


***DOROTHY LADY
NEVILL***

***LEAVES FROM
THE NOTE-
BOOKS
OF LADY
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Dorothy Lady Nevill

Leaves from the Note-Books of Lady Dorothy Nevill

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PREFACE

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When, some time ago, a collection of my mother's reminiscences was given to the public, we received a large number of suggestions that a second similar volume would be certain of the same cordial welcome as was extended to the first. The following pages, containing memories and observations extending over a long period of years, are the result of these kindly exhortations.

The task of arrangement and of selection from my mother's scrap-books and note-books has been carried out by me under her supervision; and I have also included as many recollections, hitherto unpublished, as her very excellent memory was able to furnish. Of the many anecdotes which are given, the majority, it is hoped, are here told for the first time in print; most of them, indeed, recount personal experiences of her own or of some of the well-known people with whom during a long life it has been her privilege to meet. In preparing the volume valuable assistance, which it is our desire here gratefully to acknowledge, has been rendered by many well-wishers, some of them old friends, some of them unknown to us except by their encouraging and helpful letters.

It may be added that my only aim in the pages which follow has been to arrange a mass of material—some of it no doubt old, but a great deal, I hope, new—in such a form as may interest and amuse the reader and thus serve to occupy a few leisure hours. If failure be the result, the blame

must be laid entirely at my door; while should the book in any measure achieve its aim, the whole credit belongs properly to my mother.

RALPH NEVILL.

PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES

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Lady Dorothy Nevill. Painted by
G. F. Watts, R.A., in 1844 Frontispiece

Lady Dorothy Nevill. From a
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anecdotes—Mrs. Norton—The Duchess of Somerset—The
Owl—The Fourth Party—Sir Henry Drummond Wolff—The
Comte de Paris and the Primrose League—Lord Randolph
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It has always been a passion with me to collect odds and
ends of every sort and put them into scrap-books and note-

books. Consequently I now have many volumes filled with old squibs, cuttings, photographs, scraps of verse, menus of banquets, and other trifles which, together with notes scribbled at the side, recall many pleasant and amusing days now long vanished into the past. In many of my books, I must confess, the contents are arranged in the most haphazard fashion, which now and then produces some rather amusing contrasts; for instance, opening one at hazard I came upon an old broadside of 1832 entitled "The Great Battle for Reform," side by side with a picture post-card dealing with the Suffragette agitation,—a combination which brought into my mind the following little anecdote. Long before the days of advanced female politicians, in the year 1832, an elderly couple, peacefully sleeping in their four-poster, were one morning roughly aroused at an early hour by their excited maid-servant who, bursting into the bedroom, bawled out, "It's passed! It's passed!" Extremely annoyed, the old lady called out from inside the bed-curtains, "What's passed, you fool?" "The Reform Bill," shouted the girl, "and we're all equal now"; after which she marched out of the room, purposely leaving the door wide open to show her equality.

I possess many mementoes of old elections; amongst them an election favour or ribband on which is embroidered "Disraeli," a souvenir sent me by Lord Beaconsfield in the early days of his political career.

Mr. Bernal Osborne, amongst others, also used to remember my passion for collecting, and, consequently, I have a good many old election addresses and squibs which

are now beginning to possess some slight antiquarian interest.

In 1868, at Nottingham, there was a tremendous electoral struggle, in which no less than five candidates took part. Mr. Bernal Osborne, who eventually found himself at the bottom of the poll, was one of these, and sent me a curious little paper which was published during the progress of what was a very acrimonious contest. This was an ephemeral sheet, called *The Nottingham Lamb*, a copy of which I still retain, issued apparently for the sole purpose of chaffing all five candidates.

