



HINTON ST. GEORGE.

THE HOME OF THE EARLS POULETT.

It is a bright day in early spring—the ash-buds still look quite black in the front of March—as we mount slowly the steep hill that leads to the quiet village of Hinton St. George. The fresh air breathes out vigour, but still we rest near the top to look back over the lovely browns and purples of the plain below dotted with red-tiled barns and towers of churches—Lopen, Merriott, South Petherton—built of the soft Ham stone of the county.

The road we go by has a rare charm, with tall ash-hedges not yet lopped to the shabby level demanded by the new injunctions. The crescent bending ash saplings with their ebony tips look to be some guard of halberdiers ready to marshal whichever earl eventually wins the day and comes to the old home to claim his heritage.

Primrose buds look out from the hedge-rows, but there is not yet much cheerful colour in the landscape. After the ash saplings come elder-bushes, whose boughs are just breaking in a sad green tinged with purple. The only warm colour that Dame Nature has taken on her brush is the deep blue of the hills that lie beyond Seavington and Shepton Beauchamp.

Busy folk tramping through noisy London streets are much exercised just now about the law-suit that is to be fought over this far-off spot. What a contrast there is between the

distant city and this still village so remote that no builder has spoiled the quiet street, the houses with latticed panes and generous bow-windows, the old stone cross with its mutilated figure, and the long low stone farm with green palings sparkling in the sunlight!

Yet it was in the London church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields that Queen Mary Stuart's gaoler, Sir Amyas Poulett, was buried in 1588, and this most remarkable of a long line of Pouletts was not brought to Hinton—perhaps up this very road—till 1728, when no room could be found for him in Gibbs' new church. This transference seems to form a link between the busy city and the quiet village.

Another bend brings us to the beautiful perpendicular church with its brightly gilded weather-cock dented by the shots of a past earl, who used to practise shooting at the vane from the adjoining gardens.

Very lovely is the old churchyard, with the great cedars in the garden beyond for a background, and the tall tower, characteristic of the county, softened into the mellowest greyish yellow and flecked with lichens. We linger over the grave-stones, of which many have some link with the Pouletts, and notice the curious Somersetshire name of Tryphena on the tomb of one old servant who had lived in "exemplary servitude" with the family for

forty-four years, dying in 1801. On an altar-tomb, with date 1691, is the curious inscription—

"Elizabeth Powlet lies interred here
A spotless corpse, a corps from scandal
clere.
Deny her not the trouble of your eye,
She a saint in Heaven free from misery,"
etc.

Over the pretty turf crosses, which are a peculiarity of this churchyard, a gay peacock walks, very unconscious that he is the old emblem of that immortality which shall survive "when all that seems shall suffer shock."

Through the deep porch we pass into the church where the pallid marble monuments of many Pouletts go far to overpower the little building, but are relieved by the warm tones of the pinkish fawn stone roof of the chancel, the tender yellow of the Ham stone columns, and the unassuming white plaster of the walls. A beautiful window by Clayton and Bell sends red and purple lights along the stone floor that rest on the heads of little Elizabethan Pouletts who kneel in prayerful line beneath their placid parents in ruff and doublet, seeking—

"For past transgressions to atone
By saying endless prayers in stone."

We do not linger long over the virtues of the earls of last century, though we are amused at the wire-drawn periods of the epitaph to the Honourable Anne Poulett, fourth son of the first Earl Poulett, to whom Queen Anne was godmother. A suite of rooms was prepared for the Queen in the great house hidden in its cedars, and her bed used to be shown there; but death called her to follow her eighteen dead babies before the visit came to pass. She stood sponsor for the fourth son of the first earl and named him Anne just as she did Lord Anne Hamilton, the third son of the Jacobite duke who was killed by Lord Mohun in the famous Hyde Park duel described by Thackeray in *Esmond*. Lord Anne Poulett's epitaph tells us that his "sedate fortitude, propriety of judgment, and universal knowledge, could not avert that death which tore him from his afflicted family"!

As we mount some steps into the Earl's great pew, upholstered in red cloth, we pass a severely simple pulpit which is so in harmony with the church that it seems to melt into it, and leave all to the eloquence of the preacher. The low stone rail, bound with fair worked brass, recalls George Herbert's words about the reading-desk and pulpit in his church of Layton Ecclesia, "for he would often say Prayer and Preaching, being equally useful, might agree like brethren and have an equal honour and estimation." The red pew is spoiled by a very ugly window which, happily, is so far back from the main aisle of the church that it does not spoil the general effect. A little door leads us down into a space which

was perhaps once the Lady Chapel, and which contains many monuments of great interest.

