

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Dark Lady

Charles Higham

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Jennie Jerome was a controversial American society girl and mother of Britain's most revered statesman, Winston Churchill. A single-minded and dynamic woman, she was an early feminist, advocate of Irish independence, and, above all, was notorious for her promiscuity.

In *Dark Lady: Winston Churchill's Mother and Her World* Charles Higham draws from previously overlooked sources to provide much that is startlingly new about the remarkable and tempestuous life of Jennie Jerome. The book charts her luxurious New York upbringing, her eyebrow-raising entry into the British aristocracy through marriage to Lord Randolph Churchill, son of the Duke of Marlborough, her endless line of liaisons with men of vastly inferior years, and a very different sort of affair with the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII.

Passionately in love with life, expressive of her sexuality when women were supposed to hide it, beautiful and independent minded, Jennie Churchill was decades ahead of her time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Higham, a former *New York Times* feature writer, is the author of *Howard Hughes: The Secret Life*, one of the sources for the film *The Aviator*. His *Mrs Simpson: Secret Lives of the Duchess of Windsor*, has been a *Sunday Times* and *New York Times* bestseller and he has written bestselling biographies of Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis and Orson Welles.

Praise for *Dark Lady* by Charles Higham

‘*Dark Lady*, like all of Charles Higham’s biographies, is vivacious, sensational and revelatory. Jennie Churchill emerges as an intensely individual and passionate figure, and the book is indispensable reading for a full and proper understanding of her great son, Winston.’

Simon Callow

‘A fascinating biography, told with panache.’

YOU Magazine, *Mail on Sunday*

‘A vibrant look at the life of society beauty Jennie Jerome covering murder, espionage, love affairs and political machinations.’

Daily Express

‘Charles Higham’s biography of Mr Churchill’s irrepressible mama should come with a health warning – this may induce repetitive bouts of jaw-dropping . . . Unmissable stuff – so long as you take sensible precautions for your chin.’

Scottish Daily Record

‘Higham’s colourful tale is the stuff of fiction, featuring espionage and political manoeuvres of breathtaking audacity.’

Good Book Guide

‘A fascinating story about a neglected historical figure.’

Glasgow Evening Times

‘Charles Higham’s book offers a portrait of a remarkable woman and of the society and its dramas, in which the young Winston Churchill grew up.’

Leicester Mercury

‘This book talks about the remarkable, tempestuous life of controversial American society girl and mother of Winston Churchill, Jennie Jerome – feminist, advocate of Irish independence, and, above all, notoriously promiscuous. It

charts her luxurious New York upbringing, eyebrow-raising entry into the British aristocracy through marriage to Lord Randolph Churchill, her endless line of liaisons with much younger men and a very different sort of affair in the highest of places – with the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII (one of many kings and princes to win her affection). Finally, Higham reveals the woman for whom advancing age was never an obstacle to pursuing her wildest passions while retaining the favour of the Establishment. Her death in a household accident came at the dawn of the Swinging Twenties – a period that could have been written for her.'

Scottish Parliament/Politico's Bookstore

DARK LADY

Winston Churchill's Mother and Her World

Charles Higham



To Richard V Palafox and Dorris Halsey

Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower
We feel that we are greater than we know.

WORDSWORTH

CHAPTER ONE

IN SEVERE WINTER weather, on 9 January 1854, Jeanette Jerome was born in a modest, three-storey red-brick Greek Revival house at 8 Amity Street, Brooklyn, in the Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn Heights, NY.

The America of that time still had aspects of the frontier. Children were taught at a mother's knee or in schools where they used slates for writing; they were required to follow the religious and patriotic precepts of the ubiquitous McGuffey's Readers that taught literature in even the most remote communities, as well as the virtues of simple living, thrift, chastity before marriage and, above all, Americanism. Geography was taught in song, as each child memorised lyrics set to music, referring to every capital city and state in the nation. At graduation, children were expected to deliver speeches extolling the school, parents, the town, and God.

The horse-drawn plough was paramount, and wheat was still scythed; it was an age without any of the physical comforts taken for granted in the twenty-first century. There were no refrigerators, no electric light or heat, no antibiotics, and countless infant deaths. There was not much proper surgery, and amputations were often carried out without chloroform. Cities were dirty and overcrowded, with great, teeming tenements for the poor. Clothing was heavy and encumbering, in order to conceal the human body and prevent feelings of desire; in summer, the woollen suits and dresses proved painful, and no man, even at home, and no matter how poor, would think of coming to meals without jacket and tie. Even swimming costumes concealed their owners' physiques.

