

## FRANT COURT.

"Not once or twice in our rough island-story  
The path of duty was the way to glory."—TENNYSON.



THE VILLAGE OF FRANT (LOOKING TOWARDS THE CHURCH).



WHO in the English-speaking world of the present day has not heard of the great "Elchi?"—of that splendid Englishman who, as Sir Stratford Canning, not only *commanded* the respect and affection of the Commander of the Faithful himself, but by his unswerving high-mindedness and the "unparalleled influence he exercised for right and even-handed justice throughout the whole Turkish Empire," Asiatic and European, was called by the very Turks themselves, "The Padishah of the Padishah" (the Sultan of the Sultan).<sup>\*</sup> None but those who travelled in the East, and that, too, years before the Crimean War when he became known to history as Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, can have any idea of the talismanic effect of his name even in its remotest corners, recognised by the highest and the lowest as "a terror to evil-doers which none could confront with impunity, and a refuge for the desolate and oppressed which none could seek in vain."<sup>†</sup>

His statue stands in Westminster Abbey, one of the group of three who have immortalised their family. George Canning, the cousin whom he loved so tenderly and served under, Viscount Canning, Viceroy of India during the Mutiny, and this famous Ambassador, "the

greatest of our time,"<sup>\*</sup> and in whose honour Tennyson composed the inscription on the pedestal :

"Thou, third great Canning, stand among our best  
And noblest, now thy long day's work has ceased,  
Here, silent in our Minster of the West,  
Who wert the voice of England in the East."

There are few, however, who know that he lies at rest elsewhere, in the country-side burial-ground of Frant, close to the beautiful residence wherein he passed his last most peaceful days, two miles and a half from Tunbridge Wells. If one were seeking a contrast to Groombridge Place hard by none more striking could be found than the bright position, the decorated architecture, and the associations of nineteenth century noble life presented to us in this most fascinating of English dwellings.

Frant, though a mere village, and so near the Wells, has, nevertheless, always boasted a distinction of its own, due in great measure to its more than usually bracing air, but especially to the extensive view which its situation on a high ridge affords it. The road thither—the carriage road to Hastings—is so pretty that it is one of the first shown to travellers, and, of late years, the long hill leading up from the Pantiles has been bordered by picturesque Queen-Anne villas, copies in many points of Frant Court, which introduced the style into these parts. Like so many others in the vicinity, it runs alongside Eridge Park, the Nevill

<sup>\*</sup> "Life of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe," by Stanley Lane-Poole.

<sup>†</sup> Dean Stanley's Sermon on his death.

<sup>\*</sup> *Idem.*



monogram displayed on sundry cottages, while black-birds and thrushes warble in the copses near. Unexpectedly, at the top of a steep hill, one of the park gates is reached, the Bear all over it,\* leading into an umbrageous avenue; but, continuing along the road, in a moment the whole scene changes, for a most enchanting view suddenly opens to the right, over the deer park, its elms, its sweep of bracken, grassy drives, undulating ground and woodland, up to the Saxonbury Tower.

This view it was which sealed the connection between Frant and the great Ambassador. One day, years ago, Lady Stratford de Redcliffe—as model an ambadress as he was an ambassador—driving about in search of a summer residence, and passing by this spot, was riveted to it with delight. A villa was to let close by, commanding the delicious prospect, and unhesitatingly it was taken. They both, moreover, always had an affection for Tunbridge Wells, for her father, Mr. Alexander, at one time owned Somer Hill, close by—noted property in Stuart days; and it was there, and often upon the Pantiles, that she and Lord Stratford had met before their marriage; nay, more: the villa was for sale, and so satisfactory did it prove that it speedily became their property.

At this period the veteran diplomatist was eighty-six years of age, sixty of which had been spent in the active service of his country; but nothing daunted, he had the villa well-nigh rebuilt, to suit all survivors—the fortunate cause of its present beauty—and, living to enjoy it several years himself, aptly christened it Frant Court.

