

ROMANCES
OF THE PEERAGE
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THORNTON HALL, F.S.A.

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IRENE GREENE OWEN ANDREWS

436

Mad

To Ossra

With Paddy's love

Broncroft Castle

Crown Arms

S'rops. Live

ROMANCES
OF THE
PEERAGE

To
CHARLES RIDGE SIMPSON ESQRE
With the Author's Sincere Regards



BARBARA VILLIERS
COUNTESS OF CASTLEMAINE
AND
DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND

ROMANCES OF THE PEERAGE

BY
THORNTON HALL, F.S.A.

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"Love Affairs of the Courts of Europe" etc., etc.

With 16 Illustrations

LONDON: HOLDEN & HARDINGHAM
ADELPHI - - - - 1914

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CHAPTER I

A BEAUTIFUL TERMAGANT

IN the galaxy of fair women who in turn enslaved the Merry Monarch's heart, Barbara Villiers shines splendid and supreme. Others had their day of triumph, when for a time her supremacy seemed in danger; but, from Hortense Mancini, the most radiantly beautiful of Mazarin's quintette of lovely nieces, to bewitching Nell Gwynne, the "orange wench" of Drury Lane, Barbara Villiers saw all her rivals relinquish their sceptres, while she, who was the first to receive Charles's caresses on the day of his restoration, remained to his last conscious hour his uncrowned Queen.

One looks in vain for the secret of her queendom over this most fickle of Royal lovers. She was beautiful, it is true, with a bold, dark beauty and the

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voluptuous physique before which Charles was ever weak; but in loveliness of face and figure she was eclipsed by most of her rivals, notably by La Belle Stuart and Nell Gwynne. And against her physical charms were arrayed "the temper of a fiend and the manners of a fish-wife," which might well have given short shrift to a woman more lovely and less clever.

That there was a very vicious strain in Barbara Villiers' blood her stoutest champion could no more deny than he could put a finger on the source from which she derived it. Her father was William, second Viscount Grandison, who, when she was an infant, fell fighting valiantly for his King at Edgehill, and to whose virtues Clarendon paid such a glowing tribute; and if she was great-niece of that splendid profligate, the first Duke of Buckingham, all her direct Villiers ancestors had been men of clean lives and good repute from the days when Sir Richard carried his sword with the first Edward into the Holy Land.

Cradled towards the end of the year 1640, Barbara was brought up in the country under the, perhaps careless, eye of her mother, who had found a second husband in Charles, Earl of Anglesey; and at sixteen brought her ripening charms of blue eyes, luxuriant black hair, and beautiful, though still immature, figure to London, where she seems to have lost no time in exhibiting the character which in some mysterious

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way must have been developing in the seeming innocence of rustic life. Before she had been many months in London the young beauty, still but a school-girl, was shocking her relatives by an intrigue with that handsome fop, the second Earl of Chesterfield, with whom she was daily making assignations at coffee-houses or mercers' shops in the City.

But so inconstant was she even at this early age that, while openly in love with the rakish Earl, who had already worn widower's weeds, to the amazement of everybody she actually gave her hand, in spite of the strong opposition of her family, to Roger Palmer, a law student of comparatively obscure family, without in any degree interrupting her relations with the nobleman whom Swift described as "the greatest knave in England."

Thus before she had seen her nineteenth birthday we find Barbara, daughter of the proud house of Villiers, wearing a wedding-ring as wife of a poor student of the law, while engaged in an open liaison with a notorious rake, which was only concluded when the Earl, having killed his man in a duel, was compelled to take leave of both her and his country.

For a time she seems to have led an uneventful and respectable life with her weak-kneed husband, who was the veriest slave to his beautiful wife, until a much more formidable rival than the runaway Earl came

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to disturb the domestic dovecot, in the form of the restored Stuart King, Charles II. When and where Barbara Palmer first met the man in whose life she was to play such a conspicuous part is not known. It may have been during his days of exile in Holland, where she had spent some time with her husband. We do know, however, that Charles, on the first proud day of his return to the throne of his fathers, lost not a moment in flying to her arms, with the thunders of acclaim still in his ears. He valued more a smile of welcome from Roger Palmer's wife than all the frenzied plaudits of his subjects and the fulsome oratory of the Speaker of the Commons.

On the days that followed, Pepys, who was next-door neighbour to the Palmers in King-street, Westminster, throws significant light when he tells us of the "great doings of music he heard; the King and Dukes at Mme. Palmer's, a pretty woman they have a fancy to." And through all this time Roger Palmer, now blossomed into a Member of Parliament for Windsor, looked on with weak smiles while his wife was wooed by a King and received the homage and questionable flatteries of his merry courtiers.

With what fatal swiftmess this syren enveloped her Royal lover in the toils of her beauty we know. Before he had been many months on his throne she had persuaded him to give her a coronet by ennobling her

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nondescript husband; and as Baroness of Limerick and Countess of Castlemaine she plumed her feathers for further conquest. When Charles led Catherine of Braganza to the altar it seemed for a time that her day of triumph was over; but her ladyship knew better. She made this seeming calamity a stepping-stone to a more assured position. Nothing would satisfy her but that she should be appointed Lady of the Bedchamber to the new Queen, and thus be in a position to carry her "warfare" into the enemy's camp.

Catherine was furious at the suggestion of such an indignity. She wept and pleaded and stormed; she vowed she would never admit "that woman" into her presence, and enlisted Clarendon himself as champion of her outraged honour. But Charles was inexorable alike to his wife's tears and his Chancellor's dignified protests. To the latter he declared, "Nobody shall presume to meddle in the affairs of the Countess of Castlemaine. Whoever dares to do so will have cause to repent it to the last moment of his life." And within a few days the brazen Countess was presented by the King at the Drawing Room of his Queen, who, at sight of her, "fainted, breaking a blood-vessel."

Assured beforehand of this new victory the Countess had picked a quarrel with that amiable nonentity her husband, and, in well-affected rage, had left him for

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ever, taking with her " the plate, jewels and other best things, every dish and cloth and servant; except the porter "; and was thus free to climb untrammelled the dizzy ladder of ambition on which she had now secured so firm a footing. As for the abandoned Earl, he retired for a time to hide his shame and grief in a French monastery.

Thus installed in a position of honour and intimacy in the King's palace, my Lady Castlemaine had abundant opportunities of enmeshing the King still more in her toils; and in this she succeeded until he became the veriest slave to her every caprice. And no lover, Royal or plebeian, ever had such an exacting, autocratic mistress. She lashed him mercilessly with her tongue; she would fly into rages before which he cowered; she revelled in making him an object of ridicule to his courtiers; but, so profound was his infatuation for his beautiful Xantippe, that the worse she treated him the more strongly his fetters were forged.

Much as she loved power and place, she prized money more; and money she was determined to have, to squander on pleasure or to feed the greed of her many other lovers. The Customs were made to replenish her purse at the rate of £10,000 a year; from the tax on beer she drew a similar revenue, and the Post Office was made to contribute £5,000 annually;

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while from the Irish Treasury she drew copious streams of gold. She trafficked openly in offices and dignities, and was as ready to pocket a few hundreds for a captaincy in the Army as to receive thousands of pounds for a seat on the Judicial Bench or the lawn sleeves of a Bishop. And, not content with bleeding the country to the extent of at least £100,000 a year, it is said that whenever she went shopping she charged the Privy Purse with the cost of her purchases.

From Charles himself she was constantly extorting or cajoling large sums or costly presents. Pepys, for instance, tells us that "my Lady Castlemaine hath all the King's Christmas presents, made him by the Peers, given to her"; and that "at the great ball she was much richer in jewels than the Queen and Duchess (of York) put together." One day, at a play, her jewels were valued at £40,000, an enormous sum in those days. And at one time, we learn, she had stripped her Royal lover of everything, "so that he himself lacked linen and the very servants at Whitehall had not bread to eat."

And fast as the ill-gotten gold poured into her coffers it flowed out in channels of reckless extravagance. Enormous sums, we know, found their way into other pockets over the card-table; she rarely staked less than £1,500 on a cast; and at a single sitting she once lost £25,000. Large sums were also

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squandered on her favourites, who succeeded one another in bewildering succession; in fact, in the number and variety of her lovers this Queen of a King's harem was no mean rival to Catherine the Great, the most notorious libertine in history.

Now it is Henry Jermyn, the biggest fop and rake of the day, with his large head, small legs, and absurd affectations, with whom she dallies; and now it is Jacob Hall, the rope-dancer, "a compound of Hercules and Adonis," on whom she bestows a large pension drawn from the National Defence Fund. Young John Churchill, the handsomest page at Charles' Court, was drawn into her web; and when he was compelled to make his escape through her boudoir window just as the King opened the door, and was sent packing off to the wars to cool his ardour, my lady, as she kissed him good-bye, slipped £5,000 into the hand of her "dear boy."

To Churchill succeeded that prince of profligates and dandies, the second Duke of Buckingham, who for a time shared her smiles with King Charles; then it was Wycherley who caught her volatile fancy with his handsome face and clever tongue; only to give place in turn to some other favourite, such as the actor Hart, Shakespeare's grand-nephew, of whom Pepys tells us, "My Lady Castlemaine is mightily in love with Hart; and he is much with her in private, and she

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goes to him, and do give him many presents; and that the thing is most certain, and by this means she is even with the King's love to Mrs. Davis."

Thus squandering her gold in every form of dissipation and wild extravagance, and lavishing her smiles on a panorama of lovers from Dukes to mountebanks and actors, my lady had for many years a right royal time as *maitresse en titre* to her indulgent Royal lover, whose loyalty was unshaken alike by her tempers and her infidelities.

That there were many scenes between the lovers was inevitable; but from all my lady emerged triumphant, thanks to her scathing tongue and her domineering temper. On one occasion, after withering Charles with the sirocco of her abuse, she packed up her trunks and left the palace for Richmond, swearing she would never return. Within a couple of days Charles was at Richmond imploring his Countess on his knees to forgive and forget; and the following day she was installed at Whitehall more secure in favour than ever. And this is but one of many similar occasions on which she brought her Royal lover to his knees.

For a time, it is true, her star was paled by rival luminaries which floated into the Court firmament; but her eclipse was quickly over, and she emerged from it more splendid than before. And it was only when

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Louise de Querouaille, that Queen of *intrigantes*, got Charles within her toils that her supremacy was really in danger. By this time she had blossomed into the Countess of Southampton and Duchess of Cleveland, and had been dowered with lands and revenues more than adequate, apart from her plunder, to keep up such high dignities; and so successfully did she continue to play her cards to the end that, on that memorable Sunday night, a few days before Charles's death, she was, it is said, the most brilliant figure at his final festival of gambling and song in the palace of Whitehall.

The rest of her strange story must be told in few words. With her Royal lover's death the Duchess's sun of splendour had set; but her passions lost none of their fires. She lived through James II.'s reign in luxury and extravagance, and kept up her intrigues. At sixty-six she was led to the altar by "Handsome Fielding," an insufferable fop and rake whom Swift pilloried as "one of the meanest figures in history"—a man, moreover, young enough to be her son; and with him she led a terrible life. He plundered her, beat her, and when she could not, or would not, give him all the money he demanded, he would "draw his sword and threaten to kill her, swearing it was no more sin to kill her than a dog."

When at last this horrible nightmare ended in a

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divorce, after her husband's conviction on a charge of bigamy, the Duchess retired to her Chiswick house to spend her last years in peace and retirement; and there, lonely and unfriended, she closed her days miserably one October day in 1709, leaving practically nothing behind her of her ill-gotten gold, but leaving the memory of life's best gifts squandered in a shameless life. To Charles she had borne three daughters and four sons, three of whom lived to wear ducal coronets.

CHAPTER II

FIGHTING FITZGERALD

A MAN in whose veins mingled the turbulent blood of the Geraldines and the wild, eccentric strain of the Herveys (of whom Lady Mary Wortley Montagu said, "God made men, women, and the Herveys") could scarcely be expected to play a normal or prosaic part on the stage of life; and certainly George Robert Fitzgerald proved a worthy scion of the houses of Leinster and Bristol.

His father, George Fitzgerald, was a dissolute Irish squire, who lived on the Mayo lands which his forefathers had held since Cromwell's day, and squandered his patrimony of £3,000 a year in ways which shocked his more sober-going neighbours. His mother, the Lady Mary, daughter of the Earl of Bristol, who had left the Royal Court where she was maid-of-honour to the Princess Amelia, to wear the orange-blossom for the Irish squire, had much of the beauty and character of the Hervey women, and more than her share of their eccentricities.

It was an ill-assorted, impossible union, which could

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only end in disaster; and before Lady Mary had been many years a wife she left her profligate husband, taking with her their elder son, George, and leaving behind a *ménage* consisting of the squire, a Miss Norris, who had taken her place in her husband's volatile affections, and a younger son, Charles Lionel.

The elder boy, George, after a few years at Eton, where he was the ringleader in every escapade, passed into the Army, where, before many months had passed, he began the career of turbulence and lawlessness which won for him the designation of "Fighting Fitzgerald." His first adventure was characteristic of the youth. One day, tempted by the red lips of a pretty milliner's assistant, he vaulted over the counter to snatch a kiss from them, and, a few hours later, found himself challenged to a duel by a neighbouring shopkeeper, the girl's lover. The duellists repaired to an obscure public-house, and locked themselves in a room for a fight to the death; and death would probably have been the issue had the duel not been interrupted before the fight had well begun.

Our hero was naturally disgusted at such a tame finish to his first *affaire*; but he had not long to wait for a second and more serious occasion to prove his mettle. One of his fellow-subalterns, whom he had driven to desperation by his bullying and teasing,

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summoned up courage to challenge the tyrant. A meeting took place at five o'clock in the morning, and at the second exchange of shots, Fitzgerald received the ball in his forehead, and was only saved from an early grave by the operation of trepanning. It is said that his father was so disgusted at this happy issue for his son that, when a relative ventured to congratulate him, he made an attempt, which narrowly escaped success, to run the sympathiser through the body with his sword.

But, in spite of his braggadocio, our hero seems to have been a bit of a coward, as was proved on one occasion when he repeatedly interrupted the conversation of a Mr. Dillon. Mr. Dillon bore the boy's rudeness with exemplary patience for a time; then, producing his watch, he said quietly, "I lay down my watch on the table, and if you attempt to say a word for one hour I will make it a personal matter with you. You understand me, young sir?" The "young sir" did understand, and for sixty minutes he never once opened his mouth.

While still in his teens, Fitzgerald carried his prowess and his indiscretions to Dublin, where he proved as adventurous in the lists of love as on the duelling-ground. He succumbed to the charms of a pretty heiress, a Miss Conolly; and when her family ventured to oppose the union, he promptly ran away

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with her, made her his wife, and escaped for his honeymoon to France. Here the "fine, fighting, frolicsome" Irishman cut for a time a conspicuous figure at the Court of Louis XVI., until he was kicked out of it as the result of shady conduct at the gaming-table.

A few days later, however, the irrepressible youth turned up at the Royal Stag Hunt at Fontainebleau, and proved his daring by leaping after the stag over a wall into the Seine, and bringing it to bay on the opposite bank. Nor was he long before his lust for duelling asserted itself. He found a suitable victim in a Major Baggs, whom he disabled at the first shot. Not content, however, with having put his man *hors de combat*, Fitzgerald horrified his seconds and on-lookers by threateningly walking up to the fallen Major. "Sir, I am wounded," faintly exclaimed Baggs. "But you are not dead," retorted Fitzgerald, as he put another bullet into his helpless adversary.

After such an exhibition of cowardice and treachery, Fitzgerald was glad to escape to London, where his dissolute life, his reckless gambling, and his insufferable "swagger" won for him an unenviable notoriety; and where he quickly found an opportunity of practising once more his questionable art of the duello. When a down-at-heels *habitué* of the turf known as "Daisy Walker" refused to pay him £2,500, which he cer-

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tainly did not owe, Fitzgerald promptly sent his second, and a duel was arranged. At the first exchange of shots Walker was wounded; the Irishman, before firing, offering to wager a thousand guineas that he could kill his man. Luckily for him the bet was not taken; for although seriously hurt, Walker survived many a year.

In spite of his passion for fighting, Fitzgerald seems to have been anything but bloodthirsty in appearance. He is described, at this time, as "a polished and elegant gentleman; his person was very slight and juvenile, and his countenance extremely mild and insinuating—in marked contrast to the savage treachery of his actions." That he was dandy as well as swash-buckler, we know; for when his house in County Mayo was looted by a Castlebar mob, among the personal spoil were "a set of diamond vest-buttons, a diamond loop and button for a hat, and a hat-band ornamented with five or six rows of pearls."

Fitzgerald seems at last to have had a surfeit of the duello; for in 1778 we find him fired by a new ambition—none other than to win a seat in Parliament; and into this ambition he threw himself enthusiastically. His candidature opened magnificently, dramatically. "A string of cars from the city of Dublin, of an amazing length, preceded the company several days, loaded with the choicest articles the metropolis could furnish

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necessary for the occasion. To them succeeded, in proper order, cooks and confectioners of different nations, sexes and colours; sempstresses, tailors, mantua-makers, milliners, perfumers, hairdressers, musicians, fireworkers, players, shoeblacks, and—five times the number of beggars.”

For three riotous days Castlebar kept high holiday, deluged with seas of liquor and enlivened by scores of free fights. And through the turbulent, riotous, shillelagh-flourishing crowds, our hero made his triumphal progress in a gorgeous carriage, hemmed in by sealed bags of golden guineas and “covered with a profusion of jewels.” But the candidate had made himself too obnoxious in a score of ways to the Mayo electors to win their suffrages. They would drink to his success until the world reeled, and they would pocket his guineas; but they refused to send him to Westminster.

He had little time, however, for disappointment. His father and brother were busy plotting to cheat him of his inheritance; and at this juncture his wife, to whom he seems, strange as it may appear, to have been devoted, died, to his great grief. His troubles seem to have turned his brain, if it was not already unbalanced. He became moody and eccentric to an alarming degree. He spent his nights in hunting, or racing madly over the country to the risk of his neck

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and the consternation of his neighbours. He became so savage that none dared approach him. He was, for a time at least, undoubtedly mad.

By a series of brutal and unprovoked injuries he forced his neighbour, Lord Altamont, into a duel; and before his lordship had time to draw his sword Fitzgerald fired his pistol point-blank at his head. In a later duel with a man named French he only saved his life by grovelling on the ground, where his opponent left him in disgust.

With his father and brother he was constantly at feud. He drove them from Rockfield House, garrisoned it, and defied them to regain possession; and when he was arrested for rioting he made a daring escape through the roof of his prison. He next waylaid his father on a journey to Dublin, carried him off to Turlough, and kept him prisoner. It is said even that he "had him chained to a block of wood and had three of his teeth knocked out."

Again he was arrested; and this time he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment and a fine of £1,000, only to make another daring escape from his prison, to throw himself on horseback, and race back to Turlough and his captive father. The whole country was now in arms against the outlawed "madman." A small army of soldiers was summoned from Dublin—a thousand volunteers swelling their ranks.

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Fitzgerald was hemmed in by an army of resolute men, all determined to capture him dead or alive. But again he proved more than a match for the enemy. In the dead of night he made his way through the ring of armed men, carrying his father with him. He crossed over into Sligo, and, taking a boat, fared out in the open sea, where at last he compelled his father to come to terms. A few days later he was arrested "while walking in a careless and indifferent manner in College Green."

After some months of durance, he received a free pardon—it is said through the Hervey influence; and once more he returned undaunted to the fray with his father and brother, who, he was convinced, were in a conspiracy to defraud him of his rights of heirship. A few months later, Ireland was horrified by the news that Patrick McDonnell, the legal champion of the opposition faction, and one of his colleagues named Hipson, had been brutally murdered at Fitzgerald's instigation.

This crowning outrage roused the country to the highest pitch of resentment and indignation. Turrough House was besieged by a clamorous and excited mob, supported by a troop of horse and some volunteers, and Fitzgerald was "run to earth," concealed amid a heap of blankets in a chest, and lodged in Castlebar Gaol. So strong and fierce was the feeling

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against the "cowardly assassin" that, shortly before his trial, his cell was broken into by a number of men armed with swords and pistols; and, although the prisoner fought desperately, he was left for dead. At the trial he was carried into Court on his bed, almost lifeless from the forty-six wounds that had been inflicted on him by his would-be murderers.

The trial was as brief as it was dramatic. So dense was the crowd of spectators that "they were sitting on each other's shoulders." Just before proceedings opened, a cry that the floor was giving way caused such alarm that judge and jury, counsellors and spectators, stampeded and made a mad rush for the door, in which many persons were seriously injured. To the charge against Fitzgerald, of "provoking, stirring up, and procuring certain persons to kill Patrick Randell McDonnell and James Hipson," the jury, after seven minutes' deliberation, returned a verdict of "Guilty," and sentence of death was passed and ordered to be carried out that same day. Thus swift and summary was the vengeance that had at last overtaken our hero—or, perhaps we should say, our "villain."

As the clock was striking six the same evening, the doomed man, arrayed in an old hunting uniform, with dirty shoes and stockings on his feet, and a hat tied with a hempen cord, was solemnly conducted to the

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place of execution. Mounting the scaffold, he gazed for a moment, with indifferent eyes and a contemptuous curl of the lips, at the sea of faces beneath him, then, shaking hands with the Sheriff and executioner, he prepared himself for the last act of all, adjusted the rope round his own neck, and, after a brief prayer, suddenly flung himself off.

To the consternation of all, the rope snapped, and Fitzgerald fell, a huddled heap, to the ground. Raising himself, he exclaimed, "Is it possible the grand jury of Mayo will not afford me a sufficiently strong rope?" "Never fear," answered the High Sheriff, "you shall have one strong enough, and speedily!" Then, turning to the hangman, he added, "Do you hear? No more botching!"

When a new rope was forthcoming, Fitzgerald's courage seemed to have deserted him. He begged more time for prayer. Then, after a few minutes thus spent, he mounted the ladder again with halting steps. The rope now proved too long. After a further delay, it was shortened, and, with a final appeal to the Supreme Judge, before Whom he was so soon to appear, Fitzgerald was launched into eternity.

Thus ignobly perished, at the age of thirty-eight, George Robert Fitzgerald, swashbuckler, duellist and murderer, while the High Sheriff, who watched his

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dying struggles, carried in his pocket the reprieve which would have given him a new lease of his mis-spent life.



PRINCE CHARLES EDWARD STUART

CHAPTER III

THE "HANDSOME SCOTS"

WHO was John Sobieski Stuart, Earl of Albany, who died obscurely in Pimlico one February day in 1872; and who, as he lay stretched in death, bore so strange and striking a resemblance to Vandyke's presentment of Charles II? Was he, as he claimed to be, a lineal descendant of the Merry Monarch, and rightful heir to his regal honours; or was he, as so many believed and still assert, an impostor?

That the Earl was at least honest in this belief in his Royal descent and rights, the late Mr. W. P. Frith, R.A., stoutly maintained to his last day; and there were thousands across the Scottish Border who would have been ready to lay down their lives for him had he chosen to maintain his title at the point of the sword.

Frith had first made the acquaintance of the Royal Pretender under dramatic circumstances. He was in the London studio of a Scottish artist when a knock came to the door, and the maid announced "The Princes." A moment later there walked into the studio two tall, strikingly handsome men of dis-

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tinguished appearance, at sight of whom the artist and his wife dropped on their knees, and in turn kissed the extended hands of the strangers with more than the reverent homage usually accorded to Royalty.

When the Princes had withdrawn, his Scottish friend revealed to Frith the identity of his exalted visitors. They were, he said, none other than the grandsons of "Bonnie Prince Charlie," whose pretensions to the throne of England had come to such a tragic and complete eclipse at Culloden in 1745; and they were now living in comparative obscurity and poverty in Pimlico. "Such," said Mr. Frith, "was the startling revelation made by my friend, the Scottish artist. And, indeed, I could well imagine it true; for of the two strangers the elder was the exact facsimile of Charles II., while the younger might have been the Bonnie Prince come to life again, so strong was the resemblance."

In order to judge fairly the claim made by these Princes of Pimlico, it is necessary to tell their story from its beginning—a story more full of romance and mystery than almost any other in this series of sketches; and on which the curtain rises some seventy years before this singular experience in a London studio.

One day about the year 1774, a young Scottish doctor called Cameron, who was touring in Italy, was

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strolling in the grounds of the Convent of St. Rosalie, between Parma and Florence, when he saw, rapidly approaching along the road beneath him, a carriage drawn by four horses, with postillions in scarlet liveries. As the gorgeous equipage, with its steaming horses, dashed past, the doctor caught a glimpse of its occupants—a handsome man of distinguished appearance, with a pale-faced young lady by his side. Brief as the glimpse was, it was sufficient; there could be no mistaking the face of the man, which had been familiar to him from early boyhood in many a portrait. It was that of Prince Charlie, the hero and victim of Culloden; and the pale-faced lady by his side was probably his girl-wife, Louisa, Princess of Stolberg and Countess of Albany, whom the blasé, but still handsome, Prince had married a couple of years earlier.

Within an hour, and almost before he had recovered from his sensational discovery, an officer in uniform ran breathlessly up to the young doctor, and, saluting him, said, “I believe you are Doctor Cameron? Your presence here is most opportune. May I beg you to accompany me at once to a lady who is in sore need of your services? You will be well rewarded; but I regret that it is necessary that you should accompany me blindfolded.”

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At first the doctor indignantly declined an invitation couched in such terms; but finally, partly moved by the officer's earnest pleading and partly by curiosity and a sense of honour, he consented; and, suffering his eyes to be bandaged, was quickly whirled away in a waiting carriage to his destination.

When the bandage was removed, the doctor found himself in a large drawing-room luxuriously furnished in crimson velvet, with its walls lined with mirrors, where he was left by his mysterious guide. A few moments later the door opened to admit the officer who, his face now wreathed in smiles, said, "I am delighted to inform you that the danger we anticipated is now over. During my absence the lady has safely given birth to a child, and your services will probably not be required. But, before you go, perhaps you will be good enough to see her and the child to satisfy yourself that there is no longer any danger."

Dr. Cameron, assenting, followed the officer through long corridors, and was ushered into the patient's bedroom—a large chamber faintly illuminated by a solitary wax candle—in which he saw a woman holding an infant wrapped in a mantle, and behind the curtains of a stately bed the pale, white face of the girl-mother. A few minutes served to satisfy the doctor that all was well; and, again blindfolded, he was

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swiftly conveyed back to St. Rosalie with a substantial fee in his pocket.

Nor was this the end of Dr. Cameron's strange adventures. One evening, a few days later, he was strolling along the seashore when he saw a frigate lying at anchor little more than a stone's throw away. A boat was lowered and rowed ashore, and at the same moment he heard a carriage approaching. "The carriage," to quote the doctor's own words, "was accompanied by a man on horseback, a man whom I recognised as he who had conducted me a few days earlier to the bedside of my lady patient. The carriage stopped, and from it there descended a lady bearing an infant in her arms. She entered the boat and was rapidly rowed to the vessel, while the horseman remained looking after her. Then the carriage drove off, with him riding beside it."

The infant who had so dramatically made its appearance in the world had evidently been smuggled away in what appeared to be a British war-vessel; and this child he shrewdly suspected was the son of Prince Charlie and his Countess wife, and the next Stuart Pretender to the throne of England.

* * * * *

Many years later Mr. Macdonnell, a Highland gentleman, to whom Dr. Cameron had told the story

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on his deathbed, made the acquaintance of the child of mystery, long grown to handsome manhood. He was, Mr. Macdonnell says, "a strikingly handsome man, with eyes such as never were in the head of man or bird, save the eagle and Prince Charlie." He wore the Stuart tartan, and was addressed by his French valet as "Altesse Royale" and "Monseigneur"; and made no concealment of the fact that he was that son of Charles Stuart and the Countess of Albany who, a few days after his birth in Italy, had been brought to England by Admiral Hay in a warship.

Here was strong confirmation of the strange story which the dying doctor had confided to Mr. Macdonnell. But why, if the story were true, should the Stuart Prince wish to conceal the existence of his son in such a mysterious way? To this question the answer was prompt. The Prince wished to place his child in safety until he attained his majority; he was convinced that, if his existence were known, an attempt would be made on his life. And it was the Prince's strong desire that his heir should be brought up, not only unknown as a Stuart, but ignorant of his own birth.

This explanation was sufficiently plausible to satisfy Mr. Macdonnell that "Son Altesse Royale" was in fact the new hope of the Stuarts—the child whose

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coming had been surrounded by so much romance and mystery. He learnt, too, with interest that Charles Stuart's son was himself the father of two boys, John Sobieski Stuart and Charles Edward Stuart, who were being brought up in Scotland, pledged by their father never to reveal their Royal origin during his lifetime.

* * * * *

The next scene in this romantic drama is staged by the Viscount D'Arlingcourt who, while visiting Scotland, heard much of these princely grandsons of the "Young Pretender." He was the guest of Colonel Hugh Bailie, at Red Castle, and, curiously enough, actually occupied the very bedchamber in which the Bonnie Prince had slept a few nights before the tragedy of Culloden; and from his host he learnt with astonishment that the Prince's grandsons were actually living at a place called Eilan Aigas, but a short distance away.

"They are the two handsomest men," the Colonel said, "in this part of the country. Nature has loaded them with her favours. They have education, wit, talents; and would indeed have been worthy of a throne." Naturally the Viscount's curiosity was aroused; and he thankfully accepted Lady Lovat's offer to conduct him to the home of the Princes of mystery.

He found it a mediaeval building, with ancient

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windows and painted glass, shaded by centuries-old firs and oaks; the escutcheon of Charles Edward was over the door, with the inscription, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The two Princes unfortunately were absent; but the wife of the younger (the only one married) was there to welcome the Viscount and to conduct him over the house.

The large hall he found hung around with flags. The walls were covered with trophies; and the light streamed through painted glass windows on statues and banners in the most fantastic manner. "There were collected together all the memorials of Charles Edward—his arms, his banner, his garments, his portrait. I admired his fine and noble countenance, which I then beheld for the first time. A picture painted by John Sobieski (the elder of the Prince's grandsons) struck me very much. Its subject was the 'Battle of Culloden.'"

"No imagination could remain calm under the roof of the brothers Stuart," continues the Viscount. "Charles Edward is married; his brother is still single; they never leave each other. Both of them wear habitually the Highland costume; their tartan, like that of their grandfather, is red with green squares; and the white rose is their symbol. Learned and endowed with rare talents, they cultivate the arts

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and literature. Their personal beauty and distinguished manners are such that they could not travel through Scotland a few years ago without awaking the enthusiasm of the Highlanders. Indeed, there were some who only waited for a word from their mouths to rise in their favour and claim the crown for them once more."

Such is the story told by the French Viscount of the Princes whose entry into a friend's studio had provided such a dramatic memory for Mr. Frith. From other sources we learn that in earlier years the Stuart brothers had done doughty deeds with their swords in France under the banner of Napoleon, who was so much impressed by the reckless valour of John Sobieski in one engagement that he detached his cross from his button-hole and, on the field of battle, presented it to the young hero. Everywhere the "handsome Scots" seem to have been received with distinction and to have won golden opinions.

Their later history is involved in mystery. The younger brother, Charles Edward, is said to have died suddenly at sea, leaving no child to inherit the barren honours of his family. But through what strange vicissitudes the elder brother drifted to his obscure death in Pimlico no records tell us. To his last hour he solemnly persisted in his claim to be the grandson of "Charles III. of England," and rightful heir to

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the British throne; and, in spite of much that is difficult to explain in his story, none to-day can say with certainty that his pretensions were unfounded.

It is true that the tomb of Cardinal, the Duke of York (younger brother of Charles Edward), in St. Peter's, Rome, bears the inscription, "Here lies the last of the Stuarts"; and that the Cardinal, on his brother's death in 1788, caused a medal to be struck bearing the Latin legend, "Henry IX., King of England by the grace of God, but not by the will of men." Is it possible, the sceptics argue, if Prince Charlie had had a son or grandson living at the time, that the Cardinal would thus have assumed a sovereignty which was not his; and that his tombstone would perpetuate his memory as "the last of the Stuarts"?

This, it must be confessed, is an argument difficult to rebut; but against it is a weight of evidence which makes it more than probable that the singular story which links Dr. Cameron's romantic journey to the sick-room near St. Rosalie with that death-bed scene in Pimlico nearly a century later, may hold much more truth than was known to Cardinal York, "the ninth Henry" of England, and his adherents.

CHAPTER IV

THE WOOING OF A WIDOW

WHEN, one April day in the year 1628, Mistress Bennett swathed herself in crape to follow the remains of her late husband, Richard Bennett, to his last resting-place in the God's acre of St. Olave's, Jewry, we may be sure that her mirror reflected a face of becoming grief, and that no thought of such worldly vanities as beauty and gold came to invest her cloud of sorrow with a silver halo. It was true that she was still young, and—so she was often told—the fairest woman in London City; but what were such vanities as youth and a comely countenance in face of such a loss as had befallen her?

But youth will, if you give it a chance, triumph over grief and loss, however deep; and the mirror that reflects a pretty face will not always make its flattering appeal in vain. And thus it was with our City dame, who, when she had done all reasonable justice to the memory of her departed spouse, wiped away her last tear, and began to realise that life was a beautiful thing after all, and held much promise for a woman who could bring to its enjoyment both beauty and money-bags.

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Of the former there could be no question. Every masculine eye that rested on her comeliness dwelt there to tell the tale. And as for the gilding—her departed husband had been one of the most substantial of London's citizens; and was she not heir to two-thirds of all his possessions, in addition to jewels which were the envy of every City lady, to a small fortune in family-plate, and to the Bennett coach with its four "grey mares and geldings," which even the Lord Mayor might have envied, so gorgeous was it?

Within three months of the last "Amen" spoken over her husband's grave, Mistress Bennett was ready once more to receive the homage of flattering eyes and tongues; and even, so it was gossiped, to consider claims to replace the worthy citizen in her arms and favour. And there was no lack of such aspirants, for the fame of the widow's charms and her rich dower had travelled far beyond the City bounds; and many a gallant with a handle to his name was only too willing to leave Court and boudoir to fare eastward, by way of Temple Bar, on wooing bent. And these emissaries of Cupid were no callow youths, of empty head and purse; but men of substance, of discreet years, and of good standing in the world.

Curiously enough, the very first batch of lovers that winged their way Cityward were all "birds," although

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not all gay in plumage. One was Sir Sackville Crow; another was a physician of repute, Raven by name, though not by nature; while number three was no other than Sir Heneage Finch, a grave and dignified Serjeant-at-law and Recorder of London—a man, moreover, who, but two years earlier, had sat in the Speaker's Chair in the House of Commons. Elderly lovers all; but full of the fire and fervour of youth, and as keen to win a lady's hand as any Court beau of half their years.

Of this trio, the advance-guard of an army of wooers, Sir Sackville Crow was first to make the running. He was a man of fine presence, with, it is said, the best-shaped leg in London town; and, moreover, was an expert in the art of love, as the chronicles of his earlier years prove. It was with the air of an assured victor that, decked in his gayest feathers, Sir Sackville began his pilgrimages to the City to do homage at the shrine of the fair widow. To his condolences Mistress Bennett lent a ready and gracious ear, for no one could play this rôle more effectively than the Treasurer of the Navy; but when his adroit tongue turned to lighter themes she looked coldly on his honeyed speeches and soulful eyes; and when, in spite of such warning, he went so far as to plead for "the prettiest hand in London City," her answer was as decisive as prompt. To quote the vulgar

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chronicle of the time, "he went away with a flea in his ear."

To the Crow succeeded the Raven, nothing daunted by his predecessor's discomfiture. He was no man of sugary tongue and ogling eyes like his friend, Sir Sackville. He understood women; he had studied them for years in his West End consulting-room; and he knew—none better—that it was the masterful man to whom their hearts opened most readily. He resolved to carry the fortress of Mistress Bennett's heart by assault, without any preliminary trial of gentler means of capturing it. By a liberal use of his gold he had no difficulty in bribing her servants to be out of the way on a certain November night; and before Mistress Bennett had been many minutes comfortably tucked within the sheets, the daring doctor made his entry into her chamber. Never did foolish lover make a more fatal mistake. Before he had got his nose well within the room he was greeted with such shrieks of "Thieves!" and "Murder!" as woke the "Charleys" in Cheapside from their slumber, and brought them pell-mell to the scene of the disturbance.

The recreant servants, whom he had bribed to remain at least neutral, rushed to the rescue of their mistress. The midnight intruder was caught like a rat in a hole, and ignominiously dragged off to gaol to answer for his outrage on decency. The next morning

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he was hauled before the very last man he wished to see in such a capacity, none other than Sir Heneage Finch, Recorder of London, and one of his rivals for Mistress Bennett's hand. Was ever man so unfortunate? Sir Heneage listened gravely to the serious charge—chuckling, no doubt, inwardly; and, after reading the prisoner a severe lecture on his shameful conduct, committed him, without bail, for trial at the next Sessions, where a sentence of imprisonment effectually cooled his ardour, at least for widows.

No sooner was Dr. Raven sent to quench his flames in durance than Sir Edward Dering, recking nothing of the disaster that had overwhelmed two rivals, presented himself in the lists. Now Sir Edward was one of the biggest dandies of his day, with an unrivalled record as a lady-killer. With his flowing wig, dangling his clouded cane from his wrist, and flourishing his gold snuff-box in his hand; with his lace cravat, his beribboned breeches, and his atmosphere of delicate perfume, the Kentish Baronet had, he thought, but to come and see and conquer.

But, assured of victory though he was, he was much too discreet to make any tactical blunders such as those which had proved fatal to his predecessors. He counted each step before he took it, lest a rash one should prove disastrous. He began by worshipping his lady at a distance with the "mute eloquence" of

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adoring eyes; and before he ventured into the citadel, sought to win its defenders to his side to make his path smooth. But the "outworks" proved difficult to take, as his ingenuous diary abundantly proves. Under date November 20th, he writes: "Edmund King. I adventured, but was denied. Sent up a letter, which was returned after she had read it." Unchecked by this first repulse, Sir Edward decided to see what a little judicious bribery would do. Thus the diary entries succeed one another: "November 21st—I inveigled G. Newman with 20s. November 24th—I did re-engage him (20s.). I did also oil the cash-keeper (20s.). November 26th—I gave Edmund Aspull (the cash-keeper) another 20s."

Surely such liberal lubrication ought to make the machinery of conquest run smoothly; and it did—for a time, at least; for on November 27th, just a week after his first failure, he writes gleefully: "I sent a second letter, *which was kept.*" So far, so good; but Sir Edward had not done yet with the outworks. A few days later, he writes, "I set Sir John Skeffington upon Matthew Cradock"—an artful move, for Cradock was not only the widow's favourite kinsman, but her right-hand man, and thus a most valuable ally to secure. On the same day on which Cradock's favour was sought by proxy, Sir Edward adds to his entry, "The cash-keeper supped with me."

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The way now seemed clear for another step. Sir Edward decided that the time had come to seek a nearer approach to his divinity, and thus on November 30th he writes: "I was at the Old Jewry Church and saw her both forenoon and afternoon"; and on the following day he made bold to send her "a third letter, which was also kept." On the following Sunday—so well had matters progressed—Sir Edward was intercepted, on leaving St. Olave's Church, by George Newman, who whispered in his ear "Good news! good news!" and proceeded to inform him that Mistress Bennett "liked well his carriage, and that, if his lands were not already settled on his eldest son, there was good hope for him." No wonder the amorous Baronet was so delighted with such news that, as he says, "I gladly gave him another 20s."

Sir Edward was now so confident of victory that he could not resist the temptation to announce the news to his friend the Recorder, who not only affected to be rejoiced at his rival's good fortune, but gave him excellent advice how to continue his campaign, adding that he himself had quite abandoned all hope of winning the widow and had retired from the arena. How true this statement of the crafty man of law was the sequel will prove.

Thus emboldened, Sir Edward now took his courage in his hands and prosecuted his suit in person.

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But alas! never was widow (or maid) so difficult to win. One day she was all sweetness and smiles, the next she was as frigid as an iceberg. She would and she wouldn't. She "didn't quite know her own mind," and he "must be more patient." Finally, when his patience was strained to the breaking point, and when all the pleadings and arguments of his friends proved unavailing to make the lady "toe the line," he retired in disgust, and vowed that he had "done with widows for ever."

The fact that the City beauty proved so coy and elusive only served to whet the appetite of other suitors for so tantalising a prize. One gallant after another took up the running; all in turn to retire discomfited. Sir Peter Temple, of Stowe, came with his long lineage and broad acres to back him, and a Countess to plead his suit; but he was soon sent packing. "But, madam," he protested, "I have come all the way from Buckinghamshire to win a smile from your pretty lips." "Then, sir," was the uncompromising answer, "I am afraid you must go back to Buckinghamshire." And he went.

Lady Skinner sought to win the prize for her protégé, Mr. Butler, a swarthy, if high-born, gentleman. "I have worn black long enough," said Mistress Bennett; "I don't want more mourning in a husband." Sir Henry Mainwaring, with a pedigree

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as long as his purse was short, came, with the Countess of Bridgewater to lend the glamour of fashion and rank to his suit; but the widow declined to wed her money-bags to an empty pocket. And even my Lord Lumley, fresh to his coronet, although he had for supporter the lady's brother-in-law, fared no better. Five times a week his lordship's coach took him in state to St. Olave's Church to join his prayers with those of the widow, who affected to seek in piety a refuge from her legions of lovers. The Earl of Dorset, Lord Chamberlain to the Queen, stooped to plead Lumley's suit; and Mistress Bennett went so far at last as to receive a ring from his hands. But the weeks dragged on, and still the longed-for "yes" refused even to falter from her lips, and my Lord Lumley in turn had to join the swollen ranks of the baffled.

But in spite of such discouragement, the tide of lovers still continued to flow and ebb, while London held its sides in laughter. Then, on the heels of an announcement that Mistress Bennett had decided never to marry, but that she wished to devote her life to "good works," the bolt fell from the "blue." One fine morning in April, 1629, twelve months almost to a day after her tears had rained on Master Bennett's coffin, she slipped quietly away to St. Clement Danes' Church, and stood at the altar by the side of—Sir Heneage Finch, ex-Speaker and Recorder of London.

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The tortoise had won the race; the man who had placidly looked on while his long train of rivals came to conquer and retired in defeat had been laying quiet siege to the citadel all the time, and to him the flag was at last lowered.

Thus was the elusive widow led a second time to the altar, although her new lease of wedded life was destined to last no longer than two years. As the widow of plain Master Bennett neither her beauty nor her riches could have saved her from obscurity. As the wife of Sir Heneage Finch she found herself allied with noble houses, and she herself became the ancestress of a line of Marquises.

Of her husband's seven sons, one was destined in later years to sit on the Woolsack and to wear a coronet as Earl of Nottingham. Her three stepdaughters all in turn found husbands in the sons of noble houses; while of her own two daughters by the Recorder, one blossomed into my Lady Conway, and has a proud place on the family tree of the Marquises of Hertford.



THE COUNTESS OF ESSEX
AFTERWARDS
COUNTESS OF SOMERSET

CHAPTER V

THE CRIME OF A COUNTESS

WHEN the Lady Frances Howard opened her eyes, one day in the year 1593, at her father's house near Saffron Walden, she took her place in a family-tree that had more than its share of black sheep. Every line of it recorded some name associated with deeds of violence or shame, and many an ancestor had lost his head to the executioner's axe. For five generations all but one of her father's immediate predecessors on that tree had ended their days in blood—three of them on the headsman's block, and one, the first Duke of Norfolk, on Bosworth Field. Her father, Thomas Howard, first Earl of Suffolk, had no worse crime to his charge than embezzlement on a large scale; but her mother won an evil reputation as a pensioner of Spain, her country's chief enemy, and as a woman with very lax conceptions of morality.

Nor does the black story end here; for of Frances' seven brothers and two sisters—children of the embezzler and the wanton—scarcely one left a memory untarnished by some discreditable episode. Even her sister Elizabeth has come down to us as the woman

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who left another man's son to assert a false claim to her husband's Earldom of Banbury.

With such blood in her veins it would have been strange if Frances Howard had carried a stainless name through life. But none could have dreamt, when she was playing so innocently in the nursery at Audley End, that she would take a place in history as one of the most infamous of her sex. Spending her early years partly in a rustic environment in Essex and partly at her father's house at Charing Cross, Frances grew up to a beautiful girlhood without exhibiting a sign of the evil that lay dormant in her. She was equipped with all the armoury that brings men to their knees—beauty, gaiety, a rare charm of manner—and she might, who knows, have played a pure and honourable part on the stage of life if she had not come at an impressionable age under the influence of her great-uncle, Lord Northampton.

My Lord Northampton, who was now verging on seventy, was one of the most brilliant and charming men of his day—scholar, wit, courtier. But with this early Howard taint in his blood, he seemed incapable of “running straight.” He was a born intriguer, true to no cause that did not minister to his vanity or his purse; a roué among roués; and he found an almost fiendish pleasure in poisoning the minds and perverting the morals of those on the threshold of life. It was

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the worst of ill-luck that his beautiful grand-niece should come under the fatal influence of a man who was as baleful as he was irresistible in his fascination. However the poison was administered, nothing is more certain than that it was his influence that largely gave Frances the bias to evil which her later life so tragically exhibited.

Lady Frances had little opportunity to practise her armoury of male conquest. Before she was out of short frocks the news was published, "The Earl of Essex and the young Lord Cranborne shall marry two of Lord Suffolk's daughters at Court very shortly. They only stay for the King's coming, who is looked for in the next week." Of the brides-to-be, Frances had at the time only seen thirteen birthdays; while her sister, Catherine, was a year younger. Of the bridegrooms, the Earl of Essex was a schoolboy of fourteen, and Lord Cranborne was barely eighteen.

As for Robert Devereux, my Lord Essex, who alone concerns us of the two boy-bridegrooms, he was son of that ill-starred Earl who had, a few years earlier, ended his life on the scaffold. He had been restored to his father's forfeited honours; had been brought up with the King's own son (whom, by the way, he had once soundly smacked on the head with his racquet in a boyish quarrel); and had already, child as he was, been dubbed an M.A. at Oxford.