It would not be until three years after Jennie's death in 1921 that radio would be a reality; television lay much further in the future. In the mid-1850s, more than ninety years ahead of that medium's wide popular use, and forty years before the cinema was even thought of, a telephone was something that could not be imagined. The theatre was largely restricted to the rich, and opera an extreme luxury; for the vast majority of Americans, evening entertainment consisted of families gathered around pianos and singing, or, if the religious rules were not too tight, innocent games of cards. Prayers were said every morning, attendance at church was at least twice a week, and no meal could begin without grace being said. When young men left home there was the neighbourhood saloon after a hard day's work, and for women of means, sewing bees or charity work.

Working hours were long and crushing; in factories now mushrooming across the country, young women toiled on assembly lines or stitched clothes, where a pierced finger could result in instant dismissal. Many with no home slept on cotton waste in obscure corners of industrial plants until removed by business police.

For Jennie, these harsh realities were little known. Brooklyn was an airy, comparatively clean oasis in industrial New York State, swept by salty Atlantic winds that brought relief in summer and gusts of snow in winter, creating a paradise for children as they made snowmen or pelted each other with snowballs.

Street vendors made a cheerful racket, selling chestnuts, wrapped sweets, bunches of flowers, toys and ribbons. Several mail deliveries a day brought greetings, invitations to parties or birth announcements. Children believed that Santa Claus had a reindeer sleigh and came down chimneys from the sky, and that babies were brought by a stork.

Against the rural innocence of a great nation still in the making, though, could be set the unbridled corruption of the financial centres and at the seat of government in

Washington. There was no limit to the election fixing, manipulation of the stock market, buying of Congressmen and senators, or dark injustice in the courts for those who were not rich. Insurance, shipping, railroads, road development and big-city buildings were all riddled with deception and double-cross. And Leonard W Jerome, Jennie's father, his name whitewashed ever since, was among the most corrupt of all.

He was a genially ruthless manipulator of Wall Street, who used the press to raise or lower the value of stocks, and whose almost daily shifts of fortune kept his household in a constant state of uproar.

Of British origin, he could trace his family back to sixteenth-century Cornwall; Cornishmen and women were traditionally famous for their dark skin and romantic temperaments. Early Jerome immigrants had settled in New England: Rhode Island at first, then in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. The story that Jennie's mother, Clarissa Hall Jerome, was part-Iroquois native American has added lustre to the family legend, fostered not least by Winston Churchill, but Anna Baker, the ancestor stated to have Indian blood, was in fact born and raised in Nova Scotia, where no Iroquois lived.

For generations, the Jeromes retained the flinty courage and steadfastness of Cornishmen, fond of horses and cattle, and of the harsh life of the sea. After much wandering, Jennie's paternal grandparents settled in the small, brick-and-clapboard town of Pompey Hill, in New York State, where they raised eleven children in a house made of planks, with a small outbuilding for raising livestock, most of which wound up on the family dinner table at meals.

As soon as they were old enough, each boy and girl would have to shovel snow, clear mud with their bare hands, chop logs, clean the house, wash dishes and chase off marauding animals. When they were only ten, the boys were armed with buckshot rifles; there were often wolves about.

The patriarch Isaac was a Bible-bashing tyrant, a stony, implacable despot whose word was law; his whip ruled every child. Every morning there was private worship, and each meal was preceded not only by grace but by a confession of sins.

Music other than religious was, Isaac held, the devil's own work and once when Leonard dared to play his second-hand fiddle on the Sabbath, Isaac seized it and smashed it to pieces. From then on, thrashings or no thrashings, Leonard and his brother Lawrence refused to worship God, and announced that they no longer believed in such a thing as Divine Providence.

When Leonard was admitted to the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) as a tall and strapping sophomore of nineteen, he behaved like so many young men who had been raised in morose and straitened circumstances: rebelling against authority, he became a card and a character. He once dragged a reluctant mule up three flights of stairs at Nassau Hall, and he stole street signs, gateposts and henhouses from the nearby villages and made a bonfire of them on the back campus. He ruined his chemistry professor's experiments by switching solutions in the laboratory bottles and test tubes and, to show his everlasting contempt for religion, he smeared the Prayer Hall with tar.

While Leonard was at the college, he was involved in an incident that became legendary on the night before 4 July 1835. To celebrate Independence Day, he and his patriotic friends stole a cannon, moved by the attacking British to New Brunswick during the Revolutionary War, and dragged it by horse-cart until it fell into a field. The youths left it there until they could bring up a sturdier cart, then returned it to its original position at the college, where it remains today.

