

THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER
AND
THE FUGITIVES
VOL. I.

BY
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“Lady, you come hither to be married to this count?”

“I do.”

—*Much Ado about Nothing*.

THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

HER PARENTS.

THE Duchess was a very sensible woman.

This was her character, universally acknowledged. She might not perhaps be so splendid a person as a duchess ought to be. She had never been beautiful, nor was she clever in the ordinary sense of the word; but she was in the full sense of the word a sensible woman. She had, there is no doubt, abundant need for this faculty in her progress through the world. Hers had not been a holiday existence, notwithstanding her high position at the head of one of the proudest houses and noblest families in England. It is a sort of compensation to us for the grandeur of the great to believe that, after all, their wealth and their high position do them very little good.

“The village maidens of the plain
Salute me lowly as they go,
Envious they mark my silken train,
Nor think a countess can have woe.
The simple nymphs! they little know
How far more happy’s their estate,
To smile for joy than sigh for woe,
To be content than to be great.”

So we all like to believe. But after all, it is highly doubtful whether there is more content, as the moralists of the eighteenth century imagined, in a cottage than in a palace; and the palace has the best of it in so many other ways. The Duchess had met with many vexations in her life, but no more than we all meet with, nor of a severer kind; and she had her coronet, and her finery, and her beautiful ducal houses, and the devotion of all that surrounded her,

to the good. So while we have no occasion to be envious, we have none, on the other hand, to plume ourselves upon the advantages of humble position. Duchess or no duchess, however, this lady had sense, a precious gift. And she had need to have it, as the following narrative will show.

For the Duke, on his side, did not possess that most valuable quality. He was far more proud than a duke has any occasion to be. On that pinnacle of rank, if on any height imaginable, a man may permit himself to think simply of his position, and to form no overestimate of his own grandeur. But the Duke of Billingsgate was very proud, and believed devoutly that he himself and his family tree, and the strawberry-leaves which grew on the top of it, overshadowed the world. He thought it made an appreciable difference to the very sunshine; and as for the county under his shadow, he felt towards it as the old gods might have felt towards the special lands of which they were the patrons tutelary. He expected incense upon all the altars, and a sort of perpetual adoration. It would have pleased him to have men swear by him and dedicate churches in his honour, had such things been in accordance with modern manners: he would have felt it to be only natural. He liked people to come into his presence with diffidence and awe; and though he was frank of accost, and of elaborate affability, as an English gentleman is obliged to be in these days, talking to the commonalty almost as if he forgot they were his inferiors, he never did forget the fact, and it offended him deeply if they appeared to forget it in word or deed. He was very gracious to the little county ladies who would come to dine at the Castle when he was in the country, but he half wondered how they could have the courage to place a little trembling hand upon his ducal arm, and he liked those all the better who did tremble and were overcome by

the honour. He had spent enormously in his youth, keeping up the state and splendour which he thought were necessary to his rank, and which he still thought necessary though his means were now straitened. And it cannot be denied that he was angry with the world because his means were straitened, and felt it a disgrace to the country that one of its earliest dukedoms should be humiliated to the necessity of discharging superfluous footmen and lessening the number of horses in the stables. He thought this came, like so many other evils, of the radicalism of the times. Dukes did not need to retrench when things were as they ought to be, and a strong paramount Government held the reins of State. The Duke, however, retrenched as little as was possible. He did it always under protest. When strong representations on the part of his agents and lawyers induced him against his will to cut off one source of expense, he had a great tendency to burst out into another on an unforeseen occasion and a different side—a tendency which made him very difficult to manage and a great trouble to all connected with him.

This was indeed the chief cross in the life of the Duchess; but even that she took with great sense, not dwelling upon it more than she could help, and comforting herself with the thought that Hungerford, who was her eldest son, had great capabilities in the opposite direction, and was exactly the sort of man to rebuild the substantial fortunes of the family. He had already done a great deal in that way by resolutely marrying a great heiress in spite of his father's absurd opposition. The Duke had thought his heir good enough for a princess, and had something as near hysterics as it would be becoming for a duke to indulge in when he ascertained that obstinate young man's determination to marry a lady whose money had been made in the City; but Hungerford was thirty, and his father had no control over him. There was, however, something