No house probably is less pretentious, yet none

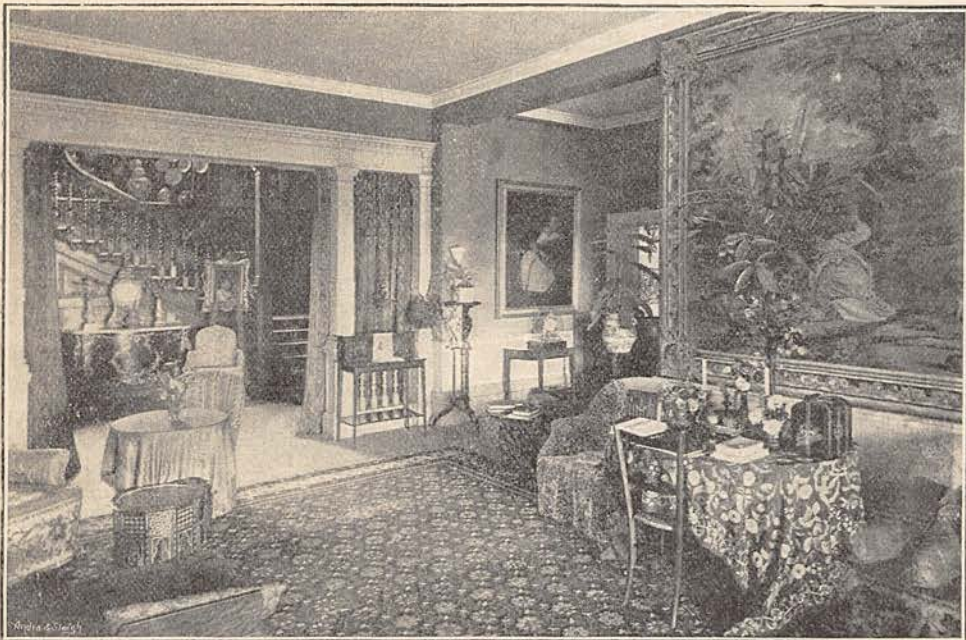
\* The Bear's head has been the Nevill badge for centuries.

more satisfying to mind and eye, for everything bears the imprint of the most cultured taste, at the same time possessing that individuality which should be the characteristic of every *home*. In this Lady Stratford, as a matter of course, reigned supreme. Married at nineteen, and transferred at once to Constantinople, then in its true Oriental days—in 1826—her inborn eye for beauty was educated by the colouring and harmonies of the East; thus, throughout their diplomatic life every house she inhabited instantly obtained a “distinctive tone,” an “æsthetic air,” long before such words were domiciled in the English language.

Here, it must be acknowledged, the position gave them an immense advantage.