Vividly emerging in debates at the famous Whig Hall, Leonard, himself a Whig, had to leave when his father's

funds failed to meet a rise in fees; instead, he went to Union College, Schenectady. He was soon dubbed a 'potboiler', a constant nuisance, inattentive and feigning illness to avoid classes. He would never have obtained his BA degree if his influential uncle, Judge Hiram K Jerome, had not pulled the necessary strings.

Once they graduated, Leonard and Lawrence joined the staff of Judge Jerome's Palmyra, NY offices, but they were far too restive to take up legal careers. The young men met attractive sisters, Catherine and Clarissa Hall, and married them, though several years apart. The rules of courtship called for attending church services together, joining in family events such as singing songs at the piano, or seeing who could peel apples the fastest.

Tall, rangy and athletic, with square shoulders, long, lean physiques and flourishing moustaches, the genial brothers were immensely popular. By contrast with Jerome's laughing, charming extroversion and good cheer, his wife Clarissa was static, chill and snobbish. Her beauty – black, shiny hair parted in the middle, finely chiselled features and a perfect figure – was not accompanied by sensuality. There was no hint of the alleged Iroquois background in this puritanical descendant of God-fearing colonials: in fact, one of her ancestors had wiped out an entire tribe of Pequot Indians.

Unlike the Jeromes, the Halls were gentlefolk and Clarissa never let anyone forget it. Her parents had died within three months of each other when she was two, and this painful knowledge propelled her into self-sufficiency as an orphan.

Another anguish that drove her deep into herself was that her older sister Jane Anne Hall was insane, and lived and died in the Hartford, Connecticut Lunatic Asylum. In those times insanity in a family was a disgrace, a cause not of compassion but of calumny. Almost equally painful was the fact that the children were not adopted by one couple but

were split up among several, all of whom denuded the children's land inheritances to pay for their upbringing.

Thriving in various enterprises in Rochester, Leonard and Lawrence started up a printing press and, keener Whigs than ever, published a polemical newspaper, the *Daily American*, which offered glowing support to Millard Fillmore, the vice president at the time, who had much in common with them.

He also was born in New York State, and was sprung from a long line of itinerant farming folk; he also had toiled as a legal clerk, but had gone on to become a successful attorney; as a young Congressman he had supported the growing science of telegraphy, in which, then and later, the brothers invested. When, on 9 July 1850, he succeeded to the presidency on the death in office of Zachary Taylor, he at once took care of the Jeromes.

Knowing that Lawrence was a tough businessman, he made him deputy collector of debts and taxes of the city of Rochester; knowing of Clarissa's longing to go abroad and Leonard's love of fine arts and music, he sent him as Consul to the Adriatic independent state of Trieste, a great centre of culture. The Jeromes took with them their daughter Clarita and her friend from Rochester, seven-year-old Lillie Greenough, daughter and granddaughter of men prominent in the history of Vassar Women's College; later, she would be taught by the poet Longfellow and would be one of Jennie Jerome's closest companions.

When Franklin Pierce replaced Millard Fillmore as president in March, 1853, the Jeromes' days in Trieste were numbered. Pierce, under the malign influence of the Kentucky anarchist George Nicholas Sanders, was busy placing controversial figures in European embassies and consulates; he was bent on disrupting the old royalist regimes. There could be no place in such a conspiracy for an unsophisticated Rochester newspaperman, and Leonard was withdrawn.

It was a blow, but there were larger shocks ahead. The oldest Jerome boy, Isaac Jr, was butchered in a rebel uprising in Nicaragua, and the family purchases of paintings and sculptures were lost when a ship foundered off the coast of Spain.

Leonard and his family moved bag and baggage into his brother Addison's house at 292 Henry Street, Brooklyn Heights. Lawrence was also there briefly, with Catherine and his boys Roswell and Lovell, before he moved to Manhattan, where he had started up as a stockbroker.

When Clarissa became pregnant with her second child, she and Leonard, who had decided to join Lawrence in business, moved to the row house at 8 (today 197) Amity Street, where Jeanette was born.

She was not born, as has been stated repeatedly, at 292 Henry Street; that, as stated, was the home of her Uncle Addison (and of his wife Julia whose nickname was Jennie, hence Jeanette's use of it for the rest of her life).