Much might be written about the early Paulets from Pawlet, near Bridgwater, and their descendant who wedded a Deneband, and so came to Hinton St. George; but in this family the chief interest centres in the early sixteenth century and the age of Elizabeth. In the mailed warriors under the north wall with their dames in curious head-dresses we see probably the warlike Sir Amias, who helped defeat Lambert Simnel at Newark in the days of Henry VII., built much at Hinton, and left his mark on the Middle Temple in London, where chiefly he lived. Beyond lies his son Sir Hugh, who helped Henry VIII. in his French war with Francis I., and is said to have put Wolsey in the stocks when he was a youth at Lymington School. This Sir Hugh perhaps helped to bring misfortune on the house, for he had the ill-fated office laid upon him of being supervisor of all the manors, etc., lately belonging to Richard Whiting, last abbot of Glastonbury.

But by far the most interesting monument in the whole church is that in the west wall of this chapel to the memory of Sir Amyas Poulett, son of Sir Hugh, and gaoler of Mary Queen of Scots during the last two years of her life. It is seldom indeed that so much personal character is expressed in marble as in the curious veins of this pale alabaster. One would think that many a Londoner must have paused, struck by the stern even irritable face, before the monument was removed from St. Martin's, where it was situate so long under the same roof as Nell Gwynne and

many another notable. How strangely it brings us into touch with past times to look at this strong face of the man who had so much to put up with! There he lies motionless in ruff and doublet upon a marble pillow, and yet he moved in the stirring world we know so well from Froude's vivid pages and Alexandre Dumas' bustling novels. In 1576 he was sent ambassador by Elizabeth to that frivolous court of Henry III., the king of favourites, who lives again in the pages of *Chicot the Jester*, with his swarms of little spaniels and his effeminate hands smeared with cream, surrounded by the plots and counter-plots of the Guises and the aged queen-mother Catherine of Medici.

Whilst Sir Amyas was in Paris, the negotiations were afoot for marrying Queen Elizabeth, a woman of forty-six, to the French King Henry's brother Alençon, Duke of Anjou, a lad of twenty-three, "a small brown creature, deeply pock-marked, with a large head, a knobbed nose, and a hoarse croaking voice." When he came to visit her in 1579, Elizabeth pretended to like him and called him her "grenouille," her frog-prince, but the English nation had not forgotten the massacre of St. Bartholomew seven short years ago, and would have none of him. Sir Philip Sidney wrote out his indignation in an honest memorial to the Queen, and then retired for some time from Court to Wilton, where he wrote the *Arcadia*. On Stubbs, a Puritan pamphleteer, who opposed the match, the Queen vented her spleen by having his hand chopped off by the common hangman. "Long live Queen Elizabeth!"



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cried the loyal Englishman as he waved his hat with his left hand. Feeling such as this proved to the Queen that her Englishmen would have none of the Italianated foreigner, but with her usual intricate diplomacy she kept up the negotiations for years, and Sir Amyas Poulett had to bear the brunt of Parisian indignation. "I have been baited here for a month or more as a bear at a stake, and had nothing to say," he writes, "but stood still at my defence for fear to take hurt."

We can fancy that the knowledge which Sir Amyas gained of French stratagems and spoils made him a suitable warder for the resourceful Scottish queen whom he watched over at Tutbury, Chartley and Fotheringay with a surly fidelity, for the last two out of her eighteen years' captivity. His restless desire to force his own particular tenets upon her must have added to the trials of her last moments, though his honest refusal to let her be murdered by any secret assassin made the last sad pageant of execution possible, in which her unwavering fortitude won for her the sympathy of posterity. Sir Amyas liked plain dealing, and seems to have fretted much at the tortuous policy of Walsingham and Burghley. He discovered a priest in disguise in the Queen's household at gloomy Tutbury, but knew not what to do with him, because Elizabeth, as he said, "so dandled the Catholics." Sir Amyas yielded to Walsingham so far as to give in, perhaps perforce, to the shameful plot which entrapped Mary into a treasonable correspondence carried on by means of a water-tight box at the bottom of the ale-casks supplied to her at Chartley by a brewer from Burton, and then shamelessly copied for Walsingham. This double-dealing must have been grievous to the old man, and the terrible responsibility laid upon him, added to the pangs of the gout, shortened his own life. Poor Queen Mary was so unconscious of the toils she was in that hope improved her health, her swollen legs healed, and she was able to ride hunting with the hounds and kill a deer with her cross-bow.

Stand with me in fancy in the little chapel at Hinton, and recall some of the strange scenes beheld by that marble face.

Think of the sunny August morning in 1586, when Sir Amyas persuaded the unconscious queen to ride out nine miles to Tixall and kill a buck in Sir Walter Aston's park. Mary is in high spirits, perhaps her many plots have seared her conscience, and if she does know of the purposed assassination of Elizabeth, it seems to her no high price to pay for her liberty. Sir Amyas on the other hand knows that Babington's conspiracy is discovered, that he has had to flee from the forest of St. John's Wood, and that in a few moments Queen Mary will be arrested for high treason. Deeply as he detests her Popish wiles, a little sympathy must surely cross his harsh features when the armed men whom she hails as her deliverers arrest her as a traitor in the Queen's name.

