

INTRODUCTION

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE LATE LORD CARNARVON

BY LADY BURGHCLERE

IF it is true that the whole world loves a lover, it is also true that either openly or secretly the world loves Romance. Hence, doubtless, the passionate and farflung interest aroused by the discovery of Tut-ankh-Amen's tomb, an interest extended to the discoverer, and certainly not lessened by the swift tragedy that waited on his brief hour of triumph. A story that opens like Aladdin's Cave, and ends like a Greek myth of Nemesis cannot fail to capture the imagination of all men and women who, in this workaday existence, can still be moved by tales of high endeavour and unrelenting doom. Let it be gratefully acknowledged by those to whom Carnarvon's going must remain an ever-enduring sorrow, that the sympathy displayed equalled the excitement evoked by the revelations in The Valley of the Kings. It is in thankful response to that warm-hearted sympathy that this slight sketch of a many-sided personality, around whom such emotions have centred, finds place here as introduction to the history of that discovery to which the discoverer so eagerly devoted his energies and ultimately sacrificed his life.

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Howard Carter and A. C. Mace

Excerpt

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Introduction

To those who knew Lord Carnarvon, there is a singular fitness in the fact that he should have been the hero of one of the most dramatic episodes of the present day, since under the quiet exterior of this reticent Englishman, beat, in truth, a romantic heart. The circumstances of his life had undoubtedly fostered the natural bent of his character. Born on June 26th, 1866, George Edward Stanhope Molyneux Herbert, Lord Porchester, enjoyed the inestimable privilege of being reared in an atmosphere coloured by romance and permeated by a fine simplicity. Nor was he less happy in his outward surroundings. Even when matched against the many "stately homes of England," Highclere must rank as a domain of rare beauty. Much of its charm is due to its contrasted scenery. From the close-cropped lawns, shaded by giant cedars of Lebanon, where in a past century Pope sat and discoursed with his friend, Robert Caroline Herbert, the godson and namesake of George II's queen, the transition is brief to thickets of hawthorn, woods of beech and oak, and lakes, the happy haunts of wildfowl; while all around stand the high downs either densely timbered or as bare and wild as when the Britons built their camp of refuge on Beacon Hill, the great chalk bastion that dominates the country-side. To children nurtured on Arthurian legends it needed little mental effort to translate the woodlands, where they galloped their ponies, into the Forest of Broceliande, or the old monkish fishponds, where they angled for pike and gathered water-lilies, into that magic mere which swallowed up the good blade Excalibur; whilst a mound rising from a distant gravel-pit merely required the drawbridge, erected by the obliging house

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carpenter across its surrounding trickle of water, to become Tintagel.

If, as any Catholic priest would assure us, the indelible impressions on the human mind are those stamped in the earliest years, Porchester graduated in a school of Romance and Adventure. Moreover, hereditary influences combined with environment to give an individual outlook on life. The son of two high-minded parents who were ever striving to give practical effect to their ideals for the benefit of others, there was nothing to unlearn in the early education. Indeed, it can confidently be asserted that, throughout his childhood, the curly-headed little boy neither heard nor witnessed anything that “common was or mean.” The village, the household, were members of the family. It was the feudal, the patriarchal system at its best, the dreams of “Young England” realized. For the law that governed the community at Highclere was the law of kindness, though kindness that permitted no compromise with moral laxity. An amusing commentary on the standards recognized as governing—or at any rate expected to govern—home life, was furnished on one occasion by the children’s nurse. One of her nurslings, thoroughly scared by the blood-curdling descriptions of Hell, and Hell-fire, contained in a horrible little religious primer, “The Peep o’ Day” (now mercifully discarded by later generations) administered to her by an injudicious governess, naturally turned to the beloved “Nana” for consolation. She did not seek in vain. “Don’t worry, dearie, over such tales,” said the good old woman, “no one from Highclere Castle will ever go to Hell!”

