

ODD CHARACTERS.

A GALLERY OF ECCENTRIC WOMEN.

By NANETTE MASON.

IV.—MARGARET, DUCHESS OF NEWCASTLE.



Y those who lived in her own day, the duchess was familiarly known as 'Mad Madge,' and certainly no madder specimen of a thoroughgoing bluestocking ever existed.

She was born about 1625, at St. John's, near Colchester, in Essex. Her father was Sir

Thomas Lucas, a gentleman of large estates, and much thought of. There were eight children: three sons—not one of them "crooked or any way deformed," we are told—and five daughters, Margaret being the youngest.

Whilst she was but an infant Sir Thomas died, but the mother was a person of great good sense, and under her guidance the family was well brought up. Margaret records that she and her sisters were "bred virtuously, modestly, civilly, and on honest principles." They read, worked, walked and talked with each other, finding their chief enjoyment at home, and the best company that round their own fireside.

Our Margaret grew up a shy girl, but under her shyness it was noticed that an eager and impetuous mind was at work. She early showed an inclination for literature, a spark that was to become a consuming fire. To quote her own words, "It pleased God to command His servant Nature to endue her with a poetical and philosophical genius, even from her birth; for she did write some books even in that kind before she was twelve years of age."

What settled her future life was a notion that came into her head that she would like to become one of the maids of honour to Henrietta Maria, the queen of Charles I. Her mother objected, but Margaret was at last allowed to have her own way. She joined the court at Oxford, and in 1643 accompanied the queen to Paris, these being the times of the civil war in England. The young maid of honour was not exactly fitted for a court life; her shy and unsocial nature caused her to be spoken about as a "natural fool."

The romantic William Cavendish, the "loyal duke"—then marquis—of Newcastle came to Paris in 1645, after the battle of Marston Moor, which resulted in the ruin of the king's cause in the North of England. He was a very fine gentleman, active and full of courage, and highly accomplished in the arts of horsemanship, dancing, and fencing, which in those days were held to constitute good breeding. He had some pretensions to literature also, and wrote several comedies—bustling pieces of intrigue and wit.

At Paris he met Margaret Lucas, and with the shy maid of honour he straightway fell in love. She was as much attracted to him as he to her. "He was the only person I ever was in love with," she says, adding that her affection was placed upon merit. There was a difference in their ages. Margaret was twenty-one; the marquis was fifty-two. He had been

married before, but the previous wedding does not seem to have interfered with the romance of this second wooing.

The two were married in Paris, and lived on the Continent, chiefly in Antwerp, till the restoration of Charles II. in 1660. They were happy in each other's company; it was a case of mutual admiration, Margaret thinking her husband a genius, and he believing her to be almost perfect. Their only source of regret was that they had no children.

It was as well that they were fond of each other, for the times pressed hard upon them. Of the large rental of his estates in England, not a farthing could the marquis get for his own use, and he had to live as best he could on credit. It was estimated that the loss sustained by him from the civil war surpassed rather than fell short of £733,579. Fortunately he found people who believed in his coming at last into the full enjoyment of his own, and were willing to lend, but before the days of his banishment were over this credit was exhausted, and he and his wife were in difficulties, even about paying for their dinners.

During this trying period Margaret consoled herself by indulging her unbounded passion for scribbling, and wrote a considerable part of the folio volumes which bear her name. Though often without a penny in her purse, and knowing not where the next meal was to come from, she made herself quite happy with a pen and an ink-bottle.

Her reasons for writing are given unanswerably in one of her productions, where she says, "I imagine all those that have read my former books will say that I have writ enough unless they were better; but say what you will it pleaseth me, and since my delights are harmless I will satisfy my humour."

"For had my brain as many fancies in't To fill the world, I'd put them all in print: No matter whether they be well or ill expressed, My will is done, and that please woman best."

In another place, defending her own authorship, she remarks, what is true enough, that writing is better than gossiping, making fun of one's neighbours, listening to flattery, admiring oneself in a looking-glass, and such-like folly.

She had a wonderful flow of ideas, good, bad, and indifferent, and not the least discrimination in the selection of them. When a thought occurred to her, down it went at once on paper. "My fancy," she records, "is so quick, that it is quicker than the pen with which I write, inasmuch that my ideas are many times lost through the slowness of my hand, and yet I write so fast that I stay not so long as to make perfect characters."

There never was a more complete bluestocking. Nothing so pleased her as to sit at home writing, or to walk up and down her own room thinking. At these times she was in the habit of talking to herself. When she went abroad it was only to pick up ideas. Contemplation, according to her own account, was her strong point. "Naturally," she says, "I am so wedded to contemplation, that many times when I have been in company I have not known one word they have said by reason my busy thoughts have stopped the sense of my hearing."

