

*PETERSHAM*  
*People and stories*

*by The Reverend R.S. Mills*

This colourful discourse on the attractive village of Petersham aims to fill in some of the details of local history which would otherwise be overlooked. Written by a former vicar of the parish, it chronicles the activities and eccentricities of some of the village's more famous inhabitants from the late seventeenth to the late nineteenth century, some of whom composed what Lytton Strachey called the most civilised society which has existed in English history. Little wonder then that creative talents as diverse as Gay, Dickens and even Van Gogh found an audience in the village. This reprint should be welcomed by all those who have a keen eye for local history.

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Petersham People and Stories:

'Three Talks'  
and  
'The Unsung Visitor'

by  
The Reverend R.S. Mills

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*Cover:* The parish church of St. Peter's viewed  
from Petersham Meadows.

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## INTRODUCTION

The history of Petersham is rich and varied. One has only to take a walk through the village to appreciate its aesthetic splendours. These are there for all to see. But the casual visitor often neglects to enquire who was responsible for leaving us this marvellous heritage. This booklet aims to fill at least part of that gap.

All the material herein is the work of a former vicar of the parish of Petersham, long since dead, who took more than a passing interest in the history of the village. The 'Three Talks' which comprise the main part of the booklet were delivered as lectures during the summer of 1949. Later on in that year, they were privately published in the form of a pamphlet, but this has been unavailable for many years. 'The *Unsung Visitor*' which completes this booklet first appeared as two separate articles in the Petersham Leaflet, the local parish magazine, of November 1957 and March 1958 respectively. They too have long been unavailable. Together, the 'Three Talks' and 'The *Unsung Visitor*' provide an interesting insight into the history of the village, from the late seventeenth to the late nineteenth century. This reprint, therefore, should be welcomed by many.

There is one other point to note. The spelling and punctuation in this booklet are of a highly original nature. The reader should be aware of this. However, there is only one error that is positively misleading. Sergeant Darnell did not live in Portland Lodge as is suggested on page nine, he lived in Rutland Lodge. The other errors and misspellings are unimportant.

The Editor.

# Petersham People and Stories

by

The Rev. R. S. MILLS

WHAT I hope to give you in these talks, this afternoon and on the two following Saturdays, is in no sense to be regarded as a history of Petersham. A history of Petersham for which the late Mr. Chas. Warren collected a mass of material and completed seven chapters is in preparation. This is not it.

This is about some of the interesting people who have lived in Petersham in the past and stories connected with them—nothing more. People have lived in Petersham for a long time, though never at any time very many—we know that in A.D. 666 there were people here.

I should have liked to have talked about some of the humble folk, whose names I have traced through registers of the church; of William de Porta and Gilbert de Suthbrook, the earliest named inhabitants of Petersham, who were perhaps indirectly responsible for the building of the chancel of this church in either 1211 or 1266; of those two sturdy yeomen of Petersham, Charles Burgot and William Turner, who in the year 1570 trailed pikes when the Surrey Musters were called out to oppose the rebellion of the Northern Earls, whose children were baptised in this church very soon after their demobilisation; of Samuel Bugbeard, who a century later owned a barge as well as tilling the soil of Petersham, whose name our Parish Clerk, Ferdinando King, found so hard to spell—he spells it in five different ways and in two in the same sentence; of our Parish Clerks and Beadles, and many more.

But "the short and simple annals of the poor" provide too tenuous material out of which to spin interesting talks. Too little is known of them, but with several of the people of Petersham we are faced with quite the opposite difficulty—altogether too much is known about them; to deal with them at all adequately would involve telling a large part of the history of England, to say nothing of Scotland.

Men like John Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale; Lawrence Hyde, Earl of Rochester; John, 2nd Duke of Argyll;

Lord John Russell are national figures. I intend sometimes to introduce such people into the story, but generally in their personal and domestic rather than their public capacities. I may say that most of the information I shall give comes either from books which you may find in Richmond Public Library or Mr. Warren's notes, to which I have continuous access.