As has been said, Mr. Osborne was *MR. BERNAL OSBORNE* defeated at this election; he did not indeed succeed in again entering the House of Commons till 1870, when he was returned for Waterford, the Irish constituency which, after his Nottingham defeat, he had unsuccessfully wooed in 1869. Subsequent to this election party feeling ran so high that Mr. Osborne had to be smuggled out of the town in a covered car, some of his opponent's supporters having announced their intention of lynching him. A few days afterwards he wrote to a friend: "I am slowly recovering from the success of an Irish election." Mr. Bernal Osborne, as is well known, possessed the derisive faculty in an abnormal degree, and this he could not help exercising everywhere, even in the House of Commons. He was, indeed, the hero of many amusing incidents which convulsed that august assembly, and even to-day tales are told of his readiness in banter and repartee. I do not, however, know whether the following little story is generally known.

Mr. Osborne had a great friend, an Irishman, and also a Member of Parliament, though of quite opposite political views. This gentleman, whose name was Tom Corrigan, was not by any means a teetotaler; indeed, malicious people said that he never addressed the House except when under the inspiration of sherry. On a certain night "Tom" chanced to follow Bernal Osborne in a debate upon some Irish question or other, and at once began: "What does my honourable friend know of Ireland? I answer, nothing, or less than nothing. We all know the lines of the poet—

A little learning is a dangerous thing" ...

"Go on, Tom," interjected his friend across the House; "go on, and quote the next line!"

"And why should I be after quoting the next line, Mr. Speaker, sorr?"

"Because, Tom," again interrupted Bernal Osborne, "the next line should particularly suit you, for it runs: 'Drink deep,' Tom, 'Drink deep.' "

Mr. Osborne was always very severe upon those who spoke above their own capacity and other people's comprehension. His favourite butts in the House of Commons, indeed, were those pompous and Pharisical members whose doctrinaire views he was ever ready to deride.

Amongst the political squibs in my scrap-book there is one directed against the over-taxation which in long-past days certainly did press very heavily upon the people of England. Exceedingly well written, it is, I believe, an extract from an article by Sydney Smith, published in the Edinburgh Review about 1820. In the form of what we should to-day

call a political leaflet, it is rendered all the more effective by the manner in which the words are arranged, and also by the very adroit use made of capital letters:—

TAXES

upon every Article which enters into the Mouth, or covers the

Back, or is placed under the Foot;

TAXES

upon every thing which is pleasant to See, Hear, Feel, Smell,

and Taste;

TAXES

upon Warmth, Light, and Locomotion;

TAXES

on every thing on Earth and the Waters under the Earth; on every thing that comes from abroad, or is grown at home;

TAXES

on the raw Material;

TAXES

on every value that is added to it by the industry of Man;

TAXES

on the Sauce which pampers Man's appetite, and the Drug that

restores him to health; on the Ermine which decorates the

Judge, and the Rope which hangs the Criminal; on the Brass Nails of the Coffin, and the Ribbands of the Bride.

At Bed or At Board, Couchant or Levant,

WE MUST PAY.

*ELECTIONEERING
LITERATURE*

The School Boy whips his Taxed Top;
The Beardless Youth manages his Taxed Horse with a
Taxed

Bridle on a Taxed Road; and the dying Englishman,
pouring his Medicine which has paid 7 Per Cent,
into a Spoon which has paid 30 Per Cent,
throws himself back upon his

Chintz Bed which has paid 22 Per Cent,
MAKES HIS WILL,

and expires in the arms of an Apothecary who has paid
£100

for the privilege of putting him to death.

HIS WHOLE PROPERTY IS THEN TAXED FROM
2 to 10 PER CENT;

Besides the Probate, large Fees are demanded for
burying

him in the Chancel;

his virtues are handed down to posterity on Taxed
Marble;

and he is then gathered to his Fathers to be
TAXED

NO MORE.