In all her writings—poetry, plays, philo-

sophical works, letters, and what not—there is a great deal of what is sometimes called "dear good little me." She is not at all backward in letting the reader know about the exquisite beauty of her person—and she was really a strikingly handsome woman—and the rare endowments of her mind. Her intellect, she mentions, was so active that her appetite became passive; she lived frugally on boiled chickens and water. Her husband was almost as abstemious in diet as herself, but for water he substituted small beer and a modest allowance of sack.

Some people maliciously hinted that she was not the author of her own works. The marquis published a denial of these false statements, in which he praised his wife's philosophy, and said it was "truly and only wrought out of her own brain." Like a devoted husband he also praised her poems, and made light of the fact, made fun of by the critics, that they often halted both in number and in rhymes. Such trifling blemishes, according to him, were only like spots on the sun. "It is new born and creating fancies," he says, "that glorify a poet." He encouraged his wife to go on writing, though he tried to persuade her to spare time from study for the pursuit of health.

Margaret was always ambitious—ambitious of the highest places, and the best occupations and the loftiest company. She had a hankering after personal perfection. "I think it no crime," she says, "to wish myself the exactest of nature's works." "My greatest desire," she records in another place, "is to be had in remembrance in after ages. All I desire is fame." By the pursuit of literature she imagined fame might be secured, and no doubt she would have had a place now on every bookshelf if writing much were only the same as writing well.

But she understood about more than merely writing books. She knew something of country life, down to the keeping of poultry, and would have made an excellent farmer's wife. Even when, however, in after years she had the opportunity she did not busy herself much with rural affairs, "by reason," she says, "my scribbling takes away most part of my time."

An eccentric passion for literature did not prevent her from having some lovable features in her character. She was constant in her affections. But having a regard for people, she tells us, proved a troublesome affair: "it is the only torment of my life," she says, "for fear any evil misfortune or accident, or sickness, or death, should come into them, inasmuch as I am never freely at rest." A considerable deal of nonsense may be forgiven in a good wife, who, write as she does, that she never finds the time tedious when she is alone, "so I be near my lord and know he is well."

"I am grateful," says our authoress, alluding to another personal characteristic, "for I never receive a courtesy but I am impatient and troubled till I can return it. . . . I am seldom angry, as my servants may witness for me, but when I am angry I am very angry, but it is soon over." She describes herself as tender-hearted: "for it troubles my conscience to kill a fly, and the groans of a dying beast strike my soul." It is to her credit that she was one of the first writers to hint at the cruelty of field sports. She mentions that she was more inclined to melancholy than mirth, but that she did not often either weep or laugh.

She was a thorough Englishwoman, and seems to have taken no pains to associate with

the foreigners amongst whom she resided so long. She had "a natural stupidity towards the learning of any other language than her own native tongue," and did not even know French, though she lived in France for five years.

The Restoration came at last, and after fifteen years of banishment the marquis returned to England. He was, in 1664, elevated by Charles II., whose governor he had been, to a dukedom, and settled down shortly afterwards with his wife to the enjoyment of brighter fortunes.

The two kept away from court as much as possible, and when they did go there Margaret's peculiarities made her somewhat of a laughing-stock. Her vanity, it was noticed, was prodigious; her affectation extraordinary; and, to crown all, she wore the most wonderful theatrical costumes.

That she did not dress like other people the duchess herself allows. "When young," she says, "I took great delight in attiring, fine dressing and fashions, especially such fashions as I did invent myself, not taking that pleasure in such fashions as were invented by others; also I did dislike any should follow my fashions, for I always took delight in a singularity, even in accoutrements of dress." "I always," she remarks elsewhere, "took delight in a singularity, even in accoutrements of habits, but whatsoever I was addicted to, even in fashions of clothes, contemplation of thoughts, actions of life, they were lawful, honest, honourable, modest; of which I can avouch to the world with a great confidence because it is a pure truth."

Her oddities made the duchess much talked about, and amongst the people who took an interest in her we find Samuel Pepys, whose Diary throws so much light on this period of London life. On the 30th of March, 1667, he makes this entry in his Diary:—"To see the silly play of my Lady Newcastle, called *The Humorous Lovers*, the most silly thing that ever came upon a stage. I was sick to see it, and yet would not but have seen it that I might the better understand her." Mr. Pepys, however, seems to have made a slight mistake: *The Humorous Lovers* is by the duke, not by the duchess, but likely enough she had a hand in it.