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Such was the husband to whom Lady Frances was to give her hand in a Royal palace, though her opinion of the match was never asked, and certainly her heart had no voice in the matter. The mockery of a marriage ceremony was performed at Court one January day in 1605-6; and the nuptials were celebrated by a brilliant tournament and by a still more gorgeous masque, written by Ben Jonson, at which, we are told, "the men were clad in crimson, the women in white; they had every one a white plume of the richest heron's feathers, and were surpassing rich in jewels upon their heads." The festivities at an end, the youthful bride and groom returned to their respective homes; and it was not until more than five years later, after Essex had made the "grand tour," that they came together as man and wife.

Such nuptials could scarcely prove otherwise than a fiasco, with an indifferent husband and a reluctant wife. Moreover, Lady Essex, while her husband was "gallivanting" at foreign Courts, had completely lost her heart to Robert Carr, the King's favourite, who had blossomed into my Lord Rochester, and was later to become Earl of Somerset—a man of strikingly handsome person, a born courtier and Prince of gallants, who had made many a conquest before he enslaved Lord Essex's stay-at-home wife.

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It needed not this complication to make the wedded life of Essex and his Countess a pathetic failure. Although he treated his wife with unvarying kindness and courtesy, she returned nothing but coldness and insults; and she refused point-blank to play the rôle of wife to one man when another had her heart.

If this had been the worst, it would have been tragedy enough. But my Lady Essex was by no means content with abuse and a contemptuous indifference. Her husband stood in the path of her pleasure; he must be removed. She consulted experts in witchcraft and magic, and paid them to practise their arts, with the double object of removing her husband and strengthening the passion of Rochester, her lover.

To a Mrs. Turner, witch and poisoner, she wrote, "My lord is very well as ever he was, so you may see in what miserable case I am"; and to a Dr. Fornam, "wizard," she wrote, "My lord is lusty and merry, and drinks with his men. I think I shall never be happy in this world." As if such hints were not sufficient, we have it on the testimony of a Mary Woods that the Countess gave her a ring, with a promise of a thousand pounds, if she would procure a poison for the Earl "that should not act within less space than three or four days."

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When poison and the black arts failed to achieve her sinister purpose she turned to divorce as a door of escape from one husband to the arms of another. And after many months of varying fortune, she ultimately succeeded in obtaining a decree of nullity, thanks largely to the King's support. On the very day on which she was thus made a free woman preparations began for a second marriage—this time to her lover, the man of her treacherous heart—Lord Rochester, whom, in honour of the event, King James now raised to the Earldom of Somerset.

And seldom has the Court of England witnessed so splendid a marriage. The wedding-presents, a chronicler tells us, were "more in value and number than ever, I think, were given to any subject in this land"—vessels of gold and silver (from a gold warming-pan to my Lady Shrewsbury's present of a gold basin and ewer, two gold pots and some "vessels all of gold") and rich jewellery, worth many a "king's ransom." One gorgeous masque followed another; the Lord Mayor entertained bride and bridegroom, at the King's own request, at a regal banquet; and, to wind up the festivities, a "Masque of Flowers," of unrivalled beauty, was presented in the Banqueting House at Whitehall.

Under such brilliant auspices did Lord and Lady Somerset's drama of wedded life open. But the drama

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was soon to be clouded by a terrible tragedy, which set the seal on Frances Howard's infamy. Ten days after the venal court had made a free woman of her, Sir Thomas Overbury died in agony in the Tower of London, and it began to be whispered that he had been poisoned. Sir Thomas, who had thus ended his days miserably and in tragedy, was one of the most accomplished and high-minded men of his day. As a youth he had met and made a friend of Robert Carr (Earl of Somerset to-be); and through his influence had risen high in the King's favour. He was dubbed a knight, the ball of fortune was at his feet; but when Fortune was smiling its sweetest on him he made two fatal mistakes.

He offended the Queen, and was banished from Court in consequence; more fatal still, he opposed the connection between his "fidus Achates" and the "base woman," Lady Essex. So strongly averse to it was he that he bade Rochester choose between his friend and his mistress. "Will you never leave the company of that base woman?" was his ultimatum. "Seeing you do so neglect my advice, I desire that to-morrow morning we may part, and that you will let me have that portion you know is due to me. Then I will leave you free to stand on your own legs."

Thus Overbury made enemies not only of the Queen, but of his old friend and (especially) of the

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woman in the way of whose passion he stood thus resolutely. Even the King, in whose favour he had stood high, turned against him; and was easily induced by Rochester to commit him to the Tower, on the flimsy pretext that, when ordered to go on an Embassy abroad, he had refused. Thus we find Overbury a prisoner, and at the mercy of his enemies, one of whom at least never forgave an injury; and it was not long before their vengeance began to take shape. The first step was to have the Lieutenant of the Tower removed, and a more convenient "tool" put in his place. Northampton (who had his finger in this evil pie) arranged for the appointment of one of his creatures, Sir Gervase Elwes, to the office; with another creature, Richard Weston, as under-keeper.

The way thus made clear, the campaign of vengeance and death opened. Weston first tried the effect of white arsenic and corrosive sublimate in tarts and jellies for the prisoner's use, bidding Elwes to say "that these tarts came not from me," and warning him not to give his wife or children any of them. But Overbury seemed to bear a charmed life. The poisons, it is true, made him very ill; but one after another he mysteriously survived them, thanks probably to antidotes administered by his servant, who seems to have suspected the attempts to poison his master. Disgusted with these repeated failures Lady

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Essex appealed to an apothecary, one James Franklin, who supplied her with seven different sorts of poison—from aqua fortis to cantharides—each of which in turn was administered to the prisoner; until, after weeks of cruel suffering and as gallant a fight for life as ever man made, death came to his release.

The moment Northampton heard the “good news” he wrote to Elwes—“Noble Lieutenant, if the knave’s body be foul, bury it presently; I’ll stand between you and harm”; and within a few hours of his death Overbury’s body was placed in the earth; and Lady Essex, with a sigh of relief, resumed the preparations for her next wedding. But the new Countess was not long left to enjoy the cup of pleasure so shamefully procured. A new favourite, George Villiers, came to supplant her husband by the king’s side; his star of ascendancy had fallen. The poison conspiracy was revealed, it is said by an apothecary’s boy; and an investigation was opened.

Lord and Lady Somerset, with all their fellow-conspirators, were arrested and brought to trial, one after another, to make the well-earned journey to the scaffold—from Mrs. Turner, who was hanged in yellow starched ruffs, and Sir Gervase Elwes, who paid for his share in the crime on Tower Hill, to Franklin, the apothecary, and Weston, the under-keeper. As for Lord Somerset and that arch-con-

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spirator his wife, they were both sentenced to death, only, however, to receive the King's pardon, supplemented in the case of the Earl with an allowance of £4,000 a year!

And now the curtain descends on this drama of passion and crime. Somerset and his Countess survived their death sentence for many miserable years of life together in Chiswick House. They lived, we are told, to hate the sight of each other, and finally ceased to speak to each other. Thus in disgrace and unhappiness, to which were added the hourly tortures of a "loathsome disease," Frances Howard made her exit, one August day in 1632, from the stage of life on which she had played such an infamous part.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROMANCE OF THE SEA-CHILD

THE Earls of Mar and Kellie have many treasured heirlooms at Alloa House and Kellie Castle, but none of which they are prouder than the wicker cradle and bundle of baby's clothes which recall a story as romantic as any to be found in the annals of the Peerage.

One winter evening in the year 1763, when the third of our Georges was comparatively new to his crown, Mr. Adam Gordon was sitting with his wife before a roaring fire in the hall of Castle Ardoch. It was a night of storm and deluge; the rain was lashing the window-panes, the wind was howling among the turrets and shrieking down the chimneys, the castle walls were trembling under the fury of the gale.

“What a terrible night!” said Adam Gordon to his wife, as he drew his chair nearer to the blazing logs. “There will be many a life lost to-night at sea, unless I am mistaken. It's the wildest storm I have known in my time.” Scarcely had the words left his lips when through the pandemonium of the gale there came the low, faint boom of a cannon. “There!” he ex-

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claimed, as the sound, so full of portent, died away. "Did you hear that? I knew it. There's a vessel on the rocks. God help those who are in her, for there is no hope for them!"

To summon his men-servants and, armed with lanterns, to sally out into the dark night on the errand of mercy was the work of a few moments. In the teeth of the gale, drenched and buffeted, the handful of men fought their way to the beach, a few hundred yards distant, and with straining eyes looked out over the wild riot of waters. Yes; there, but a stone's throw away was the doomed ship, beating her life out on the cruel fangs of the rocks which guard the coast of Ross and Cromarty from the fury of the North Sea.

That glance was sufficient; the vessel was indeed doomed. No boat could live for a moment in such a sea. All they could do was to wait and watch if by good chance any of the crew were washed ashore. Through the long dark hours of the night the patient vigil was kept; the watchers saw the vessel break up, just as the first faint streaks of dawn stole over the sky. A few moments later a shout drew the scattered men to a distant part of the beach where one of their number was stooping over the strangest piece of flotsam that was ever flung ashore by an angry sea.

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It was a wicker cradle, of curious foreign-looking make; and in it was lying a baby, with blue, open eyes of wonder, smiling up at the wild group of heads bent over it. The cradled infant thus miraculously flung ashore was all that the sea gave up from the ill-fated ship, save a few fragments of wreckage, none of which gave any clue to the identity of the vessel.

It was a strange but happy procession that made its way back in the early morning to the hospitable shelter of Castle Ardoch, preceded by Adam Gordon with the sea-baby warmly tucked inside his overcoat, and followed by John Anderson, cradle in hand; and it was a warm welcome that the infant received from the motherly arms of Dame Gordon, who little dreamt as later she tucked it in the warm bed between her two little daughters that the waif of the sea was bringing to her house a coronet in each of her baby hands. She was destined, as this story will prove, to make a Countess of each of her child-bedfellows in the years to come.

Who was this child of the sea and the storm who had come thus dramatically into the hospitable home of the Gordons? In vain did Adam and his lady try to solve the mystery. There was no clue—or at least no clue that was of any use—to the problem. That the wicker cradle, the frail bark which had brought the babe so miraculously over the raging waters, was

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from a foreign land there could be no doubt. But where was that land?

The child's clothing was beautiful in quality and texture; she was evidently the daughter of well-to-do parents; but it, too, furnished no clue beyond two embroidered and interwoven initials which conveyed no information as to identity. The wreck-baby was a complete mystery, as strange as the wonder of her advent; but she was none the less a welcome guest, who should be as carefully and lovingly tended as their own little girls.

Thus the "Princess," as Adam Gordon used to call his sea-baby, found new parents in Adam and his good wife; and never for one moment did they regret that black night of storm that had given her to them. Every year she grew in strength and beauty and winsomeness. She was a little fairy who won all hearts, from those of her playmates and foster-sisters to the grim-visaged men-servants who to a man were the slaves of the little "Missie" they had saved from the sea.

Thus happily the years passed. The "Princess" had blossomed into a lovely girl of sixteen; her sisters, equally fair, were a few years older, when the curtain was raised on the second scene of this strange drama. Again it was a night of wild storm and disaster; and again, through the thunders of wind and sea was heard

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the boom of the distress-gun; and once more, as sixteen years earlier, Adam Gordon and his men fared forth in the dark night on rescue bent.

This time, as before, the vessel was ground to pieces on the deadly rocks; and of all on board only one was yielded to the shore and to life by the greedy sea. It was a man, battered, bruised, and unconscious, lashed to a piece of wreckage. Happily, life still lingered, and the senseless man was borne swiftly to Castle Ardoch, restoratives were administered, and when consciousness returned he was put to bed.

The following morning the second sole survivor of a wreck was able to thank the good Samaritans, his rescuers, and to explain who he was and how he came to be their guest. He was, he said, a Swedish merchant hailing from Gothenburg, and had been voyaging to Scotland when the storm flung his ship on the rocky coast of Ross and Cromarty. A few days later he was sufficiently recovered to join his host at the family meals, and thus to make the acquaintance of his daughters, and of their sister, the pretty sixteen-year-old "Princess."

Then it was that Adam Gordon told him the story of that other night, many years earlier, which had brought such a welcome guest into his home, a story to which the stranger listened with growing interest and excitement. "That is indeed remarkable," said

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the stranger on its conclusion; "and to me of peculiar interest. I will tell you why. It is sixteen years since my sister left India in a vessel of which nothing more was ever heard with certainty. It was rumoured, however, that she had been wrecked on the Scottish coast. And what is more singular, my sister had with her a baby girl, an infant only a few months old. How strange it would be if this young lady," pointing to the "Princess," "should prove to be my lost sister's child, and thus my niece. May I see the cradle in which the child was flung ashore?"

The wicker cradle, which had been carefully preserved, was brought for inspection; and as the merchant examined it his excitement increased. It was undoubtedly of foreign make, and might well have been Indian. "Have you any other clue?" he asked. The baby-clothes were now produced, and at sight of the embroidered initials the stranger exclaimed, "Yes, it must be so. Those are the initials of my sister and her husband. This young lady, whom, like myself, the sea has brought to your home is surely my niece, my dear sister's daughter!"

Such was the dramatic scene of which Castle Ardoch was the setting one winter day in the year 1779. The discovery, however welcome to the Swedish merchant, was by no means equally welcome to Adam Gordon

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and his family, who feared that now they would lose the girl whom they had learned to love so well.

Nor were their fears misplaced, for the merchant proceeded to assert his claim to his niece. "It is," he said, "a poor return for your great kindness to try to rob you of one of your daughters. But I am comparatively a rich man, with no child of my own; and I owe it to my dear sister to take her place as the natural guardian of her daughter. Will you at least allow her to come to me for a year? If, at the end of the year, she wishes to return to you, I will put no obstacle in her way."

"Oh, I am so happy here!" pleaded the "Princess." "Don't take me away!" In vain did Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, who, whatever the cost to themselves, felt that she should not refuse such a tempting offer, add their persuasions to those of her uncle. And it was only on condition that one of her "sisters" should accompany her that she at last tearfully consented to leave for a time the home she loved.

Thus it was that, when the merchant left Castle Ardoch, he took with him to Sweden, not only his niece, but one of his host's daughters, who thus found themselves translated to a new world of gaiety, far removed from the peaceful humdrum days of their Scottish home. At Gothenburg their life was a con-

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stant round of pleasure; and it was not long before the two beautiful girls had lovers at their feet.

Among Miss Anne Gordon's wooers was Thomas Erskine, a wealthy merchant of Gothenburg, and a scion of an old Scottish house, who made a speedy conquest of Adam Gordon's daughter. It was not only a desirable match in all ways, but it was a true union of hearts; and when the wooer wrote to Scotland for permission to make Anne his wife, a favourable answer was not long in coming.

But excellent as the match was, we may be sure that Anne Gordon, as she stood at the Gothenburg altar with her husband, little dreamt that she was one day to wear a Countess's coronet. She knew that Thomas Erskine was of noble birth. He could look back, on his family-tree, to a long line of distinguished ancestors, headed by one Sir Robert, who was Scotland's Great Chamberlain when the second Alexander was king in the fourteenth century; and among those ancestors was a long list of Earls of Kellie. But between him and the Kellie coronet at that time were more than a dozen good lives, and if anyone had told him on his wedding-day that he would live to bear the title he would have laughed aloud.

The coronet, however, came to Thomas Erskine when his wife had worn her wedding-ring a score of years; and Adam Gordon's daughter Anne lived to be

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a Countess, thanks to the little sea-waif who had, by such strange ways, led her to her husband. Nor was this the extent of the good fortune which the "Princess" brought to the family of Castle Ardoch.

Before Anne Gordon had been a wife a year her sister Johanna arrived in Gothenburg to spend a few months as her guest; and there she met and learnt to love Methven Erskine, the handsome young brother of her sister's husband; and for the second time the wedding-bells were set a-ringing.

Methven Erskine was also a substantial citizen of the Swedish town; and when, in process of time, Thomas, ninth Earl of Kellie and eighth Baronet, was laid in the family vault, Methven succeeded him in his titles and dignities, and made a Countess of Adam Gordon's second daughter. And thus it was that the sea-child brought two coronets with her in her wicker cradle when she was washed ashore that stormy night in the year 1763.

As for the "Princess" herself, she could give coronets to others, but none came to her. Nor did she wish for one; for she found all the happiness she desired in the plain untitled husband who won her heart. He was the richest of all Gothenburg's merchants; and when to his money-bags was added the fortune that fell to his wife on her uncle's death, the "Princess" more than justified Adam Gordon's pet

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name by a hospitality and, above all, a charity which made her at once the most splendid and beloved woman in Gothenburg.



THE LADY ELLENBOROUGH

CHAPTER VII

A QUEEN OF THE DESERT

THIRTY years ago a correspondent of the Viennese "German Gazette" wrote from Beyrout:—"I met to-day an old acquaintance, the camel-driver, Sheik Abdul, and he told me that his wife was dead. Her name was once known all through the East. Sheik Abdul is the ninth husband of Lady Ellenborough, whom I met for the first time about thirty years ago at Munich, just after she had eloped with Prince Schwartzberg from the residence of her first husband. She then went to Italy, where, as she told me herself, she was married six times in succession."

Such was the singular story which, a generation or so ago, set tongues wagging from one end of England to the other, and gave a new zest to an old and almost forgotten scandal, the heroine of which had shocked Society by her unconventionalities as she had captivated it by her beauty and charms in the days of George IV.

The heroine of this strange romance, one of the

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most remarkable in the annals of our Peerage, was cradled two years after Trafalgar. The only daughter of Sir Henry Digby, G.C.B., a valiant Admiral of the Blue, and sister of the ninth Baron Digby, she could boast a noble lineage stretching back to the days when Everard Digby fell fighting valiantly for the Red Rose on Towton Field, leaving behind him seven sons, all of whom wielded deadly swords against Richard III. at Bosworth. Her mother was the Lady Jane Elizabeth, daughter of "Mr. Coke of Holkham," first Earl of Leicester, who had worn mourning for her first husband, Viscount Andover, before she was led to the altar by the embryo Admiral.

In early childhood Jane Elizabeth Digby gave promise of that exceptional beauty which made conquest so fatally easy to her in later years; and also of the waywardness and defiance of convention which were to shock her family and friends and to supply so much material for the gossip-mongers. Long before she emerged from short frocks she was at once the idol and despair of her relatives, a wild and bewitching madcap who laughed at all restraint and drove her parents to distraction by her escapades. Once she disappeared for days to share the roving life of a band of gipsies. On another occasion, it is said, she eloped with a handsome young groom, and was only rescued

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from Gretna Green after a wild chase over several counties.

Such was the heroine of our story in the days of her girlhood, a ravishingly beautiful imp of mischief, laughing her way out of one escapade only to engage in another still more daring and unconventional; and, in spite of all her wildness and waywardness, making all who knew her her veriest slaves by the magic of her winsomeness and her beauty. Of her beauty at this time we have the following description: " Her eyes were large and of an exquisite blue such as I have never seen in any other human face; her lips, parted in a merry roguish smile, revealed teeth like flawless pearls; her face was a perfect oval, and her complexion had the delicate bloom of a peach. Her figure was instinct with vitality and an incomparable grace of movement. But her chief glory was her hair, which fell, a rippling golden cascade, down to her knees."

That a maiden dowered with such rare charms had many a lover at her feet before she left the schoolroom goes without saying; but never was maid so tantalising and elusive. She would transport her wooers to heaven one moment, and plunge them in despair the next; when they protested undying devotion, she broke into peals of merry laughter and told them not to be " so absurd." One by one the wooers retired from

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the list in despair. But the little madcap was not destined to escape thus easily.

Among her slaves was one of sterner metal, who determined to win the prize from all rivals, in spite of a heavy handicap. Edward, second Lord Ellenborough, was not only nearly a score of years older than the maid he set himself to win, but he had already worn mourning for one wife, a daughter of the Marquis of Londonderry. He was, too, grave beyond his years, and a man of no great physical attractions. In spite, however, of his handicap, he laid such persistent siege to the young lady's heart, and made such effective use of an eloquent tongue and his gift of diplomacy, that one September day in 1824 the wedding-bells were set a-ringing, and the madcap left her school-books to become my Lady Ellenborough.

It would have been well, however, if my lord had been less resolute in his wooing, or had taken his heart and his coronet elsewhere. The grave, almost middle-aged statesman, who was later to rule over India and the King's Navy, had too little in common with his high-spirited girl-wife to make the nuptials a success. Trouble began almost before the honeymoon had waned; and the climax was reached when handsome, dark-eyed Prince Schwartzemberg came on the scene, and brought the battery of his fascinations to bear on the lovely and unhappy wife.

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To such a situation there could be but one ending. Lady Ellenborough had neither the wish nor the power to resist the seductions of the Prince and the prospect of escape from her misery which he offered her. Within two years of wearing the orange-blossom for one man she ran away with his successor in her affections; and, four years later, the outraged husband sought the aid of Parliament to dissolve a union which should never have been entered into.

For a few years Lady Ellenborough lived more or less happily with her Prince, to whom she bore two children; until her dream ended in a tragic awakening. The Prince, wearied at last of her charms, basely deserted her; and the unhappy woman, divorced by her husband and now abandoned by her lover, fled to Italy to hide her shame and her sorrow. Of her story during the next few years nothing appears to be known with certainty. It may be true, as stated by the correspondent of the "German Gazette," "that she found in Italy half-a-dozen husbands in quick succession," although this story is not supported by her friend and champion, Isabel, Lady Burton, who merely says, "I am afraid she led a life for a year or two over which it is kinder to draw a veil." The truth, it is to be feared, is one which will not bear too close scrutiny. Nor, when she left Italy, does her history for a time become any clearer. The only light on it (and probably a

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doubtful one) is thrown by the "German Gazette" correspondent, who says: "In 1848 I met her at Athens, where she concluded an eighth marriage with a Greek Colonel, Count Theodoki. This, however, lasted only for a short time."

It is to Lady Burton that we must look for an authentic account of the later history of this remarkable woman, which far surpasses in romance all that preceded it. It was while Lady Burton was living at Damascus, during her husband's Consulate there, that she first met our vagrant heroine; and, like everyone else, fell under the spell of her charms.

"Among the most interesting of all the personalities who attended my receptions," her ladyship records in her diary, "was Lady Ellenborough, known at Damascus as the Honourable Jane Digby El Mezrab. She was a most romantic and picturesque personality; one might say she was Lady Hester Stanhope's successor."

After outlining her history as far as we have followed it, Lady Burton continues: "She then tired of Europe, and conceived the idea of visiting the East, and of imitating Lady Hester Stanhope and other European ladies, who became more Eastern than the Easterns. She arrived at Beyrout, and went to Damascus, where she arranged to go to Bagdad, across the desert. For this journey a Bedouin escort was necessary, and the

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conduct of this devolved on Sheik Mijwal, a younger brother of the Mezrab tribe. On the journey the young Sheik fell in love with this beautiful woman, and she fell in love with him. The romantic picture of becoming a queen of the desert suited her wild and roving fancy. She married him, in spite of all opposition, according to Mohammedan law. At the time I came to Damascus she was living half the year in a house just within the city gates; the other half of the year she passed in the desert in the tents of the Bedouin tribe, living absolutely as a Bedouin woman. When I first saw her she was a most beautiful woman, though sixty-one years of age. She wore one blue garment, and her beautiful hair fell in two long plaits to the ground."

It is an eloquent tribute to the enduring beauty and fascinations of this singular woman that, on the verge of old age, she could so captivate this young Arab that he not only fell headlong in love with her, but was willing to divorce his Moslem wives in order to marry her. But surely never in the history of any aristocracy was there such a strange and ill-assorted union as this between the lovely, high-bred daughter of centuries of noble ancestors and the "dirty little black," as Lady Burton describes him in one entry in her diary.

"I went to see her one day," her ladyship records; "and when he opened the door to me I thought at

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first he was a native servant. I could understand her leaving a coarse, cruel husband, much older than herself, whom she never loved; I could understand her running away with Schwartzberg; but the contact with that black skin I could never understand. Her Sheik was very dark. All the same, he was a very intelligent and charming man in any light but as a husband. That made me shudder! ”

That Lady Ellenborough was deeply in love with her dusky consort there can be no question. She was the slave of his every wish. When in the desert, she used to milk his camels, prepare his meals, stand and wait on him as he ate, wash his hands, face, and feet; and she gloried in discharging these menial offices for a man who seemed unworthy to tie her shoelace.

In spite of this daily degradation and the constant association with the semi-savages of her husband's tribe, Lady Ellenborough “ never lost anything of the English lady, nor the softness of a woman. She was always,” we are told, “ the perfect lady in sentiment, voice, manners, and speech. She never said anything you could wish otherwise. She kept all her husband's respect, and was the mother and queen of his tribe.” And her life, apart from such menial work as her conception of wifely duties imposed on her, was that of a highly-refined, cultivated English lady. She occupied herself with painting, sculpture, or music, in all

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of which she was highly proficient; she tended her flowers, and was devoted to her Arab mares, on which she loved to race over the desert, with flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, and her glorious hair floating behind like a golden pennon—as wild and untrammelled a creature as in the long gone days when she galloped her pony over the fields and fences of England.

Although her eyes would fill with tears when speaking to Lady Burton of England, her people, and old times; and although they would light up with glory at the very mention of Schwartzenberg, who was beyond doubt the love of her life, she confessed that her happiest years were those spent with her Arab husband on the outskirts of Damascus, or leading the free, roving life of the desert.

At Damascus, indeed, she reverted for six months of each year to a semi-European life. She was highly popular not only with the small European colony there—“we all flocked around her with affection and friendship,” one of them says—but with the natives, who rendered to her the homage due to a great and gracious lady; and to all alike she was equally charming. It was only to strangers that she was at all reserved. Indeed, she refused to see anyone who did not bring a letter of introduction from a friend or a relative. “But this,” to quote Lady Burton again, “did not hinder every ill-conditioned passer-by from

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boasting of his intimacy with her, and recounting the untruths which he invented *pour se faire valoir*, or to sell his book or newspaper at a better profit."

Between these two remarkable women a deep and lasting affection sprang up in these Damascus days, a friendship so intimate that Lady Ellenborough confided to the Consul's wife the task of writing her biography, which she dictated to her day by day. "She did not spare herself," says Lady Burton, "dictating the bad with the same frankness as the good. I was pledged not to publish this until after her death and that of certain relatives."

When in later years a notice of her death appeared in the "German Gazette," Lady Burton was first in the field to still the voice of scandal by paying an eloquent tribute to her friend. "To the last," she says, "she was fresh and young; beautiful, brave, refined and delicate. Her heart was noble; she was charitable to the poor. She fulfilled all the duties of a good Christian lady and an Englishwoman." The report, however, was premature, circulated, it is said, by one of her ladyship's enemies, and was contradicted by Lady Ellenborough herself, who wrote to a friend in England to say that so far from being dead she was enjoying the best of health, and hoped to survive her obituary-notice many years.

As a matter of fact, she survived her reported death

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nearly nine years, leaving many devoted friends and admirers to mourn her loss, and happy to the last in her Bedouin life. “ She had but one fault (and who knows it was hers?),” Lady Burton says. “ Let us hide it, and shame those who seek to drag up the adventures of her wild youth to tarnish so good a memory.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE POET AND THE COUNTESS

OF the many women who in turn caught Lord Byron's volatile fancy and enslaved his heart none is invested with quite the same glamour of romance as Teresa Guiccioli, the lovely Italian of whom, if her love was not "Byron's best reward," it is true that "His laurels twine about her name."

It was when Byron, driven from England by the storm of obloquy that followed his wife's desertion, was seeking a refuge and distraction on the Continent that he met the woman who was destined to play such a conspicuous part in his life's drama. Disgusted with the world, heart-sick of its vanities and disillusionments, and craving, as he always craved, the love of woman, he found in Teresa Guiccioli a new savour to life, and a passion and romantic temperament which matched his own.

At the time of the first meeting of these two lovers, Teresa had seen but sixteen summers. The daughter of Count Gamba, an Italian nobleman, she had only left convent walls a year when her hand was given to Count Guiccioli, a man of large possessions, but older



THE COUNTESS GUICCIOLI

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than her own father. The Count had already buried two wives when he led his schoolgirl bride to the altar; and it was perhaps inevitable that this union of a middle-aged widower to a high-spirited and beautiful girl on the threshold of womanhood should give small promise of happiness. Teresa's pretty head was full of romance; released from the dreariness of the convent, she was eager to drink deep of her new freedom and pleasure; and there was not a single craving that her twice-widowed husband was able to satisfy.

She had a liberal share of the supreme dower of beauty—eyes large, languishing, and as deeply blue as the skies of her native land; “amazingly long eyelashes, arched eyebrows, wickedly pretty teeth; and a mass of magnificent hair so absolutely golden that if a guinea-gold fillet of the deepest yellowness ever seen in gold had been put about her head, the tress and the ornament would have been precisely the same hue and quality of colour.” Her neck, shoulders, arms, and bust were superb in their modelling. Such was Count Guiccioli's third wife—one of the fairest of Italy's daughters—when chance led to her the steps of the man of whom Sir Walter Scott wrote, “the beauty of Byron is one which makes one dream.”

It was Fate that brought together this supremely lovely girl and the handsomest man of his age—a man, moreover, skilled in all the arts of love, a poet of

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European fame, and the hero of a hundred romantic stories, as well known in Italy as in the England whose dust he had shaken off his feet. Each had made a loveless match, and each empty heart was yearning for its ideal lover.

It was one day in the autumn of 1818, at one of the Countess Benzoni's receptions in Venice, when Teresa had worn her uncongenial wedding-ring but half a year, that the fateful meeting took place. The Countess had been taken to the reception, much against her will, by her husband. She was *ennuyée* and in no mood to be amiable to anyone. When his hostess asked the poet if she might introduce him to the Countess he consented with ill-grace. He had no wish to make new acquaintances. "No," he said, "I cannot know her"—adding with a touch of sarcasm, "She is too beautiful."

The introduction made, a few minutes sufficed to revolutionise life for both. The superlative loveliness and charm of the girl-Countess made a slave of the poet: Byron's "matchless beauty" changed the whole world for her. Seldom has passion blazed into flame with such fatal quickness. "At parting," the Countess says, "Lord Byron wrote something on a paper and handed it to me." What that "something" was we do not know; but we know that from that first meeting the "die was cast." No day passed

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without its sweet hours together until, after eleven days of "fearful joys," the Count left Venice for his annual visit to his Romagnese estates, taking his wife with him.

The lovers were separated—and disconsolate. Teresa, we are told, fainted three times on the first day's journey; but never failed to write to her absent poet at every stage. As for Byron, he spent a leaden month in Venice, vainly trying to drown his sorrows in drink, until, unable to bear his exile longer, he in turn started for Ravenna, pouring out his soul in poetic yearnings on the way.

When at last he reached the goal of his desires he learnt, to his dismay, that his beloved Countess was seriously ill. He was distracted with grief and alarm. The unsuspecting Count, hearing of his arrival, invited him to the palace. "It will distract my wife in her illness," he said; and Byron was relatively happy again. He was near her, even when he could not see her; and that was bliss for him. He spent hours poring over medical books, and gave the Count no peace until he had summoned Aglietti, the most famous doctor in all Italy.

For two months the Countess lay on her bed of sickness. Byron was convinced that she was in consumption, and that she would surely die and leave him. "I never even could keep alive a dog that I liked or that

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liked me," he groaned; and, to find a vent for his grief and despair, wrote reams of verses, such as——

" I heard thy fate without a tear,
Thy loss with scarce a sigh ;
And yet thou wert surpassing dear,
Too loved of all to die."

" I see my Dama every day," Byron wrote to Murray. " I do not know what I should do if she died; but I ought to blow my brains out, and I hope I should."

Byron might have spared himself such tragedy, for within two months his Countess had made a surprisingly rapid recovery, and was her radiant self again, laughing at all his fears, and no doubt rejoicing in such evidences of her conquest. His wife now restored to health, the Count prepared to move on to Bologna. The poet, as an alternative, proposed to his lady-love that they should fly together; while she, dreading the disgrace of leaving her husband, suggested that she should feign death, allow herself to be committed to the vault, and then should escape secretly to his arms, free to spend the rest of her life with the man she adored.

Both projects, however, failed; and we find his lordship writing, " My mistress dear, who has fed my heart upon smiles and wine for the last two months, set off for Bologna with her husband this morning; and it

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seems that I follow her at three to-morrow morning. I cannot tell how our romance will end——” After a few more days of stolen happiness together, the restless Count was off again on his journeys, this time to his Romagnese estates; and Byron was left disconsolately behind, “alternating between fury and acute depression.” Day after day he visited the deserted home of his vanished love, wandering through the rooms made sacred by her presence, turning over her books and writing in them.

In her copy of “Corinne” he writes a long letter to his “dearest Teresa,” in which he says: “I have read this book in your garden. My love, you were absent, or else I could not have read it. You will recognise the handwriting of him who passionately loved you; and you will divine that over a book which was yours he could only think of love. In that word, beautiful in all languages, but most so in yours—*Amor mio*—is comprised my existence here and hereafter—my destiny rests with you; and you are a woman, seventeen years of age, and two out of a convent. I wish that you had stayed there with all my heart, or at least that I had never met you in your married state. But all this is too late; I love you and you love me. But / more than love you. . . .”

In the following month the Count returned to Bologna with his wife, only to start again for Ravenna;

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this time leaving her behind him, to Byron's delight. This was a golden opportunity not to be lost by the lovers. As soon as the Count was well out of the way, they left Bologna for Venice, where they made their home together for a few blissful weeks at the poet's country villa at La Mira; and here Byron first began to show signs of being a little weary of his Countess.

When Moore paid a visit to Venice he found him greatly changed. He had grown stout, was wearing a moustache, and on his long hair he wore a most eccentric headgear. He made no concealment of the fact that he was bored, and hailed Moore's arrival as at least a temporary escape from fetters which, however golden, had become irksome. He even proposed to leave his Countess, to accompany his friend to Rome; but Moore put his foot down. "You cannot leave her in such a position," he said; "it would be most humiliating to her."

A little later we find him writing to Murray, "I have got the poor girl into a scrape; and as neither her birth nor her rank, nor her connections by birth and marriage are inferior to my own, I am in honour bound to support her through." Satiety had now set in, and passion had degenerated to a belated sense of honour. Lady Caroline Lamb had described Byron, once her ardent lover, as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know";

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and the Countess Guiccioli was to learn how true the description was.

At this stage the Count, whose suspicions had slept too long, demanded the restoration of his wife. "Count Guiccioli comes to Venice next week," Byron wrote to Hoppner; "and I am requested to consign his wife to him, which shall be done. What you say of the long evenings at the Mira or Venice reminds me of what Curran said to Moore. 'So I hear you have married a pretty woman and a very good creature, too—an excellent creature. Pray—now, *how do you pass your evenings?*' It is a ——— of a question."

When her husband arrived at Venice to claim her, the Countess wept and raged and pleaded—but she had to go, and once more she and her still beloved poet were separated; and Byron, no doubt secretly glad to be thus easily rid of her, prepared to return to England, and, if possible, to arrange a reconciliation with his wife. Meanwhile Teresa, love-sick as ever, fretted and pined, and at last made herself so seriously ill that her husband, in great alarm, sent a letter to Byron begging him to come to her.

When the summons arrived Byron was on the point of starting for England. He was, in fact, about to step into the gondola, in which his luggage had been placed, when the Count's imploring letter was placed in his hand. The next day he was back in the toils,

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and writing to Murray, "Your Blackwood accuses me of treating women harshly. It may be so; but I have been their martyr. My whole life has been sacrificed to them and by them." It was in such a spirit that the poet returned to the side of the woman to whom a few months earlier he had written, "I more than love you. . . . My destiny rests with you."

For some weeks we now find him an unwilling guest in the Guiccioli palace—bored to death, and writing, "I came here because I was called, and will go the moment I see what may render my departure proper. My attachment has neither the blindness of the beginning nor the microscopic accuracy of the close of such attachments." Even the blind eyes of the Countess were at last being opened to the truth of Caroline Lamb's statement, "Oh, better far to have died than to have listened to Glenarvon!"

But emancipation for both was now drawing near. The Count insisted that his wife should dismiss her lover. The Countess laughed in his face, and retired to her father's house, where she rarely caught any glimpse of her lover. She wrote pitiful appeals to him, when her husband threatened to put her into a convent. "Byron! I am in despair! If I must leave you here without knowing when I shall see you again, if it is your will that I should suffer so cruelly, I am resolved to remain."

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Once more he joined her—at Pisa—writing to Moore, “ I set out most unwillingly, foreseeing the most evil results for all.” But he chafed more and more against his fetters. He longed to escape to Greece, to take part in the struggle for freedom that was raging there. He was sick of love as of poetic fame, and was now dying to win laurels with his sword. On the night of July 13th, 1822, he went on board the *Hercules*, which was to sail for Greece at sunrise. A storm compelled the captain to put back to port, and Byron decided to look once more on the woman he had loved and betrayed; but when he knocked at the door of her villa he was told, “ The Signora had departed.” The house was still and dark; and it was with a sigh of relief that he walked away. A few hours later he was sailing to “ where glory waited him,” and writing, “ I am better now than I have been for years.”

He never saw the Countess again. Nine months after he had turned his steps from her darkened and desolate villa he drew his last breath at Missolonghi.

CHAPTER IX

A RIGHT HONOURABLE "JACK TAR"

MANY of our Peers have come to their coronets and ancestral estates by capricious turns of the wheel of Fortune; but not one of them all under circumstances so full of romance and tragedy as gave a seat in the House of Lords to His Excellency the Earl of Aberdeen, Viceroy of Ireland, one January day forty-four years ago. This strange story is now almost forgotten, but there are some who never see the 27th day of January on the calendar without paying a tribute of regret to George, sixth Earl, over whose brief life the waters of a distant sea closed on that ill-fated day in 1870.

It was to a proud heritage that George Hamilton Gordon was born one December day seventy years ago. He was, if he lived, the assured heir to the titles of Earl, Viscount, and Baron, and to the large estates which were then enjoyed by his grandfather, the fourth lord. He had in his veins the blood of numbers of well-born ancestors, from the days when Patrick Gordon of Methlic played a leading part in Scotland under the first James; and he himself would be the

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sixth of a line of Earls who had mated with the daughters of great Scottish houses.

Such was the heritage of George Gordon, who was fated, although the Earldom was then his, to end his days as a seaman before the mast of a small trading-vessel, and disguised by a name not his own, before he had seen his thirtieth birthday.

As a boy, this heir to the Aberdeen honours was not as other boys of noble birth. There was a wayward, nomadic strain in his blood which no parental frowns or correction could control. Long before he had reached his 'teens he announced his intention to become a sailor. He was never happy except when he was on the sea; and, we are told, he would steal away from the castle that was his home and spend night after night with the herring-fishermen of Boddom, slipping back to bed early the next morning before the castle was awake. His chosen companions were the fisher-lads and men; his favourite haunts the quay and the beach; and his greatest delight a seat in a boat.

For rank and ceremonial he cared not a fig. To the fisher-folk of Boddom he was just plain "Geordie Gordon"; and plain Geordie he consistently remained to his last day, whether he was known in the Peerage-books as Baron Haddo (a courtesy title which was his while still in the 'teens), or as the Right Honourable

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the Earl of Aberdeen, double Viscount and fourfold Baron of his later years.

But much as he yearned for the free, unconventional life of the sea, he was denied all opportunity of tasting it so long as his grandfather or father was alive. And it was only when his father's death made a free man of him that he was able to realise his life's ambition. One January day in 1866 the Earl (for such he now was) said "Good-bye" to his mother and sisters and sailed from Liverpool, ostensibly on a visit to his uncle, the Hon. Arthur Gordon, who at the time was Governor of New Brunswick.

If it were possible to cure a landsman of his passion for the sea, that voyage should surely have cured Lord Aberdeen; for the passage lasted through forty-one days of almost unbroken tempest. But the howling of the gale and the creaking of the ship were as music to his lordship, who landed in New Brunswick more determined than ever to forget his Earldom in the rollicking life of a sailor.

For a month he was his uncle's guest, fêted, much to his disgust, as a British nobleman. Then one day he disappeared; and as "George Osborne" we soon find him working before the mast on an ocean tramp bound for the Canaries.

What his fellow-sailors thought of the new recruit we learn from one Hawkins, who says: "A person of

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the name of George Osborne joined the ship as a seaman. Osborne and I were in the same watch. We became very intimate. I had myself enjoyed a good education, and I soon found that he was much my superior in that, but we took to each other. When Osborne joined the ship he was not dressed as a sailor, and I was surprised to find that he had shipped as one. His hands were tender, and they soon got blistered. Mine were then in a similar state, and we joked about it. But he was always active, willing, and energetic, and took a fair share of all the work. He made himself most popular with officers and crew. He told me 'Osborne' was an assumed name, and that his real name was 'Gordon,' but he said I must not mention it on board the ship."

Such was the impression George Osborne, seaman and Earl, created on his mates on board the brig *R. Wylie*; and this excellent character he maintained to the last—that of a willing worker, a genial, kind-hearted sailor, and a good "pal." All the grit of the Gordons was required in those early, rough days of sailor-life; and it carried George Osborne triumphantly through them.

From the brig *R. Wylie* he next found himself among the crew of the schooner *Arthur Burton*, carrying a cargo of corn to Vera Cruz; and this is the testimony paid to Osborne by a shipmate called Small :

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“ I observed that Osborne, in helping to discharge the cargo at Vera Cruz, did not appear to work like a man who had been used to it. His hands seemed soft, and his legs seemed to totter when carrying the sacks of corn. But he never gave in; but he said to me he could not expect to carry as long as one of us fellows could.”

Not one of the shipmates seemed to have had any suspicion of the rank of Osborne. They recognised, naturally, that he was their superior in education and probably in social status; but if anyone had told them that “ Gentleman George ” (as his nickname was) was a great Scottish nobleman we may be sure they would have laughed loud and long.

Small, who was on greater terms of intimacy with Osborne than any of his fellows, supplies an amusing confirmation of this fact; for when, later, he was promoted to the rank of mate on the schooner *Zeyla*, he says: “ The mate divides the watches with the captain. As mate, it was my duty to select one man to be in my watch; and I selected George for this purpose. I knew I could chat freely with him, though I was an officer. He would not take advantage of it as many men would.”

Could anything be more deliciously humorous than this naïve confession? The mate of a tramp-schooner chooses an Earl for his watch, because, forsooth, his

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lordship would not take any advantage of the intimacy of his superior officer!

But to return. At Vera Cruz Osborne had the first of many narrow escapes from death. The Mexican war was raging at the time he was helping to unload a cargo of corn, and the shells of the bombardiers were shrieking past his ears. On one occasion a cannon-ball struck a building within a few feet of where he was standing. "Until the firing ceased," he wrote to his mother, the Countess, "I remained stationary, with my head through the hole the ball had made! I thought it unlikely that another shot would come just to that same spot; but while I was there I saw seven people killed."

A few months later death was again on Osborne's track. While his vessel was lying in Philadelphia harbour, a terrible fire broke out in the middle of the night and, as he tells his mother, "all on board would have been burned up if it had not been for another vessel that gave the alarm."

But George Osborne was by no means content to remain a simple seaman. Between two of his voyages he spent four months at Boston, studying navigation at the Nautical College there; and he made such good use of his opportunities that he received from the authorities a certificate of qualification as first-officer of any merchant ship. It was during this period of

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study that Osborne, Earl, Viscount, and Baron, received the following "character" from a riding-master in whose house he had lodged:—

"To whom it may concern. This is to certify that Mr. George H. Osborne has lived in my house for the past four months, and I can most cheerfully recommend him as a young man of good habits and kind disposition.—F. E. PEARSON."

One can almost see his lordship's quiet smile as he pocketed this testimonial to his virtues.

Of the Earl's simple tastes and kindly disposition at the time, a carpenter friend, called Green, supplies the following particulars: "He was very fond of reading and of music. He used to play very often on the piano in my house. He was very good to children. My wife had a little sister who was often in the house, and George used to take a great deal of notice of her, and would often buy her little presents."

So thrifty, too, was he that out of his small earnings he religiously set apart a portion for a "nest-egg," which in time amounted to fifty dollars. Once, however, he yielded to the temptation to draw two cheques, for £100 each, on his Scottish bankers—a weakness which he thus deplored to his mother: "I have never had any self-respect since I found means to get that money. I have never had any pleasure in life since.

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I despise myself for my foolish weakness. I shall never again hold up my head."

His letters to his mother, whom he loved passionately, are full of revelations of a sweet nature. A fear runs through them that he may never see her again. "How many times," he writes, "has this thought come to me in the dark and cheerless night watches; but I have to drive it from me as too dreadful to think of. I wonder where you are now, and what are you doing? I know you are doing some good, and that you are a blessing to all around you."

Those home letters record strange adventures and more than one narrow escape from death; as when the vessel he was in, "deeply loaded and very leaky," water-logged till she lay over on her beam-ends, struggled for seventeen hours in a raging sea, threatening every moment to founder. When he thought his last hour had come, "God, in His mercy," intervened for his safety. And through all these periods of stress and danger his one thought was for his distant mother, to whom he sends his "never-dying love."

So obsessed was he with the terrible fear that he would never see her again, that after three years of seafaring life he decided to return to Scotland, to resume his rank and its duties. One more voyage he would make—this time in the *Hera* from Boston to

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Melbourne; and this should be the last. But, alas, for his dreaming and his hopes! It proved indeed to be his last. The *Hera* set sail from Boston harbour on the 21st January, 1870. Six days later George Osborne was washed overboard and perished in the sea.

The story of the tragedy is thus told by the ship's captain. "We sailed on the 21st of January. We had very bad weather indeed; on the morning of the 27th of January I was alarmed in my cabin by the cry of 'a man overboard.' I rushed on deck and found that the man overboard was Osborne. Everything that my experience could suggest was done to save him. Ropes and planks were thrown to him. The boat was cleared away; but it was impossible to launch her. The waves were very high.