The old broadsides are now represented by the leaflets
and posters which so plentifully abound during modern
elections. Within the last thirty years election posters have
assumed many different developments, though, as a rule, it
must be said that they are lacking in the incisive if rather
brutal force which characterised the cartoons and
caricatures of other days. The attempt once made by the
late Mr. Lowe, afterwards Lord Sherbrooke, to put a tax upon

lucifer matches, called forth, I remember, a perfect flood of ephemeral literature, as well as a quantity of derisive illustrations, which no doubt played some part in causing the abandonment of what was regarded as a very unpopular tax. A terra-cotta statuette of Mr. Lowe standing upon a match-box is one of my treasures, and another is a match-box crowned with the bust of the politician in question.

Mr. Gladstone—his pastime of tree-felling, his habit of sending post-cards, and his collars—afforded the caricaturist a very congenial subject to work upon. I still have a very malicious cartoon entitled “Khartoum v. Criterion,” in which the Grand Old Man is pictured holding his sides with laughter in a box at the play, whilst above is shown the death of General Gordon at Khartoum. As a matter of fact, by no possibility could Mr. Gladstone have known that the very evening on which he was going to the Criterion, Gordon was being done to death in the far-off Soudan; and whatever may have been his faults, callousness or inhumanity was most certainly not numbered amongst them.

A political caricaturist of modern days, whose works I collect, is Sir F. Carruthers Gould. His wit, indeed, always of the most good-natured description, is one of the most valuable assets of the Liberal party, whilst the very moderation of his sarcasm, combined with an almost preternatural aptitude for hitting off a situation, makes the work of this talented caricaturist tell in a quite unusual degree.

The best amateur caricaturist I ever *SIR FRANK*
knew was the late Sir Frank Lockwood, *LOCKWOOD*
who used every year to send his friends

some whimsical design of his own composition. Among the New Year's cards which he sent me—souvenirs I still cherish—the best of a clever series is, I think, the one I received at the end of 1893. In this Old Father Time is pictured as a butler holding out a champagne bottle labelled 1894, whilst another, 1893 sec, lies empty on the ground. Underneath is written, "A fine wine, and not so dry as the last." On another, Time—as a sportsman carrying a dead pheasant, 1895—is shown keenly eyeing an astonished young bird (1896) perched upon a milestone, the while he murmurs, "I'll have a shot at you next, my little man." Sir Frank Lockwood was a great loss to all his friends, for a more agreeable, clever, and cheery companion never lived.

Looking over an old scrap-book of mine I came upon some Italian caricatures of the carnival at Rome in the old days, when the Pope was still an independent sovereign. These had been collected when I was travelling in Italy with my mother about the year 1842. The carnival, I remember, was not particularly gay. There were immense crowds, and a perpetual rain of confetti and dead battered flowers, which increased to a perfect storm when our carriage passed any house inhabited by our friends. The people of Rome, however, enjoyed it all immensely, and a young lady said to me, "If Paradise be half as delightful as the carnival, what can be so happy?" Some English people, however, said it was more like Purgatory!

During our travels at that time, when going by sea on a Tuscan vessel from Genoa to Naples, we met Lord Vernon, who was our fellow-passenger as far as Leghorn. He talked a great deal about Dante, the study of whose works was his

hobby, and also gave us a very lively description of his interview with the Pope.

His Holiness, he said, after some very *LORD VERNON* complimentary remarks, had inquired of *AND THE POPE* him how he translated the passage at the beginning of Canto vii. of the "Inferno"—

"Papé Satan, Papé Satan, aleppé."^[1]

The difficulty, Lord Vernon told us, was overcome by his telling the Pope that a great diversity of opinion existed as to the passage in question, and he would therefore be especially grateful to his Holiness if he, the highest authority possible, would tell him what the exact meaning of it might be. The Pope, however, who was just as quick at parrying home-thrusts as Lord Vernon, changed the subject, and pounced upon another passage, describing the effect of sunshine upon a rock, which he said he had been able to verify one day near his convent when he was a Carmelite monk. Lord Vernon then said to him, "Your Holiness's observation is most valuable, and, with permission, I will put it in a note to the translation I am making." "No, no!" exclaimed the Pope; "non bisogna mai nominare il Papa,"—"There is no need whatever to mention the Pope at all."

