears in the following periodicals :—*The Town and Country Magazine*, vi. 401-3, *The Matrimonial Magazine* (1775), pp. 65-7. *The Rambler's Magazine*, ii. 301-4, iii. 255-8, 294-6. Some of the information given in these monographs seems to be correct, and although evidently embellished, they show what her contemporaries thought of her. Other references will be found in *The Town and Country Magazine*, ix. 627, x. 346, xiv. 290, 293; xv. 147, and *The Rambler's Magazine*, i. 17, 39, 48, 80, 120, 218-19, 319, 359, 398, 439, 479; ii. 78, 158, 199, 280, 307, 399, 507, iii. 262, 480. In the latter magazine the paragraphs for the most part are copied from the *Morning Post* and *Morning Herald*.

There are allusions also in the following contemporary

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writings:—"Letters of Walpole" (Toynbee), ix. 6, 11-12, xiv. 420; "Hist. MSS. Com." (Selwyn's Letters), 15 Rep. Appx., Pt. VI. 498, 509; "Journal of Thomas Raikes," iii. 83; "Memoirs of Mary Robinson (Molloy), pp. x. 70; "Diaries and Correspondence of Lord Malmesbury," iii. 304, 307, 320, 348, 349; "Courts of Europe" (Henry Swinburn), ii. 132, 158; "Life of Mrs Gooch," ii. 93; "The Torpedo," a poem, p. 17. An admirable biography of Grace Dalrymple Elliott (*sic*) written by Mr J. G. Alger, appears in the "Dictionary of National Biography."

A full account of the Eliot Divorce Case will be found in the "Journal of the House of Lords," xxxiv. 566, 570, 594, 595, 596, 601, 604, 605.

See also "The Royal Academy of Arts—A Complete Dictionary of Contributors from 1769-1904," p. 192; "British Mezzotint Portraits" (J. C. Smith), p. 162; *Notes and Queries*, 1 S., ix. 589; 3 S., x. 161-2; "Illustrations of Literature" (J. B. Nichols), viii. 240; *Scots Magazine*, March 30, 1765, and March 8, 1774; "Gainsborough" (Sir W. Armstrong), 167, 264; "The Grenville Correspondence," iii. xxxiv. n.; Faculty List in the Advocates Library, Edinburgh; History of Writers to the Signet; Church Registers of the Parishes of Marylebone and Paddington; "Annals of the Parish of Colinton" (Thomas Murray), p. 85; "Some Old Families" (H. B. M'Call); "History of the Fife Pitcairns" (Constance Pitcairn), pp. 434-7, 463, 465, 470.

An obituary notice of Sir John Eliot appeared in *The World* newspaper, January 30, 1787. Cf. Wm. Munk's "Roll of the College of Physicians," ii. 200-1, and Eliot's Will at Somerset House.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF GERTRUDE MAHON

BETWEEN the years 1776-1786, and intermittently until the year 1793, the life of the Bird of Paradise is revealed in the columns of the daily press. In the case of a lady in a more exalted position there might be good reason to regard these newspaper paragraphs with considerable scepticism, but it must be remembered that the circulation of the *Morning Post*, the *Morning Herald*, and the *World* depended upon the accuracy of their "scandal," and no doubt they were well-informed in those subjects of which they made a speciality. Each of these journals was able to speak with authority upon all matter relating to the courtesan, and in many cases it is not difficult to corroborate their statements.

A short biography of Mrs Mahon appeared in the *Town and Country Magazine*, xiii. 178; the *Rambler's Magazine*, ii. 335-7; and the *European Magazine*, i. 404-6. Although these monographs were written at different dates they endorse each others details without seeming to copy slavishly, and much of their information is substantiated elsewhere. Thus, the elopement described in the *European Magazine*, is mentioned with full particulars by the more sober *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxix. 557; and the "Army List" shows that John Turner was a captain in the Foot Guards in the year 1777.

