

Barry Lyndon

by

William Makepeace Thackeray

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A Bibliographical Note

Barry Lyndon--far from the best known, but by some critics acclaimed as the finest, of Thackeray's works--appeared originally as a serial a few years before VANITY FAIR was written; yet it was not published in book form, and then not by itself, until after the publication of VANITY FAIR, PENDENNIS, ESMOND and THE NEWCOMES had placed its author in the forefront of the literary men of the day. So many years after the event we cannot help wondering why the story was not earlier put in book form; for in its delineation of the character of an adventurer it is as great as VANITY FAIR, while for the local colour of history, if I may put it so, it is no undistinguished precursor of ESMOND.

In the number of FRASER'S MAGAZINE for January 1844 appeared the first instalment of 'THE LUCK OF BARRY LYNDON, ESQ., A ROMANCE OF THE LAST CENTURY, by FitzBoodle,' and the story continued to appear month by month--with the exception of October--up to the end of the year, when the concluding portion was signed 'G. S. FitzBoodle.' FITZBOODLE'S CONFESSIONS, it should be added, had appeared occasionally in the magazine during the years immediately precedent, so that the pseudonym was familiar to FRASER'S readers. The story was written, according to its author's own words, 'with a great deal of dulness, unwillingness and labour,' and was evidently done as the instalments were required, for in August he wrote 'read for "B. L." all the morning at the club,' and four days later of "'B. L." lying like a nightmare on my mind.' The journey to the East--which was to give us in literary results NOTES OF A JOURNEY FROM CORNHILL TO GRAND CAIRO--was begun with BARRY LYNDON yet unfinished, for at Malta the author noted on the first three days of November--'Wrote Barry but slowly and with great difficulty.' 'Wrote Barry with no more success than yesterday.' 'Finished Barry after great throes late at night.' In the number of Fraser's for the following month, as I have said, the conclusion appeared. A dozen years later, in 1856, the story formed the first part of the third volume of Thackeray's MISCELLANIES, when it was called MEMOIRS OF BARRY LYNDON, ESQ., WRITTEN BY HIMSELF. Since then, it has nearly always been issued with other matter, as though it were not strong enough to stand alone, or as though the importance of a work was mainly to be gauged by the number of pages to be crowded into one cover. The scheme of the present edition fortunately allows fitting honour to be done to the memoirs of the great adventurer.

To come from the story as a whole to the personality of the eponymous hero. Three widely-differing historical individuals are suggested as having contributed to the composite portrait. Best known of these was that very prince among adventurers, G. J. Casanova de Seingalt, a man who in the latter half of the eighteenth century played the part of adventurer--and generally that of the successful adventurer--in most of the European capitals; who within the first five-and-twenty years of his life had been 'abbe, secretary to Cardinal Aquaviva, ensign, and violinist, at Rome, Constantinople, Corfu, and his own birthplace (Venice), where he cured a senator of apoplexy.' His autobiography, MEMOIRES ECRIT PAR LUI MEME (in twelve volumes), has been

described as 'unmatched as a self-revelation of scoundrelism.' It has also been suggested, with I think far less colour of probability, that the original of Barry was the diplomatist and satiric poet Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, whom Dr Johnson described as 'our lively and elegant though too licentious lyric bard.' The third original, and one who, there cannot be the slightest doubt, contributed features to the great portrait, is a certain Andrew Robinson Stoney, afterwards Stoney-Bowes.