The sauce with which the concoction in places is liberally drenched—whether you like it or not—is all my own. It has been thought best to have these talks in the Parish Church, where all the people I shall mention worshipped, where several of the scenes I hope to describe actually took place and where, through those windows, you can see the churchyard where the bodies of many of them rest.

It is kindling to the imagination to think here, in this precise spot on such and such a day in such and such a year, might have been seen the famous or interesting people of whom we are hearing. There are, however, disadvantages. I think we should all agree that here anything like applause would be out of place and some of the stories have risible properties—anyhow, people generally do laugh when I tell them—there is nothing so disturbing to all concerned as suppressed laughter, so if you feel so inclined, you had better laugh—moderately.

Where shall we begin? Well, I hope to end this series of talks with a wedding. A wedding is always a popular event and this church has been the scene of many famous weddings. Petersham people know because I have often told them that in one single marriage register we have the signatures of a Prime Minister, the parents of H.M. Queen Elizabeth, John Nicholson, the hero of Delhi, a god-daughter of King George IV, and the Queen Mother Mary.

And as a wedding plunges us at once into our subject, I invite you to be present at a wedding in this church on 17th February in the year 1872; it took place, we are told, at the time of the reading of Commor Prayer. It was, I am practically certain, a quiet almost casual, affair

One Sunday morning a congregation was gathered for the morning service when a coach arrived from Ham House and out stepped a lady, a gentleman and a Bishop—perhaps a message had been sent the evening before to the Minister, Mr. Henry Walker to expect them. I cannot tell you anything special about the service, but I can tell you what bride and bridegroom looked like. And here I'm afraid you are going to suffer a disappointment. You are, I am sure, expecting a lovely bride. This bride is a "Has Been." She is in fact a widow who has borne 11 children to her previous husband (six of them have died in the manner of 17th century infants); she says she is 45, but others whisper that this is an understatement. Once beautiful with a beauty that had captivated many and even quickened the beat of the puritan pulse of the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, covetousness, ambition and pride have ravaged her comeliness and left their marks on her face. And what about the bridegroom? He certainly is no beauty—a great gorilla of a man with uncouth body and a shambling gait, a massive head crowned with a disorderly tangle of red hair, and when he speaks he slobbers.

These were the bride and bridegroom who stood before the Bishop of Worcester in that chancel on that wintry day in February, 1672, and were made man and wife. A powerful, forceful, able, disagreeable couple. And after the wedding, which of this dominating couple will dominate? The lady has promised to obey—but she did not honour her promise.

In the quaint words of a contemporary writer, "She abused him most grossly and got all from him she could expect." So he died—"discontent and age" being the causes. I have been speaking, as no doubt you have guessed, of John Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale, and Elizabeth, Countess of Dysart, and if you suspect that I have been guilty of caricature in my description of their appearance, please examine the portraits of this pair sitting on armchairs contemplating each other, which you may see when you visit Ham House. Moralists may meditate on the fact that this ravenously covetous woman died practically bankrupt and has no memorial, not even a name scratched on a tombstone.

Several years before Elizabeth, Countess of Dysart in her own right and Duchess of Lauderdale by marriage, was brought to be buried before the altar there on 16th June, 1698, another man of national importance

had come to live in Petersham. In 1687 King James II's chief Minister was his brother-in-law, Lawrence Hyde whom Charles II had created Earl of Rochester. He was the younger son of Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, Chancellor of the first days of Charles II's reign, and the author of the "History of the Great Rebellion."

Lawrence, like his father, was a very stout Anglican and Tory, and at that date (1687) one of the chief prop of King James's throne. But that unfortunate King had become a fanatical Roman Catholic and decided that only those Ministers who shared his religion should enjoy his confidence and office. He tried hard to induce his brother-in-law to change his religion. Hyde was an irascible man and something of a scholar, and when the King's priests presented their arguments in favour of their faith, he lost his temper and told His Majesty very bluntly that they were ridiculous reasons for requiring a man to change his religion. That was the end of his office; it was also the end of King James. Anyhow, the King pensioned him well, from the profits of the Post Office—nationalised industries serve politicians very well—and made him Ranger of the New Park.