There is no record of her baptism. Normally, the eminent clergyman Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, writer of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whose church was just a short walk away, christened the children of the rich; it was the ultimate social requirement in any family. But his records show no mention of a Jerome and there are no other entries in any church. Some records were destroyed and others removed by a renegade minister in a local quarrel in the Presbyterian community, but the absence of a mention in any newspaper makes it clear that Leonard Jerome, as a happy heathen, overruled Clarissa in the matter, and – according to the then-current orthodoxy – risked the child going to limbo with dogs and cats, by not having her baptised.

Among the errors often repeated in books on Jennie is that Jeanette was nicknamed for the famous soprano Jenny Lind, known as the Swedish Nightingale. Ralph G Martin wrote in his 1969 biography, 'Jerome had renewed his earlier

[romantic] relationship with [Lind] and only months after Jennie's birth did Clara [sic] realise why [her husband] had insisted on the name.' This is incorrect; there is no evidence to support his even meeting Lind.

For years, the star had been deeply and exclusively involved with her handsome, brilliant and devoted young piano accompanist Otto Goldschmidt, who converted from Judaism for her sake. By 1852, when the Jeromes left for Trieste, they were already married. They also went that year to Europe, where they remained happy and faithful for years. Certainly they were not in Trieste, or on board ships on which the Jeromes were passengers.

The day Jennie was born, a blizzard had just blown out, leaving piles of snow several feet deep. The night before, two Manhattan landmarks had burned down: the Metropolitan Hall and the Lafarge Hotel. The conflagrations sent clouds of smoke, mingled with chimney soot and burning ashes, over the city, as far as Brooklyn Heights across the river, blackening the sky as Jennie uttered her first cries.

When she took her first ferry ride to the metropolis, it was an adventure into another world. From the quiet Brooklyn backwater the visitor was plunged into an inferno of noise, dirt and overcrowding. A ride in a hansom cab was perilous; the driver had to thrash his horse through a bedlam of shouting mid-street vendors, beggars and tradesmen's carts. Crowds, talking at the tops of their voices, charged from sidewalk to sidewalk, and there was a jumble of vermin-ridden horse-drawn omnibuses, open to all weathers, dangerous swaying coaches, frustrated and angry mounted police, and frequent outbursts of violence.

During Jennie's teenage years, learning French, sewing, needlework, singing, pony-riding and ice-skating, she soon emerged as a 'character'. She was no infant Florence Nightingale, mending dolls that other children had torn apart. She was strong-willed, sharp, single-minded and

passionately in love with life. She adored her laughing Blackbeard the Pirate of a father far more than she cared for her still, chaste and humourless mother, and she and her sister Clarita were very close.

Insecurity was the very air she breathed. In two short years, Leonard became a lion of Wall Street, a brutal stockjobber and manipulator; one day he would come home to announce he had made a killing, the next that he had almost been ruined. Even as a child, Jennie learned that playing the stock market was like playing poker for the highest of stakes and that her father was the ultimate in gamblers.

Leonard used a typical ploy of his time: he would have his friend James Gordon Bennett Jr, son of the owner of the *New York Herald*, announce in his newspaper that a company was in trouble; shareholders would sell the stock, then Jerome would buy it at the bottom of its price. Then he would have his other friend, Henry Jarvis Raymond, owner of the *New York Times*, publish a statement that the same company was doing well and that all previous reports were false; as a result, the stock rose and he made a killing.

These newspaper geniuses ruled Jennie's childhood: Bennett, unfashionably clean-shaven, strapping, with a great yoke of shoulders, battering any man who stood in his way with a pair of powerful fists; Raymond, tall and burly, running a little to fat, with a *farouche* countenance almost hidden behind a formidable shrubbery of black moustache and beard, and a shock of hair that resisted all efforts with brush and comb.

At offices off Wall Street and a shared house at 33 West 19th, Leonard and Lawrence flourished, despite the collapse of the New York and New Haven Railroad, in which they had an interest, and of several banks; it was only when their favourite Union Trust Company folded that Leonard decided it might be prudent to move to Europe for a time.

With their three daughters – Jennie had another sister now, Camille – the Jeromes spent two years in Paris. They were, as American nouveaux riches, received far more warmly than in New York, where they were emphatically not included in Mrs Astor's top Four Hundred – the curdled cream of corrupt East Coast society. They returned in 1858; a new daughter, Leonie was born in 1859. In his colourful (and indispensable) *Lights and Shadows of New York Life*, the social historian James D McCabe described the life of a child of a wealthy family of the time. At six, Jennie would have been taught deportment, the correct order of knives, forks and spoons at the family table, the proper way to drink tea with little finger extended, and the way to greet visitors, standing when they entered a room until given permission to sit.