"I saw Osborne struggling in the water. I heard him cry out; but the cries soon ceased. The water was very cold, and even a good swimmer must have perished very soon."

The second mate of the *Hera* gives an account of the earlier stages of this catastrophe. "We were lowering the mainsail," he says. "Osborne and I were side by side, hauling on the same rope. I was between him and the sea. The ship gave a heavy roll; the downhaul got taut. Osborne and I were both caught in the bight of the downhaul. The first

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shock came on him, because he was nearer the sail than I. I had time to lay myself down, and the rope passed over me, while Osborne was dragged across me and into the sea. It was the work of a second."

Thus perished, in the prime of his days, one of the truest gentlemen who have ever graced the British Peerage. His fears had proved only too true; for never on earth should he see again the mother he loved so deeply, and who was left to carry a broken heart to the grave. And thus it was that forty years and more ago the Aberdeen coronet came to the dead sailor's brother, John Campbell Gordon, seventh Earl of his line, who to-day rules Ireland as the King's Lieutenant.

CHAPTER X

A BELLE OF THE RESTORATION

As Cardinal Mazarin looked smilingly on at the romps of his five lovely nieces with their Royal playmates, the boy-King, Louis XIV., and his brother, Philippe d'Orleans, even his shrewd, far-seeing eyes could scarcely have foreseen the strangely romantic rôles they were destined to play on the stage of the world.

It was from no impulse of affection that the "Italian adventurer," then at the zenith of his power as virtual ruler of France and avowed lover of Anne of Austria, mother of his youthful Sovereign, offered a home to the five daughters and the son of his sister, Hieronima Mancini. His nieces were, by common consent, the loveliest children in Europe; and his design was to secure by their beauty, supplemented by his gold, such splendid alliances as would make his position as the most powerful minister in Europe impregnable.

He had not calculated, however, on the price he would have to pay for realising this ambition. From the day when his beautiful nieces woke the slumbers of the Palais Mazarin with their romps and shrieks of laughter he knew no peace. Wild and untrammelled

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as young colts, they defied his authority and shocked him by their escapades. They scoffed at his religion; and while the sisters refused point blank even to hear the Mass, in spite of his pleading, "If you won't hear it for God's sake, at least hear it for the world's," his nephew horrified him, one Good Friday, by celebrating Mass over a pig, an outrage which cost him a large slice of his uncle's fortune.

Thus the little madcaps grew up in the splendid environment of the Palais Mazarin to a ravishingly beautiful young womanhood, the toast of every gallant in Europe, and coveted prizes to a small army of Royal Princes and nobles. If they had for some years proved a terrible thorn in the Cardinal's bed of roses, he had at least no difficulty in finding high-placed husbands for them, such as his ambition desired.

Laure, the eldest of the quintette, and the only one against whom scandal never pointed a finger, was wedded to a grandson of Henri IV. Marie Anne, the youngest, blossomed into the Duchesse de Bouillon. Olympe might have been Queen of France if Anne of Austria had not so resolutely put her foot down on her son's dallying; she soon found solace, however, in the arms of the Comte de Soissons, a cadet of the Royal House of Savoy; only, in later years, to lead a scandalous and vagrant life in almost every country in Europe. And Marie, in her turn, was compelled to

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turn her back on the love-sick Louis and the throne of France, to find a husband in the Constable Colonna, as a preliminary to a life of strange adventure and equal scandal.

Of all his lovely nieces, Hortense was the only one who really captured the heart of the Cardinal; for, not only was she the most beautiful of the Mancini sisters, but she had a fascination and power of heart-conquest which none of them could boast. So effectually did she enslave her uncle that her lightest word was law to him. "I can twist him round my little finger, *comme ça*," she used laughingly to boast. As for lovers, she drew them as irresistibly (and as disastrously) as flame attracts moths. Our own Charles II., then an exile, burned his wings badly at the flame of Hortense's beauty. Twice he offered her his hand, and a share of the splendid future which he knew awaited him; and twice the Cardinal sent him packing. Other high-placed lovers, the Prince (afterwards King) of Portugal, the Duke of Savoy, the great Turenne, and many another, met with similar rebuffs from the haughty beauty or her scheming uncle.

After declining such splendid alliances as these, Europe learned with amazement that the prize of her beauty and her colossal fortune had fallen to Armand de la Porte de la Meilleraye, son of the brilliant Marshal of that name—a man of high family, it is true,

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but scarcely a fit successor to the Royal wooers to whom she had turned a cold shoulder. With his bride Meilleraye secured a dowry of thirty million francs and the title of Duc de Mazarin. His wedding gift to his wife was a cabinet containing ten thousand pistoles of gold; a present of which Hortense thought so little that she left the cabinet open for all who would to help themselves; and when the coins did not go as rapidly as she wished she flung them in handfuls out of the palace windows, and shrieked with laughter at the scrambles of the crowd to secure them.

Eight days later the Cardinal drew his last breath; and Hortense, who was awaiting the end, with her sisters, in an adjoining room, joined heartily in their exclamation, "God be thanked, the Cardinal's gone!" Such was the gratitude that crowned Mazarin's ambitious designs for his nieces!

Hortense had not been many days a wife before she would gladly have given all her gold for her lost freedom, for her husband, the Duc, was quick to reveal his true character—that of a bigoted, madly jealous man, with eccentricities bordering on insanity. So puritanical was he that one of his first acts was to deface every picture in the Palais Mazarin, and to destroy with a hammer every statue that offended his sense of decency. His jealousy of his wife's dazzling beauty took every form of cruelty the ingenuity of a disordered

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brain could devise. He dismissed her servants; raged at all her little vanities; and, lest he should lose sight of her, would drag her about with him in all sorts of weather, "compelling her to sleep in peasants' huts or to lodge with him in lonely castles." He squandered her fortune, seized her jewels, and generally treated her with such barbarity that, after seven years of "hell on earth" (as she described her life with him), she was compelled to escape to the protection of her brother, the Duc de Nevers.

Then, for some years, ensued a life of such strange vicissitudes as has seldom fallen to the lot of woman—an unhappy period, which can only be lightly outlined in this sketch. Her first flight came to a speedy end when she was arrested and imprisoned in the Convent of Les Filles de St. Marie, an aristocratic home for women of evil repute. Here she played such pranks, by "filling the nuns' holy water stoup with ink, putting wet sheets on their beds, letting dogs loose in their dormitory," and by similar practical jokes, that the Abbess, in despair, begged to be relieved of so troublesome a charge; and she was transferred to another convent prison.

Then once more we find her in flight—this time in man's clothes, accompanied by a maid, similarly attired, and two men-servants. Thus disguised she wandered through Switzerland and Italy, encountering

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many a strange adventure by the way, and reduced to such straits that she was obliged to pawn the few articles of jewellery she had been able to take with her. Now she is back again in France entreating Louis to protect her from her husband—an appeal which resulted in an arrangement by which she was to enjoy an allowance of 24,000 francs a year, so long as she remained out of the country—a sum of which a cynical courtier remarked, “ she will eat it at the first inn she comes to! ”

Back again in Italy, on her “ beggarly allowance,” we see the Duchesse embarking on a fresh series of escapades and adventures; this time with her sister, Mme. la Connétable, who, in turn, is running away from *her* husband. The two runaways, both in male attire, reach Marseilles in a small boat, after facing death in a terrible storm, and after a narrow escape from capture by Turkish pirates. With two chevaliers for escort they wander through Provence, until the approach of the Duc de Mazarin’s police agents so alarms the Duchesse that she abandons her sister and flies to the arms of one of her old suitors, the Duke of Savoy, under whose protection she remains for three years, secure from her husband’s pursuit and revelling once more in the luxury she loved.

With the death of her ducal lover and protector it became necessary to look for a new asylum; and her

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eyes turned to England and to the most ardent wooer of her girlish days, Charles II., now well established on his recovered throne. And one December day in 1675 the Duchesse, still young and more radiantly beautiful than ever, made her appearance at the Court of Whitehall, to be received with open arms by the amorous King whose offer of a crown she had spurned in his days of exile. Of her beauty at this time Forneron painted a glowing picture:—"The glory and indescribable sweetness of her eyes, which 'looked as if they had basked in love's sunshine'; the exquisite curves of her lips; the luxuriant beauty of the jet-black hair which rose in waves to crown her daintily-poised head; the purity and freshness of her complexion; the grace of a figure, every motion of which was a poem."

To her physical charms, invested as they were with the halo of his early romance, the Merry Monarch succumbed at once, the most willing of victims. He installed the vagrant Beauty in the most sumptuous apartments in St. James's Palace, and dowered her with a pension of £4,000 a year. By a leap she took her place as queen of his harem, dethroning that arch-intrigante, the Duchess of Portsmouth, to the delight of Protestant England, who to a man detested and feared the lovely "French spy"; while Louis, eager to ingratiate himself with Charles's new favourite, compelled her husband, the Duc, to allow her £50,000

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a year, and to return to her the jewels, laces, and other precious belongings of which he had robbed her.

Thus, from her long years of eclipse and persecution, Duchesse Hortense emerged into a splendid queendom in a strange land. For political power she cared not a straw; she was content to drink long and deep of the cup of pleasure and licence which Fortune now held so seductively to her lips. Her Royal lover was her infatuated slave; he showered gold and costly presents on her; dazzled her eyes with coronets which she declined to accept; and even turned a blind eye to her many intrigues with his rivals, notably with the dashing and handsome Prince of Monaco, who had the audacity to make love to her under his very eyes. She drew to her salon all the men of culture and wit in England, from the adoring St. Evremond to the poet Waller; and played to perfection the dual rôle of patroness of learning and high priestess of pleasure.

She flung herself with zest into the mania of gambling which had taken possession of Charles's Court, and eclipsed even the Duchess of Portsmouth and my Lady Castlemaine by the prodigal scale of her stakes at the basset-table, winning or losing thousands of pounds at a sitting with the same insouciant smile. Thus the gay, pleasure-pursuing years flitted by, as powerless to touch her radiant beauty as to shake the throne of her supremacy. Even when her fortieth

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birthday was in sight this remarkable woman was still drawing all the gallants to her feet; among them the Baron Banier, a handsome young Swede barely out of his 'teens, and her equally youthful nephew, the Chevalier de Soissons, son of her sister Olympe. So fierce was the jealousy between these boys that, for her *beaux yeux*, they fought a duel in which the Baron was run through the heart.

“ I could not have believed it possible,” says Madame de Sevigné, “ that the eyes of a grandmother could have wrought such havoc.” M^{me}. de Mazarin was so shocked by this tragedy that “ she closed her house, hung her salon in black, and saw nobody but the ever faithful St. Evremond.” But the unnatural passion of a nephew and the slaying of a lover young enough to be her son were, after all, mere incidents in the career of such a profligate. She quickly emerged from her crape-hung boudoir to plunge again into the vortex of dissipation. To gambling she now added an invincible appetite for whiskey, and spent the last years of her King-lover's life in an unbroken orgy of dissipation.

With Charles's death her day of queendom naturally came to an end. She shed a few tears over her fallen greatness, but speedily wiped them away to resume her life of sensual indulgence under two more Kings, from each of whom she drew a substantial pension. She

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varied her amours by the feverish joys of the card-table and the patronage of the racecourse; and it was only when she saw death looming near that she at last retired from the scenes of her splendour and her shame to spend a few months in mock penitence and preparation for the end in Chelsea. Here, one summer day in 1699, she closed her eyes on the world in which, for fifty-two years, she had played so many romantic parts.

But even with her death the chapter of her adventures was not closed. She had not drawn her last breath many hours before her body was seized by a horde of clamorous creditors, and held in pawn until her husband had paid the last farthing of her load of debts, and was able to remove it across the Channel. "For over a year," says St. Simon, "M. de Mazarin carried her body about with him from one estate to another. Once he suffered it to rest for a short time in the Church of Notre Dame de Liesse, where the peasants treated it as that of a saint, and touched it with their beads. At last he took it to Paris, and buried it beside her famous uncle, the Cardinal, in the church of the 'College des Quatre Nations.' "

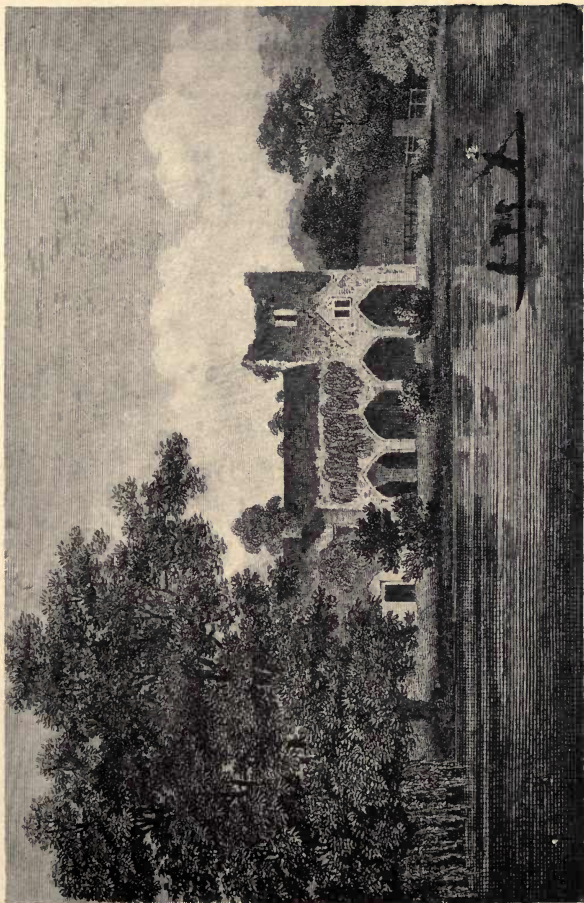
CHAPTER XI

AN INFAMOUS BROTHERHOOD

You may search England through, and not find a scene fairer to look upon than that which spreads its beauties by the River Thames between Henley and Marlow—where the village of Medmenham has its setting in rich meadow-lands and green trees, a haunt of peace and rural charm, remote from the stress and strife of man.

We cannot wonder that when the Cistercian monks first set eyes on this beauty spot, in the far-away days when King John was wearing his crown, they decided to raise there an abbey which should rival in grandeur their House of Woburn, in Bedfordshire; and before John took up his pen to place his reluctant signature on the Great Charter, the towering walls of the new Abbey of Medmenham were mirrored in the silver of the river that flowed, deep and placid, at its feet.

Here for long centuries succeeding generations of monks and abbots recited their Matins, Lauds, and Vespers, and the Angelus bell drew the thoughts of all within its sound to better things. But this long day of peace and worship, in an environment of Nature at her loveliest, came to an end when the fiat went forth



MEDMENHAM ABBEY
BUCKS

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that monasteries were to be swept away. Indeed, long before this, the Medmenham Abbey had fallen on days of poverty; and when the end came only two monks were left to pace its cloisters and recite its litanies, and, we are told, "the house was almost in ruins, its income was a little over £20 a year, and the value of its moveable goods was a paltry £1 3s. 8d." To such straits had the proud abbey fallen in the days of Henry VIII.

Shorn of its grandeur, and left to the merciless hand of time, the abbey quickly fell into hopeless decay. One after another its lofty walls crashed to the earth, until one of its many successive owners restored it to some semblance of its old-time beauty by building "a tower, cloister, and other parts" in close imitation of the original structure. "Within the cloister," we learn, from a contemporary writer, "a room has been fitted up with the same good taste; and the glare of light is judiciously excluded by the pleasing gloom of ancient stained glass, chiefly coronets, roses, and port-cullises. The figure of the Virgin seated on a throne, and holding the Infant Saviour in her arms, carved in marble, still remains, and is placed in a niche in the tower."

Such was the restored Cistercian Abbey of Medmenham in the days of George III., when Sir Francis Dashwood first cast his evil eyes on it; and the idea occurred to him to make it once more a scene of wor-

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ship—a “ worship ” this time so obscene, so unspeakable, that it has covered his name with infamy for ever; and the memory of which makes one blush to-day for a humanity that could sink to such depths of abomination.

Sir Francis Dashwood, the villain of this drama, was a scion of a family that had long been seated on its broad lands in Dorsetshire. His grandfather had amassed a large fortune as a Turkey merchant in London City; his father had blossomed into a country squire, with a seat in Parliament, the husband of four wives, of whom two were daughters of Earls. A Baronetcy was the fitting reward of his political labours; and one of his four wives, Lady Mary Fane, brought a Barony, that of Le Despencer, into the Dashwood family as part of her dower.

In 1708 Lady Mary gave a son to her husband—the Francis of our story, who grew up to clever manhood, went in his turn to Westminster, and through successive offices graduated as Chancellor of the Exchequer. There can be no question of Francis Dashwood’s abilities. He was statesman and orator, scholar and courtier—a man whose gifts were commensurate with any ambition, however great; and to his many dignities he added that of Baron Le Despencer, to which he succeeded on his mother’s death.

But to this dazzling shield there was another and

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very different side. As a youth there were few vices which Francis Dashwood had not explored; as a man he was a pastmaster in all the arts of profligacy. None gambled more recklessly than he at the card-table, or with such a splendid indifference alike to gain or losses; he was the acknowledged King of the Macaronis of his day, and with his beribboned and beflowered hat, his flowing ringlets, his spying-glass and his nosegay, was the biggest swaggerer who ever entered the doors of Almack's or Brooks's Club. He knew every haunt of vice in London, and was prouder of his amours and his three-bottle capacity than of his political fame.

Such was Francis Dashwood, the most notorious roué and blackguard of his day—

Untainted with one deed of real worth,
Lothario holding honour at no price,
Folly to folly added, vice to vice

—when his name became associated with the Thames-side abbey, to his greatest shame.

To Dashwood's depraved taste this peaceful spot, so far removed from the prying eyes of men, suggested itself at once as an ideal resort for the indulgence of his debased conceptions of pleasure. He had long exhausted all the vicious possibilities of London. Here, with fresh appetite, he could take a new lease of vice with little fear that his excesses would come

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to the ears of the public, whom he at once despised and courted.

Nor was there any lack of kindred spirits in that age of licence. He need not, indeed, go outside the circle of his intimate friends to find all the colleagues he required for his new enterprise.

There was George Selwyn, for instance—just the man for his purpose, who, in the gratification of his tastes feared neither God nor his fellow-man. He had proved this as a youth when he was “kicked” with ignominy out of his Oxford college—a story which Horace Walpole tells thus:—

“It appears that Selwyn had obtained possession of a silver chalice used for the Communion Service, and that while at a tavern, surrounded by a jovial party of friends, he once filled it with wine and handed it round, exclaiming with mock gravity, ‘Drink this in remembrance of me.’ It was for this infamous outrage on elementary decency that Selwyn had been sent down from Oxford in disgrace, to be treated in London as a hero and martyr by men as shameless as himself.”

Then there was my Lord Sandwich, a brother statesman of Dashwood, a man who was described as

Too infamous to have a friend,
Too bad for bad men to commend.

Potter, son of the Archbishop of Canterbury, was the third of this Comus crew, a man who had nothing

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to learn, even from Dashwood, of the arts of vice. Other members were Wilkes, M.P., and one of the cleverest scoundrels in London; the poet Churchill, Whitehead, and Lloyd, and others of the same kidney to the number of a dozen.

These were the men (if one can call them "men") who leagued themselves with Dashwood in a new brotherhood to revive the splendour of Medmenham by worshipping—the Devil! "Franciscan" monks they dubbed themselves, in honour of Francis, their founder and high priest; and to the restored cloister of Medmenham Abbey they made their pilgrimages to conduct their shameless rites under the eyes of the throned Virgin.

Precisely what these rites were we do not know. It was not long, however, before it began to be whispered in the taverns and coffee-houses of London that Medmenham was the scene of orgies more shameless than even those over which the "Regent Roué," the Duc d'Orleans, presided at his *Parc aux Cerfs*. There were curious eyes in Medmenham village; and strange tales began to circulate of the scenes they had witnessed through the lighted windows of the cloister-room on dark nights—scenes (some of them) too horrible to raise even a corner of the curtain on. These orgies were rarely witnessed except on two nights of the week, when the "noble order of Franciscans"

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deserted town on Saturday to pass the week-end as "cloistered monks" by the riverside. Much unsavoury light is thrown on these orgies in a contemporary book, "Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea"; and Wilkes, whose tongue was as indiscreet and unrestrained as his pen, has added the testimony of one who shared them.

"Rites," he told Lord Temple, "were celebrated there of a nature subversive of all decency, and calculated, by an imitation of the ceremonies and mysteries of the Roman Catholic Church, to render not only that Church, but religion itself, an object of contumely. To such an extent, I will own, that they cannot be reflected on without astonishment. Sir Francis Dashwood himself used to officiate as high priest habited in the dress of a Franciscan monk of the olden days, and engaged in pouring a libation from a Communion cup to the mysterious object of the homage of himself and his associates."

The *Messe Noire*, or Black Mass, appears to have played an important part in these celebrations; and in this connection the following story is told by the author of "Tarnished Coronets":—"During the celebration of the *Messe Noire*, Sandwich had to speak an invocation to the Devil. At the psychic moment, we are told by the author of 'Chrysal,' Wilkes let loose

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a black baboon adorned with the traditional insignia of horns and hoofs.

“ The animal vaulted on to the table, and then, gibbering with fright, took refuge on Sandwich’s shoulders. That worthy monk, who, of course, had a superstitious belief in the powers he was flouting, rolled on the ground in a paroxysm of craven fear, imagining that, like a second Faustus, he would be carried off to the infernal regions. With frenzy he implored the ‘ gracious devil ’ to return whence he had come, until a roar of laughter from a fellow reveller discovered the intruder to be only a baboon.”

Sandwich never forgave the practical joker. And when Wilkes was on his trial for seditious libel his opportunity for revenge came. Some years earlier, for the delectation of the Franciscans, a scandalous poem, entitled an “ Essay on Woman,” had been written in parody of Pope’s famous “ Essay on Man,” and this poem Sandwich insisted on reading to a scandalised House of Lords, declaring that Wilkes was both author and publisher of it. The Peers declared that the parody was “ obscene, libellous, and a breach of privilege ”; and a few days later Wilkes was indicted for blasphemy. Such was the shameless betrayal of one Medmenham monk by another.

It is as inconceivable in our time that statesmen should find their pleasure in ways so disgraceful, as

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that public opinion should tolerate for a day the orgies of the Franciscan monks. But strange as it seems, not one of the infamous crew, from Dashwood to "Old Q." (the infamous Duke of Queensberry) and Fox, Lord Holland, who were later members of the fraternity, seems to have suffered much in reputation or at all in position by conduct which should make a cannibal blush for them.

Dashwood survived to see his seventy-third birthday, and to wear his coronet as Lord "Le Despencer" for nearly twenty years before his shameless eyes were closed in death. His later years, when the fires of passion had burnt themselves out, seem to have been spent in retirement—let us hope, also in penitence. His fame and shame alike appear to have been forgotten, for not a contemporary line survives to chronicle his death.

Abbot and monks have long been dust. Of Dashwood, as of others of the brotherhood, a tainted memory alone remains. But the abbey which they so foully desecrated sleeps sweetly still in its ruins; and all the infamies of the blasphemers have been powerless to leave the least stain on the fairness of its fame.



FRANCES JENNINGS
DUCHESS OF TYRCONNEL

CHAPTER XII

THE DUCHESS IN THE WHITE MASK

AMONG the many keepers of stalls in the New Exchange in the Strand, a favourite haunt of fashionable shoppers when William III. was King, were two women, one in the pride of youth, the other in the decline of her days, who for different reasons attracted much curiosity. The former, who dispensed her wares under the sign of the Three Spanish Gipsies, the grand-daughter of a farrier in the Savoy, was a girl of rare beauty and charm of manner, who was destined, although she little dreamt it in those days, to die Duchess of Albemarle. The latter actually was a Duchess, and but a few years earlier had held her head proudly among the highest and fairest as the most lovely of Ireland's Vicereines.

“Above-stairs,” says Horace Walpole, “in the character of a milliner, sat the reduced Duchess of Tyrconnel, wife of Richard Talbot, Lord Deputy of Ireland under James II. She had delicacy enough not to wish to be detected; she sat in a white mask and a white dress, and was known by the name of the ‘White Milliner.’ Probably none of the fine ladies

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who purchased trifles at her stall had any suspicion that the mysterious saleswoman had been in other days the most courted beauty in England—vainly wooed by two Kings—and Deputy Queen of Ireland.”

Little more than fifty years earlier, the Duchess-milliner had opened her eyes on the world in which she was to play such a romantic and tragic rôle at Sandridge, near St. Albans. She was the daughter of a plain, jovial, fox-hunting country squire, Richard Jennings, the head of a family which had been seated for generations on its broad Hertfordshire acres, and had been content to lead the life of country gentlefolk, taking little interest in the doings of the world that wagged outside its manor boundaries.

Richard's grandfather had, it is true, been dubbed Knight by the first Charles, had been Sheriff of his county, and had ridden to the Parliament House at Westminster for a few years as a law-maker. But, apart from Sir John, no Jennings had troubled his head with other concerns than the management of his estates and his family; and Squire Richard would have laughed aloud if he had been told that the two baby-girls in his nursery were one day to wear the coronets of Duchesses, one as her Grace of Marlborough, the other as Duchess of Tyrconnel. And yet such were the surprises Fortune had in waiting for the Jennings babies.

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Both girls grew up “ in beauty, side by side ”; and almost before they had emerged from short frocks their loveliness was the talk of the countryside. Each in her different way was an exquisite flower of girlhood; but, of the two, Frances was by common consent the more lovely; and before she had laid down her school-books she was the toast of every young squire in the county, and counted her lovers by the score.

Her fame even travelled as far as the Royal Court in London; and one day the household at Sandridge was thrown into a high state of excitement by the appearance of a gaily-attired functionary, commanded by the Duchess of York, whose ambition it was to surround herself with the prettiest girls in England, to invite Frances Jennings to become one of her Maids of Honour. The bait was a dazzling one. With much misgiving, Squire Jennings gave his sanction, and Frances was translated to the gilded circle that fluttered round one of the most brilliant thrones in Europe.

To the squire’s daughter, reared in the innocence and simplicity of the country, the change was a dazzling revolution in her life. To find herself thus suddenly moving among the fairest and highest in the land, and received among them with the instantaneous and universal homage her great beauty commanded, was calculated to turn the head of any rustic maiden.

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But Frances' pretty head was not easily turned. She accepted the homage as her due, and moved among her new splendours as if she had been cradled in a palace.

She coquetted with the Court gallants, and drove them to distraction by her charms and her caprices. The Duke of York himself lost his heart at sight of her, and turned on her the battery of his sighs and smiles, his ogling, and flattering speeches. When she met his advances with alternate coolness and coquetry, her indifference only added fuel to the flame of his passion. He bombarded her with notes, "containing the tenderest expressions and most magnificent promises," slipping them into her pocket or her muff, as opportunity served; but the disdainful beauty dropped the *billets-doux* on the floor for anyone to read who chose to pick them up, until at last the Royal lover was compelled to abandon the pursuit in despair.

Much more dangerous were the advances of James's brother, the "Merrie Monarch," a man versed in all the arts of gallantry and conquest, and, moreover, one of the most fascinating men in England. Charles, undeterred by his brother's ignominious defeat, laid siege to the "lovely Jennings'" heart; and it might (who can say?) have gone ill for the fair citadel had not his imperious and beautiful mistress put her foot

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down firmly, and bidden the King to choose between her and the Maid of Honour.

Among Frances' army of high-placed wooers was Henry, Marquis de Berny, the future head of one of the proudest families of France, who was her abject slave, and vowed that he would kill himself if she did not smile on his suit. He was saved from this grim alternative by his summary recall home by his father; but to his last day he never got over his boyish infatuation. Henry Jermyn, the wealthiest and handsomest beau in England, offered his hand, gilded with £20,000 a year, to the bewitching Maid of Honour; and when she refused it, he rode away to seek death in New Guinea.

To one and all of her legion of lovers Frances turned her pretty shoulder. She revelled in her freedom and the sovereignty of her beauty; she would be no man's wife—yet awhile—and certainly no man's mistress, though he were of the Blood Royal. Of all the maids at Court she was the maddest and merriest, as she was the fairest. She was always ready for any escapade, however foolish and risky; and always was the ring-leader in it. The chronicles of the time are full of her pranks.

“What mad freaks the Maids of Honour at Court have!” writes Pepys in his Diary. “Mrs. Jennings, one of the Duchess's maids, the other day dressed her-

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self as an orange-wench, and went up and down and cried 'Oranges'; till, falling down, or by some accident, her fine shoes were discerned and she put to a great deal of shame; that such as these tricks, being ordinary, and worse among them, there be few will venture on them as wives; my Lady Castlemaine will, in merriment say that her daughter, now above a year old or two, will be the first *maid* in the Court that will be married."

But the genial diarist is too sweeping in his judgment. Frances Jennings was a madcap, it is true; but no breath of suspicion ever tarnished her fair fame. Her virtue was as impregnable as her beauty was unrivalled, although in her love of adventure she certainly ran grave risks. On one occasion she and another impish Maid of Honour, each suitably attired and carrying a basket of oranges, took a hackney coach and drove off in search of fun. As the coach rattled past the Duke's Theatre, where the Queen and the Duchess of York were among the audience, the madcaps pulled it up, and, basket on arm, entered the theatre intending to call their wares under the very noses of their august mistresses.

As ill-luck would have it, however, no sooner had they set foot in the lobby than Killigrew, a notorious rake, accosted them, and, putting his arm round Frances' waist, tried to snatch a kiss. With a scream

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she wrenched herself free, gave the roué a sound box on the ear, and, with her companion, rushed back to the coach, bidding the driver take them to the house of a famous necromancer to have their fortunes told. Of the further adventures that befell them there is no room to tell, but before they found themselves safely at Court again they had had experiences to satisfy them for many a week to come.

But among such a shower of Cupid's darts as assailed her even Frances Jennings could scarcely hope to go untouched; and the first sign of danger came at her meeting with Dick Talbot, a dashing, adventurous Irishman, with the finest physique and handsomest face in England.

Talbot was a man whom any maid, however impregnable she might think herself, might well have found irresistible. Apart from his physical perfections, he had won a European reputation by his adventures and deeds of daring; he was the ideal hero of romance, and a born courtier and lover to boot. Before a wooer so ardent and so invested with romance Frances Jennings' heart succumbed; and, with the approval and smiles of her Royal mistress, she became affianced to him. But before she had been a promised bride many months her proud spirit rebelled against the chains of a lover who proved too autocratic to please her, and in a moment of mutiny she tore them off.

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As so often happens to such wayward and wilful maidens, her heart was before long caught on the rebound by a pertinacious wooer for whom she did not profess any affection—George Hamilton, a soldierly, stalwart scion of the Abercorn family, who, through all her caprices and vagaries, had worshipped patiently at her shrine since she first left her Hertfordshire home. She had refused more than one Duchess's coronet, and had at last bartered her peerless beauty to become the wife of a plain soldier of fortune.

She was but seventeen when, as a bride, she turned her back on the splendours of Courts to fare forth with her soldier-husband to France, where Louis XIV. had need of his sword. Louis made a Count of the Captain of his *Gens d'Armes Anglais*, who, after a few years of fighting, fell gallantly in battle near Zebernstieg in 1676, leaving his young and beautiful wife, with three young daughters, penniless, save for a small pension from France.

But Frances Jennings (or the Countess Hamilton, as she had now become) was no woman to spend her days in weeping, or to watch her beauty fade in the shadow of sorrow and obscurity. She was still young, and her loveliness had but reached the fulness of its flower. It was not long before she had laid aside her mourning, and was captivating the gay world of Paris under the aegis of the English Ambassador's lady.

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In the French capital this English rose created as great a sensation as in London. To quote one of the many admirers of the fascinating widow, "Nature had dowered her with inexpressible charms to which the Graces have put the finishing touches; she has the figure of Aurora, or of the Goddess of Spring."

It was in Paris, in these days of reincarnation, as she called them, that her former lover, handsome Dick Talbot, crossed her path again. Like herself, Talbot had made a pilgrimage to the altar, and was again free to woo and wed; and this time there was no rift within the lute. Her heart had always been his, and when he claimed it the surrender was immediate and final. As the wife of Colonel Talbot she entered on the happiest period of her chequered life.

When her husband, who was a prime favourite with James II., was sent to Ireland, with an Earldom to gild him, to take charge of the troops there, his Countess went with him. A few years later "my lord" was created, by his indulgent Sovereign, Duke of Tyrconnel, and appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland.

Thus, by devious and obscure paths, Frances Jennings had at last reached the goal of her ambition; she was a Duchess. Nay, more, she was, as the Viceroy's lady, a Queen, with a Court of her own. These were splendid days for the squire's daughter—days in which she drank deep of the cup of pleasure

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and of power; and she filled her exalted position with a dignity, tact, and graciousness as conspicuous as her beauty. She won all hearts, and commanded all homage at a time when the Stuart fortunes were beset with dangers and difficulties. Even when the flood of disaster overwhelmed her Sovereign, and when he rode, desperate and ruined, from the fatal field of the Boyne, she was almost the only one of his adherents who kept a cool and exalted head. She received the dishevelled Royal fugitive at Dublin Castle with all the splendour and honours of a Queen receiving an Emperor. She knew that her sun had set; but at least it should set in flame and glory.

A little later, she was an exile in France with her King. Her splendours had fallen from her; but her proud heart was unsubdued. To husband and King alike she was a tower of strength. But evil fate dogged her still—and to the last. Her husband returned to Ireland, in 1691, to challenge the Orange King's supremacy once more. Never had he been more buoyant and more brilliant than when, one August day, he dined with D'Usson and a few kindred souls. "He drank, he jested; he was again the Dick Talbot who had dined and revelled with Grammont." As he rose, with laughter on his lips, from the table he was struck with apoplexy. Three days later he died;

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and his body was laid to rest, unmarked by stone or epitaph, under the pavement of Limerick Cathedral.

The rest of Frances Jennings' remarkable life-story can be told in a few words. For some years poverty of a grim type was her daily companion. Her beauty faded until no trace of it was left. Her three daughters by Hamilton, for each of whom she had found a Viscount for husband, were estranged from her. For a time, as we have seen, she was thankful to keep body and soul together by selling her wares in the New Exchange, hiding her pride and identity in a white mask. At last her brother-in-law, the Duke of Marlborough, came tardily to her rescue; and through his influence a small part of her husband's Irish property was restored to her. Thus rescued from privation, she spent the last thirty years of her life in Dublin, living unregarded where she had once reigned as Queen.

And her death was as pitiful as the clouded close of her life. One cold winter night in 1731 she fell out of bed on to the floor, "and being too feeble to rise or call out, she was found in the morning so perished with cold that she died in a few hours." Thus died in loneliness and tragedy one of the most brilliant women who have ever dazzled men's eyes by their beauty, or have climbed to dizzy heights on the ladder of ambition.

CHAPTER XIII

A BEAUTIFUL SHREW

THE Kit Cat Club, that famous club of Whig patriots which held its convivial meetings over Christopher Kat's pastrycook shop, within a biscuit throw of Temple Bar, some two centuries ago, had many a proud name on its roster of members—from the great Marlborough and bluff Sir Robert Walpole to Steele and Addison, Congreve and Dryden; but none quite so remarkable as that of Mary Pierrepoint, famous in later years as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the eccentric beauty and wit who wrote the most charming letters ever penned by human hand.

It was the invariable law of the Kit Cat Club that at each merry meeting a special toast should be given in honour of some lady of beauty or fame; and one evening in the year 1698 this honour fell to Evelyn Pierrepoint, who was in later years to blossom into His Grace of Kingston. "My daughter Mary," was Mr. Pierrepoint's choice, to the consternation of his fellow-members, not one of whom had set eyes on the lady who was to be thus highly honoured.

"You have not seen my daughter, gentlemen,"



LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU

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Mr. Pierrepoint said; "but I will send for her, and you shall see for yourselves that, young as she is, she is a lady worthy of your homage." Half-an-hour later the "toast" of the evening, a child of eight, who had been taken from her bed for the purpose, made her appearance—a charming picture in frills and ribbons—and, at sight of her dainty loveliness, made an immediate conquest. The toast was drunk with uproarious enthusiasm; the beautiful little maid was elected a member of the Club with acclamation, and spent a delightful hour on the knees of great noblemen and poets before she was carried back, weary but very happy, to her bed. Thus dramatically did Lady Mary Wortley Montagu make her curtsy and her first conquests on the stage of life, on which for so many years she was to be a conspicuous figure.

Fond as Mary Pierrepoint was of admiration and petting, she was fonder still of her books; and her happiest hours, even as a child, were spent in her father's library, poring over "Ovid" or "Xenophon"—a curious pastime in which she often had for companion young Edward Wortley, brother of her great friend Anne Wortley, a studious youth who still found time to write glowing sonnets to his fellow student's beauty and wit. In fact, he soon found it so agreeable to read Latin and Greek with pretty Mary Pierrepoint that he completely lost his

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heart to her, and began to avow his passion in ardent prose.

But Lady Mary (as she now was), who by this time had blossomed into a beautiful and very fascinating young woman of twenty-one, was little disposed to allow Cupid to interfere with "Xenophon." She frankly tells her wooer, "I can esteem, I can be a friend, but I don't know whether I can love. Expect what is complaisant and easy, but never what is fond in me." Such cold response as this chilled the ardour of Edward Wortley. Reproaches were followed by hot words; and, in high dudgeon, the young man at last went off, vowing he would never see her again.

Then it was, as so often happens, that the deserted girl made a discovery. She knew then that she really loved the man she had spurned; and she wrote to him, "While I foolishly fancied you loved me, there is no condition in life I could not have been happy in with you—so very much I liked you—I may say, loved; since it is the last thing I'll ever say to you. . . . I'll never see you more. I shall avoid all public places; and this is the last letter I shall send. If you write, do not be displeased if I send it back unopened."

To Edward Wortley this sudden thawing of the iceberg was a revelation as startling as it was welcome. An hour after receiving it, he was on his knees before the girl he loved, and was holding the hand which

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carried a heart with it. But Edward Wortley's difficulties were by no means at an end. The Marquis of Dorchester (as Mr. Pierrepoint had become) not only point-blank refused to accept him as son-in-law, but vowed that his daughter should forthwith be married to a man of his own choosing. If she refused, he would "disown her for ever."

In such a terrible predicament, what could a poor maiden do? She dried her tears, and consented to go to the altar with the man she hated. The wedding-day was fixed; the bride's trousseau, on which £400 had been spent, was ready to wear—and then, at the eleventh hour, when even the wedding-guests had arrived, the bride fled to the arms of Edward Wortley.

The day before she thus vanished, she had written to him—"Reflect now for the last time in what manner you must take me. I shall come to you only with a nightgown and petticoat; and that is all you will get with me. I again beg you to hire a coach to be at the door early Monday morning to carry us part of our way wherever you resolve our journey shall be. . . . I tremble for what we are doing. Are you *sure* you will love me for ever? Shall we never repent?"

Ominous words these; for seldom has even a runaway match proved more disastrous. Edward Wortley, the student-lover, was quick to show his true character—that of "an insufferable prig and the

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meanest of misers ”; and before the honeymoon had waned he began to treat his wife with the neglect and cruelty which ultimately drove her from him. The unhappy girl, however, soon found solace and distraction in a whirl of gaiety. If her husband did not appreciate her, there were hundreds of gallants to pay homage to her beauty and her wit; the world of fashion was eager to hail her as one of its queens.

When her miserly husband, who had now tacked “ Montagu ” on to his “ Wortley ” cognomen, was made Lord of the Treasury, Lady Mary transferred her charms and gifts to the Royal Court, where she soon became a prime favourite. The King and the Prince of Wales both paid her marked attention; in fact, His Majesty was always at his best and merriest when Wortley Montagu’s wife was by his side. And in this connection an amusing story is told.

One day, when she was anxious to keep an appointment, she slipped away unobserved from the King’s side, and was tripping down the staircase when she met Secretary Craggs, who was on his way to pay his respects to His Majesty. “ Ha, you little truant! You are running away? ” was the Secretary’s greeting; and “ snatching her up in his arms, as a nurse carries a child, he ran full speed with her upstairs, deposited her within the ante-chamber, kissed both her hands respectfully, and vanished.” There was no

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help for it now! Lady Mary, covered with confusion, was ushered by a page once more into the presence of the King, to whom she told the story of her abduction, with tears in her eyes.

A moment later in walked Mr. Secretary with profound obeisances, whereupon the King angrily demanded, "Is it the custom of this country to carry about fair ladies like a sack of flour?" For a second Craggs was dumbfounded, never dreaming that Lady Mary had played the traitress; and then, with a low bow, said, "There is nothing I would not do for your Majesty's satisfaction." The King laughed, we are told; but when Craggs passed Lady Mary, he whispered fiercely in her ear, "You — little tell-tale. I thought you had more sense. I'll pay you out for this some day!"

When, in 1716, Wortley Montagu was sent to Constantinople on a diplomatic mission his wife accompanied him, to spend two years in the gorgeous East, where none was more gorgeous than herself. She was more Oriental than the Orientals in her rose-coloured damask silk trousers, brocaded with silver flowers, her shoes of gold-embroidered white kid, smock of white silk gauze edged with embroidery, richly-laced scarlet waistcoat and blue braided jacket.

Of this sojourn in the East Lady Mary gives many a sprightly account in her inimitable letters, not the

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least lively of which is the following:—" One of the highest entertainments in Turkey is having you to their baths; and when I was introduced to one, the lady of the house came to undress me, which is another high compliment they pay to strangers. After she had slipped off my gown and saw my stays, she was much struck at the sight of them, and cried out to the other ladies in the bath, ' Come hither and see how cruelly the poor English ladies are used by their husbands; you need boast indeed of the superior liberties allowed you when they lock you up thus in a box! ' "

It was during this stay in Constantinople that Lady Mary " first had the thought of a septennial bill for the benefit of married persons "; and that she began to advocate the virtues of inoculation for small-pox, which was commonly practised by the Turks. " They make parties," she says, " for this purpose; and when they are met (commonly fifteen or sixteen together) the old woman comes with a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of small pox, and asks what vein you please to have opened. She immediately rips open that you offer to her, with a large needle, and puts into the vein as much venom as can lie upon the head of the needle; and afterwards binds up the little wound with a hollow piece of stick." But the English doctors jeered at the new-fangled medical heresy; and England was thus left to

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the ravages of small-pox eighty years longer until Jenner took up the cudgels for vaccination and at last conquered a sceptical world.

Back in England again, it was not long before Lady Mary's scathing pen and contemptuous indifference made a bitter enemy of Pope, whose infatuation for her led to an offer of marriage. And never was lover so humiliated as the "little hunchback," when, in passionate words, he laid his heart at his lady's feet. In spite of her utmost endeavours to be angry and look grave, Lady Mary burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, from which moment, we are told, "he became her implacable enemy." How bitter and remorseless this enmity was we all know who have read the cruel lines in which the poet satirised Lady Mary as Sappho.

But Lady Mary's "pen of vinegar" and her too clever and biting tongue constantly estranged friends and made enemies; and to her last day she seemed unable to keep either tongue or pen in decent restraint. One cannot resist a laugh at these exhibitions of her dangerous sense of humour and her sarcasm; as when she gravely assured foolish Lady Rich that the Master of the Rolls is so called "because he superintends all the French rolls that are baked in London; and without him you would have no bread and butter for breakfast"; or when she described Lady Orkney as "a

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mixture of fat and wrinkles, and before, a very considerable protuberance which precedes her ”; and Lady Portland at George III.’s coronation, as “ an Egyptian mummy embroidered over with hieroglyphics.”

Very clever and amusing, no doubt; but such misdirected and spiteful humour makes enemies inevitably, as Lady Mary found to her cost in the days of her friendless old age, when she in turn became the butt of gibes and jeers to which she was no longer able to retaliate effectively.

In 1739, after nearly thirty years of miserable wedded life, Lady Mary decided to leave her husband; and for two-and-twenty years she never set foot in England—not indeed until death had loosened her husband’s clutch of his money-bags. The latter years of this sordid Croesus (he left £1,350,000 behind him) were spent “ in a wretched hovel—lean, unpainted, and half its nakedness barely shaded with harateen stretched till it cracks,” drinking his daily half-pint of tokay and gloating over his gold.

Meanwhile, his ill-used wife was wandering aimlessly about the Continent, her beauty now only a memory—all that was left to her, her clever pen and her venomous tongue. Horace Walpole saw her at Florence in 1740, when she was barely fifty, and gives this unlovely account of her. “ Lady Mary Wortley

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is here," he writes, " an object of ridicule to the town. She wears a foul mob-cap that does not cover her greasy black locks, that hang down never combed or curled; an old mazarine-blue wrapper that gapes open and discovers a canvas petticoat. Her face violently swelled—partly covered with plaister, partly with white paint, which for cheapness she has bought so coarse that you would not use it to wash a chimney."

Even Lady Mary herself could not have painted a more cruel picture of her worst enemy than this of herself by Walpole, who in a few words has handed down to posterity a " settlement in full " of the grudges he bore her. But, making every allowance for the exaggerations of a spiteful enemy, one cannot resist a feeling of pity for this woman, shorn of the last vestige of beauty, separated from her husband and home, and abandoned by her friends, dragging out a wretched existence among strangers to whom she was an object of ridicule or aversion. Add to these the trouble caused by her son, a worthless profligate, and eccentric to the verge of madness; and who is there who can envy Lady Wortley Montagu her brief reign of splendour and conquest?

When she returned to England, after her husband's death, in 1761, her own days were drawing to a tragic close. Cancer of the breast, that most cruel and painful of diseases, seized her; and after a few months of

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indescribable suffering borne with fine courage and resignation, the brilliant and unhappy daughter of the Duke of Kingston drew her last breath one August day in 1762.

CHAPTER XIV

A NOBLE ECCENTRIC

THE British Peerage, like every human flock, has not only its black sheep, but its eccentrics, whose whimsicalities, often verging on madness, provoke either laughter or pity.