Anything which recalls the past becomes of interest as time goes on, and some of the mementoes of other days which I have carefully preserved bring vividly back to one's mind scenes now almost historical, as well as the people who figured in them.

Programmes of public meetings and menus of banquets are amongst the trifles which I have collected and kept, and

of these I have a considerable number. The menus I sought for with the greatest eagerness were those of public lunches or dinners attended by some great orator or politician, and when I got them I generally managed also to obtain the signature of the guest or guests of the evening, which naturally adds very greatly to their interest. Of these souvenirs recalling great social functions of the past, I have in particular a quantity of the time of the Jubilee of 1887, which has now become almost an historic memory. Besides their interest as souvenirs, these menus may one day be interesting as illustrating the way in which the people of our time dined. As a matter of fact, there has been very little change in the number and nature of the dishes served at public dinners and banquets during the last thirty-five years, as can be seen from some menus I still retain as a remembrance of the entertainments given to the late Shah of Persia (that is the one before the last), on his first visit to this country in 1873.

Other relics which I treasure are certain old cards of invitation to parties, weddings, and other social functions, which recall to my mind friends for the most part, alas, long since passed away.

There was a good deal of robust *WEDDINGS OF* joviality about the weddings of old days, *THE PAST* and the bride and bridegroom always drove away in a chariot drawn by postillions resplendent in blue jackets and white breeches, and wearing enormous white favours at their breasts. These, as a rule, were mounted on what were generally known as “Newman’s Greys”—horses supplied by Newman, the job-master. A

team of four was by no means uncommon, and very smart and appropriate such an equipage looked. What astonishment would it not create at a wedding to-day! But the post-boys and postillions of my youth in their quaint attire, together with "Newman's Greys," have long ago journeyed their last great stage and left no successors behind them. Their calling has now long been obsolete, and were they once more to reappear they would attract about as much attention as men in armour. Lord Lonsdale (I believe, almost alone) still makes use of postillions, who in yellow jackets and white beaver hats strike a picturesque note at Ascot and some other race-meetings which he attends in old-fashioned style.

I remember some amusing stories told in connection with marriages of the past. There was, for instance, the old peer who, though very proud of his family, tempered his pride with a considerable sense of humour. One day he was very much surprised to be told by his sister that she had conceived a great affection for a well-known though somewhat eccentric savant who, although generally esteemed, was of very humble Semitic extraction.

Not quite determined as to what course of action he should take, he sent for the prospective bridegroom with the intention of talking matters over, and after some conversation said,—

"And now, sir, I should like to know something about your family?"

"I think it will be sufficient," was the reply, "to say that I descend from the illustrious blood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

“Oh,” said the peer, “of course our family has nothing to compare with that! Therefore, if my sister really likes you, you had better take her.”

The bridegroom became a Christian; but his brother-in-law always expressed very sceptical views as to this conversion, and would often say, “Christian—fine Christian, indeed—why, the fellow has phylacteries sewn into the ends of his trousers.” Nevertheless the marriage did not turn out at all badly, and proved anything but an unhappy one.

Another rather amusing story is the one told about an East Anglian clergyman of the past who was one day considerably embarrassed at receiving a visit from a lady parishioner who, on entering the room, at once said that she had come to ask his opinion, as her spiritual guide, upon a subject about which she felt quite unable to make up her mind—did he think that it could ever, under any circumstances, be right for a woman to propose to a man?

Much taken aback, the poor rector *“THOU ART THE MAN”* replied that he certainly thought there might be circumstances which would make such a proposal justifiable; upon which, without the slightest hesitation, the lady exclaimed, as Nathan said unto David, “Thou art the man!” And, seeing no possibility of escape, he was.