On the 11th of the following month, Pepys writes: "To Whitehall, thinking there to have seen the Duchess of Newcastle's coming this night to court, to make a visit to the queen, the king having been with her yesterday, to make her a visit since her coming to town. The whole story of this lady is a romance, and all she does is romantic. Her footmen in velvet coats, and herself in antique dress as they say; and was the other day at her own play, *The Humorous Lovers*, the most ridiculous thing that ever was wrote, and yet she and her lord mightily pleased with it; and she at the end made her respects to the players from her box, and did give them thanks. There is as much expectation of her coming to court that so many people may come to see her as if it were the Queen of Sheba; but I lost my labour, for she did not come this night."

It was on the 26th of April that Pepys saw her for the first time. "Met my Lady Newcastle," he says, "going with her coaches and footmen all in velvet; herself, whom I never saw before, as I have heard her often described, for all the town-talk is now-a-days of her extravagancies, with her velvet cap, her hair about her ear; many black patches because of pimples about her mouth; naked necked, without anything about it, and a black just-au-corps. She seemed to me a very comely woman."

On May day—four days after this—he went to St. James's Park in hopes to see her grace again. A great crowd of sightseers were on the same errand. Pepys never got near her,

she being followed and crowded upon by coaches all the way she went. He saw, however, that she was in a large black coach, adorned with silver instead of gold; there were white curtains; indeed, everything was either black or white, and in the midst of this arrangement in black and white, the diarist caught sight of the duchess sitting, in her velvet cap. No wonder she made a sensation, and that the boys and girls used, as Pepys tells, to run after the coach in hundreds.

The duchess went to the meeting of the Royal Society on the 30th of May, and Pepys was there also. He got a good look at her on this occasion. "The duchess," he says, "hath been a good comely woman; but her dress was so antick and her deportment so ordinary, that I did not like her at all, nor did I hear her say anything that was worth hearing, but that she was full of admiration, all admiration. Several fine experiments were shown her, she exclaiming at every experiment that she was 'full of admiration,' and then she was led back to her coach by several lords and philosophers, including 'a very pretty young man, the Duke of Somerset.'"

Evelyn, another diarist of the period, was also present at this reception. He was on a friendly footing with both the duke and the duchess. Of the latter he says, "she is a mighty pretender to learning, poetry, and philosophy, and hath in both published divers books." He describes himself on one occasion as much pleased with "her extraordinary fanciful habit, garb, and discourse." He went farther than this: he flattered her to her face in the most extravagant manner, making her out to be the greatest genius and the most sublime wit that ever visited the earth in the person of woman.

The duchess experienced a great deal of this fulsome adulation. The panegyrics and puffs she received might well have turned her head, even had she been, what some people who might have known better called her, "the princess of philosophers." It was an age of flattery, and she received more of it, perhaps, than any other author, either before or since. The letters and poems written in praise of her and the duke were collected, in 1678, into a folio volume, which forms an astonishing exhibition of the sort of homage paid by learning to high rank in those days.

One of the duchess's privileged visitors was Richard Flecknoe, the poet and dramatist, of whom Dryden says that his—

"prose and verse was owned without dispute
Throughout the realms of nonsense absolute."

This poet has given the following description of her grace's closet or study:—

"Is this a lady's closet? 't cannot be;
For nothing here of vanity we see,
Nothing of curiosity, nor pride,
As most of ladies' closets have beside:
Scarcely a glass or mirror in't you find,
Excepting books, the mirror of the mind;
Nor is 't a library, but only as she
Makes each place where she comes a
library."

Wit and satire, however, as well as flattery, claimed the duchess for their own. Even those who praised in appearance sometimes contrived by a double meaning to ridicule in reality. When Waller, the poet, was shown some verses by the duchess, "On the death of a stag," he said that he would give all his own compositions to have written them.

"That is extravagant praise," said a friend. "Not at all," he replied; "nothing is too much to be given that a lady might be saved from the disgrace of such a vile performance."

From the time of her return to England till the day of her death the duchess wrote as diligently as she had done when abroad. So

ben was she on not allowing the least idea that entered her head to escape, that she engaged a number of young ladies, whose business it was to rise at any hour of the night and write down whatever they were told. When the bell rang, up one of them rose to commit to paper a verse, an aphorism, or a philosophic theory.

What the duke thought about these midnight labours is not told; but he was sometimes out of patience with her, if the story is true that, when complimented on her wisdom, he once said, "Sir, a very wise woman is a very foolish thing."