Such a blue-blooded oddity was Jane Elizabeth, Lady Ellenborough, sister of the ninth Lord Digby, whose singular career, which came to an end but thirty years ago, made her for half-a-century the wonder and laughing-stock of Europe. Among her many eccentricities was a mania for matrimony. Before she had been many years wedded to her first lord, and while still little more than a girl, she eloped with Prince Schwartzberg, only to leave him in turn, within two years, for the arms of a handsome Bavarian, Baron Vennigen.

In quick succession she transferred her volatile affection to half-a-dozen other husbands, before she lost her heart to a Bedouin sheik, who promptly divorced his Moslem wives and married her. The remainder of her romantic life she spent roaming the desert with her Arab lord and his dusky retinue, a

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Queen of Bedouins, or in her barbaric home just outside the gates of Damascus, happier, she declared, in her semi-savage life than if she were wearing the coronet of an English Duchess.

Other noble oddities occur readily to the memory—the second Lord Rokeby, whom it pleased to walk hatless in the pouring rain by the side of his carriage while his flunkeys rode luxuriously inside; and who spent most of his days gambolling like a merman in the sea, and dried himself by racing round and round his bathing-house, to the alarm of any who chanced to stray that way. Elwes, the Millionaire miser—who, although no Peer, counted noblemen among his ancestors, and himself refused a seat in the House of Lords—who would cheerfully lose thousands at a sitting at the gaming-table; while he would sit without fire and light in order to save coals and candles, or would feast off a month-old pancake, carried in his pocket, rather than spend sixpence on a meal at a cheap restaurant.

These and many others one recalls—such as Lady Hester Stanhope, who, like Lady Ellenborough, turned her back on civilisation to lead the barbaric life of the East; the first Earl of Dudley, a prey to weird fancies, whose habit of speaking his thoughts aloud was responsible for so many amusing stories; and the “mad” Duke of Portland, who spent his

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days in his subterranean palace at Welbeck, or dodging furtively along his corridors and through his park, fearful lest human eyes should see him.

But among all these freaks of noble humanity few are quite as interesting as George Hanger, fourth Lord Coleraine, in the Peerage of Ireland, who cut such a romantic—and, at times, grotesque—figure in the London of a century or more ago. A strange medley of humanity was my Lord Coleraine—scholar and buffoon, intimate friend of the heir to the Throne and laughing-stock of the coffee-houses; now moving splendidly among the most splendid at the Court at Carlton House, now herding with thieves and out-of-work highwaymen in the slums of St. Giles; swash-buckler, deadly duellist, famous bruiser, distinguished soldier, and coal-dealer, who scoffed at rank and titles, and vowed he was more in his element riding to Tyburn with a doomed highwayman in the execution-cart than hobnobbing with Princes.

His enemies, if he had any, could never point to George Hanger as a madman; his stoutest champion could scarcely vow that he was quite sane. He was an eccentric, a man of strange whims and fancies, a soldier of fortune and its willing football.

Such was the fourth Lord Coleraine, who opened his eyes on the world one day in 1751, at his father's seat in Gloucestershire. Precisely who he was or how

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he came by his title he used to say he did not know—and that he cared less. In his autobiography he declares that he cannot trace his ancestry beyond his grandfather, one Sir George; and as for his title, he accounts for it thus humourously :

“ My sister, Miss Anne Hanger, was married to Hare, Lord Coleraine; but my father was not in the most distant degree related to his lordship, or connected with him except by that marriage. Lord Coleraine, however, happening to die at the very nick of time without issue or heir to his coronet, my father claimed it, with just as much right as the clerk or sexton of the parish.”

But this was only “ George’s fun.” His family was highly respectable, boasting a few centuries of creditable ancestry; and the title which he inherited was quite regularly granted to his father while George was wrestling with his Eutropius at Eton, in 1762.

As a schoolboy the heir-to-be seems to have been a hopeless “ pickle,” the despair of his masters, the idol of his schoolfellows. Ringleader in every escapade, fighting when he was not playing truant and defying authority, the most birched boy in the school, he made a promising start in a career which was to be so adventurous and unconventional.

From Eton he went into the Army; spent a year in study and duelling at Göttingen, and two more at

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Hanover and Hesse-Cassel, painting both towns red with his dissipations and pranks. Then back to London, where for a few years he held his place as the gayest man in town, hero of a long succession of love adventures, duels, and bruising-matches.

Sated with such indulgences he resigned his commission in the Guards, and took his sword out to America, where the Revolution was in full flame; and there he performed such prodigies of valour, and proved himself so able a tactician, that he won his majority, and was appointed inspector of Volunteers. In the midst of his martial glory, however, yellow fever seized him in its deadly grip; and, after a long life-and-death struggle, he returned to England a mere "bag of bones."

But George Hanger was by no means beaten by fate. Before he had been many months in London we find him welcomed into the circle of the rollicking blades who were boon companions of George, Prince of Wales, "First Gentleman in Europe," one of the Prince's equerries, on a substantial salary, and his chief favourite. Those were mad, merry days for the future Baron—the cockpit, the prize-ring, coaching, philandering with be vies of Perditas, swaggering in fine attire, filled his days to overflowing; the nights were spent in feasting and drinking, at the gaming-tables, and in more questionable haunts of pleasure.

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Many a tale is told of the pranks of Prince George and his merry men in which George Hanger was ring-leader. It was he who made that ludicrous wager with the Prince, when, seated with Fox, Sheridan and others of the same jovial kidney, he was being whirled to Brighton behind the galloping horses driven by the Prince himself. A dispute arose as to the relative speed of turkeys and geese, over a course of ten miles. His Royal Highness declared that the turkeys would win easily; Hanger as enthusiastically backed the humbler birds. A match was at once arranged. The turkeys quickly established a commanding lead, and looked winners all over; but alas! as the shades of evening began to fall they took to the trees to roost, and left the geese to romp in by a margin of miles.

Such is a sample of those merry, foolish days when George Hanger was an idol of the most dissipated coterie in England. But even in those days of splendour the irrepressible George could not keep his eccentricity within bounds. "He might be seen," to quote from Mr. C. Redding's "Recollections," "riding his grey pony in Pall Mall without a servant; then, dismounting at a bookseller's shop, he would get a boy to hold his horse, and sit upon the counter for an hour, talking to Burdett, Bosville, or Major James, who used to haunt that shop, Budd and Calkin's. He was a very rough subject, but honest

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to the back-bone, and plain-speaking. He carried a short, thick shillelagh, and now and then took his quid. A favourite of the Prince of Wales, he administered a well-merited reproof to the Prince and the Duke of York, one day at Carlton House, for the grossness of their language."

At other times he would slip away from the gilded salons of Carlton House to spend a few hours in the slums of the East End, roystering with pickpockets and housebreakers, and convulsing them with his drolleries, or to join a strolling band of gipsies, and for a few happy days mend kettles with them as a variant from robbing hen-roosts.

It was on one such excursion that, he tells us, he lost his heart to "the lovely Egypta." "I used," he writes, "to listen with raptures to the melodies of her voice. I thought her the 'Pamela' of Norwood, the paragon of her race, the Hester of the nineteenth century. But, alas, on my return after a short absence one day, I found that she had gone off with a travelling tinker of a neighbouring tribe, who wandered about the country mending pots and kettles."

Thus unromantically ended the one real romance in the life of this soldier of fortune, who lived and died unwed. When he was wearied alike of Courts, of slums, and gipsy-tents, he would take to his pen and write a learned treatise on some military subject

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which would command the admiration of the greatest Army experts. "You would have made a great General, George," his friend, the Prince, once said to him, "if you weren't so — fond of low company." "Your Royal Highness should not blame me," was the quick retort, "for a preference which may be my misfortune, but is certainly your fault." Whereupon Europe's First Gentleman laughed until he grew purple in the face, as he exclaimed: "You had me there, George. I can never get any change out of you, by gad!"

George Hanger gives a vastly entertaining account of this period (and others) of his adventurous life in his autobiography, which he humourously prefaced with a portrait of himself dangling from a gallows, in sly allusion to his name, Hanger. In it he declares, with truth, that he had lived with men and women of every rank, from the highest to the lowest, from St. James's to St. Giles's, from the drawing-room to the dust-cart, in palaces and night-cellars. But even the glamour of Carlton House and the friendship of a future King of England could not long hold his adventurous spirit in check. He sought fresh worlds to conquer, fresh experiences to stimulate his restless appetite.

For a time he turned coal-merchant, and spent his days touting for custom all over London, carrying

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samples of his wares in every one of his pockets. One day the Prince chanced to meet him on one of his commercial rounds. "Well, George," he asked, as he reined in his horse, "and how are coals to-day?" "Black as ever, please your Royal Highness," was the ready retort, as George proceeded to submit his specimens to his Royal friend, who sent him away happy with an order for twenty tons.

When the black diamonds steadily refused to be transmuted into gold George transferred his activities to recruiting for the Army, spending £500 out of his own pocket in establishing agencies for the purpose. For six years he toiled at perfecting his machinery; then, as ill-luck would have it, his bubble burst. His directors in Leadenhall-street quarrelled among themselves, the scheme collapsed, and George lost at one swoop his £500, his salary of £600 a year, and his long years of labour.

When at last his title came to him, on the death of an older brother, George would have none of it. Nothing made him more angry than to be addressed as "Lord Coleraine" or "my lord." "Do you wish to insult me, sir?" he would fiercely demand. "Plain George Hanger is good enough for me; unless you address me as 'Baron Coal' without the 'raine,' for that is appropriate enough."

And so he remained to the end of his days "plain

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George Hanger"; and he was never happier than when spending his evenings among his humble cronies at the Sol's Arms in the Hampstead-road, presiding over the merry meetings in the large armchair which was always placed for him before the fire, and addressed as "George" or "friend George" by the local butcher or baker.

Thus this noble oddity drifted through the remaining years of his chequered life, struggling to make ends meet, smiling at his discomfiture and poverty, his laughter always ringing loud among the gayest, a joke ever on the tip of his clever tongue. He had sampled life from the highest to the lowest, from Court salons to sordid slums, from the soldiers' camp to the gipsies' tent; and had found his greatest happiness in the humblest environment. His favourite boast was that "he cared not a straw whether he was a nobleman or a gentleman; but one thing he knew, and that was that he was a dead shot." He was a loyal friend to all, and no man's enemy but his own.

A few days before his death he declared that the happiest time of his life was the year or so he spent in King's Bench prison—"those blessed regions of rural retirement," as he called his gaol.

The end of his strange life is thus chronicled in the "Gentleman's Magazine" in 1824: "March 31st.—Died of a convulsive fit, at his residence, near the

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Regent's Park, aged seventy-three, the Right Hon. George Hanger, Lord Coleraine of Coleraine, County Londonderry, in the Peerage of Ireland; better known by the title of Colonel Hanger, or the familiar appellation of George Hanger."

CHAPTER XV

THE WOMAN WHO MADE AN EMPEROR

WHO was Miss Howard, the woman of beauty and mystery who played such a romantic part in the life drama of Napoleon III.; who, more than all others, helped to raise him to his Imperial throne; and who, had Fate been kind to her, might have worn a crown as Empress?

To this day none can say with certainty. From the cradle to the grave her identity was as shrouded in mystery as that of "Pamela," whose modest tombstone in the cemetery of Montmartre bears no other epitaph than this name of six letters. During her life it was commonly believed that she had every right to the ducal surname she bore—that she was, in fact, a daughter of a cadet of the noble house of Howard. And even if this be but surmise, her strangely dramatic life-story, which had many links with our nobility, may legitimately be allowed a place among these "Romances of the Peerage."

That the early part of Miss Howard's life was spent in comparative obscurity seems probable. It is even said that she first met the Prince in whose life she was

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destined to play such a vital part in a West End street on her way home from the saloon-bar over which she presided. But if this were so, how are we to account for the wealth which she undoubtedly possessed, and with which she so lavishly supplied the pockets of the "hope of the Bonapartes" in the days of his exile and poverty?

Such advantage as there was in the acquaintance-ship thus unconventionally struck up was certainly all on the side of Louis Napoleon. She was young and beautiful, "as fair a rose of girlhood as could be found in the whole of England." He—the "lank-haired adventurer," as the Tsar called him—was a "mean, shuffling figure of a man"—stout, sallow-faced, heavy-jowled, with a preternaturally grave, inscrutable face, relieved only by a pair of fine grey eyes, magnetic and impressive.

She was undoubtedly rich; he was poor. She had legions of high-placed admirers, including such handsome gallants as the Duke of Beaufort, My Lords Malmesbury and Chesterfield and Count D'Orsay—all devout worshippers at the shrine of her beauty. He, in spite of his Royal pretensions, was regarded contemptuously, or only barely tolerated by English Society.

What was it in this penurious, down-at-heels Prince

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that attracted the lovely Miss Howard? "It was pity; nothing else," she declared in later years when her loyalty was rewarded with slights. Probably it was pity in part; but more largely the romance with which she invested this pretender to a throne and a woman's wish to share a life which had such splendid, if nebulous, possibilities. However this may have been, we know that from their first meeting Miss Howard dedicated her life and her fortune to her shabby admirer with a devotion of which none but a highly romantic woman could have been capable.

To her eager and sympathetic ears he confided his hopes and his despair. One day his future was full of golden promise—the crown of Emperor, which his uncle had lost, was in his hands; the next brought a black mood of despondency which no ray of hope penetrated. As his moods alternated, she revelled with him in his visions of coming grandeur, or with buoyant words dissipated the clouds that brooded over him. She fed the flames of his ambition, poured healing balm on the wounds left by the slights to which he was daily subjected, and when his fortune seemed darkest infused new life and hope into him. Her purse was ever at his service—she paid his debts, and in a hundred unostentatious ways ministered to him. Well might he exclaim in later and other years, "It

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is to you alone that I owe my crown. Without your sweet help and encouragement I should never have emerged from those black years in London.”

Can one wonder that such devotion, allied to such beauty, made a complete conquest of the Prince's heart, or that the friends so romantically brought together became ardent, if illicit, lovers? Not only did Miss Howard place her gold and her encouragement at the service of her lover, but it was largely her fertile brain that made his way clear to the throne of France. She enlisted the help of powerful friends in England and in France. She made many a journey, in various disguises, across the Channel, mixing with all sorts and conditions of people, feeling the pulse of opinion towards her princely protégé, and making friends for him wherever she went by the joint help of tongue and purse, until, as was disclosed later by certain papers found in the secret cabinet of the Emperor, she had spent no less than £40,000 on paving the way to the throne for him.

It was she who too confidently inspired that ill-fated coup in which Napoleon landed in France with half-a-hundred followers—an eagle, emblem of his coming sovereignty, perched on his shoulder. At the first shots that greeted him his soldiers turned tail, and his eagle took wing, to be captured a few days

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later unromantically devouring sausages in a butcher's shop; while the princely leader of the invading army paid for his rashness by a sentence of six years' imprisonment.

When, in 1846, Napoleon escaped, and made his way again to England, it was Miss Howard, with unshaken loyalty, who received and cared for him, supplying him with funds, and inspiring him with new hopes and courage. Had it not been for her cheery optimism he would, as he confessed later, have finally abandoned all hope of a crown. But although neither knew it, this darkest hour was near the dawn—which came, two years later, when Louis Philippe was dethroned, and the way at last seemed clear to the man who aspired to be his successor.

When, full of a new hope, he journeyed to Paris, it was with Miss Howard as companion, to watch over his interests and to take care of him as none other could have done. The tide of his fortunes had at last turned. With dramatic swiftness the returned exile was elected Member of the Assembly and Prince President of the Republic. The ultimate goal was now at hand; and through the final struggle for the throne Miss Howard's devotion shone more splendid than ever. The President required money—lots of money—to strengthen his position, to appease enemies, to win friends; and this Miss

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Howard supplied with a lavish hand, until, with emptied exchequer, she at last saw her idol wearing the Imperial crown.

Seldom in the world's history has a woman's devotion to a man reached such splendid heights of self-sacrifice, and never did loyalty so richly deserve its reward. In his days of obscurity and poverty, when all his castles were still in the clouds, Napoleon had many a time vowed that the woman who was so good to him should share his throne in the years to come; and Miss Howard would have been untrue to her sex if she had closed her eyes to this splendid possibility. And, indeed, for a time it seemed that her lover might keep his vow. One of his first acts was to confer a title on her as Comtesse de Beauregard; to settle a pension of £2,000 a year on her; and to present to her a mansion and an estate near Versailles which had once belonged to the Bourbons.

But it soon became clear that he designed the wedding-ring for another. He hawked his false heart around all the Courts of Europe; but no Princess could be found to accept it, even though he carried with it a crown. Thus spurned, he might have claimed every justification for placing the ring on the unroyal finger of the woman who had practically given him his crown; and he might indeed have done so had he not at this crisis in his life fallen under the spell

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of the most lovely woman in Europe, the Comtesse de Teba, who, through her grandfather, William Kirkpatrick, had in her veins some of the best blood of Scotland, and through her father, the Comte de Montijo, a liberal strain of Spanish blue blood.

Napoleon, ever defenceless in the presence of beauty, was the last man to resist such an appeal as the lovely Comtesse made to his passions. The picture of Eugénie de Montijo at this time of her peerless youth is irresistible in its seductiveness. She had, we are told, "features of classic regularity; a dazzlingly fair complexion, heightened by the burnished gold of her hair, and by eyes whose deep blue darkened to violet under the shade of their long lashes. Her dainty head was exquisitely poised on divinely-moulded shoulders; her tall and pliant figure was faultless in its grace and symmetry; and her hands and feet were small as those of a child."

Such was Eugénie de Montijo, Comtesse de Teba, granddaughter of a Scottish wine-merchant, when her beauty dazzled the eyes of Napoleon, fresh to his crown, and who, with a glance of her eyes, brought the Autocrat of France to her feet. Miss Howard was not long left in ignorance that her place had been taken by the most dangerous rival in Europe. But the woman who had clung so loyally to Napoleon through his long years of eclipse was not going to

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yield her place to another now that his sun had reached its zenith.

Though youth had fled, and with it much of the beauty that held her lover captive, she fought for her place in his heart as a mother would fight for a child in the hour of danger. She followed him, we are told, "like his shadow; insisted on a special and conspicuous place by his side at reviews and other ceremonies, and generally strove to assume the position of a recognised favourite." She claimed and was given a suite of apartments in Napoleon's chateau of St. Cloud; and at every State function at the Tuileries eclipsed all rivals by the splendour of her attire. Never was man placed in a more embarrassing predicament than Napoleon, by this duel between two women for his favour. But the contest was from the first an unequal one. Youth and a fresher, more radiant beauty were bound to win the verdict, and all Miss Howard's brave struggles were powerless to avert the issue.

When she learned that Napoleon had actually offered his hand to her rival, and that her hopes of wearing the wedding-ring were at an end, her rage and disappointment were quite tragic in their vehemence. She wept, and stormed, and fainted; vowed that she would end a life which was no longer of any value to her; and heaped reproaches on her

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false lover, to whom she had given all, and from whom she had received—this reward. But to all her tears and reproaches Napoleon was adamant; he had made up his mind that the Comtesse de Teba should be his Empress and no other; and he declared that, unless Miss Howard “behaved herself,” he would pack her off to America and finally disown her.

This threat, and the hopelessness of her position, which she now fully realised, brought her at last to a proper state of submission, which her recreant lover rewarded with liberal gifts of money. “If I had but anticipated this,” the deserted woman pathetically declared, “I should have done better to keep the 3,500,000 francs which he was to have paid me by the end of 1853; and it was for *this* that I begged the Emperor to tear up the first amount—two million and a half francs!”

One cannot resist a tribute of pity for a woman whose long devotion had this shameful reward, or of contempt for the man who could prove so false to every sentiment of gratitude and loyalty.

Miss Howard did not stay in Paris to see the crowning victory of her supplanter when, clad in a dress of Alençon lace, her slender waist girdled by the famous diamond and sapphire belt (the first Napoleon’s gift to Marie Louise), and with her blue eyes glowing with happiness, Napoleon placed on her shapely head the

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crown which his uncle had similarly placed on the head of his second wife.

She sought distraction by travel in Italy, where she met and, in her pique, married a handsome and graceless young Englishman, Clarence Trelawney, with whom she led an unhappy life until divorce at last set her free in 1865.

But to her last day she never forgave the Emperor who had so spurned and slighted her. During her closing years, we learn, "she frequently appeared in the Champs Elysées and the Bois de Boulogne, driving a pair of superb bays, and manœuvring in such fashion as to meet their Majesties' equipage and stare at them. Again at theatrical performances she would turn her glasses with annoying persistency on the Imperial box, her face showing the scorn she felt for the crowned Judas who had betrayed her."

The end of her life came with sudden tragedy. One August day in 1865, when she was still little over forty, she was in perfect health; the next, her troubled heart was stilled in death. There were dark hints of poison; but why her days were thus suddenly closed in the prime of life and health must ever remain a mystery, as inscrutable as that of her birth, and of the conduct of the man to whose shallow affections and selfish vanity she sacrificed not only her life, but all that a woman holds dearest—her fair fame.

CHAPTER XVI

A ROMANTIC WOOING

THERE were Arundells in England “ ere William fought and Harold fell ”; and from the Conqueror’s time, when Roger de Arundell counted his lordships up to twenty, to our own day they have always taken rank among our oldest and proudest houses. Their long pedigree bristles with doughty warriors, from Sir John (who wielded such a deadly sword in France for Henry VI.) downwards; and they have joined their blood in wedlock with many of the noblest strains in our Peerage.

It was from this stock of brave men and fair women that Isabel Arundell drew her being, making her entry on the world’s stage, on which she was destined to play so romantic and adventurous a rôle, one March day in 1831, within sight of the Marble Arch. She was the lineal descendant of Henry, sixth Baron Arundell of Wardour; and among her ancestors was that Sir Thomas Arundell who was cousin-german to Henry VIII., and, through his wife, near of kin to two of Henry’s Queens—Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. She was, moreover, entitled to call herself “ Countess ” of the Holy Empire by virtue of her

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descent from the first lord; while her mother, sister to the first Lord Gerard, boasted a common origin with the Dukes of Leinster.

Such was the proud heritage of blood of this daughter of Henry Raymond Arundell, who inherited a liberal share of the "bravery, dare-devilry, and love of conflict" of the old Knights of Arundell and of the beauty of the Arundell women; and whose life was to give full play to these remarkable gifts. Her childhood and early girlhood were spent in a white, straggling, old-fashioned manor-house in Essex, "buried in bushes, ivy, and flowers," where she led the free, untrammelled life of the country, drinking in health and beauty with every breath, scampering over the country with long poles and jumping the hedges in summer-time; sledging, skating and sliding in the winter-days; but finding her chief pleasure in the company of such vagrant gipsies as passed that way.

Among Isabel's Romany friends and admirers was Hagar Burton, who one day cast the horoscope of the beautiful English girl. "You will cross the sea," said the gipsy soothsayer, "and be in the same town with your destiny, and know it not. Every obstacle will rise up against you. Your life will be like one swimming against big waves; but God will be with you, so you will always win. You will bear the name of our tribe (Burton), and be right proud of it. You

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will be as we are, but far greater than we. Your life is all wandering, change, and adventure. One soul in two bodies, in life or death, never long apart." How strangely, uncannily true this prophecy was to prove, her story will show.

Young as she was at the time, this daughter of the Arundells gave promise of exceptional beauty. "I had," she writes ingenuously, "large, dark blue eyes and long, black eyelashes and eyebrows. I had very white, regular teeth, and very small hands, feet, and waist. I had beautiful hair—very long, thick and soft—of a golden brown. My nose was aquiline. I had all the material for a very good figure, and once a sculptor wanted to 'sculp' me."

At seventeen Isabel Arundell, radiant with health and youth, was taken from the country home in which she had spent so many delightful tomboy years to London, where she was soon caught in a whirl of gaiety and fashionable pleasures. In the exclusive circle of Almack's she was hailed as a new revelation of female loveliness. "I overheard someone telling my mother that I was quoted as the new beauty at the Club," she writes in her diary, adding, with perhaps a little mock humility, "Fancy, poor ugly me!"

It was in this hour of her new delights of conquest that she confided to her diary her conception of the man she would marry—if she married at all. "My

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ideal," she wrote, "is about six feet in height, with broad and muscular shoulders, a powerful and deep chest. He has black hair, a brown complexion, a clever forehead, large, black, wondrous eyes. He is a soldier, a *man*, and a gentleman. . . . Such a man only will I wed." Thus unconsciously did Isabel Arundell draw a strikingly lifelike picture of the man whom, a few months later, she was to meet so dramatically, and, after years of weary waiting, to wed.

The scene of this romantic encounter was Boulogne, where Isabel went with her family in August, 1850, to spend a delightful year or two. "One day," she records, "when my sister and I were walking on the ramparts, the vision of my brain came towards us. He was (mark the description) five feet eleven inches in height, very broad and muscular; he had very dark hair, and dark, clearly-defined, sagacious eyebrows, a brown, weather-beaten complexion; straight Arab features; a determined-looking mouth, nearly covered by an enormous black moustache. But the most remarkable part of his appearance was two large, black, flashing eyes, with long lashes, that pierced one through and through.

He looked at me as though he read me through and through in a moment, and started a little. I was completely magnetised; and when we had got a little distance away I turned to my sister and whispered,

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‘ That man will marry me.’ The next day he was there again, and he followed us and chalked up, ‘ May I speak to you? ’ leaving the chalk on the wall; so I took up the chalk and wrote back, ‘ No; mother will be angry ’ ; and mother found it, and *was* angry; and after that we were stricter prisoners than ever.”

But, in spite of parental frowns, Isabel’s fate was sealed from the first glance of those dark, magnetic eyes. Though she met her hero daily on the ramparts for many weeks, she exchanged no word with him; but at the sight of him, she confesses, “ I used to turn red and pale, hot and cold, dizzy and faint, sick and trembling, and my knees used to nearly give way under me.” Fate, however, was not long so unkind to the love-sick girl. One day she was invited to a tea-party and dance at the house of some relatives, and “ there was Richard, like a star among rushlights! That was a night of nights; he waltzed with me once, and spoke to me several times, and I kept my sash, where he put his arm round my waist to waltz, and my gloves, which his hand had clasped. I never wore them again. . . . I saw Richard every now and again after that, but he was, of course, unconscious of my feelings towards him.”

Thus the months passed, full for Isabel of a heart-breaking longing for the love of the man to whom, though he knew it not, she had given her heart. “ I

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suffered much and long," she confides to her journal, "and the name of the tribe, as Hagar Burton foretold, caused me many a sorrowful and humiliating hour." And when, at last, the day dawned that was to take her back to England and away from him, it brought not even the poor solace of a leave-taking.

Four long and dreary years, in fact, crept heavily by before Isabel Arundell again set eyes on the romantic figure which had wrought such havoc with her peace of mind. Meanwhile Captain Richard Burton, the "biggest daredevil" in the British Army, had risked his life on one mad enterprise after another. Disguised as a dervish, he had made his way through a thousand perils and hair-breadth escapes to the sacred heart of Mecca, where Mohammed's coffin swings between Heaven and earth; he had journeyed to Harar in Abyssinia, where no white man before him had ever dared to set foot; and had paid for his temerity by a lance through his jaw, which brought him to the verge of the grave. Burton had a narrow escape on his way to Mecca, but the story cannot be told here.

Meanwhile Isabel was breaking her heart in England, praying for him, weeping for him, and crying in her diary, "Will he never come home! How strange it is; and how I still trust in Fate!" She scanned the papers every day for some scrap of news of her hero;

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and wrote, " I glory in his glory—But I am alone and unloved. Is there no hope for me? "

When he returned to England, shattered in health, she never caught a glimpse of him; and within a month he was off again to brave the horrors of the Crimea. She made frantic efforts to follow him, as one of Florence Nightingale's nurses; but she was told that she was " too young and inexperienced, and would not do." Her only solace was to devote herself heart and soul to caring for the destitute families of the soldiers who were sharing her hero's danger.

But the longest and darkest night leads at length to the dawn. And dawn came with the primroses in 1856, when she was able to write in her diary, " I hear that Richard has come home and is in town. God be praised! " To know that he was near, though for some months she never saw him, was Heaven after the black years of waiting and praying and weeping. One August day, however, Fate led her steps to his. She was walking with her sister in the Botanical Gardens, when she met him face to face. " We immediately stopped and shook hands," she says, " and asked each other innumerable questions of the four intervening years. He asked me if I came often to the Gardens. I said, ' Oh, yes, we always come and read and study here from eleven to one ' We were in the gardens about an hour; and when I

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had to leave he gave me a peculiar look, as he did at Boulogne. I hardly looked at him, yet I felt it, and had to turn away. When I got home my mind was full of wonder and presentiment; I felt frightened and agitated."

Many such happy meetings in the Gardens followed, during which Isabel "trode on air." At the end of a fortnight he stole his arm round her waist, laid her cheek against his, and asked, "Could you do anything so silly as to give up civilisation? If I can get the Consulate of Damascus, will you marry me and go and live there?" The ecstasy of the moment struck Isabel dumb with emotion. At last she found voice to falter out, "I have prayed for you every morning and night; and I would rather have a crust and a tent with you than be Queen of all the world; and so I say now, 'Yes, *yes*, YES!'" "When I got home," she says, "I knelt down and prayed, and my whole soul was flooded with joy and thanksgiving."

For six years she had suffered, and prayed for this crowning moment; but the goal of her ultimate happiness was still far to seek. Her mother refused inexorably to give her consent to the alliance; and after a fortnight of this new-born happiness Burton was off again on another of his daring journeys—this time to explore the lake-regions of Central Africa; stealing away without a word of final farewell, in order to spare

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her the pain of parting. "My happiness," she says, "had been short and bright, and now I had to look forward to three years of my former patient endurance; *only* with this great change—before, I was unloved and had no hope; now, the shame of loving unasked was taken from me, and I had the happiness of being loved and some future to look forward to."

While her lover was braving hardships and daily risking his life among the untrodden ways of Central Africa, Isabel sought distraction in travel in Italy and Switzerland, until the glad day when she should see him again; and this day came in the late spring of 1859. When she read in the paper that he would soon arrive she wrote in her diary, "I feel strange, frightened, sick, stupefied, dying to see him, and yet inclined to run away, lest, after all I have suffered and longed for, I should have to bear more."

But the hard heart of Fate was at last softened towards the woman who had borne its harshness with such patience during nine years of thwarted hopes. One beautiful May day she found herself in her lover's strong arms. "I felt quite stunned," she says; "I could not speak or move, but felt like a person coming to after a fainting fit or a dream. I would have given worlds for tears, but none came." And how proud she was of her gallant lover—her very own at last! "I used to like to sit and look at him," she says, "and

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think, ' you are mine, and there is no man on earth the least like you.' ”

But all was not even yet smooth sailing for the long-parted lovers. Mrs. Arundell was deaf to all their pleadings, and nothing was left for them but to take their courage and their fate in their own hands, and to marry without her approval—even without her knowledge.

One January day in 1861 Isabel Arundell stole downstairs while her parents were still in bed, kissing their door as she passed; entered a cab, and a few minutes later was standing by her hero's side before the altar of the Bavarian Catholic Church in Warwick-street, while the words were spoken which set the seal on all her sufferings and all her patient love. And when her husband took her, after the ceremony, to his bachelor lodgings, she says, “ A peace came over me that I had never known. I felt that it was for eternity, an immortal repose; and I was in a bewilderment of wonder at the goodness of God, Who had almost worked miracles for us.”

Thus, after much tribulation, Isabel (in later years, Lady) Burton reached the haven of peace in her husband's arms, to fare forth with him on such voyages of strange adventure as seldom fall to the lot of woman, and to carry beyond the grave such a love as has seldom blessed the life of man.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAD KNIGHT OF MALTA

AMONG the families that left their lands and castles in fair France to accumulate lordships and honours under our Norman and Plantagenet Kings, not one can claim a prouder ancestry than the house of Courtenay, Earls of Devon.

Even in their own native land, where they were firmly seated as Lords of Courtenai Castle and large estates before the Conqueror ever came to set a marauding foot on our shores, there was, Gibbon asserts, but one line superior to theirs in "achievements"—that of the Royal House of Bourbon. And even the Bourbons could boast no more Royal strain of blood than that which was the Courtenay heritage when, it is said, Elizabeth of Courtenai was led to the altar by Peter, son of King Louis le Gros.

However this may be, we know that more than seven centuries ago Reginald de Courtenay, who came to England in the retinue of Henry II.'s Queen, Eleanor, was Baron of Okehampton, with ninety-three knights to do him homage and service; and that, during all these centuries, his descendants held their heads high among the proudest of our nobles. They mated with the daughters of Veres and Despensers, Talbots

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and Bohuns, the cream of our feudal nobility; and one of them found a wife in a daughter of Edward IV. They were ever in the forefront of battle, and broke their lances against more than one King; while their voice was among the most powerful in the councils of their Sovereigns.

It is inevitable that the story of a family so ancient and so eminent should hold many romantic chapters. Not the least strange is that which tells how the Courtenay Earldom lay dormant for nearly three centuries, through a stupid misreading of the patent of creation, until William, third Viscount Courtenay, thanks to the keen and trained eyes of Sir Harris Nicolas, established his claim in 1831, and gave a new lease of life to it. But perhaps the most remarkable chapter of all is that which tells the story of the "mad knight of Malta," on whom more than one person now living in the county of Kent may have set eyes as children.

Before William, Lord Courtenay, had enjoyed his restored Earldom a year, and when he had taken his new honours out of the country for a time, there appeared at Boughton-under-Blean, a village between Canterbury and Faversham, a magnificent individual who announced himself to the world as "Sir William Percy Honeywood Courtenay, Knight of Malta, son of Lord Courtenay and heir of Lord Mount-Cashell."

Naturally, the appearance of such a great man

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caused a flutter among his rustic neighbours, who were as impressed by his geniality as by his splendours and his rank. There was no false pride about this blue-blooded scion of the Courtenays; he was hail-fellow-well-met to any rustic who touched his hat to him; and, although he was familiar with the magnificence of Courts, he was as ready to hobnob with Giles over a glass of pothouse beer as to crack a joke with King William himself, who, he said, was one of his bosom friends.

He had a mission in life, he confided to his bucolic admirers, that of regenerating society. He would do away with those hateful tithes; he was a champion of pure election; he intended to free the poor from taxation; to sweep away Corporations; and he painted to his open-mouthed friends a glorious day when each cottager should feast on roast beef and plum-pudding, washed down by copious draughts of nut-brown ale.

Such were the seductive lures Sir William displayed to his companions of the taproom and the cottage, who knew not (and probably cared less) that my lord of Devon had no such son as this genial stranger in their parts, who was moreover no more heir to Lord Mount-Cashell than to the Man in the Moon. Nor did they know that, a few months earlier, " Sir William " had been masquerading at the Rose Inn, Canterbury, as Count Rothschild; or that, less than a year before that,

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he had been serving pennyworths of gin and whisky over a bar in Truro, where he had signed his name, "John A. Thom." Such was the true origin of the fraudulent "Knight of Malta" who came in 1832 to dazzle the eyes and fuddle the brains of the Boughton rustics—a small spirit-dealer in a Cornish town, known to his friends as plain "John Thom."

From Boughton the fame of the "noble lord" whose mission was to revolutionise life for the poor spread throughout the countryside, until he counted his friends and supporters by hundreds. It is little wonder then that, when December of 1832 brought a General Election, there should be a general cry for Courtenay, "the poor man's friend, and the apostle of reform."

At Canterbury the show of hands was declared to be in his favour; and he actually polled 375 votes against the 800 odd scored by his successful opponents. And never surely did candidate present himself to electors in such gorgeous guise.

"A Sir William Courtenay," wrote a Canterbury lady at the time, "has been haranguing the population here almost daily with novel and ludicrous addresses. He is encased in a superb dress of crimson velvet richly ornamented with gold lacings, tassels, and epaulettes; and he goes about armed with a valuable sword and a dagger, which he occasionally

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threatens to use against any person who happens to interrupt him. . . . Although he is considered handsome, his face is much disfigured by a superabundance of moustache and beard.”

To this magnificence, so calculated to impress the bucolic mind, he seems to have added the antics of a mountebank; for, we are told, at election meetings he “ would bound over the heads of the people in front of him, and alight on the table in the centre of the hall in a theatrical attitude, quite *a la* Kean.”

Although our “ Knight of Malta,” the proud and urbane Courtenay, thus failed to secure a mandate for Westminster, he was incomparably the hero of the hour. To such a pitch of idolatry did he rouse the electors that on nomination day they crowded round his carriage in thousands, took the horses from the traces, and drew him in triumph to the Rose Inn, where, from the balcony, he carried his audience off their feet by his glowing oratory and his visions of Utopian days to come under his auspices. After the poll was declared he was again dragged in triumph through Canterbury streets to a jubilant, if discordant, accompaniment of bands; and again his eloquence swayed the multitude, like so many “ reeds shaken with the wind,” from the Rose balcony.

Although this defeat was followed by a veritable Sedan when, at a later election for a division of the

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county, he polled barely a dozen votes, our Courtenay knight was by no means downhearted. He set to work to enhance his already great popularity with the lower orders; and spent his days touring the country in the most fantastic guises he could procure from theatrical costumiers, "standing treat" at every public-house on his route, and sharing a crust of bread and cheese at hundreds of labourers' cottages—everywhere capturing hearts by his condescension, and dazzling eyes by his gorgeous raiment and courtly manners.

But Nemesis was already on the track of "Sir William." In February, 1833, a smuggling-boat was captured by a Revenue cutter off the Deal coast, and the smugglers were hauled to Rochester to answer for their crime. It is true that nothing contraband had been found on the "Admiral Hood"; but the Revenue officers declared that, just before the capture, certain tubs had been flung overboard by the smugglers and picked up by the cruiser's crew.

This was an opportunity not to be missed by the popularity-hunting knight, who appeared at the trial, and swore that he himself had seen the incriminating tubs floating in the water *before* the Revenue men came on the scene. For this flight of fancy he was indited for perjury, "wilful and corrupt"; and when it was proved that at the very time he professed to have seen the smuggled flotsam he was listening to a sermon at

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Boughton Church, Sir William had to listen to a sentence of three months' durance, to be followed by seven years' transportation beyond the seas. Before, however, he had served his three months he was declared insane; and, instead of spending his next few years in a foreign land, he spent them in the Kent County Lunatic Asylum, near Maidstone.

Of course the man had been insane from (and probably before) the day he left his Truro bar; but when the asylum doors closed on him in 1833 his amazing career was by no means ended. In 1838, after five years' confinement, he was back again in his old haunts, certified a sane man once more, and living modestly as a lodger at a farmhouse a few miles from Canterbury. His restored sanity, however, was short-lived; for, within a few weeks, we find him haranguing his rustic neighbours more vehemently than ever. Not content, as before, with painting glowing pictures of the good times coming, his appeal was now to their passions; his programme, one of violence.

One May day in 1838 his projects came to a head. Rallying round him a few scores of his dupes, he set out for Fairbrook at the head of his bedraggled supporters, with flags flaunting the Courtenay lion fluttering in the breeze, and a pole crowned by a loaf of bread borne proudly aloft in the van. Each mile added recruits to the straggling army, until hundreds

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were seen marching under the Courtenay pennons as full of valorous talk as any men-at-arms ever led by a lord of Devon against Frenchmen or Scots in the long-gone centuries.

For this was no pacific army. It was out to do doughty deeds; and, as their courage was recruited at every public-house on the way, Courtenay's soldiers began to cry aloud that they had "bloody work to do." At Dargate Common the army came to a halt while its leader, removing the shoes from his feet, prayed aloud half-an-hour on end, denouncing everything and everybody to the Almighty. After a night spent at Bossenden Farm, the march was resumed, by Sittingbourne, Newnham, Eastling and Selling—each village and hamlet swelling the numbers, and blazing haystacks marking the route, until the rioters found themselves back again at Bossenden.

Here Farmer Calver, who had already seen more than he wished to see of the Courtenay rabble, sent for the police; and three constables, armed with a warrant for "Sir William's" arrest, soon made their belated appearance. No sooner had the boldest of the trio advanced to make the arrest than "Sir William," producing a pistol, shot him dead. His respite, however, was brief. An urgent message was sent to Canterbury and Maidstone for soldiers; and within a few hours a hundred men of the 45th Regiment, led by Lieutenant

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Bennett, arrived on the scene, with a magistrate to represent the strong arm of the law.

Meanwhile the Maltese knight and his followers had taken refuge in the heart of a neighbouring wood, determined to sell their lives dearly, their desperate courage stimulated by their leader's appeals to them to "quit themselves like men," and "not to count their lives dear." There was little time for such exhortation; for a hundred soldiers had already thrown around the rabble a girdle of steel and muskets; and the lieutenant was advancing to demand surrender "in the Queen's name."

But almost before the first word had left his lips "Sir William," with deadly aim, had shot the officer through the heart. The madman's last moment had now come. Before the smoke had left the assassin's pistol, a volley of shots rang out. "Sir William" and nine of his dupes fell dead; many others were wounded; and the rest of the rioters were flying in all directions, as fast as fear-impelled legs could carry them.

Thus ignominiously ended the career of the mad "Knight of Malta." He had come out to do sanguinary work, and sanguinary work had been done; for a dozen lives, including his own, had paid the price of his insane enterprise. As for his silly followers, many carried marks of that fatal day to their graves; some were transported for life; others were

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sent for varying periods to cool their ardour within prison walls. It was a black day for the county of Kent; and it will be many a long day yet before the name of Courtenay is forgotten in hundreds of Kentish homes.

But even death could not rob Courtenay of the popularity he had won by his specious arts. To quote Dr. C. Mackay, "When the maniac Thom or Courtenay was shot, in the spring of 1838, the relic-hunters were immediately in motion to obtain a memento of so extraordinary an individual. His long black beard and hair, which were cut off by the surgeons, fell into the hands of his disciples, by whom they were treasured with the utmost reverence.

"A lock of his hair commanded a great price, not only among his followers, but among the more wealthy inhabitants of Canterbury and its neighbourhood. The tree against which he fell when he was shot was stripped of all its bark by the curious; while a letter with his signature to it was paid for in gold coins, and his favourite horse became as celebrated as its master. Parties of ladies and gentlemen went to Boughton from a distance of a hundred and fifty miles to visit the scene of that fatal affray, and stroke on the back the horse of the mad 'Knight of Malta.' If a strict watch had not been kept over his grave for months, his body would have been disinterred, and the bones carried away as memorials."

CHAPTER XVIII

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SYREN

THE traveller whose steps took him as far as Florence about the time when Charles II. was restored to the throne of his fathers might, if he were fortunate, have seen something at least as fair as any other that city of beauty could boast. True, this vision of delight was only a child of some eleven summers; but she was incomparably—so contemporaries tell us—the loveliest child in all Italy, with a cascade of glorious black hair rippling far below her waist, with eyes blue as Italy's own sky, and sparkling with irresistible gaiety; a complexion delicately tinted as a rosebud; and the figure of a sylph, instinct with grace and an abounding vitality.

Such was Christine Dudley, who to a beauty inherited from centuries of fair northern ancestresses added the vitality and grace of the South. More Italian in many ways than the Italians, she was by birth half English and half French; the daughter, on one side, of a long line of Poitevin nobles; on the other, of one of the most splendid of English houses, having for great-grandfather that Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, whose fascinations made a love-

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sick woman of Queen Elizabeth almost to his last day.

How this great grand-daughter of Dudley came to be the boast and toast of Italy is easily explained. My Lord Leicester's only son (whose legitimacy, by the way, was gravely questioned) had left England to make his home in Tuscany, and had so ingratiated himself with Ferdinand II. that that Emperor had made a Duke of him, leaving him to tack "Northumberland" on to his new title. And as Duke of Northumberland Robert Dudley, the second, lived and died. Of his sons, Charles, the eldest, succeeded to the foreign Dukedom, and became the father of the fairy to whom we are now introduced, and who was later known from one end of Italy to the other as Duchess of Northumberland, or, alternatively, "Christina of Northumbria."

It was inevitable that a girl of such rare charms and such exalted and romantic birth should have lovers by the score, even before she emerged from short frocks. All the youthful nobles in Florence and in Rome (where also some of her early years were passed) were the slaves of the "lovely little witch"; and so great was her fascination that it is even said such a great man as the Constable Colonna, though he had for wife one of Mazarin's loveliest nieces,

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completely lost his head over the schoolgirl, and gave his wife many a pang of jealousy.

Thus early did Christine Dudley begin to emulate the love adventures of her handsome great-grandfather, favourite of a Queen and breaker of women's hearts; and to prove that, in her case at least, the girl is mother to the woman. But even she, conscious as she already was of the power of beauty, could not have foreseen the havoc she was to play in the years to come with the hearts of men and the peace of their wives.

The prize which tempted so many gallants thus early was not long unappropriated. Christine had barely seen her fourteenth birthday when her hand was awarded, probably without any reference to her heart, to the Marchese Paleotti, a man of some family, but scarcely a match for this daughter of the great Dudleys. Probably her ducal father thought it high time his too fascinating and precocious daughter was consigned to the keeping of a husband, and was thankful to escape any future responsibility for her. However this may be, the child-wife was certainly none too happy in her new condition, although she seems for a time at least to have been quite a model spouse, as decorous and dutiful as any reasonable husband could desire.

For eight years the Marchesa played this dutiful

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rôle, while her charms were reaching their rich and splendid maturity. It is a wonder that her pretty head had not, long before this, been completely turned by the adulation and flatteries that were showered on her. Her fame had travelled far and wide as the loveliest of all the women in Italy, and her beauty was but one of her many charms. Every poet and gallant tried to outvie his fellows in the homage he paid to her. Sonnets rained on her; her praises were sung in countless pamphlets and chronicles of the time; and swords clashed and blood flowed to vindicate her title as queen of living beauties.

“Such loveliness, such grace, and such wit,” wrote one enthusiastic admirer, “have never before been enshrined in woman.” According to Ghiselli she was “the fairest, the most exquisite of her sex.” Another of her slaves vowed that she was “an angel who had stooped to earth to show the possibilities of female loveliness.” And so, in sonnet and chronicle and epigram, the story of Christine’s superlative charm has come down to us through the centuries. Such was the fame of her beauty that we are told “Princes and great nobles came from far distant Courts to gaze on and pay homage to it”; and we know that the Emperor Leopold, in token of his homage, sent her a golden cross to wear.