Again. The fortnight of neglect and hardship at Tixall is over, and the queen

returns to Chartley with her doom upon her to find her treasures and secrets all torn open, and her favourite attendant Barbara Curle stricken by terror to a bed of sickness with the new-born baby unchristened at her side. You can fancy the furrowed forehead of Sir Amyas as he harshly refuses to christen the poor babe by the traitor's name of Mary, and the queen, ever with an instinct for the drama of history, as she promptly lays the infant on her lap and baptises it Mary in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The weeks fly past. Elizabeth will not sign the death-warrant, but has a letter written to Poulett in which she roundly complains of his want of love and zeal for not having found some way to shorten the life of the Scottish Queen. The letter reaches Sir Amyas at five in the evening, and before an hour has passed he has written the letter, which you may see to this day, to say in hot haste, "God forbid that I should make so fowle a ship-wracke of my conscience or leave so great a blot to my poor posteritie to shed blood without law or warrant." Sir Amyas had to put up with Elizabeth's angry pacings to and fro, and her words that he was "a dainty and precise fellow who would promise much and perform nothing," but her later letters to him suggest that in the end she was not sorry that the rough honest man had stood like a rock.

It must have shaken most men's fortitude to witness the terrible scene when Queen Mary knelt in the hall at Fotheringay and recited the penitential psalms in Latin and English in deep tones that sounded above the Puritan prayers of the men who refused her the last sacraments of her church and met to see her die. When the last moment came, she knelt calmly by the block among her black-robed executioners, herself clothed in blood-red from head to foot, and never finched when the blow swerved and fell a second time.

In any case Sir Amyas only lived eighteen months after the Queen's execution, and died soon after his return from the negotiations at Ostend for peace with Spain. Perhaps he endured hardships in that devastated Netherland country, where partridges were plentiful because the tilled land had become a wilderness. In any case the negotiations did not avert the Spanish Armada, and Sir Amyas died in September, 1588, a month after it had perished. He must have breathed more freely when the waves closed over the Spanish galleons, for in Queen Mary's last letter to the Spanish ambassador, Mendoza, she had bidden him tell King Philip not to forget how she had been used by certain men, and among their names was that of Sir Amyas Poulett.

Beneath the recumbent figure there is a curious French epitaph to this quondam Governor of Jersey, in which are some touching lines—

"Non, non, je ne croy pas qu'un si petit de
Terre

Couvre tant de Virtus, ait esteint tant
d'Honneur,

Que ce preux Chavalier, ce renommé
Seigneur,
Avoit acquis en Paix, avoit acquis en
Guerre."

His widow Margaret contributed a loving Latin epitaph, which may have been composed by herself in this age when Latin was no uncommon accomplishment for a lady. Queen Elizabeth puts her royal initials above a verse on the right hand of the figure—

"Never shall cease to spread wise Poulet's
fame,
These will speak and men will blush for
shame;
Without offence to speak what I do
know,
Great is the debt England to him doth
owe."

There are other inscriptions playing upon the characteristic words of his motto, *Garde la Foy*, and the three swords of his crest; but it is time for us to leave the stone precincts and mount the old tower, from which we get an exquisite view of the surrounding country and the rambling old house.

The most ancient part of the present building was the work of Sir Amyas' grandfather. The present front was built by the first Earl Poulett, Queen Anne's minister. We cannot help regretting the "right goodly manor place of free stone with two goodly towers embattled in the inner court," which old Leland saw in Henry VIII.'s days; but we may rejoice that the pretty wings remain in which "the slabs of the sandstone of the country forming the outer walls are cut in the shape of the rounded stones of the sea-shore." When gay flowers again relieve the long line of stone, and a touch of green is added to the rows of white jealousies, perhaps a look of home will return to the old mansion.

The quiet park where deer haunt the glades must have looked gay indeed when the grandson of Elizabeth's Sir Amyas entertained Mary of Scotland's grandson, Charles I., at Hinton in 1644, with a loyalty that was ready to face much and pay heavily for his allegiance to the King. It was only fifty-five years from the day of Queen Mary's execution when the two grandsons met at Hinton. Five short years were to pass, and the head of Charles I. fell from the block with a fortitude not unlike that of his grandmother, Mary Queen of Scots.

A few years more, and Hinton is holding high festival again, and feasting the Duke of Monmouth with junketing in the park. Almost directly after, the Duke was fleeing from Sedgemoor to be captured in the Hampshire fields, and travel to London and the headman's axe on Tower Hill.

As we walk back past the closed windows and fancy the treasures inside of portraits and statues, and frames by Grinling Gibbons, we find a poor dead thrush, called a "home-screech" in these parts, because its note is not so tuneful as that of its brother thrushes. The bird and its empty nest expresses the want we feel about this lovely spot with its sad memories. The nest is too good and fair to be left untenanted.

CLOTILDA MARSON.