By common consent, Porchester’s father, the

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fourth Earl of Carnarvon, was regarded as a statesman who had never allowed ambition to deflect him by a hair's breadth from the path mapped out by a meticulous conscience. But although he had resigned from the Derby-Disraeli Government rather than support the Franchise Bill of 1867, he was the reverse of a reactionary. Both in imperial and social schemes he was far in advance of most of his contemporaries on both sides in politics. Indeed, it is interesting to speculate how much of blood and treasure would have been spared to this country if the measures and judgment of this truly Conservative statesman had commanded the support of the Cabinets and party with which he was connected. Little boys are not interested in politics—except in lighting bonfires to celebrate successful elections—but whatever are the eventual developments, environment and heredity are the bedrock whence character is hewn. The fifth Earl of Carnarvon—the archæologist—in his physical and mental “make-up,” to use the modern phrase, did not recall his father. But it was from the latter that he inherited the quality of independent thought, coupled with an extreme pleasure in putting his mind alongside that of other men. Moreover, the power of scholarly concentration which he brought to bear on the many and varied subjects in which he was interested, was certainly part of the paternal heritage, for the fourth Earl was one of the finest classical scholars of his generation. Indeed, there are those still living who can bear witness to his faultless Latin oration as Viceroy at Trinity College, Dublin, and remember his admission, when pressed, that he could as easily have made the speech in Greek.

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In 1875 a shadow fell across the boy's life. His mother died after giving birth to a third daughter. The shadow was destined to be enduring, since Evelyn Stanhope, Lady Carnarvon, was one of those rare women who are in the world and yet not of it, and the want of her clever sympathy was a lifelong loss to Porchester. His whimsical wit and her keen sense of humour were made for mutual understanding. She would have helped him to overcome the ingrained reserve, which it needed the action of years to wear away, at the outset interpreting an unusual character to the world, and the world to her son.

Even when the surviving parent is as devoted a father as was Lord Carnarvon, it is perhaps unavoidable that the mother's death should bring an element of austerity into children's lives, though it also tends, as it certainly did in this instance, to tighten the links between brother and sisters. After their mother's death, Porchester, or "Porchy" as he was then habitually called, and the little girls were, however, unspeakably blessed in the devoted affection lavished upon them by their father's sisters Lady Gwendolen Herbert and Eveline, Lady Portsmouth. The former was a delicate invalid around whose sofa young and old clustered, secure of sympathy in sorrow or in joy. The fact that an unhappy chance had cheated her of her share of youth's fun and gaiety made her the more intent on securing these for the motherless children, in whose lives she realized her own life. She was the natural interpreter when vengeance threatened to follow on chemical experiments resulting in semi-asphyxiating and wholly malodorous vapours, or when excursions

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amongst water-taps sent cataracts of water down the Vandycks. The schoolroom discipline of the 'seventies was not conceived on Montessori lines. The extreme mildness of Lady Gwendolen's rule did not always commend itself to tutors and governesses. They recalled that a spear, which at his earnest entreaty she had bestowed on Porchy, was fleshed in a valuable engraving; while another of her gifts, a large saw, was regarded as so dangerous that it became "tabu" and hung suspended by a broad blue ribbon, a curious ornament on the schoolroom wall. Nor can it be denied that to present a small boy with half-a-crown to console him for breaking a window is a homœopathic method of education, which would excite protests from pastors and teachers of any age. But despite her unfailing indulgence, her influence was never enervating. It is what we are, not our sayings, and still less our scoldings, that count with those keen-eyed critics, the younger generation. Naughtiness in Gwendolen's neighbourhood was unthinkable. In her own person she so endeared the quality of gentleness—not a virtue always popular with the young of the male sex—that Porchy's sisters and small half brothers never suffered from roughness at his hands. A tease he was, a terrific tease then and to the end of life, in sober middle-age getting the same rapture from a "rise" out of his friends or family as a fifth-form school boy. But the strand of gentleness that ran through his nature was not its least attaching quality, fostered in those early days by the one effectual method of education, the example of those we love.

Long years afterwards when her nephew laid Lady Gwendolen to rest at Highclere, he reverted

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with grateful tenderness to the memories, the lessons of that selfless love. “What a blank,” he wrote, would the absence of “that little figure in grey” mean to him at the family gatherings, the christenings, the weddings, where her presence carried him back to all the lovely memories of childhood.

Never robust, it is doubtful whether Lord Carnarvon would have accomplished even his brief span of life but for the part played in his boyhood by Lady Portsmouth and her home, Eggesford, which, became his second home. The England of the 'seventies was still an age of hermetically closed windows, overheated rooms, comforters and—worst horror of all—respirators. Fortunately for the boy, Lady Portsmouth, a pioneer in many phases of work and thought, was a strenuous advocate of open air. The delicate, white-faced child, after a couple of months spent in hunting and out-of-door games with the tribe of cousins in North Devon, was transformed into a hardy young sportsman. At Eggesford horses and hounds were as much the foreground of life as politics and books at Highclere. “Mr. Sponge’s Sporting Tour” replaced “Marmion,” though it was “The Talisman” and “Ivanhoe” that Lady Portsmouth read aloud to the family in the cherished evening hour, the climax of the busy, happy day at Eggesford. Different as the two houses might appear, they were, however, alike in essentials. They owned the same ethics, they acknowledged the same standards. Highclere could not be called conventional. But Eggesford, in a country which before the advent of the motor preserved much of the flavour of the past, was distinctly unconventional. The meets brought into the field a motley assembly of men,