When Hyde saw that his fall was certain he engaged several hundred workmen to build him a grand house at Petersham and lay out elaborate gardens. That house was opposite the "Dysart Arms," just inside the gate of the park. It will save time if I point out that there have been three houses on that site. (1) The Old Manor House, where the Coles, whose large monument is in the North side of the Chancel, lived (the two small houses beyond Montrose House seem to have been the lodges of that house); then on the same site Lawrence Hyde built his house, sometime before 1700, which was largely destroyed in a great fire in October, 1721, and a few years after William Stanhope, Earl of Harrington, built the third big house, which lasted to 1834, when it was pulled down. Remember that last house of the Earl of Harrington—it comes into the story again.

Lawrence Hyde had a pew in this church, with his Arms and the Garter emblazoned thereon. For 30 years he was a political power in the land, as the chief leader of the old Tory Party. He resided in Petersham when he was out of office, which happened whenever he quarrelled with his royal relations. We read early in the reign of Queen Anne (who was his niece) how, when he was jockeyed out of

office by the great Duke of Marlborough, he retired "in a towering rage to his house near Richmond."

All contemporary evidence agrees that "Lamentable Lorry," as he was known to the vulgar, was a peppery, prickly individual; they also agree that, like a great many of his contemporaries, he drank heavily and when flushed with drink "swore like a sawyer." Nevertheless, his appearance at Sunday morning service in this church, which I guess he attended perhaps a hundred times, created much agitated interest in our Ministers of the time—first Mr. Lascelles and later Mr. Jones, for Rochester was a tremendous fellow among the clergy—to use Mr. Winston Churchill's expression, "the lay head of the Church of England."

So I picture him coming into this church, the Minister sweeping off his hat and bowing low as the great man approaches—if he was like his portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, rather a commonplace looking man, trying to look important, walking to take his place in his seat near the chancel and very devoutly following the course of the service—for this hard-drinking, hard-swearing politician was something more than a political churchman; he was genuinely devout.

We know this because 100 years after his death, among his papers were found a number of a species of composition which he called "Meditations," which he wrote for no eye but his own when he shut the door and communed alone with his Maker, and these reveal him as a sincere, devout, but fearful Christian. It is a great pity that our parish records before 1712 are extremely fragmentary, so we have little record of Rochester's residence in the great house so close to this church.

I should myself like to connect him with a number of mysterious gifts to this church early in the reign of Queen Anne; in particular the gift of the distinguished large silver patten that we use as an alms dish. Traditionally this patten was the gift of the Duchess of Lauderdale, but as it bears the mark of 1704 and the Duchess died in 1698, it is on the whole improbable that she had anything to do with it. I should like to think that Lawrence Hyde was the donor, but I have no proof.

When Lawrence Hyde came to live at the house, which was apparently known as New York, New Park, he found himself next door to an old colleague—Sir Thomas Jenner, who had built and was residing in Montrose House. Now Jenner had not

resigned his office when Rochester had quitted the service of James II. He had hung on to the falling cause too long and was overwhelmed by the Revolution of 1688, and when William of Orange came in, he found himself in the Tower.

However, William's position was too precarious to admit of vindictiveness and Jenner was soon released. He then seems to have settled down in Petersham, several of his children were baptised in this church, one of his daughters married Sergeant Darnell, who lived at Portland Lodge, and when he died he was buried in the chancel, as the large monument on the south wall of the chancel records.

These fragmentary pre-1712 records of the parish which Mr. Charles Warren collected so laboriously and lovingly, seem to suggest that Jennifer took a lively personal interest in the affairs of the parish. He had a large family and has descendants all over the world.

Lawrence Hyde died in 1711 and was succeeded as owner of New York, New Park, by his son, Henry, Earl of Rochester and Clarendon; he is described by Swift as a simple, civil man, which means that he was a pleasant fellow of no great account. He seems to have resided permanently here and married a Miss Levison-Gower. Now this Lady Rochester has a curious distinction; she is supposed to have been the most beautiful woman of her day and she has a sizable paragraph in the Dictionary of National Biography solely on account of her beauty; she did nothing, said nothing memorable, she just was. Well, plenty of people are in the D.N.B. for less good reasons.