Even now that she was a wife the Constable

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Colonna, who had been among her earliest admirers, could not resist making love to her when he saw her again, some years after she had worn her wedding-veil, at Milan. We have this on the evidence of the Constable's wife, the beautiful Maria Mancini, who writes: "The Marchesa Paleotti, daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, being then in the flower of life, attracted the eyes of all. Those of the Constable were no exception; and even had I been content not to take these stolen glances as signs of his passion for this fair lady, the attentions and assiduous compliments he paid her would have left me no room for doubt." Such is the striking tribute to Christine's fascination paid by one of the fairest and (in this case with good reason) most jealous women in Europe.

In 1671, after she had been married eight years, the Marchesa began to weary of the homely virtues, and to seek distraction in a wider sphere—innoent amusement on her part, it seems to have been, but rather disastrous in its results; for the most decorous of husbands displayed an unseemly alacrity to leave the most beautiful of wives to bask in her smiles; and strange tales are told of their follies and extravagances. In this year the Cardinal Legate found it necessary to send the siren for four months to a convent; but whether this confinement was due to political

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causes or in order to put it out of her power to work more havoc history fails to enlighten us.

Restored to freedom, the Marchesa, possibly out of revenge for such an indignity, appears to have given full play to her fascinations; and undoubtedly during this period, however really innocent her conduct may have been, she gave the tongue of scandal much cause to wag at her expense. Lovers flocked to her thick as bees to a sugar-bowl, and each tried to eclipse his fellows in the costliness of his presents and the ardour of his wooing. We read of one grave senator who showered costly jewels on her; of another who left his wife and defied the thunders of the Church to worship at her shrine. Men of all ranks and all ages joined the satellites which circled round her, and to one and all she was equally gracious and impregnable. She drank in their flatteries, received their presents, and played off one against the other to her infinite amusement. Like my Lady Shrewsbury of "wanton" fame, she loved to fan the flames of her lovers' jealousies, and was by no means ill-pleased when duels were fought and blood flowed for her.

Several times she was banished by the authorities, alarmed by the havoc she was causing; but she always reappeared, looking lovelier and more dangerous than ever, to resume her conquests and her "amusements." "Within a month or so," says Teodor de

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Wyzewa, "she is back again in Bologna, with all the husbands in the town flocking to her."

And the remarkable thing is that, in spite of such "goings on," she was universally beloved. "The children," we are told, "fall in love with her, and do the maddest things to win her affection." Even the very wives whose husbands she had lured away were among the crowd of her worshippers; so much so that when the Marchesa was once ordered off to her country-house by the Cardinal Legate, two of them—the Marchesa Bentivoglio and the Contessa Canossa—actually went on their knees to implore the Legate to call her back. As for the lower classes, they were her veriest slaves, from the coachmen and porters to the beggars in the street.

So powerless was Time to touch her beauty that at forty she was constantly taken to be sister to her own daughter, so radiantly youthful was she. It was at this time, with her loveliness still at its zenith, that she inaugurated those *conversazioni* at the Paleotti Palace which caused so much, and often groundless, scandal. To these brilliant receptions flocked all the greatest men and most beautiful women in Italy, with many others who could not claim either description—a motley gathering with but one common link, an idolatrous admiration of their hostess.

The jealousies thus provoked had their inevitable

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outlet, in such a hot-blooded country, in countless duels, and more than one murder. On one occasion almost all her guests were poisoned by chocolate served to them by a Turkish girl, a *protégée* of the Marchesa; and one, the Marquis Guido Pepoli, died. Who was responsible for the poisoning does not seem clear; but suspicion pointed to the Marchesa's own son. In spite, however, of duels and poisonings and bloodshed, the lustre of the Marchesa's reign continued undimmed. She turned the heads of all the men who entered her *salon*; and while receiving their presents and their honeyed words, forfeited none of the smiles of their wives.

And while enjoying her own triumphs she did not forget to minister to the happiness of her less beautiful guests. She revelled in finding husbands for them; and it is said she was responsible for hundreds of engagements, some of them ill-assorted, it is true, but for the most part reasonably happy.

For her own daughter, Diana, who had inherited much of her mother's charms, she secured a splendid alliance—none other than the son of her old lover, the Constable Colonna. When the youthful Prince Colonna first set eyes on the fair Diana, at a Bologna theatre, he promptly fell "head over ears" in love with her, and vowed he would know no peace until

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he had won her for wife. The Marchesa was delighted, and having once caught the Prince in the toils gave him no chance of escape, although it required two years of diplomacy to secure the consent of his parents.

This supreme effort in match-making proved to be the climax of the Marchesa's era of splendour. For forty years she had reigned a queen over all hearts; there was no cup of pleasure that she had not drained; no gift of Fortune that had not fallen, almost unsought, into her lap. But no sun that ever shone, however brilliant, but comes at last to its setting; and the Marchesa's sun was destined to set in tragedy. Her memory has been assailed by those who never knew her; and no doubt her life was not as flawless as her beauty. But when we consider the country and the times in which she lived—a land of hot passions and deeds of violence; an era of licence scarcely imaginable in our more sober day—probably the gravest charge that can be brought against Christine of Northumbria is that she did not surround her beauty with the restraints of modesty and decorum, that she made her vanity minister to the unhappiness of others.

But whatever the degree of her faults or her folly, she paid a heavy price for both before death came to claim her. Her favourite daughter, lovely almost as

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herself, shut herself in a convent, where she lost her reason, and died a madwoman. Another daughter was wedded to Count Roffeni, who treated her with infamous cruelty before deserting her; and when, freed by death from her tyrant, she became the wife of the Earl of Shrewsbury, she had to abjure her religion, to her mother's intense and lasting grief. But the heaviest blow of fate fell when the son she loved so well, her "David," was driven in disgrace from the Italian Army and ended his days on the headsman's block in London.

Crushed under these repeated blows, the Marchesa retired from the world, in which she had so long played so dazzling a part, to spend her last days in a belated piety, and to "review her past errors" with perhaps an excessive "abhorence." "I have no regret," she wrote in one of the exquisite sonnets which have survived her, "for the loss of the flower of my youth—my desires are stilled for ever. All my pleasure is plunged in oblivion. As for the few days that remain to me of this world, I dedicate them, O God, to Thee."

Thus, in loneliness and penitence, tasting the bitter dregs of the vanity of life, died the woman who, probably more potently than any other, has wielded the sceptre of a dangerous beauty.

CHAPTER XIX

PEASANT OR COUNTESS

WAS Maria Stella, Lady Newborough, the low-born daughter of an Italian peasant, or was she a Royal Princess, by right of birth the greatest lady in France? Such is the problem which her ladyship spent a fortune and half a lifetime in a vain effort to solve; and which to-day lacks conclusive answer as much as when, with her last gasp, this unhappy heroine of one of the most mysterious of Peerage romances branded Louis Philippe, King of France, "a brigand and usurper."

Lady Newborough first opened her eyes on the world that was to bring her so much romance and tragedy in the small village of Modigliana, precariously perched on a slope of the Apennines. You may read to-day in the register of the village church the original record of her birth, which runs thus: "Maria Stella Petronilla was born yesterday to Lorenzo Ferdinand Chiappini, public constable of this place, and Vicentia Diligenti, his wife, both of this parish, and was baptised on April 17th, 1773."

She was the first child of the rustic policeman and his dark-eyed peasant wife; and when other children

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followed in quick succession, the villagers were quick to note and comment on the difference between the fair-haired, blue-eyed Maria, with her dainty figure and air of grace and distinction, and the black-browed, coarse-featured little peasants who called her sister.

Was it possible, the gossips whispered, that they could be children of the same parents? It was noted, too, with many a sly hint, that the great lady of the place, the Countess Camilla Borghi, showed a marked affection for the little fairy child, while ignoring her brothers and sisters; and it was whispered, "Ah, the Countess knows more than we do!" And so probably she did.

Had it not been for the Countess's kindness, Maria Stella's years would have been less happy than they were; for, although her father, the constable, always treated her with kindness and a curious deference, her mother's attitude to her was one of harshness and open dislike. The removal of the family to Florence, where her father had received an appointment as sergeant of police, was hailed with delight by the child, associated as it was with a promise that she should be trained for the stage. Three delightful years of singing and dancing lessons followed before the climax of her happiness was reached when she made her first curtsy in response to the applause

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which greeted her *début*. At sight of her—"beautiful as a dream, and graceful as a sylph"—the Florentine audience completely lost their hearts; and before she had concluded her first dance—dainty, bewitching, ethereal in its lightness—they rose as one man and cheered her in an ecstasy of enthusiasm.

Among the audience on this first night of her triumph was a sedate, plain-featured man of middle age, known to the Florentines as the "eccentric Englishman," and in England as Lord Newborough—a man who had squandered most of his fortune, and on the death of his wife, a daughter of the Earl of Egmont, had gone abroad to try to repair his shattered fortunes by a few years of obscure and economical living, little dreaming, no doubt, of the romance that awaited him in far-away Tuscany.

To the British Peer, sated and disillusioned by the world's pleasures, the sight of this stage fairy, with her auburn hair and blue eyes, and intoxicating grace of movement, was a revelation of new delights, a renewal of the youth to which he had bidden "good-bye." At any cost he must possess himself of her; and before he retired that night he had discovered her home, and had penned a letter to her father with an offer of his hand—an offer which, accompanied as it was by promise of substantial bribes, proved too tempting to be resisted.

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The child, horror-struck at such a proposal, protested, with tears and pleadings, against the proposed marriage. She loathed the offer; and when she saw her ugly, elderly suitor, she still more loathed her husband-to-be. But tears and entreaties were equally unavailing. Her constable-father was determined that she should, willy nilly, be "my lady," to the enrichment of his purse; and within a few weeks Sir Horace Mann, then our Minister at Florence, was able to write home, "Lord Newborough, who has resided here in a very obscure manner since 1782, on 11th inst. (February, 1786), signed a contract of marriage with a dancing-girl about thirteen years of age, the daughter of a constable."

A few weeks of dazzling triumph on the stage, then, with dramatic suddenness, a loveless marriage to a man more than old enough to be her father, such was the strange experience of this beautiful child of mystery on the threshold of the new life to which she had looked forward with such glad anticipation. That such a union should be unhappy was inevitable. The girl-Baroness frankly detested her lord, and made no concealment of her dislike. Each day brought its quarrels, its rages, and its tears; until Lord Newborough, driven to despair, disappeared one day, leaving behind a note in which he declared his intention of committing suicide. "My dear Lunatic," was

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the only answer she vouchsafed, "if you wish to give me the greatest proof of your affection, hasten to carry out your threat."

Under such a chilling douche his resolution quite naturally evaporated. He returned to his little shrew; but found life so unbearable, through the exactions of the father and the mutiny of the daughter, that he was glad to escape to his native Wales, taking his lady with him; and there, after some years of qualified peace, during which Lady Newborough bore two sons to him, he died in 1807, twenty-one years after his romantic and unhappy marriage to the dancing-girl. Within three years the Baroness was again led to the altar—this time by a Russian nobleman, Baron Ungern-Sternberg—a union which proved equally unfortunate.

Thus, in the year 1820, we find Maria Stella, now a woman of forty-seven, seeking distraction by travel in her native Italy, and visiting, as an act of filial duty, her parents in their humble home in Florence. Her peasant father was now in very feeble health, and obviously at death's door; but, although she wished to tend him during his last days of life, she found, to her amazement, every obstacle put in the way of her seeing him.

Occasionally, by subterfuge, and in the absence of her mother and elder brother, who did not conceal

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their aversion to her, she was able to spend a few moments by his bedside; but, although he greeted her with kindness and a smile of pleasure, he seemed strangely reserved and formal. He made mysterious references to some wrong he had done her—the rambling, she concluded, of a wandering brain; for when she begged him to be frank and explain his meaning, he immediately changed the subject. That he was brooding over some secret of the past, however, seemed clear. But what could the secret be? He died without giving any clue to it.

A few months later the secret was partly revealed by a letter which was placed in her hands—a letter written by her father some months before his death, and entrusted to a friend to give to her when he was no more, and which opened with the startling declaration, "My daughter you are not." It was a strange story that was thus unfolded in the feebly-penned words of the man she had always regarded as her father. A few weeks before Maria Stella's birth, the story ran, a great foreign nobleman had come with his wife and retinue to Modigliana. The lady was about to become a mother, and so was the writer's wife.

It was of the utmost importance that the nobleman's wife should give birth to a boy-child; and it was arranged between the fathers-to-be that, if the great lady's child should be a girl and the peasant's child a

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boy, the infants should be exchanged—a favour for which the constable was promised a large sum of money. “His lady,” ran the letter, “had a daughter, and my wife a son; the children were exchanged, and I was made comparatively rich. The Countess, her husband, and boy, and their numerous suite, speedily left our quiet little town, and were never more heard of.”

Such was the remarkable story told by this voice from the grave; and as Maria Stella read, her feelings of amazement gradually gave place to one of delight, of triumph. She, who had always regarded herself as low-born, was in reality the daughter of a nobleman, the equal at least by birth of her two husbands and of all the great ladies whom, in spite of her title, she had looked on as creatures superior and apart. But who was this high-placed father who had so basely abandoned her, to adopt as his heir the base-born son of the peasant whom she had known as father? The discovery of this vital secret became the passion of her life.

She lost no time in journeying to her birthplace, where from a priest, the Countess Borghi's confessor, she got her first clue. He declared that her mysterious parents were the Comte and Comtesse de Joinville. And his statement was confirmed by two old servants of the Countess, who vowed that she was

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the very image of her high-born mother. The identity of her parents thus disclosed, the next step was to discover who the Comte de Joinville was; and by travelling to Joinville she was able to learn that this was a title often assumed, during his travels, by none other than Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans, a Prince of the Blood Royal of France.

Here, indeed, was a startling discovery. To the delight of knowing that she was of noble birth was added the amazing disclosure that she was a Princess, the descendant of a long line of Kings, and one of the greatest ladies, not only in France, but in Europe! Moreover, since this was so, the Duke's eldest son, a probable King of France, could be none other than the son of the village constable, who had so cruelly been put in her place as an infant. Was there ever in all the romantic drama of life a situation so inconceivably strange? The peasants' daughter had blossomed into a Princess, a Prince's son and King-to-be was born to a peasant-cradle!

Equipped with this astounding knowledge, Lady Newborough set to work to secure public recognition of her rank and rights; only to find how vastly more difficult it was to convince others than to satisfy herself. At first, it is true, her success was almost beyond expectation. When she appealed to the Bishop of Faenza to have the record of her baptism amended,

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the investigation that followed resulted in an unqualified admission of her claim. "It is plainly proved," ran the judgment of the Bishop's court, "that the Comte Louis de Joinville exchanged his daughter for the son of Lorenzo Chiappini; and that Demoiselle de Joinville was baptised under the name of Maria Stella, with the false statement that she was the daughter of L. Chiappini and his wife."

It now remained to prove to the world that the Comte de Joinville was identical with the Duc d'Orleans, and to persuade Louis XVIII. to recognise her title to rank as a Royal Princess; and with this stage of her programme her troubles began in earnest. She squandered money right and left in fruitless efforts to secure these objects. She was victimised, one after another, by a succession of swindlers, to whom she gave large sums of money, with which each in turn promptly absconded, until her fortune, large as it was, was almost exhausted.

She travelled far and wide through the countries of Europe to secure support to her pretensions; but everywhere rebuffs and disappointments were her lot. Thus the years passed, each leaving her more and more broken in health and shattered in hope and heart. As a last extremity she published her story to the world in a book entitled "Maria Stella, or the Exchange of a Girl of the Most Exalted Rank for a

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Boy of the Lowest Condition"; but no sooner had the edition appeared than it was seized and destroyed by order of the King—the constable's son, who had escaped the peasant-cradle to mount the throne of France.

This was the last crushing blow to her hopes. From that cruel day she resigned herself to despair. For thirteen years more she dragged the weary burden of life, nursing her sorrow and her baffled ambition in her rooms in the Rue Vivoli, watching through her windows the passing of the King who had stolen her birthright from her; surrounded by pictures of the Orleans family, which, while proclaiming her unmistakable likeness to them, were a constant reminder of the glories she had so tragically missed; and feeding the sparrows which fluttered in flocks to her window-sills to enjoy her bounty.

Thus, in solitude and sorrow, Maria Stella, Lady Newborough, closed her eyes one December day in 1843, with the boom of the cannon in her ears which proclaimed to the world the opening of the Chamber by the King who, however innocently on his own part, had wrecked her life, and who to his last day, crowned monarch as he was, remained a peasant in looks and speech and manners, and, moreover, the exact duplicate of the village constable.

CHAPTER XX

THE EARL AND THE BUTCHER'S DAUGHTER

WHEN Frederick Augustus, fifth Earl of Berkeley, rode with his attendant groom into Gloucester city one autumn day in the year 1784 we may be sure that no thought of love or of romance entered a mind absorbed in the business that had brought him thus far from his grim ancestral castle.

For nearly forty years he had kept a heart untouched by the assaults of Cupid. Many a maid "of high degree and fair to see" had brought the battery of her smiles and charms to bear on this handsome lord of half a county, with a rent-roll of £50,000 a year; but not one of them all had captured his fancy. And as he rode that fine October morning through the Gloucestershire lanes, he would no doubt have laughed aloud had anyone suggested to him that he was making the first stage on one of the most romantic journeys ever undertaken by a British Peer.

In addition to his broad acres, his historic castle and his elongated rent-roll, my Lord of Berkeley could boast a lineage which, for length and distinction, had few rivals in England. As he glanced down the long

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vista of his ancestry he could well afford to smile at the family-trees of many of our proudest Dukes, whose very names were unknown when his own tree had struck down its roots and spread its branches for centuries.

Before the Conqueror ever set foot on Kentish soil the first forefather of his name had, it is said, been cradled in a Royal Palace in Denmark. And, even if this be fiction, we know certainly that Robert Fitz-Harding was firmly seated at Berkeley, a man of power and large possessions, while the first Henry was still wearing his crown. And from Robert, down through the long centuries, lord has succeeded lord at "proud Berkeley," winning coronets as Baron, Earl, and Marquis, and mingling their blood with the noblest strains of the age of feudalism.

Such then was my Lord of Berkeley—proud of his blood and his vast estates, and heart free on the verge of middle-age, as he rode Gloucesterwards through the glories of an autumn day in the year 1784; as secure, one would have thought, as man could well be against the pitfalls of Cupid. But in love, it is notorious that man is seldom in greater danger than when he counts himself most secure; and thus it proved with his Lordship of Berkeley.

As he was dismounting at the door of Gloucester's principal inn, his eyes fell on an approaching vision of

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girlish grace and loveliness—and remained there. Familiar as my lord was with beauty, he had never seen it in such a fresh and dainty guise, and yet so modest and so unconscious of its peerlessness. The girl who so innocently was walking to meet her fate was no mere rustic beauty with a face of “cream and roses.” There was a distinction and grace in her carriage which an Earl’s daughter might have envied without being able to emulate.

Her well-poised head was crowned with a wealth of rippling brown hair; the perfect oval of her face, with its complexion pure as a lily, was illuminated by a pair of dark eyes, whose sweetness and tenderness their long, curling lashes could not veil. Lips, rosy red and exquisitely shaped into a perfect bow, with a smile lurking at each corner; dimples which played at hide and seek in each softly-rounded cheek; and a well-modelled chin, eloquent of character—such, in the cold medium of print, was Mary Cole when first the eyes of Lord Berkeley fell upon her in a Gloucester street.

As the middle-aged Earl rode homeward through the dusk of that October evening the lovely face of which he had caught such a brief glimpse was ever floating before him. Try as he would, he could not escape it. It haunted his dreams that night, and pursued him in his waking hours in the days that followed, until he realised that he could know no rest

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until he had seen it again and again; until, in fact, he had made it his own.

How he returned to Gloucester; how he made the acquaintance of the owner of that tantalising, peace-destroying face, and discovered in her the daughter of a red-faced, jovial butcher of the city; of the many sweet and stolen meetings that followed, which left our Earl more than ever a slave and more determined to win the prize on which all his happiness now hung—of all this period of sweet wooing, and the final winning, the story is too long to be told here.

It must suffice to say that one March day in 1785, half a year after the first fateful meeting, Mary Cole, the butcher's daughter, was installed as chatêlaine of Berkeley Castle——

Where Berkeley's right and Berkeley's might
Did meet on Berkeley's Castle height.

The Cinderella from the butcher's shop had become a Countess, the successor in that rôle of women who were born to such proud names as de Ferrers, Lisle, Stafford, and Mowbray.

So well does the Earl seem to have kept his secret that, although Berkeley Castle is but twenty miles distant from Gloucester, none of his high-placed neighbours, from the Duke of Beaufort downwards, appears to have known of the identity of the new Countess with Mary Cole, the butcher's daughter. He had led her

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to the altar as " Miss Tudor," a high-sounding name enough; and although there was naturally much speculation as to her antecedents, all suspicion was quickly disarmed by the graciousness and simple dignity with which she played her new and exalted part.

Thus passed eleven ideally happy years, during which the peasant Countess bore four sons to her lord, and moved among her husband's noble friends as if she had been cradled in a castle. Then, to the amazement of the world, the Earl once more led the Countess, and the mother of his children, to the altar; and with every circumstance of publicity made her his wife—for the second time. What was the meaning of this singular proceeding? Surely it could only mean that the Earl and his " lady " had been living all these past years as husband and wife without the sanction of the Church! Such were the questions and speculations that ran from mouth to mouth among the scandalmongers in Gloucestershire, and far beyond the limits of the county. But to all such rumours the Earl turned a smiling and inscrutable face. The only explanation he vouchsafed was that " as his first marriage had been, for reasons of his own, secret, he had thought it well to repeat the ceremony in as public a manner as possible."

In the face of such indifference and such calm assurance, the voice of calumny could not long persist;

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and whatever doubts and secret speculations might remain, the Countess still held her head as high as ever, and played the part of châtelaine of Berkeley Castle as if no doubt had ever been thrown on her title.

Fourteen more years of happy life awaited my lord and my lady—during which three more sons and two daughters came to the castle nursery—before the Earl, now full of years, died one August day in 1810; and by his death introduced a new and startling scene in the drama of his life-romance.

When his eldest son, “William Fitzhardinge Berkeley, commonly called Viscount Dursley,” presented his petition to be called to the House of Peers as sixth Earl of Berkeley, it became necessary to prove his legitimacy—to establish the alleged secret marriage at Berkeley in the year 1785; and this proved to be no easy matter.

It is true that the late Earl had solemnly affirmed in his last will and testament that the marriage of 1785 had actually been celebrated in private in Berkeley Church; but this declaration, in the absence of proofs, could not be allowed to determine such an important matter as the title to a seat in the House of Lords. Lord Dursley’s petition was referred by the Regent to a committee of the House of Peers; and an enquiry was instituted which brought strange things to light. Distinguished counsel were engaged on both sides, and

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a searching investigation was made into the antecedents of the Countess and the story of her two marriages.

In vain Sir Samuel Romilly, the most astute pleader of his day, protested, " You have the declaration of the dead Earl with regard to his first marriage to the Countess. You have also her ladyship's evidence of this marriage, establishing it to the minutest detail; and, as final and conclusive proof, you have the entry of the marriage in the register of Berkeley Parish Church."

The evidence of the marriage as given by the Countess seemed indeed conclusive in itself. There had been present at the ceremony, which took place early in the morning of March 30th, 1785, five persons—the officiating clergyman, the bridegroom and bride, and two witnesses, one of whom had signed his name " W. Tudor." The other witness, one Barnes, was not to be found—probably he was dead, as the alleged ceremony had taken place more than a quarter of a century earlier. But " W. Tudor " was available to give his evidence; and he proved to be none other than a brother of the bride, who had, for the occasion, assumed the name " Tudor," the name in which, it will be remembered, his sister was said to have appeared at the altar.

In addition to the evidence of the Countess and her

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brother, who, in their different characters of principal and witness, swore that the Berkeley marriage had taken place, there was produced the Register of Banns which contained an entry of the publication of the banns in writing which was admitted to be that of the officiating clergyman.

So far, the claimant's case seemed unimpeachable. But as the case against his claim was unfolded, a very different complexion was put on it. When the marriage-register was produced, the required entry was there beyond question. But instead of being found on a page of the register, it appeared on a slip of paper or parchment which had been placed between two pages of the register, pasted together, and had thus, evidently for years, evaded inspection and examination.

Moreover, the widow of the officiating clergyman, who was dead, declared that the entry was not, to the best of her belief, in her late husband's handwriting; thus pointing to the conclusion that, although the banns had been legally published, the marriage had not been celebrated, and that the entry in the marriage-register was a forgery. In the face of such evidence, the solemn declaration of the dying Earl and the sworn statements of the Countess and her brother naturally carried little weight.

To place the matter still further beyond doubt, the Countess's mother—who had lived to see one daughter

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wedded to an Earl; another the wife of a General; and the third married to a Baring, member of a family which has added four noble houses to our Peerage—point-blank repudiated the evidence of her daughter. And, fatal oversight, in the register recording the later and public nuptials the Earl had declared himself a “ bachelor,” and his bride, a “ spinster.” Thus, under the searchlight of the House of Lords’ enquiry, the flimsiness of the claimant’s case stood pitilessly revealed; and his claim to a seat among the Lords was declared to be not established.

The conclusion of this strange romance can be told in few words. Lord Dursley, thus deprived of his legitimacy and his titles, was reduced to the rank of a Commoner. The castle and broad acres, however, were his; and as a man of vast wealth, and the most important, except the Duke of Beaufort, in all Gloucestershire, he spent the next score of years as Colonel Berkeley, living in regal style in his castle, a patron of the Turf, and a famous huntsman; and in London as a man of fashion and Society, haunting the green-rooms of the theatres and the gambling saloons of St. James’s.

In 1831 he was raised to the Peerage as Baron Segrave, and thus found his way at last to a seat in the Lords, whose door had been so long barred against him; and, ten years later, he recovered his lost rank

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of Earl when Lord Melbourne, as fitting tribute to a Whig stalwart who had five seats in the Commons at his disposal, commended him to Queen Victoria for a patent of Peerage as Earl Fitzhardinge.

The Earldom of Berkeley, during all these years, had belonged by right to the fifth son of Mary Cole and her Earl, Thomas Moreton Fitzhardinge, the first-born child of the legal union; but, with praiseworthy, if Quixotic, self-denial, he persistently refused to wear a coronet, the acceptance of which would cast an aspersion on his mother's virtue and his dead father's fair fame. He preferred to live and die a Commoner; and, as he never married, the Earldom, the succession to which had brought to light one of the most romantic dramas in the story of our Peerage, passed to a cousin, whose son is the Earl of to-day.

CHAPTER XXI

TWO MADCAP MAIDS OF HONOUR

AMONG the many ladies fair and frail who have played their romantic parts in the drama of the Peerage—from La Belle Stuart, who allied the artlessness of a child to the wiles of a finished coquette, to that merry madcap, Frances Jennings—none of them were better equipped by nature for the conquest of hearts than two of the Maids of Honour who danced their way through the dismal Court of the first of our Georges. Surely, never did sprightly maidens find themselves in a more dreary and chilling environment than in the Court over which the lethargic, beer-guzzling George and his mistress, the grim-faced, gaunt, angular Von Schulenburg presided, and in which youth and beauty were an offence, and high spirits a crime.

Picture for a moment the life of a Maid of Honour in this transplanted German Court, as described by Pope. “To eat Westphalian ham in a morning, ride over hedges and ditches on borrowed hacks, come home in the heat of the day in a fever, and with a red mark on the forehead from an uneasy hat. As soon as they can wipe off the sweat of the day, they must simper an hour in the Princess’s apartment; from



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thence to dinner with what appetite they may—and after that, till midnight, walk, talk, work, or think as they please. I can easily believe,” adds Pope, “no lone house in Wales, with a mountain and a rookery, is more contemplative than this Court.”

Such was the Court and such the life to which Mary Bellenden, younger daughter of John Lord Bellenden, was transported straight from the schoolroom—a pretty little madcap, brimful of health and irrepressible spirits, equally ready to box a too forward Page’s ears and to pull the chair from under the august and acidulated Schulenburg herself.

No wonder the sober-sided German courtiers were aghast at Mary Bellenden’s pranks, of which a poet of the time gives this inkling:—

But Bellenden we needs must praise,
Who, as down the stairs she jumps,
Sings, “Over the hills and far away,”
Despising doleful dumps.

But even the most doleful of Teutonic dumps were powerless against such impishness allied to such radiant virginal loveliness. “Her face and person,” says Walpole, who had ever an eye to a pretty maid, “were charming; lively she was almost to *étourderie*; and so agreeable she was that I never heard her mentioned afterwards by one of her contemporaries who did not prefer her as the most perfect creature they ever knew.” Such was “Smiling Mary, soft and fair as down,” who brought sunshine into George I.’s

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gloomy Court and stirred its sluggish waters as they had never been stirred before.

Mary Bellenden's twinkling feet and merry laughter had not long disturbed the peace of the Whitehall Court before she had thawed the most frigid of German hearts. Even Schulenburg, the "Maypole Duchess," condescended to pinch her cheeks and to give her an approving pat on the head. George was tempted to leave his beer-pots and the company of his "unspeakable Turks" to bask in her sunshine, and pay clumsy court to her; while the Prince of Wales was her very slave, ready to join in her pranks and practical jokes, and to laugh when he in turn was made the victim of them.

But King and courtiers the little minx treated with equally tantalising indifference. She would flirt with them, tease them, laugh at them, but not an ear would she lend to any serious advances. One day, we are told, the Prince, when sitting by her side, "took out his purse and counted his money over and over again. The giddy Bellenden at last lost her patience, and cried out, 'Sir, I cannot bear it! If you count your money any more I will go out of the room.' The chink of the gold," says Walpole, "did not tempt her any more than the person of his Royal Highness."

But though crowns and coronets alike failed to dazzle the Maid of Honour, her heart was quick to answer to the voice of true love, even when uttered by

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a plain, untitled gentleman; and while she was still in her 'teens she gladly gave her hand to Colonel Campbell, Groom of the King's Bedchamber, who had lost his heart to her when first she set foot in Whitehall.

That she might some day wear the Coronet of a Duchess (her husband, indeed, succeeded to the Dukedom of Argyll, but only after he had mourned her loss a quarter of a century) had no weight with her. She was ideally happy with her husband in the country life he loved, far remote from the glamour of Courts.

We get a brief glimpse of this idyllic, if bucolic, life in a letter she wrote to her friend, Mrs. Howard. "I have four fat calves," she wrote one day in 1723, "two fat hogs, fit for killing, twelve promising black pigs, four white sows, ten young chickens, three fine geese, sitting with thirteen eggs under each—all this, with rabbits and pigeons, and carp in plenty, beef and mutton. Now, Mrs. Howard, if you have a mind to stick your knife into anything I have named, say so!"

Thus, prosaically, but supremely happily, the little madcap of George's Court spent her few remaining years, until unkind Death claimed her, before she had seen her fortieth birthday. She left behind her four sons and a daughter, the latter finding a husband in the Earl of Ailesbury.

Less happy was the fate of "Molly Lepel," another Maid of Honour whose beauty and gaiety also brightened the Court of the first George; and who to

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personal charms as great as those of Mary Bellenden added a witty tongue, a clever brain, and a refinement all her own. Molly Lepel came of no noble English stock. Her father was a Pomeranian, who came to England with George's "menagerie" as Page of Honour to the new King; and, entering the Army, rose to the rank of Brigadier-General.

Von Lepel's beautiful daughter had barely seen her fourteenth birthday when she was taken from her books to play her part on the dull stage of the Court life; and, like Mary Bellenden, to shock the proprieties by her light-hearted pranks and romps. She, in her turn, soon had a small army of lovers at her feet, from the dissolute Prince of Wales to Sir Robert Walpole, who would gladly have made her his wife though he was almost old enough to be her father. But Molly only laughed at the wooing of the burly, hard-drinking, fox-hunting Sir Robert and the indelicate advances of the Prince. The only one of her many wooers who found favour in her eyes was the handsomest, and most contemptible, of them all—John Lord Hervey, the biggest dandy of his day, and also the most effeminate.

My Lord Hervey must have cut a very brilliant figure in those days of his dandyism—in his strawberry-coloured coat, his laced waistcoat, and black velvet breeches. Fine Mechlin lace adorned shirt-bosom and wrists; he wore red-heeled shoes with

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brilliant buckles, and gold-clocked stockings rolled up over the knees. His flowing peruke with its long queue was drenched with perfume and powder; and when he took the air in the Mall he left behind him a fragrant wake of musk, civet, or orange-water. A sword and a snuff-box with a mirror concealed in its lid completed the equipment of this Prince of "Pretty Fellows," who caught the wayward fancy of the Maid of Honour.

That Lord Hervey was handsome beyond his fellows, that his figure was a model of elegance, and his raiment unrivalled in its gorgeousness, his enemies could not deny. He was, too, a man of wit and high culture; but of real manliness he had as little as a popinjay. In Court circles he was known as "Lady Fanny." Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, who frankly despised and hated him, described him as "the most wretched profligate man that ever was born, besides ridiculous." His profligacy had, indeed, for years been the scandal of the town, which was none too easily shocked in those days by amours even the most flagrant. He was, in fact, when he wooed and won Mistress Lepel, the dainty, winsome, witty Maid of Honour, a worn-out *roué*, concealing behind a flaunting exterior a craven heart.

But, poor creature as my Lord Hervey was, he was the only man on whom Molly Lepel cared to smile; and her love remained undimmed to his last hour, when

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he carried " a painted face and toothless head " to a discreditable grave. So infamous was he that he was ready to barter his wife's charms for his own advancement. It was at her husband's instigation that she, who had hitherto been a pattern of propriety, schemed her utmost to take the place of the Duchess of Kendal in King George's favour; and she played her cards with such skill and success that the " Maypole," alarmed for her supremacy, induced the King's Ministers to " buy her off " with a douceur of £4,000, every penny of which went into Lord Hervey's pocket to be squandered on his lights o' love.

It is little wonder that such a cur fell under the lash of Pope's most scathing satire. " That thing of silk, that mere white curd of asses' milk," must have quailed when he read the poet's scorn in the most terrible lines ever penned by that venomous satirist:

Amphibious thing! that acting either part,
The trifling head or the corrupted heart;
Fop at the toilet, flatterer at the board,
Now trips a lady and now struts a lord.
Eve's tempter thus the Rabbins have expressed,
A cherub's face, a reptile all the rest;
Beauty that shocks you, parts that none will trust,
Wit that can creep, and pride that licks the dust.

Of this " painted child of dirt that stinks and stings " (to quote Pope again) we are told, in his own words, that he " never takes wine or malt drink, only water and mild tea—two days a week he ventures on the tender white meat of a chicken for dinner; for

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breakfast, dry biscuit and green tea; for supper, bread and water—no butter and no salt.” No wonder the miserable wreck of a man was driven to use paint to “soften his ghastly appearance.” And yet to the last his painted face and clever tongue retained their power to hypnotise almost every woman who came under their spell, from the Princess Caroline to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

Mated though she was to this pitiful apology for a man, Molly Lepel seems to have been reasonably happy. Certainly she presented a smiling face to the world, and continued unchecked her career of conquest. Pope, while scarifying her husband, grew eloquent over her “merit, beauty, and vivacity”; Voltaire was proud to be her slave, and declared himself her lover in the only verses he ever wrote in our tongue:

Hervey, would you know the passion
You have kindled in my breast?

* * * * *

In my silence see the lover—
True love is best by silence known;
In my eyes you'll best discover
All the power of your own.

Even when age had robbed her of her charms, Lady Louisa Stuart wrote of her: “She must have been singularly captivating when young, gay, and handsome; and never was there so perfect a model of the finely-polished, highly-bred, genuine woman of fashion.”

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Thus, the ex-Maid of Honour lived with her despicable husband, a loyal wife and loving mother of his children, until his death in 1743, when she vowed, in her sorrow, that she could never be happy again. "Yet," she bravely added, "I will be as little miserable as possible, and will make use of the reason I have to soften, not to aggravate, my affliction."

The rest of her years she spent chiefly at her beautiful country home, Ickworth Park, tending her roses and entertaining her many friends and admirers. Her last days were clouded by terrible suffering, which she bore with a courage and patience that amazed her friends; and she carried a brave heart to the grave. Among her last words were these, addressed to a clerical friend: "'Tis not death that I fear, but it is the way to it. It is the struggles, the last convulsions that I dread; for when once they are over, I don't question but to rise to a new and better life."

Thus, twenty-five years after the death of that "thing of silk and asses' milk," her husband, came to her rest Molly Lepel, the second of the two Maids of Honour whose beauty and merry pranks had stirred the Court of the first George to its sluggish depths; and who had turned their backs on it to seek—and in one case at least, to find—the happiness that comes to true love.

CHAPTER XXII

A NOBLE DEGENERATE

THE noble house of Wemyss has carried an unsullied shield through seven centuries, since its founder, John, grandson of Gill-Michael, fourth Earl of Fife, first bore its name; and the pity is that its blood was ever tarnished by such an ignoble strain as came to its sixth lord from the veins of Colonel Francis Charteris, whom Arbuthnot stigmatised in the most scathing epitaph ever penned as "the most unworthy of all the descendants of Adam"; a man "who persisted, in spite of age and infirmity, in the practice of every human vice, excepting prodigality and hypocrisy; his insatiable avarice exempting him from the first, and his matchless impudence from the second."

That Francis Charteris deserved quite such sweeping condemnation may be open to doubt; that he was a pastmaster of many of the worst vices, his life-story makes only too manifest. He was a human pervert of the worst type, a man who never chose the straight path if he could reach his goal by tortuous and forbidden ways.

There was nothing in his antecedents to explain this vicious strain in Charteris's blood. He was a

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member of an ancient and honourable family which, at his birth, had been settled on its Haddingtonshire lands for four centuries of high repute. His mother was the daughter of a noble house; and through his father, as through her, he was blood-kin to half the nobility north of the Tweed. It was his misfortune, no doubt, that he was cradled in the licentious days of the second Charles, and that contamination came to him, at a most susceptible age, from the Merry Monarch's lascivious Court.

In addition to his birth, Nature had dowered him with uncommon physical qualities. He was, we are told, tall, elegant, of courtly manners, and highly accomplished. The road was clear to high and honourable places, had he but chosen to take it; but at its threshold he elected to follow the devious and shady paths which always seemed to allure him.

As a youth he had a rare opportunity of winning laurels with his sword as an ensign in Marlborough's army in Belgium. But such a strenuous and dangerous way to fame was not to his liking. He preferred the card-table to all the laurels Mars could give him; and here he found a congenial field for his tastes and gifts. Before long he had stripped his brother officers of all the money they possessed; and such gains as he did not squander in dissipation he magnanimously lent to his victims at a hundred per cent. interest.

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Such a state of things, coupled as it was with more than a suspicion of foul play, could not long escape notice. The young subaltern was arrested by Marlborough's orders, tried by court-martial, and ignominiously drummed out of the regiment, leaving his broken sword behind him.

Nothing daunted by his disgrace, Charteris quickly found a new opening in the army in Flanders; and so ingratiated himself in the favour of his superiors that he was despatched to England carrying a large sum of money with which to raise recruits. On his way across the sea, however, he yielded again to the lure of the cards, and was so thoroughly fleeced that he landed at Harwich without a penny in his pocket.

In spite of his empty purse, he dined expensively at the best inn in the town, and retired to rest in the happiest frame of mind. Early next morning he rang his bell violently, called for the landlord, and, in a great state of rage, declared that, during the night, someone had stolen his breeches, and, with them, sixty golden guineas. In vain did the terrified innkeeper protest his ignorance and innocence. Charteris raged so violently and threatened such vengeance and public exposure, that the poor man was at last driven, not only to replace the missing garment, but to borrow and hand over sixty guineas—thankful even at such a price to be rid of the “mad Englishman,” and little

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dreaming that his guest had himself burnt his breeches during the night!

Thus supplied with his ill-gotten gold Charteris made his way to his parents' roof, where he was received with open arms as a returned hero; and a little later we find him in the thick of the gaieties of Edinburgh, a welcome guest in all the most exclusive houses of the Scottish capital. This was an opportunity of re-establishing his fortunes not to be missed. Once he was invited to play cards with the Duchess of Queensberry; and, thanks to a mirror in front of which he contrived to place his hostess, he won '£3,000 of her money without raising the ghost of a suspicion against his honour.

In another venture he was less fortunate. He was caught in the act of using loaded dice; was seized by his designed victims, stripped of his clothes, and had to submit to the humiliation of standing in a corner of the room during the rest of the evening. In spite, however, of such experiences and his tarnished name, he was able to woo and wed the pretty daughter of Sir Alexander Swinton; and, before Edinburgh got quite too hot for comfort, he carried his bride and his knavish gifts to a fresh field of enterprise in London. Here he entertained lavishly, and quickly qualified as a social favourite and leader, robbing his guests at the card-table as opportunity served.

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He still hankered after the Army, however; and in 1710 we find him spending three thousand of his ill-gotten guineas in the purchase of a company in the Foot Guards, thus finding new scope for his knavery. He kept his company at half strength, and drew pay for the whole, and pocketed the balance; he also extorted large sums from his men before he would grant them a discharge. In these and a score of similar ways he lined his pockets richly, until his career was brought to a full stop. His peccadilloes were reported to Parliament; a committee of enquiry was appointed; and the adventurous Captain paid for his vagaries by having to listen on his knees to the Speaker's severe censure, and by a sentence of dismissal from the Army.

His career as a "soldier" was not, however, closed, even by such an ignominious experience. With the words of the Speaker still fresh in his memory he won the rank of Colonel from a Colonel Holmes at the card-table; and, a few years later, he was playing a double part in the Pretender's rebellion in Lancashire, ready to sell his allegiance to whichever party was prepared to offer the best terms for it. All the advantage he seems to have secured was that he was allowed to take from the beaten Jacobites thirty horses to replace those of which, he alleged, the insurgents had robbed him at his castle of Hornby.

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As there was no more plunder to be won with his venal sword, the Colonel once more returned to the card-table, where his curious conceptions of honourable play frequently got him into trouble. Once a young nobleman, from whom he had won a large sum, gave him a sound thrashing, and vowed he would not stop until the money was returned. "Go on," gasped Charteris between the blows. "I'll take as much as you like, but not a penny will I refund." On another occasion, in a brawl with another of his dupes at Edinburgh, he settled the affair by biting his victim's nose off!

Not content with his spoil of the gaming-table, he reaped a rich harvest by shady dealing in the South Sea Stock. And as fast as his dishonest gold flowed in he invested it in lands or stocks, until his wealth assumed large proportions. He became lord of Hornby Castle; he bought large estates in Scotland, from one of which he blossomed into "Charteris of Amisfield"; and to them he added fat manors in Lancashire. Our bogus Colonel was now one of the great landowners and richest men in Great Britain.

It would have been well if he had been content to enjoy in seemly ways his riches, however shamefully acquired. His memory would have been less unsavoury than it is in the nostrils of posterity. Sated now with the pleasures and profits of the card-table,

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he sought another indulgence for his depraved tastes. He had, it is true, already won an unenviable reputation as a rake; but there were many more laurels to be won in this field, and he determined to add them to his crown of infamy. One shameless intrigue followed another in quick succession; wherever his baleful steps took him he left behind him a wake of ruined lives, until he became the most hated and feared man from John o' Groats to Land's End.

He seldom accepted hospitality which he did not basely betray. On one occasion, when a kind-hearted Yorkshire rector offered him the shelter of his home until he recovered from a slight accident on the road, Charteris repaid his Good Samaritan by eloping with one of his daughters, only to abandon her under shameful circumstances. The very house which sheltered his wife and daughter he made the scene of disgraceful orgies, to find a parallel to which we must go back to the midnight revels of the "Regent of the Roués."

So enraged was public opinion against Charteris's shameless doings that on one occasion a furious mob besieged his house in Hanover-square, broke all the windows, and clamoured fiercely for his blood and the release of his victims. After one of his escapades, more daring and heartless than usual, he was arrested; and, in spite of the eloquent pleading of his counsel,

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was sentenced to death. But before his well-merited sentence could be executed, family influence had obtained a pardon from the King.

Worn out now with excesses, he was brought almost to death's door by a serious illness; and for a time, like the "Devil when he was sick," turned his thoughts to piety and atonement. He had actually engaged an architect to build twenty-four almshouses for his natural children, when recovery set in, and with it a longing to resume his wickedness. To complete his restoration to health he went to Aix la Chapelle to try the fashionable cure; and here he "played his cards" so well that he is said to have added another thousand a year to his already large income.

Back in London, his health now repaired for a fresh lease of licence, he resumed his interrupted life of so-called "pleasure"; but had scarcely made his first adventure when he found himself in serious trouble. As the result of a grave charge made against him by a girl named Ann Bond, whom he had inveigled into his service, he was arrested and brought to trial at the Old Bailey in February, 1730. A verdict of guilty was recorded against him, and once more he listened to the death sentence.

His plight was now pitiful. Loaded with irons, sick in body, and despairing in mind, this lord of castles and many manors was at last face to face with a dis-

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graceful and seemingly inevitable death. There was, it is true, still one slight hope. His case had been referred to the Privy Council; his powerful relatives, including his daughter's husband, the Earl of Wemyss, were moving heaven and earth to secure his pardon; but for once the felon in his cell utterly lost both heart and hope. Once more, however, he was destined to escape the fate he had so well earned. The Privy Council, thanks largely to the eloquent pleading of Charteris's counsel, Duncan Forbes, advised the King to pardon the miscreant; and he was again a free man. The first time he ventured out for an airing, his carriage was stopped by a mob of roughs, who dragged him out and gave him such a severe drubbing that he decided to wipe the dust of London finally off his feet.

His race was now nearly run. Broken in health, he became so ill that the end was only a matter of days. Nemesis had at last overtaken him; and as he lay on his deathbed, tortured by fears for his future rather than by remorse for his past, he repeatedly "offered £30,000 to anyone who would assure him there was no such place as hell." To the minister who was summoned to the dying man's bedside he refused to listen, fearful that he would expect some payment for his services. When his daughter, Lady Wemyss, assured him that the parson's services were

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gratuitous he said, with a sigh of relief, "Well, then, let us have a flourish from him."