Learning how to stitch an embroidered alphabet was an essential accomplishment for a child; French was already, after the Jeromes' trip to Paris, a second language. The classics were required early reading: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Walden: or Life in the Woods* were texts along with the McGuffey Readers for children between six and nine. Piano and voice lessons were mandatory; from the beginning, Jennie was an accomplished pianist and singer.

In addition, a child was required to learn the correct order of a household: the butler came first, followed by the housekeeper and the maids, from ladies' maid to kitchen hand, down to the humblest drudge. Every inch of the house had to be cleansed of New York dust and every floor polished every day; sheets must be changed daily, and washed in the basement-area copper, thence to be folded away in the linen closets in strictest rotation.

The parlour was the protecting womb, a shelter from the noise and dirt of a barbaric metropolis. This centre of activities was traditionally crammed with antiques in the British Victorian manner, the tables groaning with gewgaws, the heavily wallpapered walls covered in a display of the

best art money could buy. Thick velvet curtains shut out the wicked street; they were often pulled close all day.

Christmas and New Year were visiting days: first, the children would accompany their parents to visit the poor, bringing gifts of food in wicker baskets and small amounts of cash; then they would attend well-to-do households with salutations; back at home, they would receive the rich until very late at night. Everyone knew everybody else and the slightest hint of scandal was a subject for whispers across potted palms or behind fans at society soirées and balls. It would never do for the rich to let their promiscuities be known to the bourgeoisie; an illusion of propriety, however fragile, was spun like a delicate spiderweb over the sordid truth.

Jennie's first major social event was on 12 October 1860, when she was six: a welcome for the Prince of Wales, who was on a private visit to promote Anglo-American relations; Jennie and her sisters were allowed to watch from a balcony. Three thousand people had been invited, but two thousand more crashed the party. As Jennie watched aghast, the weight of the huge throng causing the hastily improvised dance floor to collapse, leaving New York society in a heap of flying skirts, spilled jewels, rumpled cutaways and ruined uniforms.

In 1861, Leonard Jerome became entangled in a business adventure that would one day almost cost him his career. Fear of imminent Civil War led him to plunge a substantial amount of cash into the corrupt Pacific Mail Steamship Company, which ran cargo ships around Cape Horn to California, avoiding any trade between the states of North and South and picking up and delivering produce to Latin American countries. James Gordon Bennett Jr again proved indispensable: he published a statement in the *New York Herald* that the Pacific's crack mail packet, the *John L Stephens*, wasn't seaworthy; the stock fell and Leonard and

Bennett bought it at bottom; days later, the *Herald* printed an apology and a correction. The stock soared, and both men made a killing. By 1863, Pacific Mail had risen from \$64 to \$329 a share.

At the outbreak of Civil War in 1861, Jennie was seven; and seven-year-old rich children were in those days allowed certain privileges. They could carry pocket money in purses or pockets; they could have a front-door latch key; they could take trips with children of their own age; they could dabble in painting and sculpture; they could express opinions at mealtime. A twirl of a parasol, or a coquettish glance at boys while walking out with governesses, were not considered improper. A child of Jennie's age and background invariably had a pigskin or Russian leather purse, a solid silver and satin-lined needlework box, and matching African ivory hairbrushes; her mirrors would be made of the finest antique silver. And when she travelled, even a short distance out of town, she would be accompanied by a red morocco-lined, brass-studded and fitted travelling trunk.

Jennie was a beautiful girl: she had her mother's dark hair, her father's pink, glowing skin, and sparkling amber eyes whose colour seemed to change with every shift of light. She was challenging and strong; already a tiny adult.

When the Civil War prevented shipments from Paris of fashionable gowns, supplied by the houses of Paquin and Worth, the New York dressmakers and milliners came into their own. The vast marble palace of AT Stewart's Emporium on the muddy, crowded corner of Broadway and Chambers Street was a wonderland for a child. The toy and doll departments were enormous and glowing, crammed with delectable items. The clothing departments, shamelessly copying Worth originals, offered a young lady hours of pleasure, with staff like a sultan's slaves and gas-lit mirrors that flattered both face and figure. No female (woman or child) of society wore the same dress twice; changes had to be made at a rate of at least three times a day, with maids

at the ready to deal in bustles, hooped skirts and corsets. Flounces of Brussels lace, lace overskirts, velour and piqué, Swiss muslin, Indian muslin, Lyons silk . . . A dressmaker's bill could run into figures approaching the equivalent today of half a million dollars a year.