I should like to think of this lovely lady, who for several years adorned this church with her beauty, was also the Lady Bountiful of this parish, and I have found some indication that she may have been—just a little pointer. Anyhow, she made Goody Hopkins, a less exalted parishioner, an allowance.

It is true that the allowance was not on an extravagantly generous scale, being 4s. a month, which I regret to have to inform you, Goody Hopkins squandered and got into debt to the extent of 23s. "to Avery the Baker at Kingston"; so on 3rd May, 1719, the Petersham Vestry ordered her allowance to be impounded—Goody Hopkins consenting till the debt was paid off. Lady Rochester then was interested in her humbler neighbours and may have made allowances to other of them.

We need have no doubt that her reputation for beauty was deserved, for besides the chorus of poets and

Swift's confession to Stella that he was in love with Lady Rochester, there is evidence that she certainly had two very handsome daughters, Lady Jane and Lady Catherine, and they didn't get their beauty from the Hydes—look at Anne Hyde's portrait in the National Portrait Gallery. Lady Jane, the elder daughter, who Swift describes as a top-toast of his time, was married in this church on 27th November, 1718, to William Cappel, Earl of Essex.

Now of all the memorable events that have taken place in this church, it is that wedding that I should most like to have seen—with the eye of the imagination I try to see it now. "It was solemnised," says a contemporary account, "with the greatest magnificence, near 200 of the Quality were invited to the celebration of their nuptials." Nearly 200 of the Quality! Row upon row of bewigged nobles and their ladies, dressed as the Quality dressed on ceremonial occasions in 1718, all crammed into a church about five-eighths of the size of the present building.

What a spectacle! Poor little Mr. Davies, the obscure Minister of Petersham—he is the dimmest of all our Ministers, nothing whatever is known of him except that he was present at this wedding—Mr. Davies's hand trembles with emotion as he records that these grand people "were married by the Most Reverend His Grace William, Lord Archbishop of York, and by a licence delivered into the hands of Tho. Davies, Clerk, Chaplain of Petersham." Clearly it was Mr. Davies's golden day.

Eleven months before this, in 1717, there is an interesting and significant entry in our registers: "Caroline, daughter of their Graces the duke and dutchess of Argyle was baptised december the first." I may add what the register does not record, that the Duke of Somerset stood godfather and the Duchesses of St. Albans and Somerset godmothers to this infant.

These two entries, the Hyde wedding and the Campbell christening, in close proximity to each other in our parish registers, reveal a remarkable state of affairs, only temporary it is true, but if not unique most unusual. See what they imply; there at the Richmond end of our village stands a great house, built and inhabited by the high Tory Hydes—but at the other end of the village the Duke of Argyll, the premier Whig peer, has been acquiring the properties which made up the ancient hamlet of Sudbrook, and was inhabiting the large house which stood on the site of the present mansion.