Much light is thrown upon Mrs Mahon's career by the Will of James Tilson (Public Record Office, Dublin), the Will of Elizabeth Anne Tilson (Public Record Office, Dublin), Will of Gertrude, Countess Dowager of Kerry (Somerset House, P.C.C. 119 Collier), and the Declaration made before the Bishop of London's Surrogate on the 13th of December 1770 (Doctor's Commons).

Other references will be found in the *Town and Country Magazine*, iii. 346, vii. 616, xii. 346, xiv. 290, 293, 346, xv. 10, xvi. 122, xx. 212; the *Rambler's Magazine*, i. 17, 18, 19, 48, 68, 106, 118, 120, 158, 218, 238, 319, 358, 478,

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ii. 118, 158, 238, 239, 240, 278, 279, 285, 358, 359, 399, 400, 439, 478, 507, iii. 38, 160, 261-2, 279, 299, 320, 400; the *Bon Ton Magazine*, i. 358, 359, ii. 282; the *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxii. 191, xxxiv. 303, xlii. 46; the *Covent Garden Magazine*, ii. 318, the *European Magazine*, i. 327.

See also "Reminiscences of Henry Angelo" (Kegan, Paul) ii. 216; "Letters of Mrs Delany," ii. 570; "Early Diary of Frances Burney," i. 25; "Caricature History of the Georges" (Thomas Wright), pp. 256-7; "Some Account of the English Stage" (J. Geneste), vi. 190, 195; "Registers of St George, Hanover Square" (Harleian Society), i. 203; *Burke's Peerage*; "History of Cheshire" (George Ormerod), ii. 678; "Beauties of England and Wales" (J. Britton and E. W. Bradley), ii. 240; "The Piccadilly Ambulator, or Old Q." (J. P. Hurstone), ii. 59; "Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies" for 1779 p. 21; "Life of Dick En—l—d of Turf Memory," pp. 6, 7; "Life of Mrs Gooch," ii. 136; "Bagnigge Wells," pp. 14-15; "Nocturnal Revels, or the History of King's Place," ii. 211,\* 235, 262.





## APPENDICES



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### MR C. W. DILKE AND "AN ESSAY ON WOMAN"

IN his well-known article<sup>1</sup> upon the "Essay on Woman," the late Mr C. W. Dilke, in order to show that Wilkes was not the author of the poem, has founded one of his arguments upon the assumption that Fanny Murray "must have been in her glory from before or about 1735 to 1745." None of his facts, however, are conclusive, as will be gathered from his statement that "the *last* mention of her" that he was able to find occurs in one of Horace Walpole's letters in 1746. Instead of this being the last, it is one of the *first* references to her life in London, and many others could be cited to prove the continuance of her notoriety until the year 1758, when the first volume of the "Memoirs of the celebrated Fanny Murray" was published. Mr Dilke also quoted the anecdote, which relates that Lord Hardwicke saw the naked portraits of Fanny Murray and Kitty Fisher at the house of Mr Montagu, as a proof that the former lady was a celebrity as early as 1740-1. Perhaps the tale is true, although it should be remembered that George Harris repeats it in his "Life of Lord Hardwicke," on the authority of Richard Cooksey, whom he acknowledges to be the author of several calumnies against the great chancellor. However, if there was a naked picture of Kitty Fisher in 1741 it must have represented a child of three or four years old, which entirely robs the story of all its point. Moreover, according to the chronology that I have adopted, and which I believe to be

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 2 S., iv. 41-2.

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correct, Fanny Murray herself can have been only twelve (or at most fourteen) at this same period. Obviously, if Cooksey's anecdote is authentic, Lord Hardwicke cannot have seen the nude portraits until Kitty Fisher became famous, or not until the year 1756 at the soonest. The only proof advanced by Mr Dilke in favour of the earlier period is based on the presumption that the Chancellor, who purchased the estate of Mistley in 1740, would probably have become acquainted with his neighbour Montagu within the space of twelve months; but, however plausible this conjecture may appear, it must give way before the stern authority of dates.