The original of the Countess Lyndon was Mary Eleanor Bowes, Dowager Countess of Strathmore, and heiress of a very wealthy Durham family. This lady had many suitors, but in 1777 Stoney, a bankrupt lieutenant on half pay, who had fought a duel on her behalf, induced her to marry him, and subsequently hyphenated her name with his own. He became member of Parliament, and ran such extravagant courses as does Barry Lyndon, treated his wife with similar barbarity, abducted her when she had escaped from him, and then, after being divorced, found his way to a debtors' prison. There are similarities here which no seeker after originals can overlook. Mrs Ritchie says that her father had a friend at Paris, 'a Mr Bowes, who may have first told him this history of which the details are almost incredible, as quoted from the papers of the time.' The name of Thackeray's friend is a curious coincidence, unless, as may well have been the case, he was a connection of the family into which the notorious adventurer had married. It is not unlikely that Thackeray had seen the work published in 1810--the year of Stoney-Bowes's death--in which the whole unhappy romance was set forth. This was 'THE LIVES OF ANDREW ROBINSON BOWES ESQ., and THE COUNTESS OF STRATHMORE. Written from thirty-three years' Professional Attendance, from letters and other well authenticated Documents by Jesse Foot, Surgeon.' In this book we find several incidents similar to ones in the story. Bowes cut down all the timber on his wife's estate, but 'the neighbours would not buy it.' Such practical jokes as Barry Lyndon played upon his son's tutor were played by Bowes on his chaplain. The story of Stoney and his marriage will be found briefly given in the notice of the Countess's life in the DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY.

Whence that part of the romantic interlude dealing with the stay in the Duchy of X---, dealt with in chapter x., etc., was inspired, Thackeray's own note\books (as quoted by Mrs Ritchie) conclusively show: 'January 4, 1844. Read in a silly book called L'EMPIRE, a good story about the first K. of Wurtemberg's wife; killed by her husband for adultery. Frederic William, born in 1734 (?), m. in 1780 the Princess Caroline of Brunswick Wolfenbuttel, who died the 27th September 1788. For the rest of the story see L'EMPIRE, OU DIX ANS SOUS NAPOLEON, PAR UN CHAMBELLAN: Paris, Allardin, 1836; vol. i. 220.' The 'Captain Freny' to whom Barry owed his adventures on his journey to Dublin (chapter iii.) was a notorious highwayman, on whose doings Thackeray had enlarged in the fifteenth chapter of his IRISH SKETCH BOOK.

Despite the slowness with which it was written, and the seeming neglect with which it was permitted to remain unreprinted, BARRY LYNDON was to be hailed by competent critics as one of Thackeray's finest performances, though the author himself seems to have had no strong regard for the story. His daughter has recorded, 'My father once said to me when I was a girl: "You needn't read BARRY LYNDON, you won't like it." Indeed, it is scarcely a book to LIKE, but one to admire and to wonder at for its consummate power and mastery.' Another novelist, Anthony Trollope, has said of it: 'In imagination, language, construction, and general literary capacity, Thackeray never did anything more remarkable than BARRY LYNDON.' Mr Leslie Stephen says: 'All later critics have recognised in this book one of his most powerful performances. In directness and vigour he never surpassed it.'

W.J.

Chapter 1

My Pedigree And Family--Undergo The Influence Of The Tender Passion

Since the days of Adam, there has been hardly a mischief done in this world but a woman has been at the bottom of it. Ever since ours was a family (and that must be very NEAR Adam's time,--so old, noble, and illustrious are the Barrys, as everybody knows) women have played a mighty part with the destinies of our race.

I presume that there is no gentleman in Europe that has not heard of the house of Barry of Barryogue, of the kingdom of Ireland, than which a more famous name is not to be found in Gwillim or D'Hozier; and though, as a man of the world, I have learned to despise heartily the claims of some PRETENDERS to high birth who have no more genealogy than the lacquey who cleans my boots, and though I laugh to utter scorn the boasting of many of my countrymen, who are all for descending from kings of Ireland, and talk of a domain no bigger than would feed a pig as if it were a principality; yet truth compels me to assert that my family was the noblest of the island, and, perhaps, of the universal world; while their possessions, now insignificant and torn from us by war, by treachery, by the loss of time, by ancestral extravagance, by adhesion to the old faith and monarch, were formerly prodigious, and embraced many counties, at a time when Ireland was vastly more prosperous than now. I would assume the Irish crown over my coat-of-arms, but that there are so many silly pretenders to that distinction who bear it and render it common.