It was during a terrific storm, amid the crashing of thunder and the tumult of the elements, that Charteris's soul left the debauched temple of his body to appear before a tribunal from which there could be neither appeal nor escape. But even death was powerless to shield him from the world he had outraged. As the hearse conveying his body to its last resting-place passed through an avenue of jeering men and women, it was pelted with filth and garbage; and when at last the coffin was lowered into its vault in the church of Greyfriars, in Edinburgh, "the carcasses of dead cats and dogs were flung in to bear it company."

By a settlement, Charteris's wealth was left to his daughter's second son, Francis, who, as sixth Earl of Wemyss, transmitted to his descendants a name associated with more infamy than any other in our Peerage, but, happily, none of the vicious tendencies that made it infamous.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF AN EARL

IN the middle years of the Second George, England was gasping with amazement and shedding sympathetic tears over the pages of a pamphlet entitled "The Adventures of an Unfortunate Young Nobleman," which unfolded a story so incredible, so seemingly impossible, that the most daring writer of fiction would have shrunk from presenting it in the guise of romance. The hero of this strange story had crowded into his short life more vicissitudes, more amazing experiences, than had probably fallen to the lot of any man who ever lived—certainly than had ever found a place in Peerage history.

This singular drama opens in the street of an English village. A ragged, barefooted boy, little more than a child, is the centre of a mob of rough village lads, who are raining cowardly blows on him, and calling him every vile name that leaps to their lips. "I am no 'dog' or 'scoundrel,'" gasped the white-faced, indignant boy amid a shower of blows and abuse. "I am better than any of you, for my father is a lord; and, when I am a man, I shall be a lord, too," a statement

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which was greeted with shrieks of laughter, and still heavier blows for "my lord," the beggar.

Fortunately, at this moment the door of a neighbouring cottage opened, and an old woman, emerging, rescued the boy from his tormentors and dragged him into safety. "Tell me," she asked, when he had recovered a little, "why they called you 'a lord.'"

"Madam," was the startling answer, "my father is Lord Altham, and my mother is Lady Altham; but she has left the Kingdom, and they say I shall never see her again." "But who tells you all this?" asked the good Samaritan. "I know it very well," the boy replied. "I lived in a great house once, and had a footman; and then was carried to a great school, and was reckoned the head boy there, and had the finest clothes. Afterwards I was carried to another school, and there they abused me sadly, because they said my father would not pay for me." Such was the story told by the "beggar-boy" to his rescuer; and, incredible as it seemed, every word of it was true.

The tattered child of the bare feet was in fact James Annesley, son of Arthur, fourth Baron Altham, and of Mary, daughter of the Duke of Buckingham and Normandy—the descendant of a long line of knightly and noble Annesleys, which reached unbroken to the days of the Conqueror. During his earliest years this son of a lord and grandson of a

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Duke had been cradled in the luxury of his rank, until an estrangement between his parents and his father's reckless extravagance had wrought a tragic revolution in his life. He became an object not only of indifference, but of hatred to his father, especially as his existence was a barrier to the raising of money to feed the Baron's extravagance. He was, as he said, removed from the great school where he wore the "finest clothes" to another, where, as his father refused to pay his fees, he was treated with indignity, and made to perform the most menial offices.

He was "cruelly beaten, and while other boys were at their school exercises, he was employed in drawing water, cleaning boots and knives, or some other servile office." For two years he bore this life of humiliation until he could bear it no longer. Then, in desperation, he ran away, in search of the father who had so cruelly abandoned him. For weeks he wandered aimlessly in his quest, begging his bread and sleeping under hedges, in barns or church porches, until he was, as we have seen, rescued by the good Samaritan from the brutality of the village lads.

Although he knew it not, the boy's wandering steps had carried him to the neighbourhood of his father's house; and the woman who had given him the shelter of her roof and the generous hospitality lost no time in communicating with the Baron. His lordship,

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however, declared that the boy was no son of his, and refused even to see him.

A few day's later the boy's uncle, the Hon. Richard Annesley, made his appearance, and asked to see him. "What name is this you take upon you?" he asked in a stern voice. "I take none upon me, sir," was the answer, "but what I brought into the world with me. Nobody will say but I am the son of Baron Altham." "By whom?" demanded the gentleman. "By his wife, the Baroness Altham." "Then," exclaimed the uncle, "you are a bastard, for your mother was a reprobate." "If I was a man," indignantly answered the child, with tears in his eyes, "you should not use my mother or me thus."

"Though you are no child of my brother and no nephew of mine," the visitor at last condescended to say, "I will see that you are properly provided for." And a few days later the boy was taken from his benefactress and placed on board a ship bound for Pennsylvania, with instructions to the captain to sell him, on arrival to the highest bidder. Over the horrors of the voyage to a distant land and to slavery it is well to draw the curtain. By captain and sailors alike he was treated with every cruelty and humiliation that a fiendish ingenuity could devise; and when he was driven to tears and protests, he was confined in the hold of the vessel.

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When the ship at last reached its destination he was promptly sold as slave to a rich planter in Newcastle County, called Drummond; and thus commenced a new life of horrors at the very time that his father died, and his uncle succeeded to the Barony of Altham. To this title were added, ten years later, the Earldom of Anglesey, the Viscounty of Valentia and the Barony of Montnorris, to all of which the plantation slave was the rightful heir.

Picture now our young Baron, the assured successor to the family Earldom, the slave of a cruel taskmaster, herding with his fellow slaves, in daily terror of the lash, and toiling long hours daily at the felling of timber, a task far beyond his boyish strength, in a pestilential air. "The horrors of this time," he wrote in later and happier years, "I cannot recall without a shudder. It was an Inferno, relieved only by the kindness of an aged female slave, who was a veritable mother to me. For four years, until her death, she watched over me, shielded and cared for me, teaching me all she knew of education. For a year after her death I bore the drudgery, the daily oppression and the degradation. Then I could bear it no more. I fled, carrying with me a hedging-bill for my protection. For days I wandered, mostly foodless, in the woods. Then occurred a dramatic incident which nearly proved my undoing."

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He was lying one evening, footsore and weary, at the foot of a tree, when he heard the sound of horses galloping in his direction. Soon there came in sight two mounted men, one of whom had a girl mounted behind him. When they had approached within a few yards of his resting place they alighted and spread a meal on the grass, and proceeded to partake of it. The sight of food proving too strong a temptation to the famished young Baron, he revealed himself; and, after telling his story, was invited to share the repast, and to accompany them on their journey to the sea, where they proposed to embark for Holland.

Before, however, they had proceeded a mile on their resumed journey, they were overtaken by a pursuing party; and after a brief and fierce fight, they were taken prisoners, and lodged in the nearest gaol. There the Baron learned that his companions were fugitives from justice—that they had robbed a wealthy planter, husband of the lady of the pillion, who had taken the opportunity to escape with her lover. For five weeks the Baron remained in durance; he saw the three companions of his adventure executed; and himself narrowly escaped the same fate, only to be handed over to his old tyrant and master into a slavery more horrible than before his flight.

Thus, when liberty seemed almost within his grasp he found himself consigned to a bondage so cruel and

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harsh that the law intervened in his favour, and compelled his master to sell him to another. After three years of suffering in his new servitude he again escaped, and this time had actually come within sight of the sea and a friendly ship, when he was again captured, and sentenced to five years of slavery, in place of the one year that remained of his term.

This second blow seems to have crushed the young nobleman's spirits. He fell, we are told, into a deep melancholy, and became so seriously ill that his master, fearing to lose his property, took him into his house and consigned him to the care of his wife and daughter—a condition which, however pleasant for a time, brought new trouble on his head.

The planter's daughter lost her heart so completely to the handsome young invalid that she knew no happiness except by his side; and, throwing all modesty aside, she implored him to return her affection. This in itself was a sufficiently embarrassing position for a slave, however noble, to be placed in; but it was aggravated by rivalry of a very serious nature. One of his fellow slaves, a young Indian maid of great beauty, conceived an equally violent passion for the Baron. "She, too, made no secret of her love. She vowed she would marry him when his time of servitude had expired, and that she would work so hard for him as to save him the expense of two slaves."

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Was ever youth placed in such an awkward dilemma—the object of a violent attachment to his master's only daughter and his master's slave? In vain did he protest indifference to both. Each was consumed by the fires of jealousy, each was of an equally fierce and vindictive nature—and tragedy was in the air.

One day when the Baron was restored to health, Maria, the planter's daughter, was making her way to a distant field where he was working, when she met her rival. Angry words and recriminations ensued. The Indian maid, in a frenzy of rage, flew at Maria like a tigress, and it was only with the utmost difficulty, and after a fierce struggle, that the latter succeeded in escaping with her life; while, baffled of her revenge, the Indian girl rushed to a neighbouring river and ended at once her love and her life.

This tragedy was followed, for the planter's daughter, by a severe illness, during which, in her hours of delirium, the story of her passion came to her parents' ears, and her father, in natural alarm, decided to be rid of a slave whom he by no means desired as a son-in-law. Instead, however, of giving him his liberty, as he promised, he sold him to another master for the remainder of his term of slavery.

For a time, the Baron now fell on happier days. His new master treated him with kindness, gave him

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light tasks to perform, and—precious privilege—allowed him the run of his library. “These,” to quote his lordship’s words, “were the only days of my slavery on which I care to dwell; for, compared with all the horrors that had preceded them, it was as an escape from hell to heaven. Unluckily, however, my kind master died after I had been with him three years, and again I was sold into slavery, this time to a master in Newcastle County, almost within sight of my first plantation.

“In the neighbourhood lived the two brothers of Turquoise, the Indian maiden whose love for me had had such a tragic ending; and they, I learnt, had vowed to kill me as the cause of their sister’s death. They watched me narrowly, and, in spite of all my caution, attacked me one day in a remote part of the woods, and would certainly have killed me had not some persons, in search of a runaway slave, providentially arrived on the scene and seized the would-be assassins. As it was, I escaped with a knife-wound on the hip, which kept me a prisoner for two months.”

Thus disaster followed on disaster. Nor was this by any means the last. One day he chanced to overhear a conspiracy between his mistress and a neighbour’s slave to rob her husband and escape together to Europe. Waiting until the guilty pair had

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separated, he followed his mistress, told her what he had overheard, and succeeded in persuading her to abandon her design, promising in return that no word of her secret should ever escape his lips. This adventure had a strange sequel. The woman conceived a strong passion for the young lord, and when he refused to gratify it was so enraged that she tried to poison him—an attempt which was happily unsuccessful.

This last experience determined Annesley to make one more desperate bid for freedom. One September day, in 1740, he made his escape, and after terrible privations and many hairbreadth escapes from discovery by his pursuers, he reached the sea and boarded a ship bound for Jamaica. To the captain who had thus befriended the fugitive, he told his singular story, with the result that, not only did it meet with credence, but he was sent to England to prosecute his claims to the estates and titles of which he had been so cruelly robbed.

The rest of James Annesley's story—one of the most remarkable any man has ever survived to tell—may be told in a few words. On his arrival in England he introduced himself to the agent of his family, and soon succeeded in enlisting the sympathy and help of powerful supporters. He was recognised by the nurse of his childhood, who, the moment she saw

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him, exclaimed, "That is my boy!" and flung her arms around him in an ecstasy of joy.

Within a few months an action for ejectment was commenced against his uncle Richard, Earl of Anglesey, Viscount Valentia and Baron Altham and Montnorris; and the cause came on for trial in the Irish Court of Exchequer in November, 1743. During the case the life-story of the "unfortunate young nobleman" was unfolded to the Court, amid a breathless silence broken only by sobs and ejaculations of sympathy and wonder. In vain did the defence attempt to prove that the claimant was illegitimate. The evidence was overwhelming, conclusive, in his favour; and after fifteen days a verdict was returned for the plaintiff.

Thus, after adventures such as outstrip all the imagining of fiction, and after sufferings such as have seldom fallen to the lot of man, James Annesley, Earl, Viscount, and Baron, came at last to his own. The family estates he took; but the titles he left to the usurper—the uncle who had been wearing a coronet while its rightful owner was herding with slaves on American plantations.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MISER WHO REFUSED A CORONET

“ THAT most puzzling of human paradoxes—the meanest man who ever lived, and also one of the most generous, giving with prodigal hand to the stranger while denying himself a crust.” So spoke Lord Beaconsfield of that strange freak of humanity, John Elwes, thrice Member of Parliament for Berkshire, a man of colossal wealth, and one of the most sordid misers who ever drew the breath of life.

If it is asked how Elwes, the miser, finds a place in this series of Peerage Romances the answer is ready and conclusive. Pitiful object as he was, Elwes was the descendant, through his mother, of a long line of knightly and gentle ancestors, and had in his veins no mean strain of noble blood, derived among other sources from the Herveys, Earls of Bristol. Sir Gervais Elwes, a famous Governor of the Tower of London, was among his forefathers; a line of Baronets figures on his family-tree; and he himself might have worn a coronet had he but said “ Yes ” to Lord North’s offer of a Barony. Thus our miser is entitled to a place in the romantic stories of the Peerage; and it is safe to say that his life-story is one of the most remarkable in its pages.

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John Elwes was born "with a silver spoon in his mouth." His father, John Meggot, was a man of wealth and broad acres, who left behind him £100,000 when the embryo miser and M.P. was still in the nursery; and, in later years, Elwes inherited from his mother's brother, Sir Hervey Elwes, himself a confirmed miser, a quarter of a million of money, together with a lordly seat at Stoke, in Suffolk, and large estates. Thus, if ever a man had small excuse for parsimony, it was John Elwes.

His boyhood and youth appear to have been quite normal. He was educated at Westminster School; he travelled widely, like other young men of position, and excelled in many manly sports, especially in the hunting-field. Indeed, until his uncle's death added so largely to his fortune, he seems to have differed little, if at all, from the ordinary man of wealth and leisure.

With this accession, however, to his money-bags he seems to have inherited his uncle's parsimonious habits; for certainly from this time his whole character was changed, and henceforth his chief object in life seems to have been to save pence although he might at the same time squander thousands. A typical story illustrates these two strongly-contrasted sides of his character. Lord Abingdon, one of his friends, had made a Turf match for £7,000, but was unable to pro-

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duce his stake. Without even waiting to be asked, Elwes offered his lordship the money, which there was a strong probability he would never see again.

On the appointed day, Elwes, accompanied by a clergyman friend, rode to Newmarket to see the match, starting on the long journey at seven o'clock in the morning. At four o'clock in the afternoon, some time after the match had been decided in Lord Abingdon's favour, the parson, who was now ravenously hungry, suggested to Elwes that it was time to adjourn to a hotel for dinner. "Very true, very true," was the answer. "I am rather hungry myself. Here, do as I do"; and producing from his overcoat-pocket a mildewed pancake which, he said, he had brought from his house at Marcham two months earlier, he handed half of it to his famished friend. And Elwes started on the journey home, munching his two-months old pancake and chuckling at having saved the cost of a dinner, while risking £7,000.

On another occasion, after playing at cards the whole night and losing some thousands of pounds, he made his way on foot from the gilded salon in which he had staked and lost a fortune to Smithfield Market, to haggle over a shilling with a butcher, while trying to sell some of his cattle, and to stay the pangs of hunger by munching a mouldy crust.

At this time, the owner of at least £30,000 a year

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was actually keeping foxhounds and a stable of hunters (his one extravagance) on less than £300 a year—an economical feat which becomes intelligible when we learn that he paid his huntsman—who also discharged every other duty of his household, from milking the cows to preparing his master's breakfast—the lordly sum of five pounds yearly. But even an annual £300, he decided, was too great an extravagance for a man of his means; and hounds and hunters were soon sacrificed to his passion for miserliness.

But though he could not afford this small sum for his one pleasure, he was ready at any moment to advance thousands to any adventurer who asked for them, or to a friend who was in need of a loan. In these ways he is said to have lost at least a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. In spite, however, of his losses, riches rolled in upon him like a torrent. His mountain of gold grew yearly, until it approached nearly a million pounds; and with the growth of his wealth his miserliness kept pace. Whenever he started on a long journey (all his travelling was done on horseback) he would carefully choose the roads where turnpikes were fewest; and for a day's food would put into his pocket a couple of hard-boiled eggs, or a few crusts, which he would eat by the roadside, choosing for his meal a place where grass and water were available for his horse, free of cost.

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In London, we are told, he would get drenched to the skin rather than pay a shilling for a coach; and rather than spend a few pence on a fire, he would sit in his wet clothes until they were dry. Nothing would induce him to order a fresh joint from the butcher until the last putrid remnant of its predecessor was disposed of. He would pick up a wig from the gutter and wear it with satisfaction; and once, when his brown coat, which he had worn for twenty years, was too tattered for further wear, he chose, from an old family-chest, a full-dress green velvet coat, with slashed sleeves, in which he strutted about, as vain as a peacock, with the gutter-wig precariously perched on his white locks.

Among Elwes' many possessions was a great number of houses in the West of London, which supplied him with an agreeable hobby, and at the same time with free quarters. When one of his houses was vacated he would move into it, with a couple of beds, two chairs, a table, and an old woman, who constituted his entire household. Here, attended by his aged domestic, he would live on his crusts and putrid meat, with the occasional luxury of a fire made from chips left by the carpenters or sticks picked up in the street, until the house found a new tenant, when he would migrate with his household goods and the old servitor to another house that was empty.

On the rare occasions when he migrated to his seat

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at Stoke his miserly habits were quite as marked. If a window was broken, he would repair it with a piece of brown paper. He spent his days wandering in search of sticks and chips for his fire; and was one day found pulling down a crow's nest for the same purpose. During harvest-time he found his pleasure in gleaning the corn left in his tenants' fields. One day, it is said, he fared sumptuously on a moorhen which had been brought out of the river by a rat; another, on the undigested part of a pike which had been swallowed by a larger one! And yet the very week after eating the rat-provided game, he rose from a gaming-table in London the loser of three thousand pounds!

About this time an amusing and characteristic story is told of him. One pitch-dark night, when returning to one of his empty houses in London, he ran so violently against the pole of a sedan-chair that both legs were seriously cut. In spite of his protests, a surgeon was summoned, and Elwes was aghast at the prospect of a bill. But even in this dilemma his ingenuity did not fail him. He saw a way of escape. "You know, doctor," he said, "I don't think my legs are much hurt. You say they are. Well, I will make this agreement. I will take one leg; you shall take the other. You shall do just what you please with yours; I will do nothing to mine. And I will wager the amount of your bill that my leg gets well before

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yours.” The surgeon consented—and lost his fee, for the untended leg won by a fortnight!

A seat in Parliament was, one would think, the last luxury such a pastmaster of parsimony would allow himself, especially at a time when its cost was sometimes counted in tens of thousands of pounds. But when Lord Craven offered to nominate Elwes for Berkshire, he consented—on one condition, that his seat should cost him nothing. As a matter of fact, it left him just eighteenpence out of pocket—the price of a dinner at Abingdon—when, for once and with much grumbling, he was obliged to desert his diet of crusts or putrid pancakes. And for twelve years he represented the electors of Berkshire in three successive Parliaments, without once adding a penny to the prime extravagance of eighteenpence. On the other side, his hand was always in his pocket to supply the financial needs of his brother M.P.’s, until he sorrowfully said, “I have lost more money by lending at Westminster than three contested elections would have cost me.”

As a legislator Elwes was a model of all the virtues, staunchly true to his party and his conscience; and, although he never opened his lips in the House, was the most regular of all in his attendance. His loyalty to his party was so conspicuous that the wits of the Opposition declared “They had full as much reason

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as the Ministry to be satisfied with Mr. Elwes, as he *never turned his coat.*" And he never did, although no coat was in such need of turning or replacement. Even his wig he finally discarded on the score of expense—since no more were to be picked up in the street; for, said he, "it is cheaper to wear my own hair, which, like my expenses, is small."

Mr. Elwes' parliamentary life narrowly escaped a tragic termination at one period. He had been missing for days, and his nephew, Colonel Timms, grew alarmed. A long and diligent search was made for him, and he was ultimately found in one of his empty houses, almost at his last gasp. When he was restored to consciousness, he explained that "an old woman who was in the house, for some reason or other, had not been near him; that she had herself been ill; but he supposed she had got well and gone away." The old woman, his migratory housekeeper, had not gone away, as was discovered later; she was found lifeless on an attic floor above the master she had served so well.

When old age began to creep on the miser, strength and reason began to fail. He grew morose and suspicious, and more greedy still of gold. To save candles he would retire to bed when the light failed; to save fire he would pace up and down his empty rooms to infuse a little cheap warmth into his bloodless

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body. He denied himself even the luxury of sheets; and, when he fell ill at his farm at Thaydon Hall, lay for days at the point of death without a solitary attendant. The summer of 1788 he spent in London, old and feeble as he was, superintending the repairs of some of his houses in Marylebone. At four o'clock every morning he would be on the spot, awaiting the arrival of the workmen, and giving them a sound rating if they were a minute late. The neighbours were amazed at such punctuality, and one of them remarked to the foreman, "I have never known such a punctual man as that *old carpenter* of yours."

At times the old man would wander aimlessly through the streets, until he lost himself, and had to be conducted home by some errand-lad or stranger who took pity on him. These good Samaritans he would invariably dismiss on the doorstep with a courtly bow and a word of thanks. Never did he invite them inside, or offer a reward for their kindness.

As his end drew near his miserliness developed into a mania. When his builder once called on him for a small advance, he reluctantly produced five guineas, and said, "Here is every penny I have; and how I shall go on with such a sum of money worries me to death. I daresay you thought I was rich—now you see how poor I am!" He spent sleepless nights pacing up and down his bare room, crying out, "I will

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keep my money, I will; nobody shall rob me of it." On one occasion, after such a night, he went in great trepidation to his bankers, on whom he had given a draft for twenty pounds, to apologise for the liberty he had taken, as he had no funds to meet the draft. "Don't worry, Mr. Elwes," the official answered, soothingly, "we have a balance in our hands of something over £14,000 to meet the draft."

Towards the last his memory completely left him. Even his own relatives and friends he failed to recognise, and greeted with shrieks of alarm and cries of "You sha'n't have my money! You are robbers!" For six weeks before his death he slept in his clothes; and one morning in November, 1789, he was found dead in bed, fully clothed for his last journey, with a stick in his hand, and an old dilapidated hat, which would have discredited a scarecrow, on his head. Of his vast wealth, which amounted to £800,000, half-a-million was left equally to two natural sons, to whom he seems to have been devoted. The remainder, consisting of entailed estates, went to his nephew, Colonel Timms.

Thus died, at the age of seventy-six, "that most puzzling of human paradoxes," John Elwes, the miser, of whom the kindest and truest judgment to pass is—he was his own worst enemy.

CHAPTER XXV

THE THREE GRACES

WHEN pretty Mary Clement was cutting out patterns and stitching small clothes in tailor Rennie's shop in Pall Mall, in the days when the first of the Georges was King, she indulged, no doubt, in many a day-dream of the future that awaited her; but we may be sure that in her rosiest dreams she never pictured a time when a daughter of hers would be a Princess of the Blood Royal and a favourite sister-in-law of the King of England, and when her descendants should wear coronets as Duke and Earls. And yet Fate had all this in store for the low-born girl who plied her needle daily at the bidding of the Pall Mall tailor.

For Fortune, though she had placed Mary Clement in one of the lowliest walks of life, had dowered her with a rare beauty of face and figure. So fair was she that many a gallant strolling down Pall Mall would linger for a peep at her charms through the tailor's window, and would lie in wait for her when, her day's work over, she walked to her poor home. But Mary Clement was as modest and chaste as she was lovely; and to one and all of these would-be lovers she turned a cold and contemptuous shoulder.

There was one, however, to whom, in spite of her-



MARIA, COUNTESS OF WALDEGRAVE
AFTERWARDS
DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER

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self, she could not long be cold. In the room above the tailor's shop lived Edward Walpole, second son of the famous Prime Minister, a young man who had inherited much of his father's good looks and brains, and who, just returned from the grand tour, was leading the life of a man of rank and fashion in town. On his way to his apartments this young gallant had caught many a glimpse of the beautiful seamstress, her dainty head, with its wealth of golden hair, bent industriously over her work, and had been rewarded by more than one upward glance from a pair of lovely blue eyes. And it is little wonder that a vision so fair and so unexpected made its impression on a heart that was not a little susceptible to female charms.

A bow and a pleasant word in passing were followed by stolen interviews when the tailor was not on guard, and the spark of love was fanned into a flame which neither of the lovers sought or cared to quench. When news of these "carryings on" came to the ears of the tailor's wife, she was furious; and the climax came in a severe lecture administered to the seamstress. "Such shameful goings on," Mrs. Rennie hotly declared, "could not be tolerated. No good could come to a poor girl who encouraged attentions from such a fine gentleman as Mr. Walpole; and she was not going to have her house disgraced in this way. Mary-Clement must either give up her lover or leave the house."

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What could a poor girl do in such a crisis? She burst into a flood of tears, declared that she could not give up her lover, and forthwith ran up the stairs to his apartments and appealed to him for protection; an appeal to his chivalry which Edward Walpole was the last man to resist. With his strong arm supporting the weeping girl and her head pillowed on his breast, he vowed that he would never desert her; that, as long as he lived, he would be her protector and husband—in all but in name.

The next morning Mr. Rennie's shop opened, but Mary Clement was never again seen bending over her work, blind to the admiring glances of passing gallants, and listening for the footsteps on the stairs of the man she loved. For a few too brief years she was ideally happy with her high-placed lover and "husband." She bore him five children, of whom her two boys died in infancy, and was herself then laid to rest, mourned as deeply and as long by her lover as any wife was ever mourned by her husband.

Edward Walpole had by this time become a Member of Parliament, on his way to higher honours. He was later dubbed a Knight of the Bath, and was made a Privy Councillor and Chief Secretary for Ireland. But, though still in the prime of life, one of the handsomest and most accomplished men in England, who might have "picked and chosen" among the fairest women in the land, he remained true to the memory of

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his little seamstress, and found his chief pleasure in watching his three daughters grow daily in beauty and winsomeness. As children, their beauty and pretty ways captivated all hearts. Horace Walpole, their uncle, idolised his fair nieces, and his happiest moments were spent in romping with them in his house at Strawberry Hill. "These pretty nieces of mine," he wrote, "make one feel quite a boy again. They are lovely as a dream and frolicsome as kittens; and what merry, mad pranks we play together!"

As they grew up in all the pride of young womanhood their beauty was the wonder of London. "I firmly believe," wrote one enthusiastic admirer, "that if the three Graces of the heathen world returned to earth, it is doubtful whether they would be more afraid of the fair Walpoles or of the fair Gunnings as rivals." The Gunning sisters had recently taken the London world of fashion by storm. Horace Walpole wrote of them as, "two Irish girls of no fortune, who make more noise than any of their predecessors since the days of Helen, and who are declared the handsomest women alive." But there were many, Horace Walpole among them, who vowed that not even the two Gunnings were as supremely lovely as Maria Walpole, whom a Royal duke declared to be "the loveliest woman in the whole world."

But fair and fascinating as the three Walpole beauties were, and man of distinction as their father

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was, the exclusive circle of the Court was closed to them by the bar sinister of their birth. They were admired, fêted, petted everywhere; but the most exalted circles of Society would not admit them within their pales. This exclusion, however, mattered little to the "three Graces," who enjoyed their life and conquests to the full. Nor did it damp one whit the ardour of their well-born wooers.

Laura, the eldest of the trio, was the first to wear a wedding-ring; and it was placed on her finger by an Earl's brother, the Hon. and Rev. Frederick Keppel, brother of Lord Albemarle. Of this union "Uncle Horace" wrote: "I have forgot to tell you of a wedding in our family. My brother's eldest daughter is to be married to-morrow to Lord Albemarle's brother, a Canon of Windsor. We are very happy with the match. The bride is very agreeable, sensible, and good, though not so handsome perhaps as her sisters. . . . The second, Maria, is beauty itself. Her face, bloom, eyes, hair, teeth and person are all perfect. She has, too, a great deal of wit and vivacity, with perfect modesty." Laura was, in fact, the least beautiful of the three Walpoles; and her match was less brilliant than those of her sisters, although her husband lived to wear a Bishop's mitre, and to sit in the House of Lords; and, as the Hon. Mrs. Keppel, she was the first to "break her birth's invidious bar," and to find a place and a welcome in the circle of the Court.

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Where Laura led the way Maria and Charlotte were not slow to follow. Indeed, both, had they wished, might have preceded her to the altar, for they were besieged by tempting offers of marriage. Each had her retinue of coronetted lovers and slaves; and, like the Gunnings, whenever they took their walks abroad or appeared in public, they were besieged by mobs, of both sexes, eager to catch a glimpse of the famous beauties.

But both knew the power of their beauty, and were in no hurry to barter it for coronets. They could afford to "bide their time" and make a deliberate choice. Maria had more than one ducal coronet laid at her feet, but she would not stoop to pick it up. Among her many titled lovers, however, was one who would not accept "No." He was James, second Earl of Waldegrave, a man no longer quite young—he was over forty—but a man of distinction in more ways than one, of high character, and great intellectual attainments. He was Governor and Privy Purse to the Prince of Wales, a Privy Councillor, Knight of the Garter, and a Teller of the Exchequer.

He was not dismayed by the knowledge that he had many younger and handsomer rivals, or by the coldness with which his advances were received. He was one of those men who do not know the meaning of defeat, and his persistence was at last rewarded by the capitulation of the fair fortress.

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Thus it was that one day in 1759 Maria Walpole blossomed at the altar into my Lady Waldegrave. The daughter of the tailor's apprentice was entitled to wear the coronet of a Countess. Her happiness, however, was short-lived. For four years she was the happy wife of an adoring husband. Then the Earl was struck down with small-pox, and died, after an illness through which his wife nursed him with touching devotion and an entire disregard of danger to herself.

It was long before the widowed Countess reappeared in Society; and then she emerged from her grief and retirement more lovely, if possible, than ever. Once more legions of admirers and would-be wooers swelled her train. She would have naught of any of them. Her life was wrapped up in the three daughters of her late lord, who already promised to be as fair as their mother. Each of these daughters, to anticipate, made an excellent match. One found a husband in her cousin, the fourth Earl of Waldegrave; another became Duchess of Grafton; and a third of these grand-daughters of the Pall Mall seamstress married Admiral Lord Hugh Seymour, and became ancestress of the Marquises of Hertford.

But, though she had vowed herself to widowhood, it was fated that Lady Waldegrave should again become a wife—that she should make the most dazzling alliance possible to a lady not herself of Royal rank.



LADY MARIA WALDEGRAVE
Countess of Euston
Daughters of Her Royal Highness Maria Duchess of Gloucester

LADY VISCONTRESS CHEWTON
LADY HORATIA WALDEGRAVE
Wife of Capt. Hugh Conway

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Among her many lovers, and the most abject and adoring slave of them all, was none other than Prince William Henry, Duke of Gloucester, brother of King George III.

The Duke was but a boy of nineteen, and many years younger than the widow who had stolen his heart away; but he was no boy in the ardour of his passion for and pursuit of the lovely Countess. In vain the lady protested that he was too young, and that the union was in all ways undesirable. The Prince would take no denial, listen to no protest. He vowed that he would resign a crown gladly to make her his wife, and that, if she would not consent, he would throw away his life, as worthless without her. What, in face of such passion and pleading, could the widow do but consent? And thus it came to pass that the daughter of the seamstress became the legal wife of the King's brother, a possible wearer of the Crown of England.

The story of Maria Walpole's second wedded life is too long to tell in detail. King George was naturally furious at the match, and rated his brother soundly on his indiscretion. It was bad enough that his other brother, the rakish Duke of Cumberland, should have made a wife of Mrs. Horton, a merry widow of no good repute; but that the brother he loved so well, more than anyone else in the world, should have taken a wife without his knowledge, although that wife was a Countess of unimpeachable character, was intolerable.

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It was long before the angry King would consent to recognise the marriage; but when at last he yielded to his brother's pleadings and to the voice of love, his consent was as ungrudging as it had been reluctant. He admitted the low-born Duchess to the full rank and privileges of a Princess of the Blood; he showered smiles and favours on her; and, thus recognised as a member of the Royal Family, Maria Walpole's cup of pride and splendour was full to the brim.

Her day of power, however, was not of very long duration. Her Royal husband proved to be as fickle as he had been passionate. Another charmer caught him in her toils, the Lady Almeria Carpenter; and the Duchess, realising that her place in her husband's affection was lost, refused to continue any claim to it. She left him, and spent the last years of her life in retirement and in works of charity, leaving hundreds of humble hearts the sadder for the loss of the "good Princess." To the Prince she bore two children—a son, Prince William Frederick, Duke of Gloucester, who married his cousin Princess Mary, daughter of King George III.; and a daughter, the Princess Sophia, who died unmarried in 1844.

Of Charlotte, the youngest of the three Walpole Graces, the story is soon told. "I announce to you," wrote Horace Walpole, in October, 1760, "my Lady Huntingtower. I hope you will approve the match.

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I suppose my Lord Dysart will, as he does not know, though they have been married these two hours, that at ten o'clock this morning his son married my niece, Charlotte, at St. James's Church. And now, if you want to know the detail, there was none. *Venit, vidit, vicit.* The young lord has liked her for some time. On Saturday sen'night he came to my brother and made his demand. *The Princess did not know him by sight*, and did not dislike him when she did. She consented, and they were to be married this morning."

"The young lord, it appears," Horace Walpole writes in another letter, "had been in love with Charlotte for some months, but thought so little of inflaming her that yesterday sen'night she did not know him by sight. On that day he proposed himself as son-in-law to my brother, who, with much surprise, heard his story, but excused himself from giving an answer. He would send for Charlotte and know her mind. She was with her sister Maria, to whom she said very sensibly, 'If I were but nineteen I would refuse point-blank; for I don't like to be married in a week to a man I never saw. But I am twenty-two. It is dangerous to refuse so great a match.'"

And thus it was that the youngest daughter of the Pall Mall seamstress became the future Countess of a man whom she had never seen until a week before she wore the orange-blossom.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE IDOL OF A HERO

A PROFUSION of auburn hair, which fell in a glorious cascade down to her very heels, a broad forehead, finely arched and pencilled eyebrows, blue eyes, whose shyness was strangely winning; a delicate aquiline nose, a short upper lip, a dainty mouth, already giving promise of the voluptuous charms it displays in Romney's canvases; a chin of incomparable shapeliness, good teeth, a complexion pure and bright as an angel's colour, an expression of seraphic sweetness, a head set like a piece of antique art on a long, fair neck; a figure tall and slight, and exquisitely perfect in its modelling.

Such, at the zenith of her peerless loveliness, was the woman who, from her cottage cradle, grew to be an Ambassadors, bosom friend of a Queen, and enslaver of England's greatest hero. Probably never has a woman risen from such obscurity to such heights of sovereignty by virtue alone of her beauty.

When Emma Lyon first opened her eyes on the world in which she was destined to play such a dramatic part it was in the cottage of a Cheshire black-

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smith, whose wife—her mother—was a maid-of-all-work until she wore her wedding-ring. We know nothing of Emma's sordid early years until, at thirteen, we find her acting as nursemaid to the children of a Hawarden doctor—the first of several situations, the last of which was as general servant to a greengrocer in St. James's Market.

It was here that her extraordinary beauty attracted the attention of a lady of fashion, who rescued her from domestic drudgery to become her companion. But the beauty, now fully conscious of her budding charms and the power they gave her, was not long content to be the shadow even of such a fashionable mistress. A Captain Payne cast amorous eyes on her, and at their bidding she changed her rôle of companion for that of mistress, a "situation" of which she soon wearied. We next see her earning her living by posing as Hygeia in the exhibition of a notorious quack doctor; and a little later she is installed in the country house of Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh, a dissolute Sussex Baronet, whose plaything she remained until, in a fit of temper, he turned her out of his door, to fare penniless into the world, face to face with an early prospect of motherhood.

These were terrible days for the Ambassadors-to-be. To all her pleadings the Baronet turned a deaf ear. She was haunted with the dread of starvation for

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herself and her child, until in her extremity she appealed for help to the Hon. Charles Greville, younger son of the Earl of Warwick, a man whom she had met under Sir Harry's roof, and with whom she seems, from the letter she wrote to him, to be already on intimate terms. "Good God," she wrote to him, "what shall I dow? I have wrote 7 letters and no answer. I have not a farthing to bless myself with. For God's sake, G——, write the minet you get this, and only tell me what I am to dow. I am allmos mad."

In response to this pathetic, if illiterate, appeal, Greville, who seems to have been a man of good heart, sent her money to bring her to London, and offered both herself and her mother a home with him—an offer which was thankfully accepted. Thus we see Emma Hart (as she now called herself) and her mother, the ex-maid-of-all-work, comfortably, if modestly, installed in a small house, with a couple of maids, near Paddington Green, where for four years she led a happy life with her new protector. Greville, who was a Member of Parliament, and a man of considerable culture, spared no pains to cultivate the mind of his rustic protegée. He encouraged her to read poetry, provided her with masters for singing and the pianoforte, and generally surrounded her with the refinements of life.

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It was during these happy days that Romney fell under the spell of Emma's beauty—his "divine lady," the great painter called her, "the most perfect woman in the world." He painted twenty-four portraits of her, portraits of imperishable beauty and fame; and not only Romney, but Reynolds, Laurence, and Hoppner vied with each other in making her charms immortal on canvas.

That the blacksmith's daughter was devoted to her protector there can be no doubt. Gratitude alone would have ensured this; and to gratitude was added a deep affection for her handsome and cultured lover. But Greville's constancy was not proof against the disillusioning of time; and when his uncle, Sir William Hamilton, our Ambassador at the Court of Naples, succumbed in turn to Emma's beauty, during a visit to his nephew, he welcomed the opportunity of escape.

Under the pretext of monetary troubles which would compel him to give up housekeeping and to retire to Scotland to retrench, Emma, with many tears and pleadings to be allowed to remain with him, was induced to accept Hamilton's invitation for a six months' visit to Naples; and in April, 1786, we find her setting out rather fearfully for Italy, taking her mother with her, and cheered by Greville's promise to join her there as soon as he could settle his affairs.

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In Naples she was received with open arms by her new and middle-aged lover, who was more than thirty years her senior. He provided for her handsome apartments near the Embassy, a carriage, a boat, servants in livery, beautiful dresses—all the equipment of a great lady. But still she was far from happy. She had left her heart in Greville's keeping, and to him she writes thus pitifully: "I am sure to cry the moment I think of you. Therefore, my dear, dear Greville, if you do love me, for my sake try all you can to come here as soon as possible. . . . I respect Sir William, and he loves me. But he can never be my lover. I belong to you, Greville, and to you only." In a later letter she writes, "For God's sake, write to me and come to me, for Sir William shall not be anything to me but your friend. . . . What is to become of me? Give me only one guinea a week for everything and live with me, and I shall be contented."

But Greville was in no mood to resume the responsibility he had transferred to his uncle. Emma realised at last that he was weary of her, and in her pride and indignation determined to plead no more, but "to make love to the lips that were nearest." Within a few months we find her writing to Sir William, "Ah, what a happy creature is your Emma! Me, that had no friend, no protector, nobody that I

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could trust; and now to be the friend, the Emma, of Sir William Hamilton! ”

In her new world the blacksmith's daughter was quick to assert the sovereignty of her beauty. The greatest artists of Italy craved permission to paint or model her charms. When she was entertained on an English man-of-war she was greeted with a salute of twenty guns; the people of Ischia prostrated themselves at her feet, a homage compelled by her likeness to the Blessed Virgin. The Duchess of Argyll, when on a visit to Naples, lost her heart completely to her, and took her under her wing; the King and Queen treated her as a Royal sister; and Goethe was among her most ardent worshippers, vowing that she was “ a masterpiece of the great artist—Nature.” Such was the admiration and homage she excited that Sir William Hamilton had no scruple in leading her to the altar one September day in 1791. The blacksmith's daughter was now an Ambassador's lady, and member of a ducal house!

Lady Hamilton had worn her wedding-ring less than two years when Nelson, then captain of the *Agamemnon*, first set eyes on her, and at sight of her was undone. “ The captain I am about to introduce to you,” Sir William said, before the fateful meeting, “ is a little man, and far from handsome, but he will

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live to be a great man. Let him be put into the room prepared for Prince Augustus.”

Over the stirring and romantic times that followed swiftly on this first meeting of the hero and his enchanter, culminating in the flight of the Royal family to Naples (in which, Lady Hamilton says, “ I began the work myself, and removed all the jewels and thirty-six barrels of gold to our house; these I marked as ‘ stores for Nelson ’ ”), we must pass to that memorable trip to Malta, in which the “ little sailor ” and her ladyship were thrown into hourly companionship, and learned to love each other with a passion stronger than death itself. How deep this passion had already become on Lady Hamilton’s part had been proved when Nelson arrived at Naples fresh from his victory on the Nile. At sight of her hero, with bandaged head, blind eye, and armless sleeve, we are told she exclaimed, “ Oh, God, is it possible? ” and fell swooning into her hero’s one remaining arm.

It was the voyage to Malta that sealed the incongruous passion between the mutilated Admiral and the wife of the Ambassador. What vows were exchanged on the blue waters of the Mediterranean we know not; but we know that thenceforth the two lovers were inseparable, and that Sir William, unsuspecting, remained loyal to both wife and friend to his last breath. Together the oddly-assorted trio travelled through

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Europe, Nelson fêted as an Emperor; and under the same roof they lived together either in London or at Merton Place, as members of one family—even the birth of Horatia (Nelson's child, undoubtedly) awakening no misgiving in Hamilton's heart.

And thus unsuspecting, Sir William died, describing his betrayer in his will as "my dearest friend, Lord Nelson, Duke of Brontë, the most virtuous, loyal, and truly brave character I ever met with. God bless him, and shame fall on those who do not say Amen."

Thus released, Lady Hamilton was free to continue her liaison with the Admiral without even the modified precautions which her husband's presence made advisable; and, curiously enough, this relationship seems to have met with no discouragement from Nelson's family, with which she was on affectionate terms. Now the chains which bound Nelson to her became stronger than ever, although her beauty had grown too coarse to appeal to aesthetic tastes. "Her figure," says Mrs. St. George (mother of the Archbishop Trench of later years), "is colossal, but, excepting her feet, which are hideous, well shaped. Her bones are large, and she is exceedingly *embonpoint*. I think her bold, daring, vain even to folly, and stamped with the manners of her first situation much more strongly than one would suppose, after having represented Majesty and lived in good company fifteen years." This is

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certainly not a flattering picture; but to Nelson she was still the one incomparably lovely woman for whose sake he was glad to be rid of his jealous and somewhat shrewish wife, and to risk his fair fame, and even his career.

It was while dallying with his buxom charmer that the summons came to Trafalgar and glory, and (though he did not suspect it) to his death. And it was she who fought the weakness which would have kept him by her side. "Go," she said to him. "You will have a glorious victory; and then you may return and be happy." When, a few months later, Nelson lay dying in the cockpit of the *Victory* his last thought were all for her and his child. "Remember," he gasped, in the last articulate words he spoke, "remember that I leave Lady Hamilton and my daughter Horatia as a legacy to my country."

With the death of her "great and immortal hero," the curtain fell rapidly on Lady Hamilton's days of happiness. Although she had an income of not less than £2,000 a year, her fortune was quickly dissipated in wild gambling and extravagance. Within two years she was £8,000 in debt. She was arrested, and spent several months within the walls of the King's Bench Prison, whence she contrived to escape to Calais with her child, whose treatment of her was not the least of her many troubles. A year earlier she had

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written to Horatia, "Your conduct is so bad, your falsehoods so dreadful, your cruel treatment of me such that I cannot live under these afflicting circumstances. My heart is broken."

After a final bitter struggle with starvation at Calais she died one January day in 1815, after addressing a pathetic appeal to the Prince Regent to care for her daughter. "I most earnestly recommend her on my knees," she wrote in that tragic hour, "blessing her and praying for her that she may be happy, virtuous, good, and amiable."

A story has been told that a Mrs. Hunter "found Lady Hamilton living in Calais in the winter of 1814 in absolute want; that she surreptitiously supplied her with food, and when she died, buried her in a deal box, with a pall made out of an old silk petticoat." This story, however, has been proved to be a fable; for it has since been discovered that she was decently buried, according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church, at a cost of £28 10s., "which money was paid by a Mr. Caodgan."

CHAPTER XXVII

A MAID OF MYSTERY

WHO was Pamela—that child of mystery and romance whose life-story adds to the annals of our Peerage one of its most fascinating and pathetic chapters?

When her childish laughter was first heard in the nursery of the Duc de Chartres (later Duc d'Orleans), and her fairy figure, with flushed face and flying curls, was seen racing along the corridors of the Palais Royal, no one in all the palace, from the stately Mistress of the Robes to the youngest scullion, seemed to know whence she came or who she was. Who was this little English fairy of the golden hair, the dancing blue eyes, and the merry laugh, who had come thus strangely into the Royal nursery to be the playmate of the Duc's children; where had she come from, and what was her history? Such were the questions that passed from mouth to mouth, in salon and boudoir and kitchen alike.

There were many who whispered that she was the Duc's own child. There could be little doubt about it; for was she not the exact image of her nursery



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playmates? Others declared with equal certainty that her mother was none other than Mme. de Genlis, the Governess of the Orleans children, and a favourite of the Duc, whom, it was said, she could "twist round her little finger." And if Madame's child, probably also the Duc's; for how otherwise could she have found such a welcome in his palace? And so it was settled to the satisfaction of all that, whoever she was, she had no doubt every right to be where she was.

Madame de Genlis, however, made no concealment about the matter. The child's presence in the palace had, she said, the simplest and most natural of explanations. She, as responsible for the Royal children's education, had decided that it would be well to introduce into the nursery a little English girl to share the studies and the games of her pupils, and this suggestion had the Duc's cordial approval.

