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978-1-108-05209-2 - Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope: Volume 2

Charles Lewis Meryon

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I.

Lady Hester Stanhope's descent—Dr. M.'s first introduction to her—Her reasons for quitting England—Anecdotes of her childhood and womanhood—Her motives for going to live with Mr. Pitt—Mr. Pitt's opinion of Tom Paine—Lady Hester noticed by George III.—Anecdote of Sir A. H.—Of Lord G.—Of Lord A.—Impertinent questioners—Anecdote of the Marquis * * *—Mr. Pitt's confidence in Lady Hester's discretion—and in her devotion to him—His opinion of her cleverness, and of her military and diplomatic abilities—Her tirade against doctors—Her reflections on prudery—Anecdote of General Moore—Of the Due de Blacas, &c.

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CHAPTER I.

It probably will be known to most readers that Lady Hester Stanhope was the daughter of Charles Earl of Stanhope by Hester, his first wife, sister to Mr. William Pitt, and daughter of the first Earl of Chatham. He had issue by this first wife three daughters—Hester, Griselda, and Lucy. The earl married a second wife, by whom he had three sons: the present earl; Charles, killed at Corunna; and James, who died at Caen Wood, the villa of his father-in-law, the Earl of Mansfield.

I became acquainted with Lady Hester Stanhope by accident. The chance that introduced me to her was as follows:—I was going to Oxford to take my degree; and, having missed the coach

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at the inn, I was obliged to hurry after it on foot, for the want of a hackney-coach, as far as Oxford-road turnpike, where I overtook it, and mounted the box in a violent perspiration. The day was bitterly cold, and, before night, I found myself attacked with a very severe catarrh. The merriment of a college life left me little time to pay attention to it; and, after about fifteen days, I returned, with a troublesome cough, to London, where I took to my bed.

Mr. H. Cline, jun., (the son of the celebrated surgeon) being my friend, and hearing of my indisposition, came to inquire after my health very frequently. One day, sitting by my bedside, he asked me if I should like to go abroad. I told him it had been the earliest wish of my life. He said, Lady Hester Stanhope (the niece of Mr. Pitt) had applied to his father for a doctor, and that, if I liked, he would propose me, giving me to understand from his father that, although the salary would be small, I should, if my services proved agreeable to Lady Hester, be ultimately provided for. I thanked him, and said, that to travel with such a distinguished woman would please me exceedingly. The following day he intimated that his father had already spoken about me,

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and that her ladyship would see me. About four days after, I was introduced to her, and she closed with me immediately, inviting me to dine with her that evening. Afterwards, I saw her several times, and subsequently joined her at Portsmouth, whence, after waiting a fortnight, we sailed in the *Jason*, the Hon. Captain King, for Gibraltar.

The reasons which Lady Hester assigned for leaving England were grounded chiefly on the narrowness of her income. Mr. Pitt's written request, on his death-bed, that she might have £1500 a year, had been complied with only in part, owing to the ill office of certain persons at that time in the privy-council, and she got clear, after deductions for the property-tax were made, no more than £1200. At first, after Mr. Pitt's death, she established herself in Montague Square, with her two brothers, and she there continued to see much company. "But," she would say, "a poor gentlewoman, doctor, is the worst thing in the world. Not being able to keep a carriage, how was I to go out? If I used a hackney-coach, some spiteful person would be sure to mention it:—'Who do you think I saw yesterday in a hackney-coach? I wonder where she could be driving alone, down those narrow streets?' If I walked with a footman

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behind me, there are so many women of the town now who flaunt about with a smart footman, that I ran the hazard of being taken for one of them ; and, if I went alone, either there would be some good-natured friend who would hint that Lady Hester did not walk out alone for nothing ; or else I should be met in the street by some gentleman of my acquaintance, who would say, ‘ God bless me, Lady Hester ! where are you going alone ?—do let me accompany you :’ and then it would be said, ‘ Did you see Lady Hester crossing Hanover Square with such a one ? He looked monstrous foolish : I wonder where they had been.’ So that, from one thing to another, I was obliged to stop at home entirely : and this it was that hurt my health so much, until Lord Temple, at last, remarked it. For he said to me one day, ‘ How comes it that a person like you, who used to be always on horseback, never rides out ?’ — ‘ Because I have no horse.’ — ‘ Oh ! if that is all, you shall have one to-morrow.’ — ‘ Thank you, my lord ; but, if I have a horse, I must have two ; and, if I have two, I must have a groom ; and, as I do not choose to borrow, if you please, we will say no more about it.’ — ‘ Oh ! but I will send my horses, and come and ride out with you every day.’ However, I told him

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no : for how could a man who goes to the House every day, and attends committees in a morning, be able to be riding every day with me ? And I know what it is to lend and borrow horses and carriages. When I used to desire my carriage to go and fetch any friend, my coachman was sure to say, ‘ My lady, the horses want shoeing ;’ or the footman would come in with a long face, ‘ My lady, John would like to go and see his sister to-day, if you please :’ there was always some excuse. All this considered, I made up my mind to remain at home.”