left which he had entirely in his own hands, his daughter—Lady Jane. She had all the qualities which the Duke most esteemed in his race. She resembled in features that famous duchess who had the good fortune to please Charles II., but with a proud, and reserved, and stately air, which had not distinguished that famous beauty. The repose of her manners was such as can be seen only on the highest levels of society. Her face would wear an unchanged expression for days together, and for almost as long a period the echoes around her would be undisturbed by anything like the vulgarity of speech. She was a child after her father's own heart. Though it is a derogation to a family to descend through the female line, his Grace could almost have put up with this, had it been possible to transfer the succession from Hungerford and his plebeian wife to that still, and fair, and stately maiden. Jane, Duchess of Billingsgate (in her own right). He liked the thought. He felt that there would be a certain propriety even in permitting the race to die out in such a last crowning flower of dignity and honour. But no day-dream, as he knew, could have been more futile; for the City lady had brought three boys already to perpetuate the race, and there was no telling how many more were coming. Hungerford declared loudly that he meant to put them into trade when they grew up, and that his grandfather's business was to be Bobby's inheritance. Bobby! He had been called after that grandfather. Such a name had never been heard before among the Altamonts. The Duke took very little notice of any of the children, and none whatever of that City brat. But, alas! what could he do? There was no shutting them out from a single honour. Bobby would be Lord Robert in spite of him, even at the head of his City grandfather's firm.

But the marriage of Lady Jane was a matter still to be concluded, and in that her father was determined to have his own way. There had not been the violent competition for her beautiful hand which might have been expected. Dukes are scant at all times, and there did not happen at that time to be one marriageable duke with a hand to offer; and smaller people were alarmed by the grandeur of her surroundings, by the character of her papa, and by her own stateliness of manner. There were a few who moved about the outskirts of the magnificent circle in which alone Lady Jane was permitted to appear, and cast wistful glances at her, but did not venture further. The Marquis of Wodensville made her a proposal, but he was sixty, and the Duke did not think the inducement sufficient to interpose his parental authority; and Mr Roundel, of Bishop's Roundel, made serious overtures. If family alone could have carried the day, the claim of this gentleman would have been supreme, and his Grace did not lightly reject that great commoner, a man who would not have accepted a title had the Queen herself gone on her knees to him. But he showed signs of a desire to play this big fish, to procrastinate and keep him in suspense, and that was a treatment which a Roundel was not likely to submit to. Other proposals of less importance never even reached Lady Jane's ears; and the subject gave him no concern. It is true that once or twice Lady Hungerford had made a laughing remark on the subject of Jane's marriage, which was like her underbred impertinence. But the Duke never did more than turn his large light-grey eyes solemnly upon her when she was guilty of any such assault upon the superior race. He never condescended to reply. He did very much the same thing when the Duchess with a sigh once made a similar observation. He turned his head and fixed his eyes upon her; but the Duchess was used to him and was not overawed. "I cannot conceive what you can mean," he said.

“It is not hard to understand. I don’t expect to be immortal, and I confess I should like to see Jane settled.”

“Settled!” his Grace said—the very word was derogatory to his daughter.

“Well, the term does not matter. She is very affectionate and clinging, though people do not think so. I should like to make sure that she has some one to take care of her when I die.”

“You may be assured,” said the Duke, “that Jane will want no one to take care of her as you say. I object to hear such a word as clinging applied to my daughter. I am quite capable, I hope, of taking care of her.”

“But, dear Gus, you are no more immortal than I am,” said his wife. He disliked to be called by his Christian name in any circumstances, but Gus had always driven him frantic, as, indeed, it is to be feared the Duchess was aware. She was annoyed too, or she would not have addressed him so.

The Duke looked at her once more, but made no reply. He could not say anything against this assertion: had there been anything better than immortality he would have put in a claim for that, but as it is certainly an article of belief that all men are mortal, he was wise enough to say nothing. Such incidents as these, however, disturbed him slightly. The sole effect of his wife’s interference was to make him look at Lady Jane with more critical eyes. The first time he did so there seemed to him no cause whatever for concern. She had come in from a walk, and was recounting to her mother what she had seen and heard. She had a soft flush on her cheek, and was if anything too animated and youthful in her appearance. She had met the great Lady Germaine,

who had brought a party to see the Dell in the neighbourhood of Billings Castle. The Duke did not care for intruders upon his property, but it had been impossible to refuse permission to such a leader of fashion as Lady Germaine. "There were all the Germaines, of course, and May Plantagenet, and—Mr Winton," said Lady Jane. She made a scarcely perceptible pause before the last name. The Duke took no notice of this, nor did he even remark what she said. "No longer young!" he said to himself, "she is too young," and dismissed Lady Hungerford's gibes and the Duchess's sigh with indignation. He did not even think of it again until next season, when Jane came to breakfast late one morning after a great ball, and made a languid remark in answer to her mother's question. "There was scarcely any one there," she said with something between a yawn and a sigh: half London had been there; but still it was not what his daughter said that attracted his attention. He saw as he looked at her a slight, the very slightest, indentation in the delicate oval of Lady Jane's cheek. The perfection of the curve was just broken. It might only have been a dimple, but she was not in the mood which reveals dimples. There went a little chill to the Duke's heart at the sight. *Passée?* Impossible; years and years must go before that word could be applied to his daughter; but still he felt sure Lady Hungerford must have remarked it: no, it was not a hollow; but no doubt with her vulgar long sight she must have remarked it, and would say everywhere that dear Jane was certainly going off. The Duke never took any notice apparently of these sallies of his daughter-in-law, but in reality there was nothing of which he stood in so much dread.