Norfolk in past times produced many strange types. I remember an old parson who lived near my brother’s place—a landowner as well as a clergyman, and one who farmed his own land, thus being what was known as a “Squarson.” One Sunday his parishioners found affixed to the church door a notice which said, “In consequence of domestic

affliction there will be no service to-day." Everybody being naturally much concerned, sympathetic inquiries were at once made, when it was ascertained that the domestic affliction was an accident which had happened to a fine bullock, in consequence of which it had been destroyed, after which the rector had decided personally to superintend its being cut up. Another old parson, at one of whose churches service was usually a mere form on account of the lack of worshippers, found himself deprived of the services of his ancient clerk, who was well used to his ways. On his arrival at the church the following Sunday the new one set vigorously to work at ringing the solitary bell, an innovation which was anything but to the rector's liking, as he quickly showed by shouting, "What on earth are you doing, you fool, you? Don't you know that if you go on ringing like that some one is sure to come?"

My brother himself was something of a character, and could give an apt enough reply when he chose. Two old ladies, cousins of ours, once pestered him to let them see his country retreat, where he lived a very solitary existence. Thinking at last to end their importunities, he wrote saying that they might come and stay for a few days, in reply to which he was informed that they hoped he would see that some one was present as chaperon, as it would be hardly proper for them to be all alone with him. Further correspondence (and their visit also, I must add) was, however, checked by the brief note which he returned, in which he said that as, according to computation, their ages and his own amounted to about two hundred years, he

thought that the voice of scandal was not much to be feared.

People of original character and brilliant intellect were undoubtedly more frequently to be met with some thirty or forty years ago than is now the case, when almost every one seems to be cast in a mould of a more or less mediocre kind.

There was, for instance, Mrs. Norton (who is still remembered on account of her remarkable cleverness and graceful gift of versification), and her sister, the beautiful Duchess of Somerset, who had been Queen of Beauty at the Eglinton Tournament. I knew the latter very well, a most original woman, possessed of a great deal of the Sheridan cleverness and wit. Meeting her one day at an exhibition of pictures, one of the principal features of which was a portrait of Mr. Gladstone, she led me up to it and, pointing to the picture, a most execrable piece of painting, said, "At last we Conservatives are avenged." At one time she was very much taken with the idea of utilising guinea-pigs as a new sort of dish, declaring that they were most excellent when cooked, and actually induced me to try them. I must candidly admit that they really were not at all bad; she got me a little cookery book entirely filled with recipes for preparing the curious little creatures for the table.

There does not now exist, I fancy, any *"THE SOULS"* brilliant little circle of people such as in the 'sixties started that curious sheet the Owl, though from time to time attempts at something of the sort have been made. There was, for instance, the little coterie the members of which called themselves "the Souls."

These, I believe, had more or less regular meetings for mental communion and improvement, and at one time they attracted a good deal of attention. There were certainly several clever people amongst them, as well as some exceedingly attractive and good-looking ladies, whose mental aspirations (so they declared) lay in the direction of a higher intellectual life than the one led by ordinary mortals.

The late Sir William Harcourt, whose keen and incisive wit was ever very quick at summing up things at a true valuation, is said, when asked what he thought of "the Souls," to have replied, "All I know about 'the Souls' is that some of them have very beautiful bodies."

I often regret that I did not keep a complete set of the Owl; it was a very clever little publication, and for a time created a considerable sensation in London society. Originally started by Mr. Evelyn Ashley, Mr. James Stuart Wortley, and the present Lord Glenesk, it was published in a small shop in Catherine Street, the first number consisting of but a single page containing some clever political comments, a little light and satirical verse, as well as a good deal of amusing chit-chat. The price was high, sixpence, for it was in no way intended for the general public, being indeed, at its inception, sent gratuitously to many of the best known people in London. Its success, however, was so enormous that the scope of the paper was very considerably enlarged, many celebrated people becoming contributors, including Laurence Oliphant, and an Owl dinner being held every Monday, at which the forthcoming number of the paper was discussed. By the public the Owl was regarded

more as an aristocratic literary plaything than as anything else, but whenever it appeared (for it was published or not according to the inclinations of its editors) every copy would be sure to be snapped up. The political information, in particular, contributed by those in the best position to know, was especially good, and it used to be said, indeed, that the Times itself was occasionally anything but averse to drawing upon the notes printed on the Owl's front sheet, which invariably contained a good deal of novel and accurate information as to forthcoming events, both in the parliamentary and diplomatic worlds.