Leonard's attitude to Abraham Lincoln was ambiguous. His lawyers, Samuel Barlow, Jeremiah Larocque and partners, were outright Copperheads, opponents of the Washington administration and enemies of the President because of his high-handedness in disposing of the right of habeas corpus – the right of an accused person to be brought before a court – and his prevention of trade arrangements with Europe through tariff and blockade. Jerome's friend, August Belmont, as agent for the Rothschild banking empire in Europe, was similarly unhappy. Millard Fillmore hated Lincoln with all his heart. Jerome was also, like his brothers, still a Whig.

But much as he may have belonged to a powerful anti-Lincoln faction, Leonard would, at all costs, be loyal to the Union. He supplied money for warships, he raised funds at a mass meeting at Utica and he entered, albeit ill-advisedly, into a Lincolnian scheme to give an example to the South in the proper way to treat blacks.

On Lincoln's orders dated 31 December 1862, he shipped African-Americans to a Liberia-like colony on the Isle of Vache off the coast of Haiti, where they would enjoy self-rule in democratic conditions. However, the resettlement agent absconded with the money, leaving the settlers stranded. At the same time, he engaged an African-American nursemaid for his daughters, the colourfully dressed and beloved Dobbie, who accompanied the family for years, on travels out of New York, and eventually in Europe.

Leonard saw no reason not to profit from the war: he arranged, through his own private telegraphic company, to receive inside information from the battlefronts before

either government or press: THE BOY IS BACK meant a reversal; THE BOY IS BETTER a victory. This schoolboy code enabled him to buy and sell stock accordingly and added considerably to his riches. Since he was helping to finance the Union, there were no complaints from Washington.

By 1862, at the age of eight, it was time for Jennie to go to boarding school. Soon after the family moved to their own house at 30 West 21st Street, she was enrolled at Miss Lucy Green's exclusive establishment for girls, at 1 Fifth Avenue, on the northeastern corner of fashionable Washington Square.

The red-brick building stood on the site of a former execution ground, where convicts had been hanged in public. Its atmosphere was appropriately grim: the hatchet-faced Miss Green, dressed in the severe grey costume of a Quaker woman, ran the school with all the freezing severity of Miss Scatcherd at Lowood in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

The days began with a harsh bell that summoned the pupils to clean up their rooms and make their beds. They had to carry heavy chairs, placed as far away as possible, to the dining room, then fetch china and cutlery from the kitchen and lay them neatly on the table. At eight o'clock they would return this tableware to the kitchen, wash and dry it, and take the chairs back to their original location.

Mornings were taken up first with attendance at the Church of the Ascension, reached through sunshine, snow or rainstorm, where the bleak old theologian Dr George B Cheever would give fire-and-brimstone sermons, seeking to strike terror in the girls, warning of the fearful consequences if they should stray from the narrow path of virtue.

Back at school, the young ladies had to repeat the morning sermon, which they were supposed to have memorised by heart, and recite from sacred texts. After a meagre lunch they had to study French, German, Latin, Greek and Italian, while all conversation had to be in French. Jennie and the other pupils had to spend long hours in the

evenings at lectures given by Lucy Green's influential older brother Andrew on Latin literature or such abstruse subjects as fourteenth-century jurisprudence; on Saturday afternoons, at the New York Society and Astor Libraries, she had to memorise ancient Greek manuscripts.

Severe though the training was, it gave Jennie a matchless grounding in politics, languages and history that is unthinkable in the modern world, and would stand her in good stead in her future career in England. And she also learned about newspapers from Henry J Raymond, who lectured at the school on the press in wartime, and from Elihu Root, the young future statesman, who taught political science. His looks were such that to subdue fluttering hearts, he had to be accompanied to his talks by a repressive and glaring chaperone.

Both at school and at home, Jennie continued her devotion to musical studies. She was encouraged by her father, who shared her addiction, a fact that has led successive chroniclers to state that at the time he was both the lover and sponsor of the great Italian-American diva Adelina Patti, then on the brink of her spectacular international career, and whom he and August Belmont presented at the Academy of Music at her debut in November 1859. But he had no romantic interest in the sour, plain, contentious future star; she was locked in battles with her father and manager, whom she later sued for misusing her, and by the time she was supposed to be in love with Leonard Jerome, she had already left for Europe, where she remained for many years.