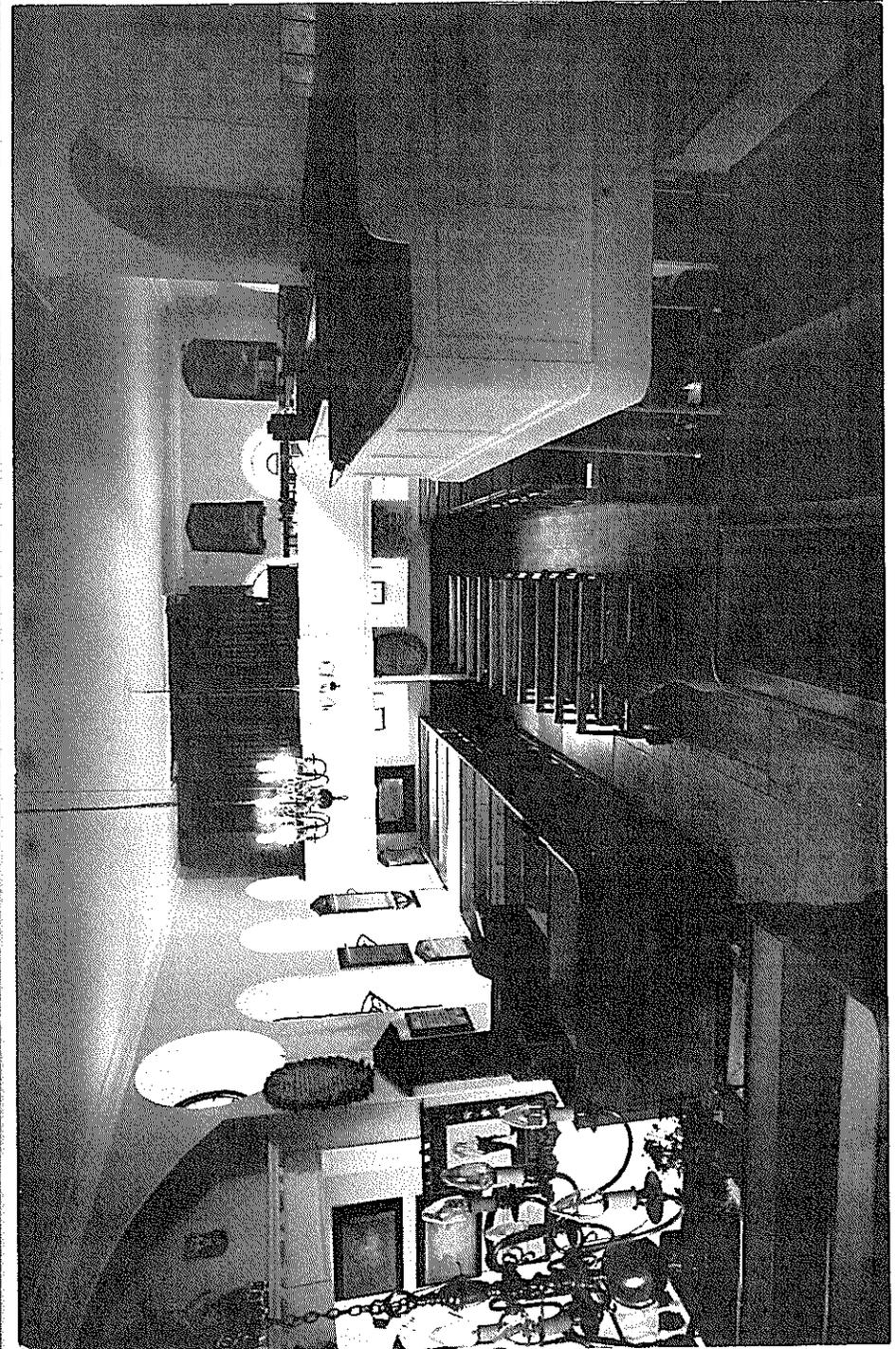
A Tory house and Whig house at each corner of the parish, their grounds adjoining and embracing the village. Those were times of fierce political faction, but Tory and Whig seem to have lived quite peaceably here; anyhow they met quite amicably in our parish registers. Petersham was ever the place for peace, the place to which as we shall see later on the warring Scottish clans of Campbell and Montrose retired to have a mild gamble at loo instead of cutting off each other's heads as they had done in the previous century.

But that entry in the year 1717—"Caroline, daughter of their Graces the duke and dutchess of Argyle was baptised december the first"—reminds me that I haven't yet told you a story, so now I proceed to keep my promise and tell you one which explains why the infant was baptised in the name of Caroline and who was the Duchess for whose housing the present Sudbrook was built.

So I will now tell you the story of Jenny and the Duke. (I must apologise to those of you who have heard me tell it before.) Let us then look away from Petersham to a country house in Cheshire and see a young lady, Jane Warburton, starting off to take up the position that her parents have had the good luck to have secured for her as a Maid of Honour to Queen Anne.

Before the coach starts let us have a good look at Jenny. She is a plain young woman and stolid—very stolid and very much a country wench. Cheshire was then real country far away from London and its refinements, and Jenny has been brought up among milkmaids and has country manners and mannerisms and a mind full of country ideas. As her fond parents waved her good-bye they could have had but slender hopes of a brilliant career for their daughter. Now Queen Anne's court into which Jenny was suddenly plunged was a highly cultivated place—it was not that the Queen herself was particularly fitted to preside over a cultivated society—she was not so stupid as Whig historians have made out; like Queen Victoria she was simple rather than stupid.