But whatever he thought it is certain that the duchess never for a moment wavered in her admiration of him. She wrote his life, and published it in 1668, during his lifetime, so that any error might be corrected; but she says, "I challenge anyone (although I be a woman) to contradict anything I have set down, or prove it to be otherwise than truth." The work had a pompous enough title-page, containing over a hundred and forty words: "The Life of the thrice noble, high and puissant Prince William Cavendish, Duke, Marquess and Earl of Newcastle,"—and so on—"Written by the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent Princess Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, his wife."

The book attracted a good deal of attention. Pepys read it, and made this entry in his Diary on the 18th of March, 1668: "Stayed at home, reading the ridiculous history of my Lord Newcastle, wrote by his wife, which shows her to be a mad, conceited, ridiculous woman, and he an ass to suffer her to write what she writes of and to him."

Tastes differ, however, and we meet with praise of this work pitched in a high key in one of Charles Lamb's essays. "No casket," he says, "is rich enough, no casing sufficiently durable to honour and keep safe such a jewel."

Her enthusiastic summing up of the merits of her husband is amusing, at all events, whatever the other characteristics of the life may be. She compares the duke to Julius Caesar. "Nay," she adds, "in some particulars he did more than Caesar ever did." In her estimation he was "the best lyric and dramatic poet of his age." Was he as a dramatist equal to Shakespeare? Equal! says the duchess; he was beyond him—"he was as far beyond Shakespeare for comical humour as Shakespeare was beyond an ordinary poet in that way." After that it is not surprising to learn that she was more than satisfied with the elegance of his exterior, the becomingness of his dress, the simplicity of his diet, and the weight and variety of his discourse.

As a companion work to this life of the duke she wrote an autobiography—"A true relation of her birth, breeding, and life." Of all her books this is the most worth looking at: the naïveté of it alone is charming.

The production she herself thought most of was her "Philosophical and Physical Opinions": she calls it "her masterpiece and the beloved of all her works." Authors are seldom good judges of what they do. The fact is that her grace's philosophy is the most absurd feature about her: it is the dead weight that drags her to the ground. Occasionally we meet with a piece of common sense, but it has to be searched for under mountains of ignorance and extravagance.

It was noticed that she had rather a contempt for solid facts, and that she was only herself when she ran wild in confused speculations. On one occasion she met Dr. Wilkins, the Bishop of Chester, who had written a book on the possibility of a passage from the earth to the moon.

"Doctor," said the duchess, "where am I to find a place for resting on the way up to that planet?"

"Madam," replied the bishop, "of all people in the world I never expected that question from you, who have built so many castles in the air that you might lie every night at one of your own."

The duchess is seen at her worst in her plays. There are nineteen of them, some of them in two parts and with scenes almost innumerable. No literary appetite nowadays is equal to reading them. Some people said that she stole her plots, but that could hardly be, for her plays have only the ghosts of plots. Her characters are mere abstractions representing certain virtues and vices. The speeches made by them are often scholastic and long-winded, as if they were extracts from her grace's letters and philosophical opinions.

Amongst her grace's short poems those dealing with fairy subjects have been praised. Her verses, however, exhibit marked deficiencies in the matter of feet; and as for the rhymes, the duchess's ear, to put it mildly, must have been an odd one. She does not deny that she was weak in the artistic construction of poetry, but this she held to be a trifle—an opinion shared, as we have seen, by her husband. The important thing, according to them both, was the thought, not the way it was expressed.

In her "Poems and Fancies," the duchess has this characteristic request to the reader: "Let me entreat you to consider only the fancies in this my book of poems, and not the language, numbers, nor rhymes, nor false printing, for if you do you will be my condemning judge, which will grieve my muse." In the same volume, she says, "I must entreat my noble reader to read this part of my book very slow, and to observe very strictly every word they read, because in most of these poems every word is a fancy."

"Excuse and pardon me," she writes in another place, "for making all this noise about my own books. I have launched my labours into the world, and am rejoicing at my own handiwork." She was easily pleased. Her thirteen folio volumes merit the description she herself gives of them. "You will find my works," she says, "like infinite nature, that hath neither beginning nor end, and as confused as the chaos wherein is neither method nor order, but all mixed together without separation, like evening light and darkness."

In case anyone should wish to see a specimen of her grace's poetry, we give the following extract from an "Epistle to her brain":—

"I wonder, brain, thou art so dull, when there
Was not a day but wit passed, through
the year.
For seven years 'tis since I have married
bin,
Which time my brain might be a maga-
zine
To stow up wise discourse naturally sent
In fluent words, which free and easy
went.
If thou art not with wit enriched thereby,
Then useless is the art of memory;
But thou, poor brain, hard frozen art with
cold—
Words, scales of wit, will neither print
nor hold."