Lord Wharncliffe used frequently to entertain the staff of the Owl at dinner at Wharncliffe House, occasionally contributing acrostics (for which he had a natural bent) to the columns of the paper, whilst Lady Wharncliffe would sometimes send notes as to any current event which might be of interest to the fashionable world.

In the copy of the Owl published on *"THE OWLS IN* June 22, 1864, is an amusing account of a *THE IVY BUSH"* meeting of the staff held at the Star and Garter, Richmond; it is entitled "The Owls in the Ivy Bush." On this occasion there were present the Hon. Mrs. Norton, the Bishop of Oxford (Wilberforce), Lord Houghton, Mr. Bernal Osborne, Laurence Oliphant, Sir William (then Mr.) Vernon Harcourt, Abraham Hayward, and some others. A very brilliant assemblage of wit and intellect, which, I fear, the London society of to-day (or rather what passes for London society) would be totally unable to equal.

Some of the jokes and scraps of verse which appeared in different numbers of the Owl were exceedingly brilliant and

amusing, whilst fads and fancies of the day were dealt with in a very humorous fashion.

The following lines, for instance, were published in the Owl at the time when Mr. Banting's system of reducing fat was a general subject of discussion:—

“Banting in Infernis”

Here lies the bones of him whose strife

Was how to drop the staff of life:

Falstaff he was; survivors he has shown 'em

How “nil” to leave “de mortuis nisi bonum.”

In another number is a witty riddle also dealing with the eminent upholsterer in whose instructions for producing a reduction of weight the fat people of 1864 placed so much trust:—

“Why is Lord Palmerston like Mr. Banting?” “Because his present measures are far smaller than the clothes (close) of last session would warrant.”

My cousin, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, is one of the few survivors of that brilliant band who were contributors to the Owl, and no doubt will have much that is amusing and interesting to say about it in the volume of Memoirs which he has at last been persuaded to prepare for publication. Unrivalled as a raconteur, Sir Henry was a constant guest at my luncheon-table in the 'eighties, when almost every Sunday three-fourths of the Fourth Party, that is to say, Lord Randolph Churchill, Mr., now Sir John, Gorst, and Sir Henry used to give me the pleasure of their company, to the delight of all who chanced to be present.

Those were the early days of the *THE WHITE* Primrose League, the immediate success *ROSE LEAGUE* of which put us all in very good spirits. A little later on, at the time when the League as a political force was beginning to make its influence felt, the late Comte de Paris became much interested in its methods, conceiving the idea that some organisation of a similar kind

might be formed to promote Orleanist interests in France. He questioned me a good deal about the League, I remember, and I referred him to my daughter, who, ever an ardent worker on the Conservative side, thoroughly understood its machinery. As a result of his inquiries, a French "White Rose League" was soon afterwards formed, the badges being in the form of a gilt rose, specimens of which we received and still retain. France, however, manifested little enthusiasm at this attempt to breathe new life into Royalist circles, and after a short time nothing more was heard of the White Rose League, which soon relapsed into an obscurity from which indeed it can hardly be said to have ever really emerged.