Anyhow, whatever her personal defects as a leader of cultural life, her court inherited the Stuart tradition of culture—Mr. Churchill has noted in his "Life of Marlborough" how rapid was the progress of civilisation among the upper classes in this period. In these sophisticated and polished circles poor Jenny floundered like a fish out of water. She had, poor girl, a most unhappy time. Her slowness,



The interior of St. Peter's viewed from the north balcony.

her rustic expressions, her insensitive-ness and lack of interest in the things of the mind, made her the butt of her fellow maids of honour. She had, I repeat, a most unhappy time.

Back from the wars of the Duke of Marlborough, where he had fought with the greatest distinction and personal gallantry, came John, 2nd Duke of Argyll. If we are to believe contemporary evidence he was the perfect "Hero of Romance," splendidly handsome with charming manners, brave, witty, eloquent, able and a Duke. Yes, all that. Exaggerations of poets and eulogists apart, there is ample evidence that he was a tremendous fellow; the first 40 years of the 18th century are full of his fame as soldier, statesman and as a discriminating patron of art and letters; of course he became at once the idol of Queen Anne's court.

Now on the Queen's birthday the Lord Chamberlain, who was the Duke of Shrewsbury—gave a dinner to the maids of honour. At the end of the dinner it was the custom for each maid of honour to give a toast. The cloth was removed and each lady was called upon for a toast. You will understand that these sophisticated young women were not going to give themselves away by toasting anybody they especially had their eyes on; so each girl gave as her toast somebody quite safe, an elderly peer or perhaps a bishop; at the last came Jenny's turn. Jenny's thought processes were slow but she had arrived at a conclusion—she had looked on the Duke of Argyll and what she had seen pleased her—so she arose and toasted the Duke of Argyll.

This was a fearful "faux pass"—the contrast between poor Jenny and the splendid Duke was too much for the gravity of the party; the whole company burst into shouts of mocking laughter. Poor Jenny realised that she had blundered again and dissolved into tears. That evening when everybody met again at the ball, the Duke of Shrewsbury said to Argyll, who stood near him. "My Lord, you little think what mischief you have occasioned to-day. A poor young lady has been shedding tears on your account." And then he told what had happened. "Oh, poor thing!" exclaimed the Duke, "it is very hard upon her. Which is she? Introduce me."

So the Duke was introduced to Jenny and to the surprise of everybody devoted himself to her for the rest of the evening. Other meetings followed and at last they became daily, and to quote Lady Louisa Stuart, from whom I am stealing this

story, "His attachment to her became notorious and was as passionate as it was extraordinary."

There was, however, a serious impediment to the smooth course of true love, the Duke was already married; when very young he had married a Miss Mary Browne, the daughter of a wealthy city man; she was the niece of that Sir Charles Duncombe of whom Macaulay writes in his history. There was one child of the marriage; somewhere in the churchyard you can see through the windows, on 25th January, 1700, the tiny body of the baby of Lady Katherine Campbell was laid; but I cannot tell you where for no tombstone marks the place and never has, which gives us an indication of the character of the marriage; The Duke hated his wife, who was a chronic invalid and did not live with her.

It is to be feared then that the Duke's intentions toward Jenny at this stage were not strictly honourable. But a remarkable thing had happened which astonished everybody and threw the Duke himself quite off his balance. Jenny did not fall in love with him. If he really was like his portrait—handsome, gay and gallant—in the National Portrait Gallery, this was quite a feat.

Of course, the jealous ladies of the court had an explanation. Jenny, they said, was too dull and insensitive even to fall in love. So the Duke was allowed to give her presents, to sit in her chamber and watch her sewing, but all proposals of anything more were refused with Shakespearian bluntness.

Exciting things were happening at Queen Anne's court at this time, in which the Duke was deeply involved. He and his friend, the Duke of Somerset, had appeared with swords in the Council Chamber, prepared to use them, but Jenny cared for none of these things, she sat in her chamber and sewed, and the Duke found the sight of this plain girl plying her needle while she uttered unsophisticated commonplaces wonderfully soothing after the fevers of political life. We men sometimes require bromides more than stimulants.