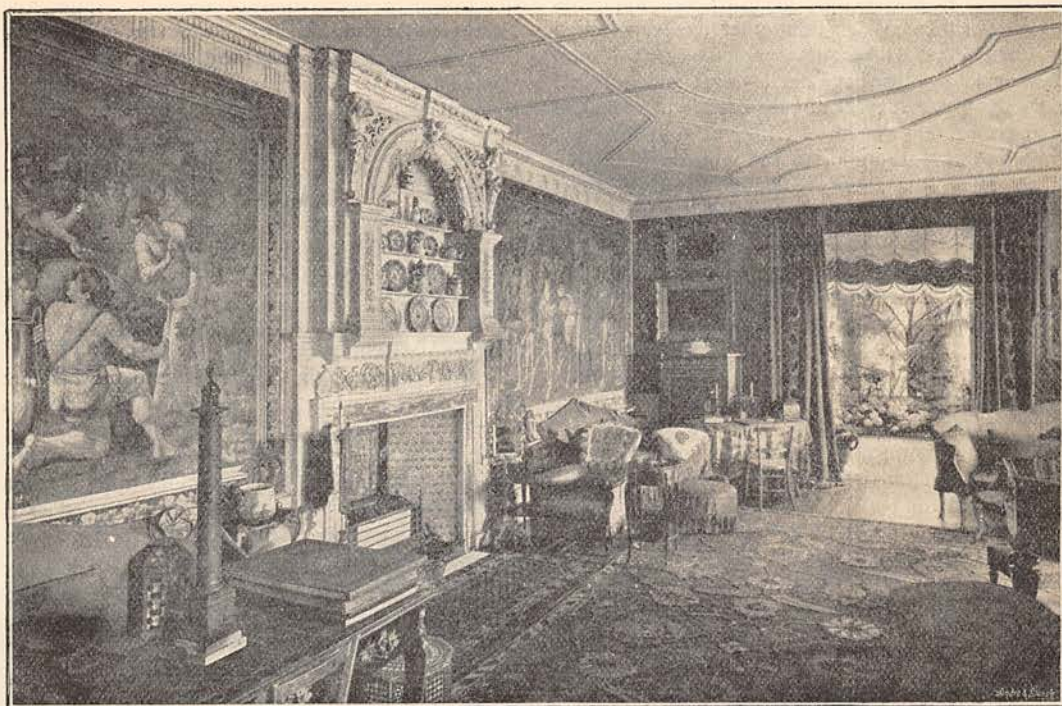
To the left lies Frant itself: a pretty, neat, quiet village, but separated from the Court by a well-cared-for “green,” along one whole side of which runs the red brick semi-Tudor, Queen-Anne house, with its decorated chimney-stacks, its picturesque gables, and its mullioned bedroom windows overlooking the rural life always in action here; but its sitting-rooms are not to be discerned, for these have been made purposely to face the other way.

Nor when we turn in through the arched gateway is anything special visible, a thick mass of trees and shrubs shutting out all beyond. Great, therefore, is the start of admiration when, emerging from the entrance beneath a Turkish curtain to a glazed passage, full of palms and Eastern souvenirs, the glorious landscape bursts upon one; nay, its beauty is enhanced by a broad terrace in the immediate foreground, one perfect blaze of brilliant flowers. Beneath this is another of close-shaven turf, a third lower down again, and then the ground drops so suddenly that the very tops of the



THE SALOON.





THE DRAWING-ROOM.

large trees below are only on a level with the coped wall of the lower walk.

It is impossible to look inside the house until one's eye is sated with the lovely combination; even the kitchen garden, hidden in a nook at the bottom, must first be visited, for a low hedge alone divides it from the hawthorn dell of Eridge Park, and the historic deer\* are browsing tamely under the lofty elms at its other side.

Returning to the house, one as quickly forgets the view, so full is every corner of interest and beauty. And yet the rooms are not large or expensively furnished, only pre-eminently "liveable." No upholsterer has been here—nothing but the pervading eye and hand of cultured minds, and the principle carried out successfully which Frenchwomen assert is their guide in dress—namely, to make it so harmonious and well-fitting that details should be at first imperceptible. Or one may liken it to an exquisite peacock, whose plumage shows new and unexpected tints at every turn.

The first striking object on entering the saloon, at the far end of which rises a dark oak staircase filled with blue china and brass embossed dishes, is the portrait in crayon of the Ambassador by Richmond, taken in 1853 during the Crimean War, when he was sixty-seven years of age, and placed here upon an easel since his death.

\* Eridge Park having been a Royal Chase, is held on the condition that twenty head of deer, at the least, be always maintained on the ground.

This is backed by a remarkable Romney of his handsome Irish mother, to whom he used to write such loving letters—notably from Washington—clasping her only daughter in her arms.

Then you become aware that the walls are covered with painted tapestry, the subjects Scriptural, quaintly treated, but full of life: "The Finding of Moses," in which all concerned are in Renaissance costume; "Moses Striking the Rock"; and David returning to Jerusalem after defeating Hadadezer with "the arms of gold which the servants of Hadadezer wore."\*

This is in the farthest drawing-room, close to a conservatory glowing, according to the season, with camellias, azaleas, roses, and the like, and the horses look so brimful of intelligence that they seem to be discussing the advisability of stepping down to the brightness beneath.