Yet another musical error is that Jennie's closest friend of the Civil War period, the gifted mezzo-soprano Minnie Hauk, who would one day rival Lind and Patti in fame, was Jerome's illegitimate daughter. This was impossible: conceived in Europe to a German carpenter and his laundress wife, Amalia Hauck was born during their very brief stopover in New York on 16 November 1852; they

moved at once to the newly growing town of Sumner, in the Kansas heartland, a hamlet so fragile that years later it blew away in a tornado, leaving no trace.

The parents, who had run a lodging house, made their way by riverboat to New Orleans, where Minnie won approval in concerts for the Civil War relief fund. Sent by adoring citizens to New York, she was adopted jointly by Jerome and August Belmont as sponsors; she was trained by Jennie's own teacher, the great Achille Ernani.

In July 1863, in record-breaking heat, the Draft Riots tore New York City apart; as the mob pillaged, raped and murdered, Leonard rushed to the defence of Henry J Raymond's *Times*, of which he was now a director. With laughing enthusiasm and deadly aim, he manned a Gatling gun and shot at the mob through the windows; to his and Raymond's surpassing delight, he drove the rioters into ransacking their competitor, Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. It was necessary for Leonard to get his family out of town and away from danger, so he bundled them onto a train for Newport, Rhode Island, where so many of his ancestors had settled, finding them a temporary home on breezy Narragansett Avenue.

In those days, Newport was a quiet, unassuming backwater that offered airy clapboard houses, tree-lined streets and a bright waterfront where a few small yachts tossed prettily at anchor. August Belmont had built a house there, and so had Peter Lorillard Ronalds, eccentric heir of a tobacco dynasty, whose enchantingly spirited wife Fanny adored Jennie and her sisters and took them on donkey-cart rides by the sea; Jennie and she would be lifelong friends.

Sadly the successful escape from New York was quickly overshadowed. Despite its fresh look, Newport was plagued by bad plumbing, supplied by Lorillard himself, and soon dysentery ravaged the city, followed by typhus. Camille, Jennie's younger sister, succumbed at the age of seven years and eight months; it was a devastating blow to the

family. And Jerome clearly remained unsettled by it; after buying a \$20,000 lot and beach rights, he sold them in less than two years on 2 June 1865. He was never able to make Newport his home, and his future visits were few.

The family found compensations. As a major fundraiser for the Union cause, a group headed by the Belmonts, with Clarissa Jerome and Fanny Ronalds on the ladies' committee, raised over a million dollars for the United States Sanitary Commission's New York City Metropolitan Fair. From January 1864, the backers kept hammering away at Mayor Charles G Gunther to arrange for city buildings to house the fair stalls. At last, he handed over an empty structure near Tammany Hall on the north side of Union Square, and another on West 14th Street. At the same time, Leonard was in the process of completing a grand faux-French chateau on 26th Street and Madison Square, designed by Tammany Hall's architect Thomas R Jackson at a cut price of \$55,000 (about \$7,000,000 today). The five-storey extravagance had a slanted roof in the style of Louis XIV's François Mansart, a marble portico, a marble-floored entrance hall and a grand ballroom that rivalled August Belmont's on Fifth Avenue. The stables where Jerome kept his horses were carpeted wall-to-wall, and he had walnut and African mahogany fixtures. Upstairs, Leonard built an elegantly appointed theatre that he lent to the Sanitary Commission for theatrical and operatic performances.

The grand opening of the fair on 4 April 1864 was a tremendous occasion. A public holiday had been declared and all of New York not opposed to the war turned out to greet a procession of 11,600 soldiers marching to a brass band and a chorus singing 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. Flags flew from every building and the harbours were alive with horns tooting and sailors cheering as they poured ashore. The Jerome family manned a booth on Union Square; everything was sold from captured Confederate

flags all the way up to family jewels; Jennie and Clarita were there to sell to other children.

They were also present to see Fanny Ronalds, the exemplar of beauty and style, appear in a tableau vivant with Mrs Caroline Belmont at the 14th Street Floral Temple; later, Ronalds sang at the Theatre San Jeronimo over the stables, in the quartet from *Rigoletto*. It was a long festivity of excitement for Jennie, and even Miss Lucy Green could not deny her days of leave to attend it.