For some time did Lady Hester remain in Montague Square ; but her brother and General Moore, having fallen at the battle of Corunna, I believe she grew entirely disgusted with London ; and, breaking up her little establishment, she went down into Wales, and resided in a small cottage at Builth, somewhere near Brecon, in a room not more than a dozen feet square. Here she amused herself in curing the poor, in herdairy, and in other rustic occupations : until, not finding herself so far removed from her English acquaintances but what they were always coming across her and breaking-in upon her solitude, she resolved on going abroad, up the Mediterranean.

Arrived at Gibraltar, she was lodged at the go-

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vernor's, in the convent, where she remained some time; and then embarked for Malta in the *Cerberus*, Captain Whitby, who afterwards distinguished himself in Captain Hoste's victory up the Adriatic. At Malta, she lived, at first, in Mr. Fernandez's house: afterwards, General Oakes offered Lady Hester the palace of St. Antonio, where we resided during the remainder of her stay.

We departed for Zante in the month of June or July, 1810. From Zante, we passed over to Patrass, where she bade adieu to English comforts for the rest of our pilgrimage. Traversing Greece, we visited Constantinople, and, from Constantinople, sailed for Egypt. At Rhodes we were shipwrecked, and I there lost my journals, among which were many curious anecdotes that would have thrown much light on her ladyship's life. I shall relate what I have since gathered without observing any order, but always, as far as I could recollect, using her very expressions; and, in many instances, there will be found whole conversations, where her manner would be recognised by those who were acquainted with it. I shall sometimes preface them with observations of my own.

Speaking of her sisters, Lady Hester would say:
"My sister Lucy was prettier than I was, and

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Griselda more clever ; but I had, from childhood, a cheerfulness and sense of feeling that always made me a favourite with my father." She exemplified this by an anecdote of the second Lady Stanhope, her step-mother, referring to the time when her father, in one of his republican fits, put down his carriages and horses.

"Poor Lady Stanhope," she said, "was quite unhappy about it : but, when the whole family was looking glum and sulky, I thought of a way to set all right again. I got myself a pair of stilts, and out I stumped down a dirty lane, where my father, who was always spying about through his glass, could see me. So, when I came home, he said to me, 'Why, little girl, what have you been about? Where was it I saw you going upon a pair of—the devil knows what?—eh, girl?'—'Oh! papa, I thought, as you had laid down your horses, I would take a walk through the mud on stilts; for you know, papa, I don't mind mud or anything—'tis poor Lady Stanhope who feels these things; for she has always been accustomed to her carriage, and her health is not very good.'—'What's that you say, little girl,' said my father, turning his eyes away from me; and, after a pause, 'Well, little girl, what would you say if I bought a carriage again for Lady Stan-

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hope?—‘Why, papa, I would say it was very kind of you.’—‘Well, well,’ he observed, ‘we will see; but, damn it! no armorial bearings.’ So, some time afterwards, down came a new carriage and new horses from London; and thus, by a little innocent frolic, I made all parties happy again.”¹

Lady Hester continued. “Lucy’s disposition was sweet, and her temper excellent: she was like a Madonna. Griselda was otherwise, and always for making her authority felt. But I, even when I was only a girl, obtained and exercised, I can’t tell how, a sort of command over them. They never came to me, when I was in my room, without sending first to know whether I would see them.

“Mr. Pitt never liked Griselda; and, when he found she was jealous of me, he disliked her still more.

¹ In accordance with his republican principles, Lord Stanhope caused his armorial bearings to be defaced from his plate, carriages, &c. Nothing was spared but the iron gate before the entrance to the house. Even the tapestry given to the great Lord Stanhope by the king of Spain, with which one of the rooms in Chevening was ornamented, he caused to be taken down and put into a corner, calling it all damned aristocratical. He likewise sold all the Spanish plate, which Lady Hester said weighed (if I recollect rightly) six hundred weight.