The Duchess on her side was well acquainted with that hollow. It *was* a hollow, very slight, sometimes disappearing altogether; but there it was. She had awakened to a consciousness of its

existence one day suddenly, though it had evidently taken some time to come to that point. And since then it had seldom been out of the Duchess's mind. She had no doubt that other people had discovered it before now, and made malicious remarks upon it: for if she observed it who was so anxious to make the best of her child, what would they do whose object was the reverse? But what did it matter what any one said? There it was, which was the great thing. It spoke with a voice which nobody could silence, of Jane's youth passing away, of her freshness wearing out, of her bloom fading. Was she to sit there and grow old while her father wove his fictions about her? It had given the Duchess many a thought. She knew very well what all this princely expenditure would lead to. Hungerford would not be much the worse; he had his wife's fortune to fall back upon, and perhaps he would not feel himself called upon to take on himself the burden of his father's debts after he was gone. But for the Duke himself, if he lived, and his family, the Duchess, looking calmly on ahead, knew what must happen. Things would come to a crash sooner or later, and everything that could be sacrificed would have to be sacrificed. Rank would not save them. It might put off bankruptcy to the last possible moment, but it would not avert it altogether; and the moment would come when everything must change, and a sort of noble exile, or at least seclusion in the country, if nothing worse, would be their fate. And Jane? If she were to be left to her father's disposal, what would be the end of Jane? She would have to descend from her pedestal, and learn what it was to be poor—that is, as dukes' daughters can be poor. The grandeur and largeness of her life would fall away from her, and no new chapter in existence would come in to modify the old, and make its changes an advantage rather than a drawback. The Duchess said to herself that to go against her husband was a thing she never had done; but there was a limit to a wife's duty.

She could not let Jane be sacrificed while she stood aside and looked on. This was the question which the Duchess had to solve. She was brought to it gradually, her eyes being opened by degrees to other things not quite so evident as that change in the oval of Jane's perfect cheek. She found out why it was that her daughter had yawned or sighed, and said, "There was nobody there," of the ball to which half London struggled to get admittance. On the very next evening Lady Jane paid a humdrum visit to an old lady who was nobody in particular, and came home with a pretty glow, and no hollow visible, declaring that there had been a delightful little party, and that she had never enjoyed herself so much. The Duchess felt that here was a mystery. It was partly the 'Morning Post' that helped her to find it out, and partly the unconscious revelations of Jane herself in her exhilaration. The 'Morning Post' made it evident that a certain name was not in the list of the fine people who had figured at my Lady Germaine's ball, and Lady Jane betrayed by a hundred unconscious little references that the bearer of that name had been present at the other little reunion. The Duchess put this and that together. She, too, no doubt would have liked to see her daughter a duchess like herself; but, failing that, she preferred that Jane should be happy in her own way. But the question was, had Jane courage enough to take her own way? She had been supposed to have everything she wanted all her life, and had been surrounded by every observance; but, as a matter of fact, Jane had got chiefly what other people wanted, and had been secretly satisfied that it should be so. Would she once in her life, against her father and the world, be moved to stand up for herself? But this was what the Duchess did not know.

CHAPTER II.

HERSELF.

A PRINCESS royal is always an interesting personage. The very title is charming—there is about it a supreme heiress-ship, if not of practical dominion, at least of the more delicate part of the inheritance. She has the feminine rule, the kingdom of hearts, the homage of sentiment and imagination. Even when she grows old the title retains a sweet and penetrating influence, and in youth it is the very crown of visionary greatness, an elevation without any vulgar elements. Lady Jane was the Princess Royal of her father's house. There had been just so much poetry in his pride as to make him feel this beautifying characteristic of feminine rank to be an addition (if any addition were possible) to his dukedom. And she had been brought up in the belief that she was not as other girls were, nor even as the little Lady Marys and Lady Augustas who in the eyes of the world stood upon a similar eminence. She stood alone—the blood of the Altamonts had reached its cream of sweetness, its fine quintessence in her veins. Hungerford was very well in his way. He would be Duke when his time came. The property, and lands, and titles would be vested in him; but he had no such visionary altitude as his sister. He himself was quite aware of the fact: he laughed, and was very well content to be rid of this visionary representativeship, but he fully recognised that Jane was not to be considered as an ordinary mortal, that she was the flower and crown of so many generations, the last perfection to which the race could attain. And with infinite modesty and humility of mind Lady Jane too perceived her mission. She became aware of it very early, when other girls were still busy with their skipping-ropes. It was a great honour to fall upon so young a head. When she walked

