

TRUE STORY OF "THE LADYE OF BURLEIGH."

BY DR. SHELTON MACKENZIE.

BROWNLOW CECIL, of Burghley, in Northamptonshire, second Marquis, and eleventh Earl of Exeter, is an Englishman of much wealth and influence, and now Lord Steward of Queen Victoria's household. He is directly descended from William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's confidential Secretary-of-State and Lord Treasurer, better known as Lord Burghley, the title she conferred upon him in 1571. He is connected, by intermarriages of his ancestors, with half of the older nobility of England. Yet, with all this pride of lineage, this self-same Marquis of Exeter is himself only the son of one Sarah Hoggins, daughter of a Shropshire miller.

Respecting this nobleman, an English journal lately had the following:—"A romance of real life attaches to the history of his lordship's mother, gracefully known in poetry as 'The Ladye of Burleigh.' The tale is briefly this: Henry, tenth Earl of Exeter, his lordship's father, distrustful of the courtly circles in which he moved, resolved to lay aside the artificial attractions of his coronet, and, under the simple designation of 'Mr. Cecil,' seeking some country maiden who would wed him from disinterested motives of affection. In furtherance of the plan, he selected for his place of residence a pretty village in Shropshire, and, while living in the seclusion of a farm-house, wooed and won the beautiful child of his host, Sarah, daughter of Mr. T. Hoggins, of Bolas. In a brief space it became necessary for Mr. Cecil to resume his title, and to introduce his rustic bride, which he did, as Countess of Exeter, at his princely seat of Burghley House, near Stamford. The surprise her ladyship experienced on first learning the elevated rank of her husband, is strikingly alluded to by Tom Moore, in one of his exquisite Irish melodies. Her ladyship lived but six years after her marriage, and died in 1797."

The real story, which is as follows, may interest some readers:

Henry Cecil (afterwards tenth Earl of Exeter, with landed estates to the yearly value of one hundred thousand pounds, and the palatial residence of Burghley, with its statues, paintings, and articles of *vertu*, said to be worth five hundred thousand pounds) married a Miss Vernon,

from whom, owing to her violation of the marriage vows, he was divorced in 1791. Almost heart-broken by this disgrace and misfortune, immediately after the divorce, he betook himself to a retired country village in Shropshire, named Bolas, about one hundred and twenty miles from his own beautiful Burghley. Of that place, however, he was not lord then, nor until the death of his uncle, the ninth earl, in 1793.

At Bolas, he actually became a farm-servant to one Thomas Hoggins, who, besides his farm, had a mill, in pretty full employ. Cecil's chief work was in this mill, and he labored like any other servant, fairly to earn his wages. He had frequently to call at the house of the Rev. Mr. Dickenson, the clergyman of Bolas, where, according to the custom of the time and place, he was always invited to rest in the kitchen, and take "a mug of ale." He seldom was tempted to enter into conversation, but spoke so well, when he did converse, that Mr. Dickenson's household gave him the name of "Gentleman Harry." It was not long before this *sobriquet* and its cause, became known to Mr. Dickenson, who put himself in the way of meeting this strange miller's man, and became so much interested in him, that instead of being asked to rest and refresh in the kitchen, "Gentleman Harry" was regularly invited into the study, where the good pastor used to join him in a draught of home-brewed and a pipe of the Nicotian weed.

Ere long, Mr. Dickenson, who had freely lent him various books, hinted his suspicion that "Gentleman Harry" belonged to a higher position than he then occupied. This was confessed, with an assurance that there was no disgrace connected with his *incognito*, and a promise to reveal the secret at no distant day.

Thomas Hoggins, the miller, had one daughter, named Sarah, known far and wide, as "the beauty of Bolas." About this time she was scarcely twenty. She read and wrote correctly, had some slight acquaintance with the French, and played tolerably well upon the harpsichord. It came to pass that Miss Hoggins turned a favorable pair of bright blue eyes upon "Gentleman Harry." Alas, for the romance of the story, his *premier jeunesse* was gone—for he was

in his thirty-eighth year. It happened, also, that he became interested in her: so much so, that he called at the parsonage, one evening, to consult with Mr. Dickenson—in a word, to entreat him to marry them privately; and then, making a clean breast of it, "Gentleman Harry" confessed that he was Mr. Henry Cecil, next heir to the earldom and estates of Exeter. He bound over the clergyman to secrecy, not allowing him to disclose his personal secret to Mr. Hoggins, not even to the fair Sarah. It was a difficult matter for the clergyman to obtain the miller's consent to the marriage, which was celebrated on the 30th October, 1791. The happy couple lived upon a small farm during the following two years, until Mr. Cecil casually learnt from a Shrewsbury paper that the death of his uncle had placed a coronet upon his brow, and immense wealth at his disposal.

Still concealing the secret of his rank from his wife, Cecil told her that he had determined upon a change of residence. She prepared to accompany him, leaving her native Bolas with regret, for she had been happy there, as maid, wife, and mother. She accompanied her husband, and they came, at last, to Burghley, the beauty of which greatly struck her, as they rode by it in their humble conveyance.

Her husband told her that it was a show-place, and she gladly assented to his invitation to alight and see it. They entered the demesne, walked up the broad avenue with its double fringe of stately oaks, went through the garden

and conservatories, and finally made a tour of the mansion. At last, returning down the grand staircase into the stately hall, around which were arranged figures in antique armor, and family portraits, from the days of Holbein and Vandyke down to Reynolds, her husband asked her how she liked the place? "Beautiful!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Henry, what a paradise to live and die in!" By this time a small crowd of relatives and attendants had made a circle around them. "Sarah," said he, as he kissed her white brow, "this place is yours. I am Earl of Exeter." Then turning to the company, he said, "This is the Countess of Exeter."

Hazlitt himself, a Shropshire man, (Wem, his birthplace, being near Bolas,) has told this story, and adds that the surprise was too much for the peasant-Countess. She fainted at the disclosure, and, he says, her mind never wholly recovered its balance.

Her children were, a daughter, born at Bolas, in 1792, (whose daughter, wedded to Lord Charles Wellesley, will probably be Duchess of Wellington ere she die,) and two sons, the eldest of whom, born in 1795, is the present Marquis. The peasant-Countess died in 1797, and her disconsolate husband married a third wife in 1800. He was elevated to a marquisate in 1801, and died in 1804.

This is the real story of "the Ladye of Burleigh," as narrated by Mr. Dickenson, of Bolas, as lately as 1851, when he died.

MY LOVE AND I WENT SINGING.

BY C. L. THOMPSON.

My love and I went singing,
Through flowery meads afar,
And merry sprites were ringing
Their flower bells,
In rose-clad dells,
'Neath many a glittering star.
Oh, richly, sweetly swells
That chime of flower bells,
With a melody unknown,
Felt by the soul alone,
Flowing wave-like, and in tone
With the cadences of love—
Lifting yearning hearts above
The music of the earth
To sounds of heavenly birth,
To the melody of stars
In their bright and glittering cars.
And my love was very fair,

And her presence to the air
A trembling loveliness imparted,
And the beauty of her face,
With its saintly, radiant grace,
Gave a thrill at which the flowers started—
They started—shrinking quick aback,
And trembling sadly—oh! alack—
How their petals shrunk and withered—
How the blushing roses quivered,
And the bells—those flower bells,
In those vine-wreathed, rose-clad dells,
Ceased their melody; and silence—
And an awful thrilling silence
To the blue-bells and the lilies taught,
Words which my listening heart thus caught:
"Ye blue-bells, and ye rose-leaves fall,
A lovely woman out-vies you all."