Around is china of a rare kind, picked up long, long ago in the Constantinople bazaars; a Dresden that was *then* specially manufactured for the highest Turks, and of which this house is full, mingled with water-colours in Eastern mother-of-pearl frames; of Turkish harems in Arabas at the old Sweet Waters; a sketch of the Bosphorus by Preziosa, a Maltese artist of great talent; while curtains—sunflower-bordered, cushions, and semi-painted, semi-embroidered bouquets of roses, abound on every side. Chairs, tables, cabinets, etc., are Chippendales or Louis XV., collected by Lady Stratford in her constant foreign travels; but in

\* 2 Samuel viii. 7.



one corner stands a trophy from Kertsch—a proclamation found in that market-place by its conquerors during the Crimean War; in another a silver-decked eikon or a Preziosa of some monastery at Mount Athos, where Lord Stratford's ladies were once allowed to land: the greatest mark of consideration the monks could bestow, no woman having been permitted, according to the tradition, to set foot on the Holy Mountain since the Empress Helen. But the most interesting of all are, no doubt, views by the same artist of the English army encamped at Scutari and the English Fleet anchored in the Bosphorus; a national historical event, that stirred all hearts at the time.

Perhaps the dining-room is the most original of all, the pale green walls are covered with brackets holding blue plates and various-sized dishes, as though ready—and *de raison* in a dining-room—to be handed down for immediate use.

This ground-floor suite of rooms looks forth under a shady verandah on the exquisite ever-shifting landscape, but it was on the upper floor that the Elchi had his own special apartments, a large plate glass window allowing him to enjoy to the full the setting sun and the Eridge Woods steeped in its gorgeous hues.

Here he spent nearly ten years of that "old age which was a shining example of what faith and hope in the best things, and a bright, intellectual activity may do to preserve the fire and energy of youth to a period long beyond the lives of most of the strongest men."\*

As his favourite sitting-room is approached, a large panorama of the Bosphorus is seen which lines the wall. Even now his presence seems to fill the room

\* "Life."

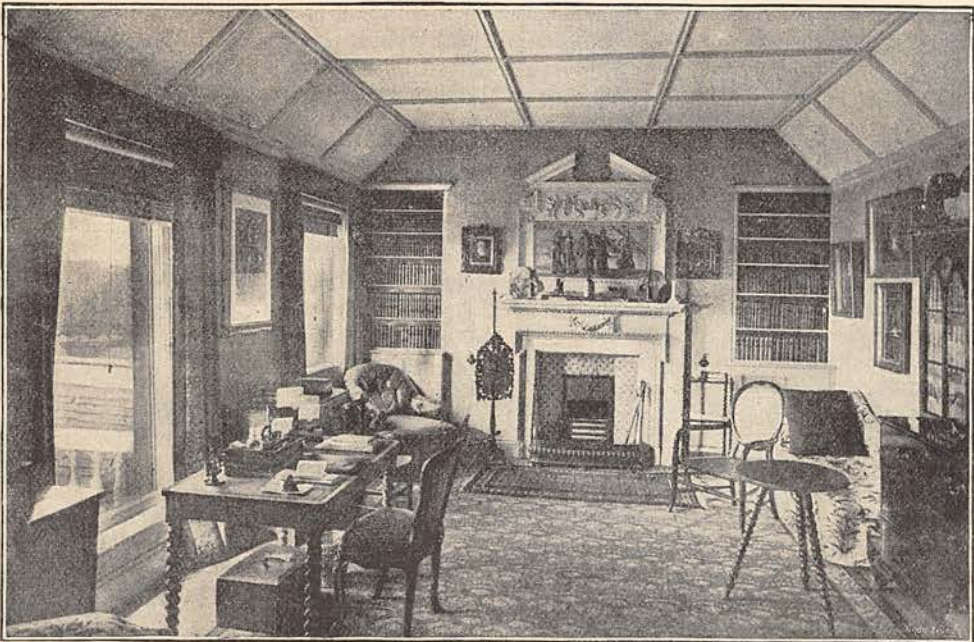
where he lived, and thought, and wrote. Poetry was the favourite occupation of these his latter years; "gathered round him were the treasured relics of the past, each with its own story; the books he was so fond of, the prints of men he most admired, silent companions of his exile for so many years; the little picture of Nelson, which had not left him since his earliest days; George Canning his cousin and honoured master in public life; Pitt, Wellington, his country's heroes, cared for to the very last."