Who knows, but for the fault of a woman, I might have been wearing it now? You start with incredulity. I say, why not? Had there been a gallant chief to lead my countrymen, instead of puling knaves who bent the knee to King Richard II., they might have been freemen; had there been a resolute leader to meet the murderous ruffian Oliver Cromwell, we should have shaken off the English for ever. But there was no Barry in the field against the usurper; on the contrary, my ancestor, Simon de Bary, came over with the first-named monarch, and married the daughter of the then King of Munster, whose sons in battle he pitilessly slew.

In Oliver's time it was too late for a chief of the name of Barry to lift up his war-cry against that of the murderous brewer. We were princes of the land no longer; our unhappy race had lost its possessions a century previously, and by the most shameful treason. This I know to be the fact, for my mother has often told me the story, and besides had worked it in a worsted pedigree which hung up in the yellow saloon at Barryville where we lived.

That very estate which the Lyndons now possess in Ireland was once the property of my race. Rory Barry of Barryogue owned it in Elizabeth's time, and half Munster beside. The Barry was always in feud with the O'Mahonys in those times; and, as it happened, a certain English colonel passed through the former's country with a body of men-at-arms,

on the very day when the O'Mahonys had made an inroad upon our territories, and carried off a frightful plunder of our flocks and herds.

This young Englishman, whose name was Roger Lyndon, Linden, or Lyndaine, having been most hospitably received by the Barry, and finding him just on the point of carrying an inroad into the O'Mahonys' land, offered the aid of himself and his lances, and behaved himself so well, as it appeared, that the O'Mahonys were entirely overcome, all the Barrys' property restored, and with it, says the old chronicle, twice as much of the O'Mahonys' goods and cattle.

It was the setting in of the winter season, and the young soldier was pressed by the Barry not to quit his house of Barryogue, and remained there during several months, his men being quartered with Barry's own gallowglasses, man by man in the cottages round about. They conducted themselves, as is their wont, with the most intolerable insolence towards the Irish; so much so, that fights and murders continually ensued, and the people vowed to destroy them.

The Barry's son (from whom I descend) was as hostile to the English as any other man on his domain; and, as they would not go when bidden, he and his friends consulted together and determined on destroying these English to a man.

But they had let a woman into their plot, and this was the Barry's daughter. She was in love with the English Lyndon, and broke the whole secret to him; and the dastardly English prevented the just massacre of themselves by falling on the Irish, and destroying Phaudrig Barry, my ancestor, and many hundreds of his men. The cross at Barrycross near Carrignadihioul is the spot where the odious butchery took place.

Lyndon married the daughter of Roderick Barry, and claimed the estate which he left: and though the descendants of Phaudrig were alive, as indeed they are in my person,[Footnote: As we have never been able to find proofs of the marriage of my ancestor Phaudrig with his wife, I make no doubt that Lyndon destroyed the contract, and murdered the priest and witnesses of the marriage.--B. L.] on appealing to the English courts, the estate was awarded to the Englishman, as has ever been the case where English and Irish were concerned.

Thus, had it not been for the weakness of a woman, I should have been born to the possession of those very estates which afterwards came to me by merit, as you shall hear. But to proceed with my family, history.

My father was well known to the best circles in this kingdom, as in that of Ireland, under the name of Roaring Harry Barry. He was bred like many other young sons of genteel families to the profession of the law, being articled to a celebrated attorney of Sackville Street in the city of Dublin; and, from his great genius and aptitude for learning, there is no doubt he would have made an eminent figure in his profession, had not his social qualities, love of field-sports, and extraordinary graces of manner, marked him out for a higher sphere. While he was attorney's clerk he kept seven race-horses, and hunted

regularly both with the Kildare and Wicklow hunts; and rode on his grey horse Endymion that famous match against Captain Punter, which is still remembered by lovers of the sport, and of which I caused a splendid picture to be made and hung over my dining-hall mantelpiece at Castle Lyndon. A year afterwards he had the honour of riding that very horse Endymion before his late Majesty King George II. at New-market, and won the plate there and the attention of the august sovereign.