## APPENDIX B

### RESIDENCES OF KITTY FISHER

IN the "Life of Reynolds" by Leslie and Taylor we are told that Kitty Fisher "lodged opposite to him (*i.e.* Sir Joshua) near Cranbourne Alley," and the statement has been repeated a hundred times. Yet there is no evidence that she ever lived in such a place. Apparently, Mr Tom Taylor has misinterpreted a newspaper cutting pasted inside the fly-leaf of the copy of "Kitty's Stream" in the British Museum. It is not Kitty Fisher who is said to have "lodged opposite" the great artist near Cranbourne Alley, but Elizabeth Inchbald, in the year 1792, as a reference to the "Memoirs of Inchbald," by James Bowden, i. 300-1, will prove. Since the suggestion may appear to reflect unfairly upon the moral character of Reynolds, it is to be hoped that modern art critics will cease to repeat Tom Taylor's blunder.

According to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxxvi. p. 228, Kitty resided at one time in Carrington Street, Mayfair, and there seems no reason to doubt the statement in vol. xiii. p. 66, *Town and Country Magazine*, an unusually well-informed authority in such matters, that she lived also in New Norfolk

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Street, near the Tyburn Turnpike. Sir Joshua's pocket-book states that in September 1766, just before her marriage, she was lodging in Hambleton Street. In his declaration before the Archbishop's Surrogate, on the 2nd of December 1766, John Norris stated that his bride had been living for the previous four weeks in the parish of St George, Hanover Square.

## APPENDIX C

### KITTY FISHER'S HUSBAND

JOHN NORRIS, junior, the son of John Norris and Judith, daughter of Robert Western, was born on the 3rd of April, 1740, twelve years after the marriage of his parents. Thus, he was twenty-six when he married Kitty Fisher. Chosen M.P. for Rye in March 1762, he continued to represent the borough for a period of twelve years. At the General Election of 1774 he retired, having fallen into disgrace. Soon after the death of Kitty, which, as it has been shown, plunged him into the deepest sorrow, he had entered into a liaison with Mrs Catherine Knight, *née* Lynch, a daughter of Mrs Elizabeth Carter's friend, Dr Lynch, the Dean of Canterbury. The report of the proceedings at Doctor's Commons, where the injured husband applied for a divorce, is given in "Trials for Adultery" (S. Bladon), Vol. III. The petition was successful and a divorce by Act of Parliament followed. On the 12th of March 1771, John Norris married Mrs Knight, but the union was an unhappy one, as the pair were unsuited, and he is believed to have formed the connection in a fit of recklessness as a solace for his grief on account of the death of his first wife. The second Mrs Norris died at Chatou near Paris in November or December 1781 at the age of forty. In the previous year her husband, who had squandered his fortune since he had lost Kitty, obtained an Act of Parliament

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to sell the family estate of Hemsted, which was purchased by Thomas Hallet Hodges. John Norris, whose death took place at East Malling in his seventy-second year, was buried at Benenden Church on the 18th of April 1811 in the same grave as his first wife. The tradition of Kitty Fisher's beauty and kindness of heart is still preserved in the parish.

"History of Kent." Edward Hasted, III. 83.†

"The Parish of Benenden." Edward Haslewood, 181-8.

Information received from the Rev. Arnold Mayhew, The Hut, Benenden.

### APPENDIX D

#### POLLY AND KITTY KENNEDY

WITH one exception, all the contemporary accounts of the proceedings against the two brothers refer to their sister merely as Miss Kennedy. *The Freeholder's Magazine* alone mentions her name, speaking of her as "Miss Kitty." This assertion is corroborated by the register of the parish church of St Marylebone, which chronicles the marriage, on the 16th of August 1773, of Robert Stratford Byram and Catharine Kennedy. In the bridegroom's signature, however, the name appears as Byron, and as this spelling is adopted by the newspapers and magazines, it is presumably the correct manner.<sup>1</sup> In the press notices of the wedding he is said to have been a brother of Lord Byron, but I have been unable to verify this statement or to discover any information about him. There is no doubt that the bride was "the celebrated Miss Kennedy of Newman Street," as will be proved by reference to the *Gents. Mag.*, xliii. p. 413; *Town and Country Magazine*, v. p. 477; *Westminster Magazine* (1773), p. 468; and the *Middlesex Journal*, Aug. 24-26, 1773. Moreover,

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, his name is spelt Byram in the Declaration that he signed at the Vicar-General's Office on the 16th of August 1773, when he applied for a special licence.