The originator of the Primrose League, as is well known, was Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, who from the first received enthusiastic encouragement from Lord Randolph Churchill, then a brilliant pillar of the Conservative party, and full of political energy and intellectual strength. An audacious conversationalist when in a good mood, few were able to excel him in quickness and facility of expression, whilst he would at times exhibit a gaiety which was very contagious. Nevertheless Lord Randolph would never allow the tone of the conversation thus engendered to degenerate into familiarity, and would be quick to resent any approach to it. He always seemed to me as being a man who was secretly conscious that he must make his mark quickly. Who can tell that some foreboding of his premature end did not loom before him? Socially his personality was a very striking one, and that personality he managed to impress upon the electorate within a very short time of his entry upon a

political career. He realised, as it were, I think, that advertisement (I am not speaking in a sense derogatory to his memory) was necessary in a democratic age, and well advertised he was. The newspapers were filled with his portraits and doings, whilst his twirling moustache proved a never-ending subject of amusement to the caricaturists. Theatres and music halls rang with references to "Randy-Pandy," who at one time was certainly the best known figure in England. Then came the fall, brought on, I believe, by his conviction that the Conservative Government were absolutely unable to do without him. Bismarck it was, I think, who said, "no man is indispensable, every man can be replaced," or words to that effect, but Lord Randolph held a different opinion.

Considering himself absolutely necessary to the very existence of the Conservative party, the selection of Mr. Goschen to fill his place came upon him as a complete surprise, for he had left that politician quite out of the calculations which he had made.

Lord Randolph's exclamation on "*I FORGOT GOSCHEN*" learning that his resignation as Chancellor of the Exchequer had been accepted is well known to everybody, but the words "I forgot Goschen" were not the only ones which were used by him.

Mr. Walter Long (who may now be called the chief hope of the Conservative party) chanced to be present when Lord Randolph received the first intimation of what was practically his political doom, and the following is the true version of what occurred.

Mr. Long was that day in the smoking-room of the Carlton Club, sitting with Lord Randolph, when the latter, who had just heard the news that Lord Goschen (then, of course, Mr. Goschen, and not an M.P.) had accepted the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, exclaimed: "All great men make mistakes. Napoleon forgot Blücher, I forgot Goschen."

I may add that it is with Mr. Long's consent that I publish the true version of a somewhat dramatic historical episode.

[1] This is a line of exceedingly obscure meaning. Pollock in a note translates it, "Ho, Satan! Ho, Satan! my Alpha or Chief!"



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Society—Conversation and the lack of it—Miss Gordon Cumming and Munro of Novar—The Duke of Wellington's hatred of publicity—Sir Robert Peel's wedding at Apsley House—Mr. Delane—An eccentric patron—A curate's wit—The Stock Exchange and the West End—Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar's drive home—American influence—Lions—Mr. Watts and the crinolette—Matchmaking—Lady Beaconsfield—Some anecdotes—Lord Henry Lennox and the Duchess of Cleveland—Maria, Marchioness of Ailesbury—Frances, Lady Waldegrave.

Society in old days cannot in any way be compared with the motley crowd which calls itself society to-day. A witty Frenchman of the eighteenth century once said that in perusing the memoirs of the time of Louis XIV. one

discovered, even in the bad company of that age, something which was lacking in the good of his own day—a remark which with but slight alteration might, with justice, I think, be applied to the society of to-day as compared with that of fifty or sixty years ago. To-day it would be difficult to discover accurately who is in or who out of society, or, for the matter of that, whether society itself exists—though, of course, many little coteries of people think that they, and they only, are the leaders of the fashionable world.

In old days society was led by certain *DECAY* *OF* recognised rulers who framed its *CONVERSATION* ordinances, against which there was no appeal; whilst it was entertained by men whose capacity for wit and brilliant conversation was universally admitted—individuals, indeed, who ruled with almost undisputed sway and retained their power even when age had somewhat dulled their wits. Society was quite content to listen, and it was not considered good manners to resent being told things one knew perfectly well even by people who did not sometimes know them at all. Now, however, everybody chatters; it is not talkers that are wanted, far from it; but listening is almost a lost art. The general tone of modern conversation is, without doubt, much lower than it was in the days of the great talkers of the past—inane flippancy being treated in much too lenient a manner. The general impression given by those who habitually indulge in it always seems to me to be that they are not quite sure that they are ladies and gentlemen, and are therefore perpetually engaged in trying to laugh it off.