Although he was only the second son of our family, my dear father came naturally into the estate (now miserably reduced to L400 a year); for my grandfather's eldest son Cornelius Barry (called the Chevalier Borgne, from a wound which he received in Germany) remained constant to the old religion in which our family was educated, and not only served abroad with credit, but against His Most Sacred Majesty George II. in the unhappy Scotch disturbances in '45. We shall hear more of the Chevalier hereafter.

For the conversion of my father I have to thank my dear mother, Miss Bell Brady, daughter of Ulysses Brady of Castle Brady, county Kerry, Esquire and J.P. She was the most beautiful woman of her day in Dublin, and universally called the Dasher there. Seeing her at the assembly, my father became passionately attached to her; but her soul was above marrying a Papist or an attorney's clerk; and so, for the love of her, the good old laws being then in force, my dear father slipped into my uncle Cornelius's shoes and took the family estate. Besides the force of my mother's bright eyes, several persons, and of the genteel society too, contributed to this happy change; and I have often heard my mother laughingly tell the story of my father's recantation, which was solemnly pronounced at the tavern in the company of Sir Dick Ringwood, Lord Bagwig, Captain Punter, and two or three other young sparks of the town. Roaring Harry won 300 pieces that very night at faro, and laid the necessary information the next morning against his brother; but his conversion caused a coolness between him and my uncle Corney, who joined the rebels in consequence.

This great difficulty being settled, my Lord Bagwig lent my father his own yacht, then lying at the Pigeon House, and the handsome Bell Brady was induced to run away with him to England, although her parents were against the match, and her lovers (as I have heard her tell many thousands of times) were among the most numerous and the most wealthy in all the kingdom of Ireland. They were married at the Savoy, and my grandfather dying very soon, Harry Barry, Esquire, took possession of his paternal property and supported our illustrious name with credit in London. He pinked the famous Count Tiercelin behind Montague House, he was a member of 'White's,' and a frequenter of all the chocolate-houses; and my mother, likewise, made no small figure. At length, after his great day of triumph before His Sacred Majesty at Newmarket, Harry's fortune was just on the point of being made, for the gracious monarch promised to provide for him. But alas! he was taken in charge by another monarch, whose will have no delay or denial,--by Death, namely, who seized upon my father at Chester races, leaving me a helpless orphan. Peace be to his ashes! He was not faultless, and dissipated all our princely family property; but he was as brave a fellow as ever tossed a bumper or called a main, and he drove his coach-and- six like a man of fashion.

I do not know whether His gracious Majesty was much affected by this sudden demise of my father, though my mother says he shed some royal tears on the occasion. But they helped us to nothing: and all that was found in the house for the wife and creditors was a purse of ninety guineas, which my dear mother naturally took, with the family plate, and my father's wardrobe and her own; and putting them into our great coach, drove off to Holyhead, whence she took shipping for Ireland. My father's body accompanied us in the finest hearse and plumes money could buy; for though the husband and wife had quarrelled repeatedly in life, yet at my father's death his high-spirited widow forgot all her differences, gave him the grandest funeral that had been seen for many a day, and erected a monument over his remains (for which I subsequently paid), which declared him to be the wisest, purest, and most affectionate of men.

In performing these sad duties over her deceased lord, the widow spent almost every guinea she had, and, indeed, would have spent a great deal more, had she discharged one-third of the demands which the ceremonies occasioned. But the people around our old house of Barryogue, although they did not like my father for his change of faith, yet stood by him at this moment, and were for exterminating the mutes sent by Mr. Plumer of London with the lamented remains. The monument and vault in the church were then, alas! all that remained of my vast possessions; for my father had sold every stick of the property to one Notley, an attorney, and we received but a cold welcome in his house--a miserable old tumble-down place it was. [Footnote: In another part of his memoir Mr. Barry will be found to describe this mansion as one of the most splendid palaces in Europe; but this is a practice not unusual with his nation; and with respect to the Irish principality claimed by him, it is known that Mr. Barry's grandfather was an attorney and maker of his own fortune.]