With this object she had sent Mr. Forth—one of the Duc's valets, and himself an Englishman—in quest of a suitable playfellow. After much searching, Mr. Forth had discovered in Hampshire the very child for the purpose in the five-year-old daughter of a poor widow, of whom she told the following story: A few years earlier, Mary Simms, a girl of humble birth, had become the wife of a Mr. Seymour, a gentleman of good family, who had carried his pretty and low-born bride off to Newfoundland. Two years or

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so later Mr. Seymour had died, and his widow, who was left penniless, had returned with her baby-girl to her native land, where she found the utmost difficulty in supporting herself and her child by her needle and any kind of menial work she could procure.

Such was her situation when, one day in 1777, Mr. Forth made the widow's acquaintance, and, struck by the beauty and winsomeness of her little daughter, succeeded at last, by liberal offers of money, and by painting a glowing picture of the child's future in a Royal palace, in persuading the hopeless mother to part with her girl. To make the transfer more complete, Mrs. Seymour consented to give her daughter as "apprentice" to Madame de Genlis, until she came of age, and signed an agreement to this effect.

Such was the plausible explanation vouchsafed by Madame to the sceptics of the presence of the new playmate in the Royal nursery—an explanation which was received with smiles of incredulity, and, it is to be feared, only served to feed the flames of scandal. The more or less mythical "Nancy Simms" of the Hampstead village ceased to exist, and "Pamela" came to bring sunshine and laughter into the Palais Royal.

And seldom, if we are to believe contemporary accounts, has a palace had so sweet and bright an in-

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mate as this English maid of doubtful history. She was such a creature as poets dream of—a woodland sylph, graceful as a fawn, wild as an elf, lovely as Titania; a merry little sprite, brimming over with vitality and mischief, her blue eyes always a-dance with merriment, her golden curls tumbling riotously over her dainty little head, her pearly teeth always agleam between her rosy laughing lips.

To resist the little witch was as impossible as to escape her impish tricks. And before she had been in the palace a month, everyone, from the Duc downwards, was her very slave, proud to share her romps and to win a kiss from her pouting lips. Even Mme. de Genlis, who affected to treat her new charge with indifference, was powerless to keep the child out of her heart. "I was passionately fond of her," she confessed in later years. "This charming child," she continues, "was the most idle I ever knew; she had no memory, she was very wild, which even added to the grace of her figure, as it gave her an air of vivacity. This, joined to her natural indolence, and to a great deal of wit, made her very engaging. Her figure was fine and light; she was extremely handsome; she flew like Atlanta."

That Pamela was ideally happy in her new home goes without saying; that the adulation by which she was surrounded, from her playmates in the nursery

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to the great Court ladies, was powerless to spoil her nature, is much to her credit. As the happy years passed each added its touch of beauty and grace, until by the time she blossomed into young womanhood she was, by universal consent, the most beautiful and bewitching girl in the whole circle of the Court of France. Many a high-placed lover sought her hand—the Duc de Montpensier among the most ardent of them all—but Pamela had no mind to exchange her freedom for any fetters, however golden.

And thus she kept her heart untouched—until “Prince Charming” came her way, in the guise of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, son of his Grace of Leinster—the handsomest man, it is said, in all Ireland; a man, moreover, as brave and gifted as he was good-looking. Where and when the young people first set eyes on each other is not known with any certainty; but from that first meeting, sometime in 1792, their fate was sealed. It was love at a glance; and love until death.

In vain did Mme. de Genlis throw every possible difficulty in the way of the union. Where Pamela gave her heart, her hand must follow; and thus it came to pass that one December day she took her stand before the altar at Tournay with the man to whom she so gladly surrendered her heart and freedom.

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A union so romantic could not fail to excite widespread interest, nor could it fail to revive the old speculations as to Pamela's origin. The marriage contract, which is still preserved in Tournay, recites the nuptials of "Edward FitzGerald, son of the late Duke of Leinster, and Stephanie Caroline Anne Simms, known by the name of Pamela, aged 19 years, daughter of William Berkley and of Marie Simms."

If this was the description of herself given by the bride, we have a striking contradiction of the story of her birth as given by Mme. de Genlis, who, it will be remembered, declared she was the daughter of a Mr. *Seymour*. That this official statement was not generally accepted is proved by the fact that the "Masonic Magazine" for 1793 announced the wedding of "the Hon. Lord Edward FitzGerald to Madame Pamela Capet, daughter of His Royal Highness the ci-devant Duke of Orleans"; and Moore, in his "Life of Lord Edward FitzGerald," says that "Pamela was the adopted, or, as it may be said without scruple, the actual daughter of Mme. de Genlis by the Duc d'Orleans." Thus we see the mystery of Pamela's birth remains at her marriage as impenetrable as when she first appeared in the Palais Royal nursery.

Pamela's marriage wrought a great change in her life—from the splendours of a Royal Court to the frugal obscurity of "love in a cottage" with the hus-

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band of her heart. But she would gladly have bartered much more than she had lost for such happiness as was hers for the next five years—for the life which, she says, was “more like a beautiful dream than a reality.”

It is a picture of idyllically-beautiful wedded life that Lord Edward discloses in his letters to his Duchess-mother during this halcyon period, when he and his lovely wife made their home in various parts of Ireland, from Kildare to Blackrock, near Dublin. Their home, at Mr. Conolly's Lodge in Kildare, Lord Edward describes as “a little Paradise. . . . It has all the things that make beauty to me. My dear wife dotes on it and becomes it.”

At Blackrock the life was equally ideal—“a living poem”; and charming are the pictures he draws of their simple doings—“Pamela busy in her little American jacket, planting sweet peas and mignonette, while I write to my dearest mother. . . . We came last night, got up to a delightful spring day, and am enjoying the little book-room with the windows open, hearing the little birds sing, and the place looking beautiful. Pamela has dressed four beautiful flower-pots; upon the two little stands there are six pots of fine auriculas, and I am sitting in the bay-window, with all those pleasant feelings which the fine weather, the pretty place, the singing birds, the pretty wife and

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Frescati give me. Her table and work-box, with the little one's cap, are on the table. . . ."

Such are glimpses of the sweet Arcadian life of our two lovers when, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," they lived but for each other and the little one who came to crown their happiness and to fill their cup of bliss to overflowing. Pity that these sunny days could not last to the end. But there was a restless strain in Fitzgerald's blood which even his passion for his wife and child and the home sanctuary could not keep in subjection, and which was to prove his undoing.

The stirrings of political discontent lured him away from the peace of his home and the sweet comradeship of his wife to the meetings of the Society of United Irishmen. He was tempted to take a leading part in a scheme for a French invasion of Ireland; and when the bubble burst, and his life was in danger, he had to seek safety in flight.

Over the heartrending sequel to this fatal folly, which brought the edifice of his happiness tumbling about his—and his wife's—ears, we must pass briefly. For a time, he found a safe asylum in Dublin, whither his devoted wife followed him, finding a lodging for herself and child near Merrion-square; and thither FitzGerald would often steal, under the friendly cover of the darkness, to spend an hour with the

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woman whom he loved more than life itself, and to mingle his tears with hers over the cradle of their sleeping infant. Even the anguish and terror of these stolen meetings could not rob them of their sweetness.

But these fearful joys could not last long, with the bloodhounds so keen on the "traitor's" track. FitzGerald's hiding place was at last discovered; and one night the door of his room was burst open to let in a posse of soldiers, resolute at any cost to secure him. But FitzGerald was not the man to be easily captured, even with such fearful odds against him. With his back to the wall, and dagger in hand, he fought with the courage of despair. One after another his would-be captors fell before the deadly thrust of his dagger. But the odds were too great. He was overwhelmed, flung down, and secured, and, with the blood ebbing from half-a-dozen wounds, was carried off to the Castle. When he was asked by the Lord-Lieutenant if he had any message to send to his wife, he gasped, "Nothing, nothing! But, oh, break this tenderly to her."

On learning her husband's fate Pamela's anguish was heartrending. She begged piteously to be allowed to share his prison and to nurse him. She sold all her little possessions, even the rings from her fingers, and offered her last penny as a bribe to his

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gaolers. But all in vain. She was not even permitted to see the man for whom she would so gladly have laid down her life. The crowning blows fell when she was peremptorily ordered to leave Ireland, and when, a week or so later, news came that her husband had died from his wound.

“Her agonies of grief,” says the Duke of Richmond, who broke the news to her, “were very great, and violent hysterics soon came on. But by degrees she grew more calm at times; and although she has had little sleep and less food, and still has nervous spasms, yet I hope and trust her health is not materially affected.”

The latter years of Pamela’s life were as clouded with sorrow and tragedy as her early years had been full of sunshine. After a time spent under the hospitable roof of the Duke of Richmond, she made her home in Hamburg, where her lonely and destitute condition led her to the altar a second time—with a wealthy banker called Pitcairn. But this union, against which heart and body alike rebelled, proved one long misery; and not many years later we find the unhappy woman living obscurely at Toulouse, where she spent the last eleven years of her life.

Here she seems to have found some solace—in her loneliness and sorrow—in acts of kindness and charity (such charity as her poor purse could provide) to her

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humble neighbours. "Her name," says Madame Ducrest, a niece of Madame de Genlis, "will ever be remembered gratefully in the cottages of the poor. People of fashion will remember, perhaps, the fascination of the beautiful Lady FitzGerald; the poor will never forget the kind and generous acts of Pamela."

Eighty years have gone since the heroine of this strange story closed her weary eyes on a world which had given her so much joy and so much unmerited sorrow; and for eighty years she has been sleeping her last sleep at Montmartre under a modest tombstone, which bears but one word—as inscrutable to-day as when its owner made the Palais Royal ring with her childish laughter, and when her golden curls were seen flying along the palace corridors—the word
PAMELA.



MRS. FITZHERBERT

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN UNCROWNED QUEEN

“DEBAUCHEE, dissolute, heartless, fickle, cowardly” —the fourth of our Royal Georges no doubt well merited every one of the scathing adjectives Thackeray heaps on his memory. He was all this and more; his vanity was monstrous, he was weak and treacherous to the last incredible degree. But he was none the less “the first gentleman in Europe,” a man of handsome exterior, of courtly graces, and, when he wished, of infinite personal charm. He was a pastmaster of all the arts of gallantry; and, though he blighted the life of every woman who caught his wayward fancy, there were few who could resist the battery of his fascinations.

Among the many victims of this Royal libertine none commands our respect and sympathy more than Mrs. Fitzherbert, the “new constellation” that made an appearance in the fashionable hemisphere in the summer of 1784; and drew to herself as satellites “half of our young nobility.”

Who was the woman who thus took London by storm and enslaved all hearts? Mrs. Fitzherbert was

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no *débutante*, fresh from the schoolroom, and bringing with her the first bloom of a radiant youthful beauty. She had already worn the bridal veil for two husbands, and had also worn widow's weeds for both. The granddaughter of Sir John Smythe, a Durham Baronet of long and noble lineage, she was barely nineteen when she wore the orange-blossom for Mr. Edward Weld, a Dorsetshire squire, who left her widowed in the same year that saw her a bride.

Three years later the wedding-bells rang for her again, and this time she was led to the altar by Thomas Fitzherbert, Esq., a man of many acres and a long purse, who had been cradled before her own father. For three years she was a wife for the second time, before death set her free once more—a double widow with a jointure of £2,000 a year, and still only five years advanced in her twenties.

After this second bereavement Mrs. Fitzherbert spent three years in retirement on the Continent, weary of wedded life and its uncertainties, and vowing she would never barter her freedom again for any man, however charming. But youth stirred in her veins. Her mirror told her that she was more lovely than when she first left her father's roof to become a bride; and though she had forsworn marriage, there was no reason why she should deny herself the

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pleasures of life which her liberty and purse made not only available, but very seductive to her.

Thus it was that one day, in 1784, she crossed the Channel, leaving her weeds and sorrows behind her, and startled London by a vision of beauty such as had not feasted its eyes since the days of the Gunnings and the Walpole "Graces." One has only to look at her picture to understand the sensation which greeted the rising of this new beauty in the firmament of fashion. It would require a pen more skilful than that of the writer to do justice to such charms as even her painted portraits present—the wealth of golden hair, in whose dainty curls and tendrils the sun's rays seem imprisoned; the liquid blue of the eyes; the complexion of "wild rose and hawthorn"; the perfect oval of the face; the exquisite sweetness of the lips with the colour and fragrance of a red-rose leaf; the dainty poise of the head, and a figure, every soft, rounded line of which is instinct with grace.

Such, in cold print, was Mrs. Fitzherbert when, in the summer of 1784, she took the air on Richmond Hill, or made her dazzling appearance in Lady Sefton's box at the Opera; and it was not long before "Florizel," ever eager for new conquests, set covetous eyes on the lovely widow. Where or when His Royal Highness Lothario first saw her is a matter of dispute;

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but we know that before she had been many weeks in England he had not only made her acquaintance, but was the most abject of all the slaves who prostrated themselves at her feet.

That she seemed as indifferent to his fascinations and his wooing as she was unimpressed by his exalted station only served to fan the flames of his passion. To have his homage spurned was indeed a novel experience for Royal George. Had she been complaisant, an easy prey, she would certainly have fared no better than many another fair flower in the garden of women whom his passion had blasted and left to ruin and shame. But Mrs. Fitzherbert was no woman to be wooed in such fashion, and she quickly let him know that his pursuit was unwelcome, even if it led to the altar. "There are," she told him (though none better knew that it was false), "hundreds of women prettier than myself. Take your love to them. I ask nothing of you but to be let alone." Daring words to speak to the heir to a throne. But what cared she? She was free as the air to do and speak as she chose; and she wanted no lover, however ardent and exalted.

When he vowed that he would take his life if she would not listen to his suit she only laughed in his face, and told him not to be "a silly boy." There was no weapon in all his armoury which could pene-

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trate her indifference; her contemptuousness drove him to distraction.

One day, as Lord Stourton tells us, Lords Onslow and Southampton and others of the Prince's household came to Mrs. Fitzherbert's house in a state of great consternation. The Prince, they told her, had stabbed himself; his life was in grave danger, and only her immediate presence could save it. For a long time she refused point-blank to go to him; and it was only after long and almost piteous pleading that she at last consented; and, with the Duchess of Devonshire as chaperon, was driven swiftly to Carlton House. There she found the Prince, lying pale and covered with blood, and to all appearance *in extremis*—a pathetic spectacle which moved her far more than all his vows and tears. So deeply affected was she that, when the Prince, in feeble tones, vowed that he would not live unless she allowed him to place a wedding-ring at once on her finger, she consented; and thus, in her grief, alarm, and sympathy, she suffered a ring of the Duchess to be placed by the apparently dying man on her hand.

Before the next morning dawned, however, reaction and disillusion came. She was convinced that she had been lured into this pledge by a despicable trick; and so strong was her resentment at the conspiracy which had wrung from her a consent which she would

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not have given under any other conditions, that she fled to the Continent to find a refuge from such heartless persecution.

When the Prince heard of her flight he was distracted with rage and despair. He raved like a madman, tore his hair, and flung himself on the floor, shrieking that he would follow her to the ends of the earth; and that, even at the cost of his throne, he would make her marry him. When his father, the King, refused to allow him to leave England on any pretext, he pursued the fugitive with letters "full of passionate pleadings, of heartrending appeals," and of threats of suicide if she would not return and consent to become his wife.

Was ever woman so assailed, or placed in such a predicament? Surely, few could long remain obdurate to such lava-hot passion, and to such heartrending appeals. And perhaps it is little wonder that Mrs. Fitzherbert at last began to show signs of yielding; or that, by degrees, she was induced, first, to promise that "she would never marry any other man," and, finally, that she would give her hand to save the life of such a desperate wooer.

Thus, one December day in 1785, the widow and "Florizel" were plighting their vows in her London drawing-room, with her uncle and brother as witnesses to the secret nuptials, and one of the Prince's gentle-

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men keeping guard at the door. The Prince had won at last, and Mrs. Fitzherbert was his wife, "in the eyes of Heaven."

For more than a year all went fairly well. "Florizel" surrounded his beautiful bride with luxury and a semi-royal state, and lavished a more or less spasmodic affection on her; but he was far too great a coward to acknowledge to the world as his wife the woman who had sacrificed herself to his passion; nor would he utter a word to silence the voice of scandal that sought to sully her fair name.

More cowardly than his silence was his denial that she was his wife. When, in his financial straits, it became once more necessary to wheedle Parliament into paying his debts and increasing his allowance, his baseness reached the depth of asking his friend Fox to give a flat denial in the House of Commons to the report of his marriage. And this Fox did, to the extent of declaring that the rumour was "a monstrous invention, a low, malicious falsehood." And yet, such was "Florizel's" incredible treachery that, the very next day, he went up to Mrs. Fitzherbert, and, taking hold of both of her hands and caressing her, said, "Only conceive, Maria, what Fox did yesterday. He went down to the House and denied that you and I were man and wife. Did you ever hear of such a thing?" Mrs. Fitzherbert, we are told, "made no

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reply; but changed countenance and turned pale." Thus did this Royal Judas lie to friend and wife—thus did he betray both.

But so long-suffering was Mrs. Fitzherbert that she remained true to the Prince, in spite of his many infidelities (for even her first year of wedded life was varied by scandalous amours) and the cruelty with which he sandwiched his affection. So afraid was she of him that many a time, "when she heard the Prince and his drunken companions on the staircase, she would seek a refuge from their presence under the sofa, when the Prince, finding the drawing-room deserted, would draw his sword in joke, and, searching about the room, would at last draw forth the trembling victim from her place of concealment."

Her solace was that, however brutal and unfaithful her husband might be, she was respected and kindly treated by every other member of the Royal Family, including the King and Queen, whose tenderness and affection were very grateful to her. Her position as wife to the heir to the throne was, indeed, so far recognised that a Duchess's coronet was offered to her—only, however, to be declined.

When George's growing debts at last drove him to his ill-starred marriage with Caroline of Brunswick—a ceremony at which the bridegroom "was so drunk that the Duke of Bedford could scarcely support him

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from falling"—Mrs. Fitzherbert once more recovered her freedom for a time, until the Prince begged her to return to him; an appeal which, strangely enough, was supported by many members of his family. But it was only after the Pope had sanctioned the re-union that she consented to live with him again as his wife.

Then followed eight years, which she always declared were the happiest of her connection with the Prince—years in which "Florizel" seems to have made a real effort to treat her with loyalty and affection. But it was not in his nature to be constant to any woman; and it speaks volumes for Mrs. Fitzherbert's power of fascination that she kept him so long by her side. When Lady Hertford crossed his path, a woman as designing as she was beautiful, the Prince's fickle heart flew to her, and his growing coldness convinced his wife that he was finally lost to her.

The climax came one June day in 1811, at a dinner given to Louis XVIII. When Mrs. Fitzherbert asked the Prince where she was to sit, his frigid answer was, "You know, madam, you have no place." "None, sir," was the dignified answer, "but such as you choose to give me."

After such a rebuff, following on months of neglect Mrs. Fitzherbert decided to live no more with her husband. She retired to Brighton, where for twenty-six years she led a life of retirement, winning the love

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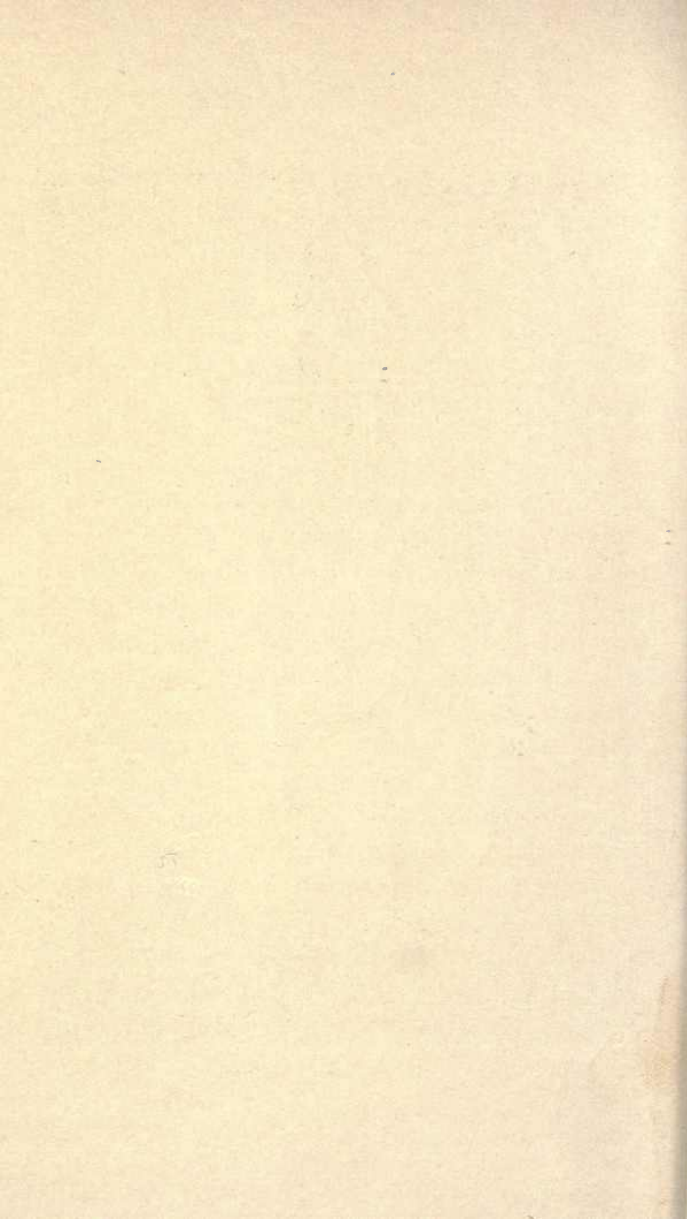
of all who knew her by her charm and her goodness of heart, and almost worshipped by the poor, to whom she was an unfailing friend and sympathiser, as well as a Lady Bountiful.

The Hon. Grantley Berkeley, who knew her well in her latter years, says, "I remember her well, her delicately fair, yet commanding, features and gentle demeanour. That exquisite complexion she maintained, almost unimpaired by time, up to the arrival of old age; and her manner, unaffected by years, was equally well preserved."

Seven years before this "uncrowned Queen" was laid to rest in the old Catholic church at Brighton, her husband, who, as George IV., had worn his crown for ten years, was gathered to his fathers. By his own wish he was laid to rest "with the picture of my beloved wife, Maria Fitzherbert, suspended round my neck with a ribbon, as I used to wear it when I lived, and placed right upon my heart." And when he lay in death in Windsor Castle, the Duke of Wellington "discovered round his neck a very dirty and much-worn piece of black ribbon," to which was attached a jewelled miniature of the woman who, in spite of his falseness to her, was probably the only woman who had ever found a permanent place in his fickle heart.



LORD GEORGE BENTINCK



CHAPTER XXIX

A METEOR OF THE TURF

THERE are probably few who to-day recall the splendours of Lord George Bentinck, whose brilliant and too brief life closed in tragedy two generations ago; although for more than twenty years, when the last century was young, he was beyond question the brightest star in the social and sporting firmaments of England.

The chronicles of his time are full of glowing tributes to "Lord George," as he was affectionately known. "He was," said John Kent, one of his veriest slaves, "the *beau idéal* of an English nobleman. He stood over six feet in height; his figure was, beyond that of any other man of my acquaintance, stately and elegant; his features were naturally handsome and refined; his hands and feet small, and beautifully shaped; and his whole appearance most commanding."

"Sylvanus" wrote enthusiastically of him in the "Gentleman's Magazine" as "a tall, high-bred man, with an air particularly his own, so distinguished, yet so essentially of the country, did he seem even

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amongst the galaxy of patrician sportsmen with whom he was congregated. He had all the eye and complexion of the pure Saxon, and the indescribable *air noble* to perfection."

Such was the physical equipment of this young nobleman, of whom his contemporaries spoke with bated breath as "a superior being," "a god-like man, a king of men"; and who flashed meteor-like across the sky, to be merged suddenly and tragically in darkness.

One looks in vain in these drab days for a personality so picturesque and so commanding. Picture Lord George in all the glory of buckskin breeches, exquisitely-made top-boots, buff waistcoat of reddish-brown, green cut-away coat ornamented with buttons of the Jockey Club, his beaver-hat poised at the modish angle on his handsome head of auburn hair, and we get a fair presentment of this noble "idol" of three quarters of a century ago as he rode on to a racecourse, the observed of a hundred thousand eyes—as seemingly unconscious of the admiration he excited as he was indifferent to homage which a King might have envied.

Such, then, was Lord William George Frederick Cavendish Bentinck, who was cradled at Welbeck three years before the cannon thundered at Trafalgar. A son of the ducal house of Portland, he was born to

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a splendid heritage; although, as a younger son, the strawberry-leafed coronet and the ancestral acres were not for him. A passion for the Turf was in his blood; for his father, the Duke of Portland, was one of the keenest of sportsmen, who lived to see his horse Tiresias win the Derby, in the very year in which his son, George, first wore his uniform as cornet in the 10th Hussars.

Lord George's career as a soldier—the handsomest officer in King George's army, he was acclaimed—was destined to be brief. He was not the man, wilful and high-spirited as he was, to submit tamely to discipline; and it was not long before a quarrel with a superior officer, a Captain Kerr, brought matters to a climax. “If you don't make this young gentleman behave himself, Colonel, I will!” the Captain hotly exclaimed one day on parade; whereupon the subordinate “sub” retorted, “Captain Kerr ventures to say *on* parade that which he dare not say *off*.”

When, however, the Captain sent Bentinck a challenge, it was promptly and firmly declined, to the amazement of his brother officers. The young lieutenant was branded “coward”; but he smiled indifferently at the taunt—as indeed he could afford to smile, for on later occasions he proved to the world that he had courage enough and to spare. Notably when he fought his famous duel with Squire Osbaldes-

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ton over a Turf quarrel. The Squire was the deadliest shot in England, a man who could bring down a swallow on the wing with a pistol-ball. Bentinck had never had a pistol in his hand before the day of the duel; but he faced his man with a smile; and, while he himself fired in the air, had the good luck to escape with a ball through his hat.

Fortunately a way of escape from the awkward predicament his refusal to fight Captain Kerr had brought about was found in the appointment of Mr. Canning, his uncle, as Governor-General of India. Bentinck was chosen to accompany him as secretary, an office which he later filled when Canning became Foreign Secretary and leader of the Commons. Thus the young nobleman drifted by slow degrees from arms to a political life, and incidentally to the Turf, in both of which fields his peculiar gifts found a congenial and ample scope.

In a short time we find him representing Lynn in Parliament, building up a reputation as a statesman, and devoting his leisure to his beloved horses. On the Turf his career was brilliant from the very first. He was a born horseman, and rode many of his own horses to victory. In 1833 he started a racing-stud under John Day's management; and his colours, the sky-blue and white cap, were soon seen in the first flight on every great racecourse in England. One by

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one the great prizes fell to him—the St. Leger, the Two Thousand, the Ascot Cup. Within seven years he had as many as sixty horses in training; while his racing-stud numbered a round hundred.

In one year his training bill alone came to £7,000; travelling expenses to £3,600; and forfeits to £23,000. His out-of-pocket expenses in that year reached £50,000; but he won double this sum in stakes and wagers; so that he put £50,000 in his pocket as the result of one year's racing.

No man—not even Lord Glasgow or the Marquis of Hastings—ever plunged so regally on the Turf. His daring and colossal wagers were the despair and wonder of all rivals; and so admirable was the judgment that inspired them that he seldom made a heavy loss. He stood, for instance, to win £150,000 on his horse Gaper for the Derby of 1843; but, although Gaper could not even get a place, so skilfully was his owner's book made that he had £30,000 to draw on settling day. Crucifix alone won £60,000 for him—among his many victories being the Two Thousand Guineas, the One Thousand, and the Oaks. But the one great triumph on which he had set his heart, the Derby—the crown and goal of his ambition—always eluded him, and made all his other triumphs but “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

So keenly, as the years passed and this golden

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guerdon eluded him, did he feel the cruelty of Fate that, in despair, he determined to abandon the Turf. One day in 1846 the world of sport was astounded to hear that Lord George had sold his entire stud "for a song"; and that the Turf would know him no more.

It was on the Goodwood course that he walked up to George Payne, and said, "The lot, Payne, from Bay Middleton to little Kitchener (his jockey) for £10,000? Yes or no?" "I will give you £300 to have till breakfast-time to-morrow to consider the offer," Payne answered. At breakfast on the following morning Payne handed Bentinck a cheque for £300, which the latter was placidly pocketing, when Mr. Mostyn, who was sitting at the lower end of the table, glanced up from the letters he was reading, and quietly said, "I'll take the lot, Bentinck, at £10,000." "If you please," Lord George replied, equally calmly, and the bargain was concluded.

Thus dramatically Lord George's career as owner of racehorses came to an end. But mark the irony of fate. Among the horses thus parted with "at a word" was Surplice, which two years later captured both the Derby and the St. Leger. The crowning guerdon of Bentinck's life was actually in his own hand, and he had flung it away in a moment of disgust and pique. Was ever Fortune more cruel than to this "spoiled child" of hers?

Beyond a doubt this dastardly blow of Fate broke Lord George's heart. How crushing it was Lord Beaconsfield reveals to us. On the day following the Derby of 1848, which Surplice had so gallantly won, the great statesman met Lord George Bentinck in the library of the House of Commons. "He was standing," Beaconsfield says, "before the bookshelves, with a volume in his hand, and his countenance was greatly disturbed. His horse, Surplice, whom he had parted with among the rest of his stud that he might pursue without distraction his political labours, had won that paramount and Olympic stake to gain which had been the object of his life. He had nothing to console him, and nothing to sustain him, except his pride. Even that deserted him before a heart which he knew at least could yield him sympathy. He gave a sort of superb groan.

"'All my life I have been trying for this, and for what have I sacrificed it?' he murmured.

"It was in vain to offer solace.

"'You do not know what the Derby is,' he moaned out.

"'Yes, I do; it is the Blue Riband of the Turf.'

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

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A few months later, one September night in 1848, Lord George was found dead in a remote corner of the park of Welbeck Abbey, the home of his boyhood. On the morning of that fatal day he had risen full of health, in the very prime of his physical strength, and, after spending a few hours in his study, had started to walk to Lord Manvers' house, six miles away, where he was to spend a couple of days. He had sent his valet in advance by the road, intending himself to follow across country; but he never reached his destination.

When the darkness fell, and he had not yet arrived, a small army of servants with lanterns was sent in search of him; and they found him, lying outstretched, face downwards, cold and stiff at the foot of a gate on the fringe of the deer-park. He had covered a mile of his journey when death overtook him, and with a coward's blow struck him down in the prime of his days. Thus, in tragedy and loneliness, closed one of the most brilliant lives that ever adorned the Turf or won the homage and the love of men.

The news of this tragedy in a lonely glade of the Welbeck deer-park was received throughout England with horror and incredulity. It seemed so impossible—an outrage, no less—that a life so splendid and full of promise should thus be cut off in the plentitude of its powers. The bucolic jury gave as its ver-

dict, "Died by the visitation of God: to wit, a spasm of the heart." That it was a visitation of God—as every death must of necessity be—could not be gain-said; that Lord George's heart may have been weak or diseased, though none had heard of it, was possible. But was this the true explanation of the tragedy—might it not be the result of a crime? Such were the thoughts that set many a tongue wagging. There was, however, no sign of violence—no evidence of any other hand than that of God.

It was no doubt these misgivings that gave rise to a story widely accepted at the time, although, no doubt rightly, discredited now. It was more than hinted that Lord George did not die a natural death—that a human hand, in fact, was responsible for his mysterious end, and that hand was the hand of his elder brother, the Marquis of Titchfield, known in later years as "the mad Duke of Portland," the "Wizard of Welbeck."

Thus the story ran. Lord George and his brother, the Marquis, had long been rivals for the favour of a lovely and penniless girl, Annie May Berkeley, whose birth was as romantic as her beauty was great. She was, it is said, the daughter of Frederick Augustus, fifth Earl of Berkeley, by Mary Cole, daughter of a Gloucester butcher, whom in later years, after Mary's birth, he made his Countess. Thus, through her

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father, Annie May Berkeley could claim a noble birth, though it was marred by the bar sinister.

The rivalry of the brothers for the sole possession of Miss Berkeley's charms had led, as such rivalries naturally will do, to many a quarrel, in which heated words, and even blows, had been exchanged. It had led not merely to estrangement, but to a mutual hatred. Assuming such premises, it was no difficult matter to evolve a tragedy from them. While strolling across the deer-park on his way to Thoresby, Lord Manvers' seat, Lord George, according to the story, chanced to meet his brother and rival. Angry words were followed by blows; a heavy blow struck by the Marquis landed on his brother's chest, over the heart, which was diseased, and proved fatal.

Such is the story which, sixty years and more ago, was widely circulated and believed. That it owed its origin to a too vivid and fertile imagination seems more than probable. But, if true by any chance, it would certainly solve two problems which otherwise must ever remain without satisfactory solution—why Lord George Bentinck perished thus mysteriously in the full vigour of a particularly robust manhood; and why his brother, the Marquis, developed so soon afterwards that moroseness and misanthropy and those eccentricities which earned for him the designation, “the mad Duke of Portland.”

CHAPTER XXX

AT THE SIGN OF THE "RED SHIELD"

ANYONE who chanced to walk through the Judengasse in Frankfort about the middle of the eighteenth century might have seen a dark-eyed, sallow-faced boy, with his satchel of books on his back, hurrying home from school; but he would scarcely have given a second glance at this Jewish bantling who differed in no way, except perhaps in the brilliance of his eyes and the keenness and determination of his little face, from the hundreds of other children who swarmed in the dark, evil-smelling rookery. In this narrow street of towering, grimy buildings, into which the sunlight rarely found its way, were herded the despised and persecuted Jews of Frankfort. Each wore the badge which marked his cursed caste; and at nightfall heavy chains were drawn across each end of the foetid lane, beyond which none might pass, under penalty of death, until the dawn of another day came.

It was in one of these human rookeries, before which swung a "red shield" for sign, that Meyer Amschel Rothschild, the dark-eyed schoolboy, was cradled one day in the year 1743; the son of a poor dealer in oddments, but destined by capricious Fate to found "a

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house that should stand far higher than that of Hapsburg or Coburg, by the right of a power more mighty than that of ancestry—the power of gold.”

From his low-born forefathers, whose name *Bauer* (peasant) proclaimed their origin, Meyer Amschel inherited all a Jew's love of gold; but the genius which he so early developed for winning it was all his own. As a schoolboy, he began to make money by shrewd dealings in coins and curios. He quickly realised that there was no scope for him in the narrow confines of the Frankfort Ghetto; and, as soon as his schooldays were over, he fared boldly forth into the world, knapsack on his back, a stout stick in his hand, and his small savings in his pocket, to conquer fortune.

At Hanover he found a vacant stool in the office of Oppenheims, the wealthy bankers; and he turned his opportunity to such excellent account that within a few years he had scaled the ladder of promotion to the rung of manager. And when he once again set foot in Frankfort it was as a man of capital and experience that he set up as a dealer in bullion and bills of exchange, as a banker and financier.

Already, on the threshold of manhood, this son of the unsavoury Ghetto was a man of wealth and power. Customers flocked to him from far and near, and his fair dealing soon won for him the description “The Honest Jew.” Gold flowed into his coffers; and

living modestly, even meanly, his fortune progressed by leaps and bounds, until Meyer Rothschild, the peasant's son, was known as the richest man in Frankfort.

One day, so the story is told, Baron Erstoff took the young banker to introduce him to William IX., Landgraf of Hesse-Cassel. The Landgraf, absorbed in a game of chess, glanced up from the board and asked the Jew, "Do you understand chess?" "Sufficiently well," was the prompt and diplomatic answer, "to induce me, if the game were mine, to castle on the king's side!"—an answer which pleased His Highness so much that, a few days later, Rothschild found himself installed as banker to William and his Court.

These were the terrible days when Napoleon was laying Europe waste with fire and sword; and his destroying armies were now drawing near to Frankfort. The Landgraf, alarmed for his personal safety, began to make hurried arrangements for flight; and, unable to take his gold with him, gave it into the custody of his banker—probably scarcely hoping to see it again. It is said that Rothschild promptly buried the treasure, amounting to half-a-million pounds or more, in his garden, where at least it should be safe from marauding soldiers. But the more probable story is that the Hof-Agent found a much better

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use for the gold thus entrusted to his care. “ He saw how to make it yield an excellent return to himself; and at a time when gold was so scarce, and in such universal demand, he saw that it required only a cool head and sound judgment to turn over the capital to considerable advantage. The result was that within six years he had nearly quadrupled the Landgraf’s treasure.”

However this may be, we know that when William was at last able to return to Hesse-Cassel, the banker proudly handed over every pound of his fortune, with substantial interest added; that he was a much richer man than when it came into his keeping, and also that William was so pleased with this evidence of honesty that he left the money in Rothschild’s hands to do as he pleased with.

The tide of Meyer Amschel’s fortune now began to run more strongly than ever. War, which brought ruin and disaster to others, poured streams of gold into his exchequer. From his stores of gold he was able to lend large sums to Napoleon, to the allied Princes, and to Denmark. He made £150,000 a year by conveying specie from England to Spain to pay Wellington’s soldiers. He became the financial king of Europe, to whom other Kings came as suppliants; and while feeding the flames of war with his gold, drew from it fortune on fortune.

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When at last Meyer Amschel died, full of years, and rich beyond his wildest dreams, he summoned to his bedside his five sons and daughters, and counselled them to keep intact the large fortune he had built up for them—to work together in harmonious partnership—never, so far as possible, to marry outside the family circle; to be cautious, honourable, and industrious. This and much other sage counsel the dying Croesus gave to those to whom he left the burden and responsibility of his wealth. But already he had long seen all his five sons following worthily in his footsteps. Each was head of a branch of the family business—at Frankfort, Vienna, London, Naples, and Paris. The Rothschild net was cast all over Europe, and every branch was flourishing.

So precociously clever was his son Nathan that at thirteen he had been sent to England to take charge of the family interests; and in a few years he had qualified as the most astute dealer in cotton that Manchester had ever known. From Manchester he migrated to London, with £200,000 at his back, to match his wits against the cleverest of our financiers; and so brilliant was his success that before he saw his thirtieth birthday he had increased his fortune tenfold.

He made hundreds of thousands of pounds by trafficking in Wellington's drafts, which he bought at a heavy discount, and sold to the Government at par.

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Like his father, he advanced enormous sums to the great nations of Europe, clearing a fortune on each transaction; and soon waxed so rich and powerful that twice he saved the Bank of England from the ignominy of having to close its doors.

A story which shows how Nathan first compelled the Bank of England to realise his power is told thus: The Bank had refused to accept the paper of private individuals, and Nathan is supposed to have exclaimed: "Private individuals! I shall make the directors feel what kind of private individuals are the Rothschilds." Picture him, three weeks later, in his old frock coat, presenting to the cashier of the Bank of England a five-pound note, for which he receives, not without close scrutiny, five sovereigns. Another five-pound note is tranquilly presented at the wicket, and nine of Nathan's employés are engaged in the same tedious process of exchange. This process continues all through banking hours, and the next day Nathan and his employés return. The Bank finds his conduct "very eccentric"; but, as he assures the directors that he is able and willing to continue the siege in this manner for two months, they capitulate, and agree to accept the paper of those "private individuals," the Rothschilds.

There was no army on the Continent that was not followed by the keen eyes of Nathan's agents. Every

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day swift pigeons were winging their way to London, carrying cipher messages recording each ebb and flow in the tide of war; and every day the astute Jew was coining information into gold on the Stock Exchange.

The climax of his foresight came when Napoleon's final fate hung in the balance on the plain of Waterloo. Nathan himself had followed Wellington's army to the battlefield, clinging closely to its skirts, in spite of the Duke's threat to "hang that plaguey Jew if he did not keep his distance"; and from a point of vantage he watched keenly the fortunes of the day.

When he saw that Napoleon's fate was sealed, he dug his spurs into his horse, raced madly through the night to Ostend, bribed some fishermen to risk their lives by carrying him across the storm-tossed Channel; and the next morning was in his place in the Stock Exchange, the picture of solemnity and dejection. Soon the news flashed through the House that Wellington had been beaten—Rothschild's face alone was proof enough. The funds dropped heavily; and as they dropped his agents bought and bought, to the tune of many millions. The following day came news of the great victory. The enemy of Europe was crushed beyond recovery. Up soared the funds like a rocket. Nathan's agents unloaded; and their clever master was able to put a round million pounds of profit into his pocket.

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But all his millions were powerless to bring happiness to Nathan Rothschild. As he progressed in years and riches he became more and more a prey to torturing delusions. He lived in daily fear of the assassin's knife or pistol; he saw in every man he met an enemy. The caricatures and satires of which he was the butt made him so morbidly sensitive that he would slink shamefacedly along the streets, fearing to see derision in the face of every passer-by. And when death came at last to relieve him of his gold and his fears, his last words, gasped with horror in his eyes, were: "Look! He is trying to kill me!"

While Nathan was prospering in England, his four brothers were equally successful on the Continent. Each of them (as well as Nathan) had been ennobled, and had blossomed into a Baron of the Austrian Empire. Each was the centre of a fawning crowd of satellites, including Kings and the great ones of the earth; and to each the most exclusive doors of Society were flung open in obsequious welcome. The sons of the Ghetto child were the financial sovereigns of the world.

At Paris, Baron James was "plus roi que le roi." He was a weekly and welcome guest at the King's table; his wife's receptions were attended by Louis Philippe and his sons; his home was a palace of Art and luxury which had scarcely a rival in Europe; and,

in his prodigal charity, he would dine with his windows open, so that he might fling banknotes and gold to the grovelling beggars gathered outside.

Such were the splendours and wealth which the sons of the Judengasse dealer in curios lived to see. How, in later years, the family of Rothschild added to their gold until it is now estimated in hundreds of millions of pounds; the colossal scale of their transactions, of which the raising of £160,000,000 in British Government loans is a sample; their splendours and their regal charities—all these are too well known to call for detailed mention.

The present head of the English house figures on our roll of Peerage; the Rothschild daughters have mated with foreign Princes and nobles. One wore a Countess's coronet as Lord Rosebery's wife; others have become members of the Hardwicke and Southampton families. And in the years to come the blood of the Ghetto child will, no doubt, flow in the veins of scores of the most exalted families of Europe.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN EARLDOM THAT WENT A-BEGGING

THE noble house of Hastings, whose proud pedigree reaches back to the far-away days when Hugh de Hastings played the rôle of Steward to the first of our Henrys, records many a romantic story in its eight centuries of history; but none more singular than the episode to which the death of the tenth Earl of Huntingdon was the prelude.

When Francis, the tenth lord of his line, was laid to rest in the family vault one October day in 1780, it seemed to the world at large that the book of his family history was closed for ever. One after another the descendants of every Earl who had preceded him had died out. His own three brothers had died unwed; and to himself no child had been born. The newspapers which recorded his death and his virtues referred to him as the last of his distinguished line.

But noble houses are not often so completely extirpated. There is usually to be found some remote and obscure kinsman, whose very existence is perhaps unknown, who steps forward to claim the derelict honours, and so it was with this Earldom of Huntingdon. The tenth Earl had not long been in his vault before it began to be rumoured that he had a successor

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in a country parson, the Rev. Theophilus Henry Hastings, Rector of Great and Little Leke, an obscure and eccentric cleric who had just celebrated his seventieth birthday by taking to wife a domestic servant.

The Rev. Theophilus was, in fact, the rightful heir to the Huntingdon Earldom, although he had to go back to Elizabeth's day to prove his title. He was the lineal descendant of Sir Edward Hastings, youngest son of the second Earl by Katherine Pole, who had for great-grandfather George, Duke of Clarence, brother of King Edward IV. His pedigree, when it was produced, was unimpeachable; and the country Rector, who cared far more about tithes than titles, found himself in his old age the richer by a coronet and a wife, both equally undesired. And by both wife and rank he came equally romantically.

When Mr. Hastings was a young man fresh to his cassock he had lost his heart to the charms of a winsome chambermaid, one Betsy Warner; and in the fervour of his passion he promised to make her his wife as soon as a living fell to his lot. Years passed, the lovers were separated—and the faithless Theophilus had secured both the living and another bride, but Betsy never came either to claim her rights or to load him with reproaches.

He was, in fact, a widower and an old man, with more thought of the next world than of earthly altars,

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when one day a post-chaise drawn by four horses rattled up the Rectory drive, and came to a halt at his door. An elderly, plain-featured woman descended, and was ushered into the parson's study.

“What can I do for you, madam?” was the reverend gentleman's greeting to his unknown visitor. “What can you do for me?” the lady repeated, in accents of surprise and reproach. “Why, Theophilus, don't you know me? I am Betsy—Betsy Warner, the girl you loved and promised to marry many years ago. I have been true to you from that day to this; and now that you have got the living, of course you'll keep your word and marry me!”

Was ever man—parson or layman—placed in a more awkward predicament? Here was an aged, unattractive, illiterate woman who claimed him as husband. There was no escape. His honour was pledged; and, true to his word, within a month he placed a wedding-ring on Betsy's finger, and in fact made a Countess of the once buxom peasant's daughter. A second wife was thus thrust upon him; but to his title he would have nothing to say. He declined to be addressed as “my lord”; and when once a friend protested against such modesty, he answered somewhat ungraciously, “I have no objection to being an Earl; but I will never make Betsy a Countess.” And as plain Theophilus Hastings he died and was buried, after enjoying his shadowy honours less than four years.

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But although he refused to wear his coronet, he was none the less anxious that his right to it should be acknowledged and put on record; and, with this object, he had placed on one of the pillars of his gate a plate with a Latin inscription, stating that he was the eleventh Earl of Huntingdon, and by descent entitled to the Earldom.

When the eleventh Earl followed the tenth to his last home the title once more became dormant. Theophilus's only surviving brother, George, has preceded him to the grave by two years; and of George's four sons every one was said to be dead. Thus, it seemed certain that the Earldom, which had survived for nearly three centuries, had seen its last holder. But, although the College of Heralds and every learned genealogist had come to this exhaustive conclusion, there was one man who knew, or thought he knew, very different.