Now and then, in her prose works, the duchess says things worth repeating. One can hardly write much without occasionally hitting on something good. Here are some examples:—

"Vanity is so natural to our sex that it were unnatural not to be vain."

"Great memories are like standing ponds that are made with rain; so that the memory is nothing but the showers of other men's wits."

"Surely those who do not delight in poetry or music have no divine souls or harmonious thoughts."

"The reason why women are so apt to talk too much is an overweening opinion of themselves in thinking they speak well; and striving to take off that blemish from themselves of knowing little by speaking much, as thinking that many words have the same weight as much knowledge."

With these sensible sentences we part on good terms with this eccentric woman. Soothed by flattery and firmly believing that she would be famous for ever, the duchess breathed her last on the 7th of January, 1673-4. She was laid in the North Transept of Westminster Abbey, and her husband three years afterwards found a resting place there by her side.

Over them was erected a stately monument, with an inscription which has called forth the admiration of many a visitor to the ancient edifice:—

"Here lies the loyal duke of Newcastle and his duchess, his second wife, by whom he had no issue. Her name was Margaret Lucas, youngest sister to Lord Lucas of Colchester, a noble family, for all the brothers were valiant and all the sisters virtuous. This duchess was a wise, witty, and learned lady, which her many books do well testify: she was a most virtuous and loving and careful wife; and was with her lord all the time of his banishment and miseries; and when they came home never parted from him in his solitary retirements."

(To be continued.)

NURSING THE SICK.

By ALBERT WESTLAND, M.A., M.D.

V.—TEMPERATURE OF THE SICK-ROOM.



MATTER of considerable importance which claims the attention of a nurse is the maintenance of the proper temperature in the sick-room. In a variable climate like that of Eng-

land, it is very seldom that the external temperature, even during the day, remains as constant as is desirable in most cases of serious illness; while the very great difference

between the temperature of midday and midnight, at almost all seasons of the year, renders it absolutely necessary to resort to means and appliances for artificially modifying the degree of warmth of the patient's chamber. For the purpose of satisfactorily regulating the temperature, it is necessary to have a thermometer placed in some part of the sick-room; and it is generally found desirable to have another outside the window of the room, so that the external temperature may be noted and compared with that of the inside of the room. Fortunately, thermometers are not now an ex-

pensive luxury, being bought sufficiently good for ordinary purposes at one shilling, or even less. I have been accustomed to recommend that the one to be placed outside the window should be a spirit one, with the spirit dyed some colour, such as green or red, so that it may be easily seen at any time, even at night. Such a thermometer can be read quite easily by holding a lamp or candle near it inside the window; while for the interior of the room, a mercurial thermometer, which can be used also for registering the temperature of water for baths, etc., is more convenient. In this country thermometers are almost always graduated on what is called the Fahrenheit scale; that is, the degree at which fresh water freezes is marked 32, and the degree at which fresh water boils is marked 212, the space between being divided into 180 equal parts, or, as they are called, degrees Fahrenheit. Occasionally they are graduated in what is called the Centigrade scale, where freezing point is represented as 0 and boiling point as 100, and in this case the hundred parts between 0 and 100 are named degrees Centigrade. This latter scale is the one employed in the greater part of the continent of Europe. When writing a temperature, it is usual to employ the letter F or C after the number of degrees, so as to indicate which scale is intended; and instead of using the word degrees, a symbol is used, such as is represented in the following examples. Thus, in the Fahrenheit scale, boiling point is represented as 212° F., and in the Centigrade as 100° C. In conver-

sation in England, the Fahrenheit scale is always understood, if another is not especially mentioned. Many thermometers are now graduated on the one side with the Fahrenheit scale, and on the other with the Centigrade. A well-made thermometer will register equally accurately the temperature, whether it is placed lying flat or suspended; but it is generally more convenient to hang it on a nail, or to place it upright on a stand. As regards the position in which they should be placed, care must be taken that they are uninfluenced by anything which will interfere with the exact determination of the temperature of the atmosphere, respectively outside and inside the room, which is the information we wish to obtain. The external one should, if possible, be hung in such a position that the rays of the sun will not fall directly upon the thermometer, as if they do they will make the instrument register a much higher temperature than the atmospheric heat, which is what is known as the temperature in the shade. The difference will depend upon the amount of sunshine and the directness with which the rays fall upon the thermometer. In summer, if the sun is shining brightly, and the rays fall full upon the thermometer, there may be as much as 50° F. of difference between the temperature in the sun and that in the shade. If from the position of the window it is impossible to find a place on either side upon which the sun's rays do not beat at some period of the day, such as will be the case in a window looking due south, the difficulty can