The splendour of the funeral did not fail to increase the widow Barry's reputation as a woman of spirit and fashion; and when she wrote to her brother Michael Brady, that worthy gentleman immediately rode across the country to fling himself in her arms, and to invite her in his wife's name to Castle Brady.

Mick and Barry had quarrelled, as all men will, and very high words had passed between them during Barry's courtship of Miss Bell. When he took her off, Brady swore he would never forgive Barry or Bell; but coming to London in the year '46, he fell in once more with Roaring Harry, and lived in his fine house in Clarges Street, and lost a few pieces to him at play, and broke a watchman's head or two in his company,--all of which reminiscences endeared Bell and her son very much to the good-hearted gentleman, and he received us both with open arms. Mrs. Barry did not, perhaps wisely, at first make known to her friends what was her condition; but arriving in a huge gilt coach with enormous armorial bearings, was taken by her sister-in-law and the rest of the county for a person of considerable property and distinction. For a time, then, and as was right and proper, Mrs. Barry gave the law at Castle Brady. She ordered the servants to and fro, and taught them, what indeed they much wanted, a little London neatness; and 'English Redmond,' as I was called, was treated like a little lord, and had a maid and a footman to himself; and honest Mick paid their wages,--which was much more than he was used to do for his own domestics,--doing all in his power to make his sister decently comfortable

under her afflictions. Mamma, in return, determined that, when her affairs were arranged, she would make her kind brother a handsome allowance for her son's maintenance and her own; and promised to have her handsome furniture brought over from Clarges Street to adorn the somewhat dilapidated rooms of Castle Brady.

But it turned out that the rascally landlord seized upon every chair and table that ought by rights to have belonged to the widow. The estate to which I was heir was in the hands of rapacious creditors; and the only means of subsistence remaining to the widow and child was a rent-charge of L50 upon my Lord Bagwig's property, who had many turf-dealings with the deceased. And so my dear mother's liberal intentions towards her brother were of course never fulfilled.

It must be confessed, very much to the discredit of Mrs. Brady of Castle Brady, that when her sister-in-law's poverty was thus made manifest, she forgot all the respect which she had been accustomed to pay her, instantly turned my maid and man-servant out of doors, and told Mrs. Barry that she might follow them as soon as she chose. Mrs. Mick was of a low family, and a sordid way of thinking; and after about a couple of years (during which she had saved almost all her little income) the widow complied with Madam Brady's desire. At the same time, giving way to a just though prudently dissimulated resentment, she made a vow that she would never enter the gates of Castle Brady while the lady of the house remained alive within them.

She fitted up her new abode with much economy and considerable taste, and never, for all her poverty, abated a jot of the dignity which was her due and which all the neighbourhood awarded to her. How, indeed, could they refuse respect to a lady who had lived in London, frequented the most fashionable society there, and had been presented (as she solemnly declared) at Court? These advantages gave her a right which seems to be pretty unsparingly exercised in Ireland by those natives who have it,—the right of looking down with scorn upon all persons who have not had the opportunity of quitting the mother-country and inhabiting England for a while. Thus, whenever Madam Brady appeared abroad in a new dress, her sister-in-law would say, 'Poor creature! how can it be expected that she should know anything of the fashion?' And though pleased to be called the handsome widow, as she was, Mrs. Barry was still better pleased to be called the English widow.

Mrs. Brady, for her part, was not slow to reply: she used to say that the defunct Barry was a bankrupt and a beggar; and as for the fashionable society which he saw, he saw it from my Lord Bagwig's side-table, whose flatterer and hanger-on he was known to be. Regarding Mrs. Barry, the lady of Castle Brady would make insinuations still more painful. However, why should we allude to these charges, or rake up private scandal of a hundred years old? It was in the reign of George II that the above-named personages lived and quarrelled; good or bad, handsome or ugly, rich or poor, they are all equal now; and do not the Sunday papers and the courts of law supply us every week with more novel and interesting slander?

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