And in conversation no one was more fascinating, so simple and unostentatiously communicative. A question was enough to draw forth a whole history, that made him seem like a ladder by which one climbed into the last century.

I well remember his describing to me his having been taken as a boy into the House of Commons to hear Pitt; how he watched Metternich, next whom he sat at the Congress of Vienna—where he, Lord Stratford, went as English Plenipotentiary in Switzerland—so pre-occupied, that he twisted and re-twisted a waxen taper in his fingers without seemingly being aware he had anything whatsoever in them.

Another day, when Lanfrey's "History of Napoleon" was spoken of, he told me that, meeting George Canning in Curzon Street when returning from church one Sunday in 1807, they turned into his house, and, pacing up and down the room, Canning dictated to him the famous dispatch upon which depended questions of peace and war; Lord Stratford quoted it word for word, and, looking at the original, we found he had not missed an expression.

Very fond was he also of describing old Mr. Carroll, of famous memory, and who, as his biographers



LORD STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE'S STUDY.



relate, outlived his rebeldom for fully fifty years. Lord Stratford had passed three days on a visit at his house in Maryland while in the States in 1822, playing lively games of whist with the splendid old gentleman in the

until I opened these books that I settled no less than sixteen disputed questions then pending between the two countries."

The old lion clearly doubted his own identity.



FRANT COURT FROM THE GREEN.

evenings, to which he often alluded when at his own nightly rubber: a pastime he, Lord Stratford, continued till within two months of his death.

It was my good fortune to have been his partner on almost the last occasion. Next morning I had to cut short my visit, and went to take leave of him. Alas! it proved to be my last sight.

Some American question was on the *tapis*; and wishing to refresh his memory about the Monro doctrine, first heard of in 1822, when he was English Envoy at Washington under the Monro Presidency, he had called for his dispatches, all neatly bound in volumes.

Never can I forget the picture—the books outspread before him, and the eagle eye that met mine with: "I am all amazement! I had altogether forgotten

Later, only ten days before his end, Sir R. Morier, the present Ambassador at St. Petersburg, thus records a visit—

"His intellect was as clear, his speech as incisive, his interest in poetry and politics as keen as when last I saw him, three years ago. It was a beautiful English summer afternoon; a warm sun lit up his pale features, which fully retained their splendid outlines, and were entirely wanting in the wrinkles or withered look of extreme old age. I could not help thinking of the lines:—

"How sinks more lovely ere his race be run."

"He seemed some grand old Titan majestically sinking to his rest in all his glory, as if he knew the Infinite was waiting to receive him with all due honour."

W. M. W.

## AN IMPERFECT SUBSTITUTE.

BY W. P. M. BLACK.

### CHAPTER THE FIRST.



HE dinner-bell had ceased to resound through the spacious corridors of a certain Scotch Hydropathic Establishment. The guests were gathered together round the table, and the meal was about to begin. Every seat was occupied,

except one which came between a young lady of about twenty and a stout red-haired Scotchman, who was just making some remark about the late occupant of the intervening chair to the young lady, when a tall, dark, thin-faced young man entered the room, and was directed by a waiter to the vacant chair. He sat down and took a quiet look at the people round the table; then turning to the young lady beside him, he made some commonplace remark about the weather—that convenient subject for opening a conversation—