about the noble woods at Billings and dreamed as girls do of the world before her, this sense of rank was never absent from her mind: impossible to foresee what were the scenes through which it might lead her. She heard a great deal of the evil state of public affairs—the decadence of England, the advance of democracy, the approaching ruin in which everything that was great and noble must soon be engulfed; and Lady Jane took it all seriously, and felt it very possible that her fate might be that of a virgin martyr to the cruel forces of revolution. For one time of her life her favourite literature was the memoirs of those great and noble ladies, full of charity and romance, who cast a pathetic glory upon the end of the old *régime* in France, and died for crimes of which they were no way guilty, paying the long arrears of oppression which they had done all they could to modify. Jane took, as was natural, the political jeremiads of her father and his friends with the matter-of-fact faith of youth, and she did not think that even the guillotine was impossible. If it came to her lot—as, according to all she heard, seemed likely—to maintain the cause of nobility to the last, she was ready to walk to the scaffold like Marie Antoinette, holding her head high, and smiling upon her assassins; or if it were possible to save the country by another kind of self-devotion, she was prepared, though with trembling, to inspire a nation or lead an army. These were the kind of dreams she entertained at fifteen, which is the time when a girl is most alive to the claims of patriotism, and can feel it possible that she too may be a heroine. Older, she began to be less certain. Facts came in and confused fancy. She saw no indications such as those which her books said had been seen in France; everything was very peaceable, everybody very respectful wherever she went. The common people looked at her admiringly when by chance she drove with her mamma through the crowded streets. They seemed all quite willing

to acknowledge her position. She was greeted with smiles instead of groans, and heroism seemed unnecessary.

Then there came a time when Lady Jane felt that it would probably be her mission to be, if not a martyr, a benefactress to the world. It would be right for her to move half royally, half angelically, through all the haunts of wretchedness, and leave comfort and abundance behind. She imagined to herself scenes like the great plague, times of famine and fever, in which her sudden appearance, with succour of every kind about her, would bring an immediate change of affairs and turn darkness into light. She did not know—how should she?—what squalor and wretchedness were like, and this great and successful mission never in her thoughts so much as soiled her dress, and had nothing disgusting or repulsive in it. But by-and-by, gradually there came a change also upon this phase of mind. A princess royal has always the confidence that in her own ministrations there must be a secret charm; but still she could not shut her eyes to the fact that in her mother's charities all was not plain sailing. And it became apparent to her also, with a considerable shock, that there were many things which the Duchess wished but had not means to do; which had a painful effect upon Lady Jane's dreams, and cut them short, confusing her whole horizon, and arresting her imagination. She then paused, with considerable bewilderment, not quite perceiving where the mission of her rank would lead her. It must give her distinct duties, and a sphere above the common quiescence of life—but what? Lady Jane was perplexed, and no longer saw her way. Vulgar contact with the world was impossible to her; she shrank from the public organisation of charity. Something else surely, something of a more magnanimous kind, was to be hers to do. But in the meantime she did not know what, and stood as it

were upon the battlements of the castle wall looking out, somewhat confused, but full of noble sentiment and desire to perform the finest functions for the advantage of the world.

This was the aspect which pride of birth took in the pure and high-toned spirit of the Duke's daughter. She accepted undoubtingly the creed of her race, and never questioned the fact that she was something entirely removed from the crowd, elevated above the ordinary level of humanity. The Duchess had little of this inborn conviction, but yet a duchess is a duchess, and unless she is of a quite remarkable order of intelligence, it is very unlikely that she should be able to separate herself from the prejudices of her rank. As a matter of fact, the members of a duke's household are not ordinary mortals. Limits which are natural to us have nothing to do with them. It must require a distinct independence and great force of mind to realise that they are just of the same flesh and blood as the scullery-maid and the shoe-boy; nay—for these are extravagant instances out of their range of vision—even as the groom of the chambers and the housekeeper, who are entirely devoted to their service. To doubt this, accordingly, never entered the mind of Lady Jane; but anything resembling personal pride had no existence in her. She did not know what it meant. There is no such beautiful scope for pure humility of spirit as in the mind of a creature thus fancifully elevated. It never occurred to her that it was her own excellence which gave her this place. She was unfeignedly modest in every estimate of herself, docile, ready to be guided, deferring to everybody. Never had there been so obedient a child to nurses and governesses, nor one who accepted reproof more sweetly, nor sought with more anxious grace to gain approbation. It was difficult to rouse her to the exercise of her own judgment at all. "Do you think so?" she would say to the humblest

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