Some years after the death of Earl Theophilus there was living at Enniskillen one Captain Hans Francis Hastings, who, after long service in the King's Navy, had found a snug, if obscure, berth there as garrison storekeeper. A quiet, unpretentious man was the Captain—a plain old “ salt ” who was hail-fellow-well-met with everybody—one of the last men in Enniskillen who would be associated with titles of Peerage. Indeed, no word of his birth and possible claims ever escaped the Captain's lips, except in his

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confidential chats over a glass and a pipe with Nugent Bell, a local attorney, who made a hobby of genealogy, and thus took an interest in questions of family history.

It was during one such confidential chat that the lawyer said jokingly, "I say, Hastings, why don't you put in a claim to the Huntingdon Earldom? I'll wager you have as good a chance as anybody; and I'll help you all I can." To this the Captain laughed enigmatically. "That's all right. If you can't make an Earl of me, nobody can." And with such small encouragement the attorney drew from his friend one reluctant scrap of family history after another, until at last he exclaimed, "'Pon my soul, Hastings! I really believe you are the Earl! We'll have you in the House of Lords yet!"

Then it was that Hastings made a further confidence. "A good many years ago," he said, "I took the trouble to go to the College of Arms to ask what steps I should take to claim the title, and how much it would cost; but when I learned that nothing less than three thousand guineas would pay the bill, I decided not to trouble any more about it."

The following day the Captain wrote to his friend: "My dear Bell,—I will pay you all costs in case you succeed in proving me the legal heir to the Earldom. If not, the risk is your own, and I will certainly not be answerable for any expense you may incur in the course of your investigation." On the back of this

letter, as showing what he thought of the whole affair, the Captain had written, "By all that's good, you're mad."

Bell's optimism, however, had thoroughly roused the Captain, though he still affected to treat the matter in a humorous light, as the following letter, written a few days later, proves: "My dear Nugent,—If you should establish me in the Earldom, all I can say is that it will be impossible for me or mine to do too much for you and yours. I am not sanguine; but the very names of George, Henry, Ferdinando, and Francis convince me we are the only true descendants of Francis, the second Earl. D—— it! Succeed, and you shall be my *falconer!* If the 'Countess' does not leave Dublin by Tuesday morning, you will certainly see me at No. 3, Morland-street, on Wednesday. Therefore, I beg you will provide for the *Earl* at that hour.—Yours, etc., FRANK."

This was quite sufficient for the lawyer. He had now gone exhaustively into the Hastings pedigree; he was personally satisfied that if anyone had a right to the Huntingdon Earldom, it was the Captain, who, moreover, was willing that he should do what he could in the matter. In August, 1817 (within a month of the conversations I have recorded), Mr. Bell was in England prosecuting his searches. At Castle Donington and Donington Park (Hastings' seats) he met with rebuffs and disappointment. Everywhere he

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found himself baffled, and he had begun to despair, when accident at last placed the sought-for clue in his hand.

One day he was tramping in Leicestershire, carrying a heavy heart with him, when he was overtaken by an old woman in a market-cart, who kindly offered him a lift on his way. As they jogged along, the garrulous old lady entertained him with stories of her youth, when she was "a very pretty girl," and a maid in the service of the Hastings family. At the word "Hastings," the attorney pricked up his ears; and, to his delight, learned that the old market-woman had actually known Colonel George Hastings (the father of his friend, the Captain), who was "on the eve of being married to her young mistress, the Lady Selina, when her ladyship died suddenly, in the bloom of youth and beauty."

"Colonel Hastings at last married"—continued the old gossip, little dreaming how eagerly her listener was drinking in every word of her story—"a very beautiful young lady, and had four sons, who, sorry am I to say, are all dead. Master Frank, the eldest, died at Grantham in his sixth year; Henry and Ferdinando died of yellow fever in the West Indies; and the fourth and youngest son, Hans, was drowned in the Cove of Cork."

At last, by the merest chance, the lawyer had learned the truth. "After I had patiently heard her out,"

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he says, " I, in my turn, informed her that the person supposed to be drowned at Cork was still alive and happy, and that it was by no means improbable that she would soon see him in possession of at least the honours of his family."

There could now be no doubt about it. The Colonel George Hastings of the old woman's story was brother of the late parson-Earl, and father of his Enniskillen friend, Captain Hans Francis. The Captain's three brothers were all dead; but, unknown to the Peerage-books and the world, Hans Francis was no drowned man, but very much alive and ready to step into his heritage as " heir male of the body of the first Earl." Such was the result, within a few weeks, of a jocular remark made in Enniskillen over a glass of toddy and a pipe.

Thus furnished with the vital clue, Mr. Bell completed his case by prolonged searches among parish records and tombstones, until at last he was able to submit complete proofs to Sir Samuel Romilly, the great lawyer, from whom he soon received a most reassuring letter. " It appears to me," wrote Romilly, " that the evidence which I before thought wanting has now been supplied by you; and it does not occur to me that any further search is necessary. . . . I have written to Lord Huntingdon respecting his taking the title; and, although there does not exist the slightest doubt of his just claim, I have now rather

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dissuaded him from using it before his claim is established.”

A few days later the Enniskillen storekeeper was reading this letter, with the significant footnote in Bell's handwriting, “ D—— it, my dear Earl, I *have* succeeded, and I claim my appointment as falconer! My homage to the Countess.—N.B.”

So clearly-established was the claim that, when Mr. Bell presented a petition to the Crown, the Attorney-General was able within a few days to report to the Regent: “ Upon the whole of the case I am humbly of opinion that the petitioner, Hans Francis Hastings, has sufficiently proved his right to the title of Earl of Huntingdon; and that it may be advisable, if your Royal Highness be graciously pleased to do so, to order a Writ of Summons to pass the Great Seal to summon the said petitioner to sit in Parliament and there enjoy the rank and privileges to the said title belonging.”

On the 7th of January, 1818, the Prince Regent signed the Royal warrant; and a few days later the Enniskillen storekeeper was making his stately progress, in his Peer's robes, up the floor of the House of Lords to take the oaths and his place as twelfth Earl of Huntingdon; while among the spectators in the gallery was Nugent Bell, attorney, who had thus romantically placed a coronet on the head of his friend.

CHAPTER XXXII

A TRAGEDY OF THE ALTAR

ON the far-reaching family-tree of the noble house of Cathcart there is many a name that recalls a story of more than ordinary romance—from Sir Alan, whose sword dealt such doughty strokes on Loudoun Hill six centuries ago, to William, tenth Baron and first Earl of his line, who won the laurels of war in the Peninsula and at Copenhagen, and at St. Petersburg proved himself as astute in diplomacy as he was valiant in battle.

The Cathcarts have ever been brave soldiers, “worthy and widht, stalwart and stout,” revelling in hard knocks, and always in the thickest of the fray, from Loudoun Hill and Flodden Field, where two of their bravest sons were “among the noble slain,” to Inkerman, where General Sir George drew his last gallant breath on that black November day in 1854. And the wives of these martial Cathcarts have been as fair as their husbands have been brave, with the blood of some of the proudest stocks of Scotland in their veins.

In glancing down the list of these Cathcart dames, the eye is arrested by a name which recalls a story of strange romance—that of the wife of Charles, eighth

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Baron. "This," says Sir Bernard Burke, "is the lady of whom the extraordinary story is told of her having been confined for many years by her last husband, Colonel Maguire, in a lonely castle in the fastnesses of Ireland."

The heroine of this strange adventure first opened her eyes on the world in Battersea one day in the year 1692. She had for father a Mr. Malyn, a Southwark tradesman, who had prospered so well that he was able to leave his business premises and instal his family in a country home of some pretensions among the pleasant fields of Battersea, where his four daughters grew to vigorous and pretty girlhood.

Of the tradesman's daughters, Mary was by common consent the most beautiful—a high-spirited girl, with a figure abounding in grace and vitality, and a face of "cream and roses," from which a pair of blue eyes looked out merrily and mischievously at the world. It was little wonder that this beautiful daughter of the well-gilded merchant had no lack of wooers to dance attendance on her; or that she wore her orange-blossom before she had long graduated from short frocks.

The first of Mary's four husbands was Mr. James Fleet, a handsome young man, son of a most prosperous merchant in London City, who, as Sir John Fleet, had served his year in the Lord Mayor's chair. And thus was proud Mary Malyn, while still in her

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'teens, installed as a lady of the manor in a goodly mansion at Tewin, in Hertfordshire. But her first taste of wedded life was destined to be as brief as it was happy, for her husband left her a widow before she had long passed her twentieth birthday.

She was not, however, long disconsolate. Before she had worn her weeds many months, wooers came flocking to the feet of the pretty widow, who to youth and good looks now allied a substantial dower in gold and lands. She had made her first adventure at the altar for money; this time she determined she would give her hand to no man who couldnot give her the *entrée* to good Society, whose doors were closed against the tradesman's wife and daughter. And after much dallying and coquetting, she bestowed it on Captain Sabine, a scion of an old family, whose brother, General Sabine, was one of the great men of her county. With her second husband she spent many more or less happy years, realising her small social ambition and playing the Lady Bountiful with her gold, until once again she was called upon to wear widow's mourning; and this time with, it seemed, small prospect of wearing a wedding-ring for any other man.

Mrs. Sabine was now on the borderland of middle-age. Her figure had lost the graceful lines of youth; her complexion had lost its roses. But she was still a comely woman, with a sprightly wit and a clever

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tongue; and once more wooers came to seek her hand, and among them was a man who could, if she would, place a coronet on her head. This titled lover was no other than the eighth Lord Cathcart, a handsome man little older than herself; and, although he was a widower, and the father of four stalwart sons and as many daughters, a great favourite at Court, and a soldier of distinction.

To such a lover few women could long remain obdurate; and certainly not the Hertfordshire widow, who had long hankered after the splendours of Courts. And thus it was that one day in the year 1739 Mary Malyn made her third trip to the altar; this time to leave the church a lady of title, the eighth on a proud line of Baronesses. At last she had reached the goal of her ambition; but, alas! once again Fate was to prove unkind. She had worn her new honours but a year when her lord was taken from her side, and sent in charge of an expedition against the Spanish King's dominions in America, a land which he was fated never to reach; for illness seized him, and he died on the outward voyage, leaving his wife a widow for the third time.

“ I married my first husband for money,” she said at this time; “ my second for social position; my third for a title. If I marry again, it shall be for love alone.” And before she had ceased to mourn her

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Cathcart husband, love came to her (or so she fondly imagined) in the guise of a good-looking, fascinating Irishman, whose blarney and tales of heroism quickly turned the widow's middle-aged head. He was, he told her, an officer in the Hungarian army—and by far the most valiant man in it, on his own showing; but this foreign army rank, invested with glory as it was, did not satisfy my lady, who, as evidence of her favour, spent £2,000 in purchasing for him a Colonelcy in a British regiment. Never did bride of seventeen go more blithely to the altar with the man of her heart than this thrice-wedded Baroness with her brave and adoring Colonel. She had won gold and rank with her charms; now she was to receive the crown of her desires in a man's passionate love.

But before her honeymoon had waned disillusion had dawned. The gay, lion-hearted soldier proved a cur and a coward in the crucible of matrimony. With brutal candour, he was quick to let her see that her gold, and not herself, had been the lure that had attracted him. "Do you imagine," he blustered one day, within a month of the wedding-bells, "I should have married an old frump like you if you had not been well-gilded? It's your money I want; and your money I will have." And when she refused to open her purse—for she still had plenty of spirit left—he whipped out a pistol and presented it at her head.

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But, in spite of her bold front, the Baroness was so alarmed at her husband's violence that she secreted all her valuables, hiding her jewels in the plaits of her hair and in the linings of her petticoats. As if brutality and threats were not outrage enough, the Colonel conducted *liaisons* under the eyes of his wife, and introduced his lights o' love into the house to play the spy on her. When, thanks to the treachery of one of these conspirators, the Colonel one day discovered his wife's will and read its contents, his rage knew no bounds. He assaulted her violently, threatened to blow her brains out, and concluded by declaring that she was a lunatic, and that he would have her "shut up in a madhouse."

The poor lady's position had now become perilous in the extreme. Each day brought its scenes of violence, its threats, and its disgusting amours. But worse still was in store for her. One day the Colonel invited his wife to drive with him; and as he appeared in a more amiable mood than usual, she consented—little dreaming what her destination was to be. Mile after mile was covered without any sign of return, until the Baroness, in alarm, begged that the horses' heads should be turned homewards. "Certainly not," was the Colonel's violent answer. "I am going to Chester, and to Chester you shall come with me"; and in spite of her pleadings and tears the fate-

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ful journey was continued—to a destination and fate she now shuddered to think of.

When days passed, and the Colonel and his wife did not return home, the servants and neighbours grew alarmed—especially as Maguire's threats had become common knowledge, and he had been seen in the carriage, on the morning of the departure, gesticulating fiercely at the Baroness. A magistrate was consulted; and soon an attorney, armed with a writ, was in hot pursuit of the fugitives, whom he overtook near Chester, at a wayside inn where the Colonel had stopped to change horses.

Ushered into the Colonel's presence, the man of law asked permission to speak for a few moments with his lady, a request which was met with a point-blank refusal, coupled with violent language and threats. The attorney, however, persisted with his demand, until at last Maguire, after satisfying himself that the lawyer did not know the lady by sight, consented. "Very well," he said, "you may see her, since you insist on it. But I warn you that it is no good. She will tell you that she is going to Ireland with me of her own free will, and that neither you nor anybody else can stop her."

After a few moments' delay the attorney was conducted to a neighbouring room, where a lady, with a gracious bow, asked him his business. "Is it true,

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madam," he asked, "that you are going to Ireland with this gentleman of your own free will?" "Perfectly true," was the answer. "Then, madam, I have nothing more to say, except to express my regrets for having troubled you." And he bowed himself out—little dreaming that the lady he had interviewed was a chambermaid, whom the crafty Colonel had bribed and coached, during the few minutes' interval, to personate his unhappy wife.

Not content with thus hoodwinking the lawyer, Maguire promptly sent a couple of stout fellows in pursuit of him. The attorney was overtaken, soundly beaten, and flung into a ditch; and, an hour later, his papers were in the pocket of the abductor. Thus secure from further interference with his designs, the Colonel continued his journey to Ireland, and his victim found herself installed in a dismal moated house in the heart of a desolate country, separated by many miles from the nearest habitation. In this gloomy prison-house, hemmed in by high, unscalable walls and locked gates, she spent the next few years, with a surly gaoler and his wife as custodians, visited at intervals by her husband, whose brutality and threats nearly drove her over the verge of sanity.

Of the outside world she saw nothing, except an old crone who came periodically to weed the overgrown garden-paths; and through her she was able to send to

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a trusted friend the jewels she had succeeded in hiding from the Colonel. Over this period of her life, with its leaden hours of misery and dread, with shattered health and reason trembling in the balance, we must pass hurriedly to that day in 1764 when release, long despaired of, came at last. On that morning the Colonel was found dead in his bed.

Concealment was no longer possible when his relatives were summoned to his funeral. Lady Cathcart, after long years of "hell on earth," was at last a free woman; and a week or two later the horses were being taken from her carriage, and she was drawn in triumph through the streets of Hertford by the jubilant friends and neighbours of her happier days. She survived to dance a minuet at Bath when long past her eightieth birthday, and she was within sight of her hundredth year when death at last came to her. But to her last day it was dangerous to mention the word "marriage" to the old lady, unless she was in a particularly amiable mood, when she would say, "I think the devil owed me a grudge, and wished to punish me for my sins!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE BEAUTIFUL SHERIDANS

IN her "Record of a Girlhood" Fanny Kemble gives a charming account of an evening she spent at the house of Mrs. Norton, "when a host of distinguished public and literary men were crowded into the small drawing-room, which was literally resplendent with the light of Sheridan beauty, male and female."

Mrs. Sheridan, the mother of the "Three Graces," was there, more lovely than any but her daughters; Lady Graham, their beautiful aunt; Mrs. Norton, Mrs. Blackwood (Lady Dufferin), Georgiana Sheridan (Duchess of Somerset), and Charles Sheridan, their younger brother, a sort of younger brother of the Apollo Belvidere. "Certainly," says Fanny Kemble, "I never saw such a bunch of beautiful creatures all growing on one stem. I remarked it to Mrs. Norton, who looked complacently round her tiny drawing-room and said, 'Yes, we *are* rather good-looking people.'"

Such, eighty years ago, were the Sheridans, incomparably the best-looking family in England, with a beauty inherited from their grandmother, Elizabeth Linley, the "Nightingale of Bath," and with gifts and graces of mind worthy of Richard Brinsley Sheridan,



THE HONORABLE MRS. NORTON

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the story of whose romantic wooing of the "Nightingale" has already been told in a former volume.

Of the three daughters of handsome, witty, fascinating Tom Sheridan (the "Nightingale's" son) it is not easy to say which was the most lovely, since each, in her way, was matchless. "The beauty of each," says the late Marquis of Dufferin, son of Helen Sheridan, "was of a different type, but they were all equally tall and stately. The Duchess of Somerset had large, deep blue or violet eyes, black hair, black eyebrows and eyelashes, perfect features, and a complexion of lilies and roses. Mrs. Norton, on the contrary, was a brunette, with dark, burning eyes like her grandfather's, a pure Greek profile, and a clear, olive complexion. The brothers were all over six feet.

"My mother, though her features were less regular than those of her sisters, was equally lovely and attractive. Her figure was divine—the perfection of grace and symmetry. Her hands and feet were very small, many sculptors having asked to model the former."

It was Lord Dufferin's mother who, when describing herself and her sister to Disraeli, said, "You see, Georgy's the beauty and Carry's the wit; and I ought to be the good one, but I'm not." And perhaps, if one must award the palm of beauty to one of the "Graces," it should go to Georgy, who, as Duchess of Somerset, was considered by many the

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most supremely lovely woman of her day in England—and this, in spite of Disraeli's verdict that Lady Dufferin was "the most beautiful and charming of the three wonderful sisters"; and also of that verdict of Shelley, who said of Mrs. Norton, "I never met a woman so perfectly charming, with so variable, but always beautiful an expression."

That women so "divinely fair" should remain long unappropriated was not to be expected. Each in turn was led to the altar while still a girl, and each entered the circle of the Peerage by the altar steps. Helen was but seventeen, in the first flush of her girlish charms, when she gave her hand to Commander Price Blackwood, who succeeded his father in the family Barony; and in much later years, when she was a middle-aged woman, she made a second dramatic marriage with Lord Gifford, heir to the Tweeddale Marquisate, on his deathbed.

Caroline Sheridan found a husband in the Hon. George Norton, a shiftless barrister, who crowned his infamous treatment of her by a baseless charge, in which his wife's name was shamefully associated with that of Lord Melbourne; and when a bedridden woman, verging on seventy, and within three months of her death, she became the wife of her old and valued friend, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell. Mrs. Norton, who for fifty years dazzled Society by her

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brilliant gifts, and achieved fame by the magic of her pen, was, says Charles Austen, "the most brilliant woman I ever met; her brilliancy was like summer lightning—it dazzled, but it did not hurt."

Fascinating as are the life-stories of these two Queens of Beauty, with their superlative gifts and graces, we must pass to the youngest of the sisters, Georgiana, who inherited in such full measure her grandmother's dower of loveliness and her grandfather's clever brain.

We have already seen a charming picture of Georgiana by her nephew, the great diplomatist; but no words can do justice to charms which baffled the brushes of the most skilful artists of her day. As a child, in her mother's home at Hampton Court, Georgy won the hearts of all the Court gallants by her fairy beauty and sylph-like grace; and among her many "upgrown" lovers was none other than the Regent himself, who loved to take his little "Princess," as he called her, on his knee, and to steal a kiss from her pretty, pouting lips.

A few years later we find her the acknowledged belle of the children's ball which the Duke of Clarence gave to the little Queen of Portugal; at which she says, "Caroline and I had gold and green wreaths with scarlet berries in our hair, and I had a red velvet body—a 'Marie Stuart,' which is the

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fashion now—and white satin skirt.” A curious contrast to this Irish beauty must have been the girl Queen of Portugal who, “although ten years old, looked fourteen, and was dressed like a grown-up woman, in a pink gauze gown, with her hair turned up and flowers in it.”

Among Georgiana’s many lovers was the shy and awkward Edward Adolphus, Lord Seymour, heir to the Dukedom of Somerset, a young man who, apart from his rank, was at a marked disadvantage compared with his rivals. But what he lacked in personal attractions he made up by a devotion so great that it completely won his lady’s heart; and it was not long before Georgiana was able to write to her favourite brother :

“ My darling Brinny,—Your Georgy is going to be turned into a chaperon. Lord Seymour, the Duke of Somerset’s son, asked me yesterday to marry him; and I, being civil and polite, said ‘Yes.’ Joking apart, I *am* going to marry him. He is very clever and good. The Duke, his father, has no objection, and is very kind indeed. So are his sisters; but my acquaintances are rabid and frantic at my daring to do such a thing; and they turn round after first congratulating mamma, and say, ‘Good Heavens, is Lord Seymour mad? What a fool!’ with other pleasing intimations of their good wishes towards me.”

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Thus simply and with such quaint humour does the young beauty announce that she is to be the bride of the heir to a Dukedom.

Less than a month later Georgiana, "dressed in plain white satin, with no ornaments but a diamond-brooch and earrings, beautiful blonde *séduisantes*, and a magnificent blonde veil thrown over her head, so large that it nearly reached her feet," was quietly wedded to her lord in the back drawing-room of his father's town-house, with a few relatives for spectators. "I think," writes her sister, Lady Dufferin, "I never saw anything so perfectly beautiful as she looked." After the ceremony the young couple set off for a six weeks' honeymoon to Wimbledon Park, where, the bride says, "the bedstead in my room was the bed of Lady Jane Seymour."

Thus we find the loveliest of the Sheridans transported from the seclusion of Hampton Court to the splendours of ducal palaces, and to the centre of the great world of fashion of which, for so many years, she was to be so conspicuous an ornament. By right of beauty and of rank she took at once the position of a queen of society, a position which she filled with a rare grace and dignity.

After she had been a wife nine years her crowning triumph came, when she was chosen from the whole world of fair women to preside as "Queen of

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Beauty" over that famous tournament in which Lord Eglinton revived all the splendours of mediaeval chivalry. The tournament, it is true, was a fiasco, thanks to the pitiless deluge of rain which converted the ground into a quagmire, and drenched alike knightly plumes and ladies' finery; but through it all the beauty of the "Queen" shone with dazzling radiance, as if the elements themselves were powerless to dim its lustre.

It was fresh from this triumph that Lady Seymour engaged in that epistolary duel with a Lady Shuckburgh which has furnished so much amusement for later generations. She had written to Lady Shuckburgh for the character of Mary Stedman, who had applied to her for a situation as cook; and to this perfectly polite letter the knight's lady had answered that she was not accustomed to give characters to "*kitchen maids*, this being always done by my house-keeper, Mrs. Couch," to whom Lady Seymour should apply for a character.

To this high and mighty letter Lady Seymour retorted, "Lady Seymour presents her compliments to Lady Shuckburgh, and begs she will order her house-keeper, Mrs. Pouch, to send the girl's character without delay; otherwise, another young woman will be sought for elsewhere, as Lady Seymour's children cannot remain without their dinner because Lady

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Shuckburgh, 'keeping a professed cook and house-keeper,' thinks a knowledge of the details of her establishment beneath her notice. Lady Seymour understood from Stedman that, in addition to her other talents, she was actually capable of dressing food fit for the little Shuckburghs to partake of when hungry."

This scathing, and not quite "ladylike," note was accompanied by a pencil-sketch, picturing the little Shuckburghs, "with large turnip-looking heads and cauliflower wigs voraciously scrambling for mutton-chops provided by Mary Stedman, who is looking on with serene satisfaction, while Lady Shuckburgh appears in the distance with horror and dismay on her face."

To this letter Lady Shuckburgh deigned no reply herself, but left her housekeeper to take up the cudgels, with this result: "Madame,—Lady Shuckburgh has directed me to acquaint you that she declines answering your note, the vulgarity of which is beneath contempt. And, although it may be the characteristic of the Sheridans to be vulgar, coarse, and witty, it is not that of a 'lady,' unless she happens to have been born in a garret and bred in the kitchen. Mary Stedman informs me that your ladyship does not keep either a cook or a housekeeper, and that you only require a girl who can cook a mutton-chop. If so, I apprehend that Mary Stedman, or any other

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scullion, will be found equal to cook for, or manage the establishment of, the Queen of Beauty. I am, your ladyships, &c., ELIZABETH COUCH (*not* POUCH).”

Such was the tournament in which the Queen of Beauty herself couched a lance, and in which she does not seem to have carried off the honours. But a quick temper and a sarcastic tongue were among the Duchess's few blemishes, and no doubt made many enemies for her. An amusing and characteristic sample of her sarcasm is given thus:—One day she ordered certain goods of a tradesman, which were not sent home. On the following morning when she visited the shop again to enquire the reason, the proprietor was unable to trace the order. “May I ask your Grace,” he enquired, “who took the order? Was it a young gentleman with fair hair?” “No.” curtly answered the Duchess, “it was an elderly nobleman with a bald head.”

Splendid as was Georgiana's life with her indulgent and worshipping husband, it was clouded by more than one terrible tragedy. Her second son, Lord Edmund St. Maur, was killed by a tiger in India; and her eldest son died with tragic suddenness in his mother's arms. One September night in 1869, Earl St. Maur was seized with a violent attack of coughing, and “went to sleep in a little back parlour, where I had a little iron bedstead put up. Next morning at eight my maid ran into the room,”

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the mother says, "crying, 'the Earl is ill!' I hurried down the two flights of stairs. 'He is down on the floor!' A clay-cold hand clasps mine. 'Oh, mother!' and he became speechless. My maid and I raised him up, sitting against our knees. I sent a pressing, urgent message to the doctor. I remained three-quarters of an hour on my knees, supporting a gasping, dying man."

For hours the lamp of life flickered, the agonised mother "tearing up her nightdress for rags, cutting the strings of her petticoats for the surgeons, waiting on them herself because there were no servants." And all to no purpose. Her son drew his last breath in her arms. "No pauper," exclaimed the heart-broken mother, "could have died more denuded of chances; no wandering Hagar could have seen her son perish more helplessly or more alone."

For fifteen years the Duchess survived this crowning tragedy. Robbed of her children, her beauty but a memory, she presented a brave, smiling face to the world, until, just at the moment when she had announced her intention "to live again at last," death came to claim her. "On Sunday morning," her bereaved husband wrote to his brother-in-law, "Georgy passed away in a quiet doze. She had suffered so much during the last eight months, and had nearly lost her sight, that it is for her a comfort, but to us a great loss."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE COMTESSE DE GRAMONT

AMONG the Court ladies who have danced their way across the stage in our Peerage Drama there have been so many whose fairness was only matched by their frailty, and whose charms have been the guerdon of the highest bidder, that it is a pleasure to turn to one Queen of Beauty who proved that she could carry an unspotted fame through all the temptations of the most vicious Court England has ever known, while sacrificing none of the supremacy which is the dower of supreme loveliness.

Such an embodiment of all the graces and all the virtues was Elizabeth Hamilton, who came from France with Charles's exiled Court in 1660 to shed a lustre on the restored glories of our Stuart Kings. She had spent the years of her early girlhood with her father, Sir George Hamilton, a younger son of the Earl of Abercorn, and with her brothers and sisters in the Paris Faubourg St. Jacques, sharing the fallen fortunes of her Sovereign, and waiting patiently for the day that should see him restored to his throne. And even as a girl her beauty, her winsomeness, and her gaiety captivated all hearts.



LA BELLE HAMILTON
AFTERWARDS
COUNTESS DE GRAMMONT

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“Everyone was her lover,” says Sir John Reresby; “from the King himself to the youngest Page. In his Majesty’s frequent fits of gloom she was the only one who could bring a smile to his lips by her infectious and irrepressible high spirits. I, myself, was her veriest slave, and would gladly have made her my wife had my fortune permitted.”

When at last the dark days of exile gave place to the splendid era of the Restoration, Elizabeth Hamilton’s beauty, although she had still to see her twentieth birthday, had reached its dazzling zenith. “She had,” says her brother Anthony, “the finest shape, the loveliest neck, and the most beautiful arms in the world. She was majestic and graceful in all her movements; and she was the original which all the ladies copied in their taste and art of dress. Her forehead was open, white, and smooth; her hair was well set, and fell with ease into that natural order which it is so difficult to imitate. Her complexion had a freshness not to be equalled by borrowed colours; her eyes were lively, and capable of expressing whatever she pleased; her mouth was full of graces, and her contour uncommonly perfect; nor was her nose, which was small, delicate, and turned up, the least ornament of so lovely a face. In fine, her air, her carriage, and the numberless graces dispersed over her whole person made the Chevalier de

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Gramont (her future husband) not doubt but that she was possessed of every other qualification."

Such, in the cold medium of prose, was this daughter of the House of Abercorn when she joined the galaxy of fair women that flitted round the throne of the now Merry Monarch in the first years of his reign. There was no Court in Europe which contained so many lovely women as this of Whitehall when the second Charles was new to his crown—from La Belle Stuart, whose childish beauty and waywardness played such havoc with the King's susceptible heart, to Frances Jennings, whose radiant and more mature charms drew lovers to her feet as irresistibly as the magnet draws the needle.

But Elizabeth Hamilton was Queen, by common consent, of them all, with a beauty more splendid than theirs, and graces of mind which none of them could hope to rival. Every gallant at Court was her avowed lover—from the Duke of Richmond, whose mourning for his first wife was still new, to Henry Jermyn, King of Restoration beaux, whose flowing wig, clouded cane, and daintily-perfumed laces were ever in the wake of the new divinity.

Richard Talbot, the handsomest man of his day, and the idol of every Court lady, was driven to distraction by her coldness and transported to heaven by her smiles; Henry Howard tried in vain to dazzle her

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eyes with the prospect of a Duchess's coronet; and there was no man at Whitehall who was not equally eager to secure the prize with his good looks, his rank, or his riches.

One of the most constant and ardent of her slaves was no other than James, Duke of York, the King's brother, and his successor on the throne, who had begun his wooing years earlier in the Faubourg St. Jacques, almost before Elizabeth had ceased to nurse her dolls. Now that she had reached the perfection of her beauty, his ardour was increased tenfold. He was her very shadow, following her everywhere; and when his sighs and oglings and pretty speeches made no impression on her, he would bombard her with *billet-doux*, full of tenderness and protestations of undying love. Never was maiden's heart subjected to such an obdurate siege, or with smaller success; for she made it abundantly clear to Prince and courtier alike that her favours were for no man who could not possess her heart with them; and that heart she was in no hurry to give into any man's keeping.

But to Elizabeth Hamilton—as to so many other “impregnable” maidens—the “Prince Charming” came at last in the guise of the Comte de Gramont, one of the least likely, one would have thought, of all her legion of suitors to win the prize. Gramont was a late comer in the lists of love; for he did not make

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his appearance at Whitehall until Elizabeth Hamilton had enjoyed a full year of her queendom.

He was a man of no physical attractiveness—in-
deed, in later years, his face was once described as
“that of an ape,” although another description credits
him with “laughing eyes, well-made nose, beautiful
mouth, and a little dimple in his chin.” And he was
just twice her age. But, though he lacked both youth
and comeliness, he was an adept in all the arts of
love, a courtier to his finger-tips, with a tongue skilled
in the framing of witty speeches and subtle flatteries.
He had, moreover, the magnetism of personality,
which attracts women more potently than mere per-
fection of face and figure.

It was at a Court ball that Gramont first set eyes
on the queenly figure and grace of the woman who
was to become his wife; and at sight of her he was
undone. The impression he made on her was very
different; for, it is said, she asked Jermyn, who was
still dangling hopelessly at her heels, “Who *is* that
ugly man, who looks so like a monkey?” An unflat-
tering speech which later came to Gramont’s ears.
“So,” said the Count, “she calls me a monkey, does
she? Well, I must show her some of my tricks.”

Wounded vanity and such a passion as now fired
the breast of Gramont are a formidable armoury for
any maiden’s heart, however strongly entrenched, to

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fight against. And so La Belle Hamilton found when the Frenchman laid siege to it with all the skill learned in twenty years of woman conquest; for, ill-favoured as he was, there was no gallant in all France who had won more laurels in the arena of love. Contempt and indifference soon gave way to a pleased complaisance, and complaisance to a warmer feeling, until, within a few months of setting eyes on the "monkey," Elizabeth Hamilton was ready to give her life into his keeping. Beautiful as she had been before, the love that had come into her life made her still more bewitching, until Henry Howard exclaimed, "Surely nothing more perfect has ever trodden earth in woman's guise!"

During the three years that Miss Hamilton spent at Whitehall her gaiety was ever the life of the Court. There was no escapade of which she was not the ruling spirit, whether it was a night adventure in London with a fellow-madcap, or a practical joke on a grave Court official. Of one of these jokes an amusing and characteristic story is told.

Among the women of fashion who frequented the Court was Lady Muskerry, whose vanity was only equalled by her grotesque appearance. She was abnormally stout and short, with a sallow, uncomely face, disfigured by an abominable squint, and with one leg shorter than the other. But, unattractive as

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she was, a caricature of a woman, she was obsessed by the idea that her charms were irresistible, and she spent a fortune in embellishing them with the costliest finery and jewels that money could buy.

My lady's indignation may be imagined when a Court masque ball was announced to which she received no card of invitation. She fretted and fumed and shed tears of mortification, declaring that some jealous enemy of her own sex had brought this slight upon her. She was even on the point of seeking audience with the Queen herself, to demand the invitation which was due to her rank and fascinations, when, to her inexpressible delight, a messenger arrived bearing not only the longed-for invitation, but a special request that she should not fail to honour the ball with her appearance. The character assigned to her ladyship was that of a Princess of Babylon, and her partner none other than the Comte de Gramont.

So overjoyed was she that she kissed the precious card rapturously, and shed tears over it before ordering her coach, to purchase the necessary finery. But her first journey was to her cousin, Elizabeth Hamilton, to impart the good news to her, and to get a few hints as to the appropriate dress for a Babylonian Princess. Needless to say, Miss Hamilton shared the good lady's joy to the full, and sent her away with

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such a conception of the required costume as would have shocked even the Queen of Sheba herself.

On the fateful evening the gorgeous Muskerry coach, with its four horses in their gilded trappings, dashed up to the palace door just as Gramont, attired as a Spanish Grandee, was entering. "Monsieur de Gramont," shouted a high-pitched voice, "stop one moment; you are my partner." A glance at the speaker was sufficient. The Comte took to his heels, and never stopped until he found himself in the presence of the King, to whom he declared that he had been stopped at the door of the palace by a "devil of a phantom," who said that he was to be her partner. "Your Majesty should just see her," he said, amid shrieks of laughter from the surrounding courtiers. "She must have at least sixty ells of gauze and silver tissue about her, not to mention a sort of pyramid upon her head, adorned by a hundred thousand baubles."

"Who can it be?" was the question which passed round the circle of dancers. Charles declared the "devil of a phantom" must be the Duchess of Newcastle, an eccentric lady whose conceptions of dress were usually startling. "And I," said Lord Muskerry, who was standing near, "will wager it is another fool, for I am much mistaken if it is not my wife." And before the lady could be summoned for

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inspection, he had made his way to the waiting coach, to find his worst fears confirmed. A minute later the "Babylonian Princess" was being driven hurriedly home, where she was locked in her bedroom, with a sentry at the door to make sure of her for the night. To her last day Lady Muskerri never knew that the flattering card of invitation was forged by the mischievous hand of Elizabeth Hamilton, who was also responsible for the Babylonian finery and the shock to the Comte de Gramont's nerves.

Now that Gramont had won his prize, his ardour seems to have cooled; to such an extent, indeed, that, when he paid his next visit to France, he quite forgot even to say "good-bye" to the lady whose heart he had won. He had no sooner reached Dover, however, than he heard the sound of galloping horses behind him; and before he had well dismounted, found himself face to face with two of her brothers. "Chevalier de Gramont," said George Hamilton sternly, "is there nothing you have forgotten in London?" "Pardon!" was the prompt reply, accompanied by a sweeping bow; "pardon, monsieur, but I have forgotten your sister."

And, thus reminded, the next morning he was riding back to London to do his neglected duty at the altar. To quote the somewhat satirical words of Anthony Hamilton, one of the lady's brothers, "the

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Comte de Gramont, as a reward for a constancy he had never before known, and which he never afterwards practised, found Hymen and Love united in his favour, and was at last blessed with the possession of Miss Hamilton."

The rest of our heroine's story may be told in a few words. Elizabeth, Comtesse de Gramont, passed the remainder of her long life partly in England and partly in France, turning to piety as a refuge from the worldliness and heartlessness of her husband. She bore him a son and two daughters, one of whom found a husband in Henry Howard, Earl of Strafford; and she survived to see the crown of England worn by Queen Anne, daughter of the Prince who had wooed her so importunately in the too brief years when she was Queen of Beauty.

CHAPTER XXXV

A DUCAL ROUÉ

Wharton, the scorn and wonder of our days,
Whose ruling passion was the lust of praise,

* * * * *

A fool, with more of wit than half mankind,
Too rash for thought, for action too refined ;
A tyrant to the wife his heart approves,
A rebel to the very King he loves ;
He dies, sad outcast of each Church and State,
And harder still ! flagitious yet not great.

SUCH are the scathing words in which Pope pictures Philip, the " eccentric, witty, and profligate " Duke of Wharton, who was surely the most remarkable jumble of gifts and vices that ever masqueraded in the guise of man. Polished orator and wit, courtier to his finger-tips, dowered with every grace of body and mind to win honour and high repute, he was content to drift through his short life a profligate among profligates, the sport of every mad impulse that seized him, false to country and friends, to every woman who crossed his baleful path, and to himself, changing his religion as lightly as he changed his coat, and, having been cradled in Calvinism, ending his days a penitent Catholic.

Philip was the degenerate descendant of a long line

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of noble and knightly Whartons, who had been seated on their broad Westmorland lands for many a long century, and one of whom, Sir Thomas, had won a Barony for doughty deeds against the Scots when the eighth Henry was King. His ancestors had mated with the daughters of such famous houses as Talbot, Devereux, and Clifford; and his mother was a Loftus, daughter of Lord Lisburn. He had, moreover, for father "Honest Tom" Wharton, who, profligate as he was, was a pillar of the Protestant Church, and by his loyalty to the Crown won for himself the coronet of a Marquis. Philip thus succeeded to a goodly heritage of virtues; and, that he might not stray from the straight path his forefathers had followed, he was rigidly brought up, like his father before him, "among Geneva bands, lank hair, upturned eyes, nasal psalmody, and sermons three hours long." He took to his books as a young duck takes to water; and by the time he was thirteen was a very prodigy of learning; steeped in classics, mathematics, and metaphysics, and reeling off rhetoric like a seasoned parliamentary orator.

But the youthful hope of the Whartons was not destined long to remain such a pattern of the proprieties. He had barely seen his sixteenth birthday when he lost his heart to the pretty and penniless daughter of a Major-General Holmes; and, flinging away his

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books, he ran off with her to London, where he found a down-at-heels Fleet Prison parson willing to marry the runaways for half-a-crown and a bottle of wine, with the ring of a window-curtain for wedding-ring. After a few weeks of honeymooning, however, Philip Wharton, ex-student and "boy-saint," began to weary of his girl-wife, and to sigh for other lips and other arms; and before he had been a husband half a year we find him packing his bride off to her home and engaging in one sordid intrigue after another—beginning, in fact, that career of debauchery to which alone he was constant for the remainder of his misspent life.

This violent shock to their hopes proved fatal to Philip's parents, who quickly followed each other to the grave; and before the prodigal son had reached his seventeenth birthday he found himself a double Marquis, Earl, Viscount and Baron, and in possession of a revenue of £16,000 a year. He had the ball at his feet, and meant to kick it right merrily, laughing at the provision of his father's will that he should go to Geneva to finish his education, with an austere Huguenot pastor as tutor. It was in a state of high glee and anticipation that the young lord turned his back on England and set foot on Dutch soil, in spite of the grim face that accompanied him. In Holland and Germany the handsome boy with the charming

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manners was made much of wherever his journeying took him. Ladies smiled on him; princelings and courtiers fawned on him as they emptied his purse at the card-table and drank his health in a third bottle of good wine; and when one Grand Duke presented him with a knightly Order in exchange for a regal present, the silly boy's head was completely turned. His cup of joy was quite full when one day he gave his tutor the slip and escaped to Lyons, leaving behind him a pet bear to keep the dominie company on his further travels.

At last he was free to "fling his legs" as he pleased; and the first use he made of his new liberty was to throw overboard his loyalty to his king, and ingratiate himself with the Pretender, who was then holding his mock Court at Avignon. A gracious letter, accompanied by the present of a splendid charger, had the desired sequel in an invitation to the Court, where the young lord was received with open arms. The son of "Honest Tom" Wharton, one of the bitterest enemies of the Stuart House, was an adherent well worth securing; and before the Marquis had been many days his guest, the Pretender conferred on him the Dukedom of Northumberland, with such complimentary speeches as transported him to the seventh heaven.

From Avignon the new Duke rode to Paris to pay

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homage to James II.'s Queen, and incidentally to drink deep of the pleasures of that city of gaiety. He threw himself into every kind of dissipation, flinging his gold about with prodigal hands—drinking, gaming, philandering, until his purse, which his trustees kept none too well supplied, was empty. Then, in his extremity, he took his coaxing tongue to Mary Beatrix, the Stuart Queen; and, full of zeal for the Jacobite cause, persuaded her to lend him £2,000—to raise which sum she had to pawn all her remaining jewels—on his solemn undertaking that every penny should go to promote the cause of her exiled House. A few hours later the Duke was staking the price of his infamy in one of the lowest gaming-houses in Paris, and boasting that “ he would remain a Jacobite only as long as the money remained unpaid! ”

After exhausting all the lowest so-called pleasures of Paris, the Duke shook the dust of France off his feet for a time; and we find him installed in the Irish House of Lords as Marquis of Catherlogh, where, boy as he was, he won immediate fame by his eloquent support of the Government and his championship of the Hanoverian King—a loyalty which so pleased George I. that he raised the youth of nineteen to the Dukedom of Wharton. Two years later he stood in England with a reputation as one of the leading orators and statesmen of his day, and was winning laurels as the most

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eloquent speaker in the English House of Peers—and, at the same time, infamy as the most dissolute man in town, a haunter of low resorts, a reckless gambler, and a drunkard.

Careless of his fame as a statesman, his only ambition was to be a ringleader of vice; and this ambition he realised to the full when he was elected President of the infamous “Hell Fire Club,” an association of the most abandoned evil-livers in London. It was after a night’s debauch at this supreme haunt of vice that Wharton made perhaps his most powerful and eloquent speech—in favour of a Bill for suppressing profligate societies. With disgusting hypocrisy, he proclaimed himself the champion of virtue, and supported his arguments with copious texts, read with unctuous voice from an old family Bible. A few hours later he was lying dead drunk in a house of ill-fame, the sport and derision of his low associates.

Meanwhile, the Duke’s profligacy was draining his purse to such an extent that he was forced to sell one estate after another. His library and pictures came under the auctioneer’s hammer; and finally his property was vested in trustees, who cut down his allowance to a beggarly £1,200 a year. His neglected wife had died of grief and shame; and his debauchery had created so much scandal that in 1724 he was glad to

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escape once more to the Continent. Here he resumed the rôle of ardent Jacobite; and as Ambassador of King James III. was received with distinction at the Courts of Vienna and Madrid. When an order under the Privy Seal was sent to summon him to England, we are told, "His Grace, being in a coach when it was delivered to him, contemptuously threw it into the street without opening it, and soon after declared himself a Roman Catholic." "I would rather," he wrote to a friend, "carry a musket in an old Muscovite regiment than wallow in riches by the favour of the Usurper"—the "Usurper," be it noted, being the King whose valiant champion he had been a few months earlier, and who had rewarded his loyalty by a Dukedom.

At the Court of Madrid this ducal roué and traitor succumbed to the charms of Miss O'Byrne, the penniless daughter of an Irish gentleman, and Maid of Honour to the Spanish Queen. When Her Majesty refused her assent to the match, Wharton vowed that he would kill himself or starve himself to death; and actually took to what he declared was his deathbed until the Queen relented. Within an hour of receiving the good news he was up and about again, as well as ever, and was attending Mass as a preliminary to writing to his sister, "Nothing shall ever tempt me to forsake the religion wherein I was educated." But

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his new Duchess was as powerless to reform her husband as her predecessor had been. At Rome, where he now journeyed, he shocked everyone by his drunken orgies and his amours, until the city of the Popes became too hot for him; and, with an empty purse, he went to offer his sword to the Spanish King, then preparing to besiege Gibraltar.

Here, as Philip's aide-de-camp, he amazed the Spaniards by his reckless courage, probably inspired by his cups. Once, we are told, he walked, alone and unarmed, up to the English lines and hurled taunts and insults at his own countrymen, proclaiming his name, and walking back as coolly as if he were promenading in Hyde Park. Such cold-blooded treachery as this could only have one sequel. The Duke was indicted for high treason, and a sentence of outlawry was pronounced against him. In vain he now grovelled to Walpole, our Ambassador at Paris, begging him to intercede with the King, and vowing that his greatest wish was to "pass the evening of my days under the shadow of his Royal protection." All the answer he got was the cold message: "His Majesty does not think fit to receive any application from him." Even the Pretender now turned away from him in disgust, advising him to return to England, as he had no use for him.

Thus stripped of all his honours, and of all supplies,

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herding with the scum of the barracks, scorned by his brother officers, despised by even his low associates, Philip Wharton, twofold Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, and Baron, spent the last sordid days of his misspent life. In 1730 his health, undermined by his excesses, broke down. He started on a last pilgrimage to Catalonia to drink medicinal waters, but his strength failed, and he was picked up unconscious on the roadside by a party of Benedictine monks. A few days later, after a brief interval of penitence, he drew his last breath in the monastery of Aragon-Poblet, leaving no single soul to mourn his loss, but leaving the memory of such a wanton squandering of gifts and opportunities as the world has rarely known.

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