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the burial of Catherine Byram (*sic*) is entered in the register of St Marylebone on the 18th of November 1781, which, according to W. Fawkener's letter to Lord Carlisle, was the month in which St John's Miss Kennedy died. See also Bromley's Catalogue, p. 439, which would seem to confirm the date of her death.

The connection between Catharine or Catherine Kennedy of Newman Street, who married Robert Stratford Byron or Byram, and Kitty Kennedy, the mistress of Lord Robert Spencer and John St John, the lady who saved the lives of her brothers, appears to be proved conclusively by a paragraph in the *Public Advertiser*, on Wednesday, the 19th of February 1772, which seems to supply the missing link: "On Monday (Feb. 17) died in Newman Street, near Oxford Street, Mr Kennedy, father of the two unfortunate Kennedys convicted of murder, who lately made so much noise in the world." The paragraph concludes with the statement that he was formerly an auctioneer, which the *Freeholder's Magazine* tells us was the trade of Kitty's father. His burial is also recorded in the register of Marylebone church. Further than this, two pages are devoted to the celebrated courtesan in that curious work, "Nocturnal Revels or the History of King's Place," ii. 233-4,\* where reference is made to her two brothers, and where she is spoken of as Kitty Kennedy. A careful investigation of all these documents must lead every one to the conclusion that Messrs Leslie and Taylor, in their "Life of Reynolds," are wrong in assuming that the name of their heroine was Polly.

Miss Polly Kennedy "of Great Russell Street" was another person altogether. There is a full account of her in "Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies" for the year 1773, pp. 68-71, which makes it evident that she was no relation to the mistress of John St John. Again, in the *Town and Country Magazine*, viii. 589, it is stated emphatically that "this is not the celebrated lady whose brothers were tried for murder." Further proof will be found in Capt. Edward Thompson's "Court of Cupid," pp. 24-25.

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Thus, it will be seen, the identity of Reynolds' portrait of the lady in the Eastern dress, who holds a handkerchief in her right hand, still remains a matter of doubt. The fine mezzotint by Thomas Watson has made it familiar to everyone. According to Bromley's Catalogue, p. 439, the picture represents "Polly (?) Jones, alias Kennedy, ob. 1781," and it appears from Reynolds' pocket-book that a Miss Kennedy sat for the artist during the year that the portrait was painted. It was a commission from Sir Charles Bunbury (see "Life of Reynolds," Leslie & Taylor, i. 397-8), and there seems little doubt that it represents one of the two ladies in question. There appears to be no evidence that Kitty ever was a friend of Bunbury, but it does not follow on that account that it is not her portrait. The conclusions of J. Chaloner Smith in "British Mezzotint Portraits," pp. 565, 568, 1558, are erroneous, cf. *Notes and Queries*, 10 S., vii. 344, ix. 97.

## APPENDIX E

### GRACE DALRYMPLE ELIOT OR ELLIOTT

IN the last Will and Testament of Sir John Eliot at Somerset House the name appears as "Eliot" throughout the document. The same spelling is used in the epitaph on the doctor's monument in Hatfield Church, and he signed his name in a similar manner in the St Pancras register on the day of his marriage. It is impossible for evidence to be more conclusive, and it would be well if the "Dictionary of National Biography," which contains a most admirable monograph of Mrs Eliot written by Mr J. G. Alger, would make the necessary correction. Apparently, Grace herself was in the habit of writing the name as "Elliott." This spelling appears in the register of her daughter's baptism at St Marylebone Church as well as in her "Journal" of the French Revolution.



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