On the other hand, the conversational autocrats of other days were far too dictatorial, and, in many cases, undoubtedly checked general conversation owing to a secret fear of incurring their displeasure and evoking some verbal castigation not at all conducive to social enjoyment.

The professional conversationalist, who in former days did really exist, has now long since passed away. To-day he would be voted a bore, for his social qualifications were not such as would render him popular in the modern world, in which every one likes to share in the conversation, which for the most part deals with trivialities.

The great talkers of old days, bold of speech and ruthlessly outspoken at times, were especially deft in making use of banter, a weapon of which, when necessary, they availed themselves with terrible effect. This banter, let it be understood, was quite a different thing from the chaff of to-day, which in most cases is little more than silly comment on personal peculiarities, or criticism of a very primitive and obvious kind which sometimes sinks to the level of childish teasing. A good maxim which should never be forgotten is that to chaff any one up to such a point that the victim loses his temper, places the assailant in a very awkward and uncomfortable position, whilst demonstrating his complete mental inefficiency in that particular line in which he has been attempting to indulge.

It should never be forgotten that one angry or even irritated individual will completely spoil a dinner-party. The difference between a clever talker and one who delights in saying things which embarrass and annoy is much the same

as that which exists between a first-class fencer and a bungling assassin.

In these days, when the art of *MUNRO OF NOVAR* conversation is little understood, it is no infrequent thing to encounter hosts and hostesses who wilfully check conversation by remarks, in many cases well meant, such as, "Now we will talk of something else," "Don't you think we have heard enough about that?" and other verbal stupidities which affect the good talker like an icy blast.

The necessity for such crude methods can never really exist, for it is perfectly easy to lead a conversation away from one topic to another by almost imperceptible gradations which do not entail that awful silence which is the solemn requiem of social enjoyment. After a pause of this kind general conversation is difficult to revive, and then it is that a bold and even an assertive talker is especially valuable in order to put every one at their ease. In connection with this subject I cannot help telling a little story which will exemplify what I mean.

Miss Gordon Cumming, a lady noted for her independence of speech, would at times make very apposite and amusing remarks. Years ago there was a certain Scotch gentleman, Munro of Novar, who was well known for his carelessness as to dress, which indeed amounted almost to eccentricity. He was, by the way, the possessor of a very fine collection of pictures, which were sold in order to help the Turks in their struggle against Russia in 1878, by his successor and heir, Mr. Butler Johnston, M.P., who was a warm and generous supporter of the Ottoman Empire. This

gentleman, I remember, created a great sensation by making a most admirable speech in the House of Commons, which at the time caused people to predict a great political future for him. His health, however, broke down and nothing more was heard of him, for, becoming an invalid, he withdrew from public life and died not very long afterwards of consumption. Munro of Novar was, as I have said, very unconventional in his attire, and usually managed to display a considerable amount of shirt between the ending of his waistcoat and the beginning of his trousers. This snowy space was one evening especially noticeable. During dinner, for some reason or other, an awful pause in the conversation, amounting practically to a dead silence, occurred, when Miss Gordon Cumming, raising her voice, suddenly remarked, "I beg to call the attention of the company to the very lucid interval between Novar's waistcoat and his trousers." This utterance, naturally provoking uproarious laughter, caused the chieftain in question to make the necessary adjustment in his dress, and put every one into a good humour.

The general level of conversation in the so-called society of modern days must, of necessity, be low, for society, or what passes for it, is now very large, whilst wealth is more welcome than intellect. Good conversation, therefore, is practically non-existent. The majority of people, indeed, would, I think, quite frankly admit their incompetence in this respect, perhaps adding that serious conversation is a bore, which is true enough when an attempt is made to indulge in it by those who have never learned anything and never wish to learn. To such the world appears much as it does to that