CHAPTER TWO

LIKE SO MANY men of his generation, Leonard Jerome saw his future in railroads. It was his dream, shared with his wife and children, to bring trains into the heart of Manhattan, and preferably close to his own residence at West 26th Street. His first move was to join the New York City Board of Aldermen known as the forty thieves, and owned outright by 'Boss' William Marcy Tweed; that Democrat operator's 6-foot, 300-pound figure and flaring temper dominated all meetings. The Board sold franchises in streetcars, markets, department and dry-goods stores, and now railroads - and smashed all attempted legislation that threatened their plans.

Armed by backing from Tweed and up to his eyes in cheerful corruption, Jerome, who also had presidential support because of his paying for Union battleships, army equipment and uniforms, set out to double-cross the formidable Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, supreme tycoon of the age, whose approach to business dealings was well known. For example, when flagged down by one of the skippers of his yachting fleet that he must at once return to make another killing on Wall Street, he would order full steam ahead, and any small craft that got in his vessel's way was cut through and sunk, leaving the crew floundering.

Jerome had invested heavily in the New York and New Haven Railroad, which had started to penetrate the metropolis in partnership with Vanderbilt's Harlem line. NY & NH supplied the rolling stock, while the commodore provided the tracks. Jerome could see that if he built a track of his own, he would no longer have to share the profits with the Vanderbilts. Acting in secret, he personally snapped up,

for \$300 an acre, a stretch of land that could be used to provide such a line: Saw Mill River Valley, in Lower Westchester County, including the derelict Bathgate Farm, and he began laying tracks under cover of darkness.

Vanderbilt had an army of spies and he soon found out about this. He strode into the offices of the New York and New Haven when Jerome was out and bought up the board of directors as well as all of the common and preferred stock. This left Jerome facing ruin with hundreds of useless acres, as Vanderbilt had the rails pulled up and the plan abandoned. But then, with his horse-loving daughters clearly in mind, Jerome found a solution.

New York City needed a new racetrack for the fashionable set, and Jerome had only to watch Jennie and Clarita happily cantering about his Bathgate Farm property to know how much they would love the idea. But how could he get society to come from the heart of Manhattan to the track? The elite, with their cavalcade of carriages, must be able to get across the Harlem river and it had no bridge, only the old, jerry-built, collapsing one at Macombs' Dam. A brand-new road and bridge would have to be provided, but the cost would be crushing – even for a Jerome. He found a characteristic solution. He went to see the mayors of two nearby towns, Morisane and West Farms, and talked them into floating city bonds, at two per cent, maturing in two hundred years, to pay for the bridge and road which, he persuaded them, would bring them riches and prestige. Through advertising in his *New York Times* and in Bennett's *Herald* the issue was sold out in a week. And so the road known as Central Avenue was laid down, and the bridge was rapidly built.

With increasing investments in railroads, Leonard began a regular column in the *Times*, running almost every day from 21 December 1864, recommending the public to buy railroad stock. To eliminate a competitor, he denounced the

Erie Railroad Company on 15 January 1865, accusing its owners of illegal stock trading, market manipulation and issuing false prospectuses (a clear case of the pot calling the kettle black). Anxious to keep in with the government when a Congressional investigation into his activities was threatened, he soothed the troubled waters by urging his readers to snap up government bonds.

There can be no doubt that Jennie was, even at ten, an avid reader of his column; indeed, it is certain that reading it at home was mandatory. She remained even more passionately fond of her father than ever and he somehow talked Lucy Green into breaking the school rules of Sunday worship so he could take his daughter on the famous weekend society parades through Central Park. In gaudy calèches and four-in-hands, watched by cheering crowds, the peers of New York would ride in all weathers led by Jerome, Peter Lorillard Ronalds, and August Belmont, the spanking horses scrubbed and polished to a fault, the carriage doors painted with the owners' colours, and the entire gaudy procession guarded by Chief of Detective John M Young's hand-picked, mounted police.

Jennie rode proudly with her father on the box seat, adoring him as he cracked his whip, his top hat barely staying on his head in the high winds, his flourish of mustachios the bushiest in New York. His carriage was black-bodied with bright-red wheels, the blue-and-white Jerome colours vividly displayed on the doors.

Then came the grand opening of the Jerome Park Racetrack, dedicated to Clarissa, Clarita and an ecstatic Jennie, on 22 September 1866. Despite threats of rain, the sun shone brilliantly as Jennie and her family left West 26th Street that afternoon in their four-in-hand, cutting through street crowds along Fifth Avenue to Central Park, then up Eighth Avenue across the newly completed Harlem River Macombs' Dam Bridge by way of Central Avenue in the