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boys, horses and ponies, such as probably outside Ireland could have been collected in no other corner of the United Kingdom. Of these not the least individual figure was Lord Portsmouth, probably the most popular M.F.H. in England. Seldom, indeed, can goodwill to men of goodwill have been more clearly writ large on a human countenance than on this great gentleman's, whose very raciness of expression only the more endeared him to the Hunt.

In later life Lord Carnarvon's friends often noted with amusement his fondness for those they describe as "quaint personalities." It may be that this taste owed its origin to those holiday hours spent waiting for the fox in spinneys, and by larch woods dappled with the early greenery of the incomparable West Country spring-tide. Perhaps it was there also that he received lessons in a less facile art than the observation of the quaint and curious. The perfect ease of friendship, a friendship that excludes alike patronage and familiarity, was the keynote of the old M.F.H.'s intercourse with man, woman, and child on those mornings. It was much the same keynote that governed Lord Carnarvon's relations with persons whose circumstances and mentality might seem to set a wide distance between them. Those who travelled with him on his annual journey—or progress rather—from Paddington to Highclere at Christmas can never forget the warmth of greetings his presence called forth in the railway employees of all grades, from inspectors to engine-drivers. The festival gave them and gave him an opportunity of expressing their feeling, their genuine feeling for one another. It is no exaggeration to

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say that it was a moving scene, singularly appropriate to the celebration of the great family feast of the year.

A private school and Eton are the successive steps which automatically prepare a boy in Porchester's position for a future career. His private school was not happily chosen. It subsisted on its former reputation, and neither diet nor instruction was up to the mark, but he was at least fortunate in emerging alive from an epidemic of measles, which the boys treated by pouring jugs of cold water on each other when uncomfortably feverish.

To the end Eton retained in his eyes that glamour which marks the true Etonian, and his tutor, Mr. Marindin, shared in that affection. Yet it was something of a misfortune that school did nothing for the formation of methodical habits in a boy endowed with an exceptionally fine memory and unusual quickness. It would, for instance, have been a blessing if an expensive education had taught him to answer his letters. Thus, on one occasion, literary circles rang with the wrathful denunciations of a distinguished critic, who had vainly applied to Lord Carnarvon, as heir to the eighteenth-century Lord Chesterfield, for information regarding that statesman's relations with Montesquieu. It was known that the author of "L'Esprit des Lois" had visited either Chesterfield House or Bretby, where it was presumed that some trace of the visit might be found. On inquiry it transpired that Lord Carnarvon had spent hours, if not days, searching the library at Bretby, a library collected entirely by Lord Chesterfield, for any vestiges of Montesquieu. But the search having proved vain, it had not

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occurred to Carnarvon to send a postcard to that effect—if only to point out how much trouble he had taken on an unknown stranger's behalf.

Before he left home for school, tutors and governesses had pronounced Porchy to be idle ; and probably, as in the case of most active young creatures, it was no easy task to hold his sustained attention. Yet, judged by the less exacting standards of the present day, a child of ten would now scarcely be considered backward who was bilingual—French being the language used with mother and teachers—was possessed of a fair knowledge of German, the Latin Grammar, and the elements of Greek, and sang charmingly to the old tin kettle of a schoolroom piano. Labels are fatal things. Once labelled idle it is the pupil and not the instructor who earns the blame. Perhaps also the perfection of the father's scholarship was a stumbling-block to the son. It is one of life's little ironies, on which schoolmasters should ponder, that a man destined to reveal a whole chapter of the Ancient World to the twentieth century, frankly detested the classics as taught at Eton.

The fourth Earl was too sensible to insist on his son pursuing indefinitely studies doomed to failure. Porchester left Eton early to study with a tutor at home and abroad what would now be called the "modern side." The amount of strenuous scientific work achieved in the little laboratory by the side of the lake at Highclere or during walking tours through the Black Forest was probably small ; but at any rate these two *wanderjahren* left him in possession of a store of miscellaneous information