Then Queen Anne performed that act for which she is universally famous. She died. And the whole political scene was transformed overnight. Hanoverian George came in at pudding time, as the Vicar of Bray tells us. George, you all remember, was brought in by the Whigs, the Whigs were the main support of his throne—the Duke of Argyll was the premier Whig peer. It was whispered to George that Jenny Warburton was

the Duke's friend and a place had better be found for her at court. Jenny had, in fact, become an important political personage. (Queer thing, politics, such extraordinary people become important political personages.)

Anyhow, Jenny was given the post of lady-in-waiting to the Princess of Wales, Caroline. These early Hanoverian royalties were, with one exception, dull, insensitive, disagreeable people; the exception was Princess Caroline, who was clever and capable of humane feelings. So Jenny waited on her, and when she wasn't waiting, went on sewing in her chamber watched by the Duke. But soon the Duke was called away. He had to go to Scotland to deal with a Jacobite rising under the Earl of Mar. There he fought a battle; according to the song the Scots made up about it it was a remarkable battle for both sides ran away, but the Jacobites ran faster than Argyll's men and in war the side that runs fastest loses, so the Duke returned with enhanced prestige to sit in Jenny's chamber and watch her sewing.

The next year, 1716, Jenny's affairs ran up to a crisis, for the Duke's wife died. Round the court the question was asked, what will the Duke do? Will he marry Jenny now he is free or will he gracefully fade out? He is known to be rather overfond of money and Jenny is penniless. Will Jenny be a Duchess in a few months or suffer a collapse and be packed up sent home again?

Poor Jenny must be in a state of extreme agitation wondering what her fate is to be. So at any rate thought Caroline, Princess of Wales, "How I pity the poor Warburton," she said to Mrs. Howard (afterwards the famous Lady Suffolk who lived just over the water at Marble Hill. "Her agitation must be cruel; go and tell her she need not wait to-day."

When Mrs. Howard carried the Princess's kindly message to Jenny, she continued calmly sewing, "Why shouldn't I wait," she replied, "I like waiting; of course I am going to wait."

What will the Duke do? Well, what the Duke did was to fly to Jenny and offer her himself, his wealth, his Dukedom, everything and at once. "At once," replied Jenny, "me, a well brought-up country girl marry a man with a wife above ground; indeed not, you must wait." And wait he had to for some months, and then Jenny became Duchess of Argyll, and when her first daughter was born she was christened in this church on 1st December, 1717, and of course they gave her the name Caroline after the

kind Princess of Wales, on whom Jenny (Not her Grace the Duchess of Argyll) had waited.

That is not really the end. The sequel is as curious as the story itself. In most marriages (they say) there is the lover and the loved—the devoted partner and the partner who accepts devotion. In such a marriage as this where a brilliant, attractive man marries a plain, dull woman, it would be natural to assume that she would adore him and he accept the adoration. Real life is just a succession of paradoxes; it was here the other way round, for the whole of their married life the Duke remained the devoted husband—he seemed to see his wife with quite others eyes than others saw her with—he carried about with him a miniature of a handsome woman bearing no resemblance that anybody else could see to his wife. There's my Jenny, he would say as he proudly showed it.

It is said to have been a most moving spectacle to see how even after they had been married 20 years or more, whenever he had been absent from home for any time, on entering the room where his ugly old Duchess was sitting, his eyes would light up with pleasure and he would go straight to her, take her hand and utter endearments. And she? Well, she gave as much as her stolid insensitive nature would allow her to give. She did not treat him well. She wouldn't even allow him to tell his own stories. He had gathered a fund of anecdotes of war and peace, which he told remarkably well; but if he ventured upon one in the presence of his Duchess before he was well launched she would grab it and he would resign it to her and silently listen to it being mangled.

I think that every husband here would agree that if no other evidence of the virtue and highmindedness of John, 2nd Duke of Argyll, existed, this alone would be sufficient to establish the nobility of his character beyond cavil. If we are to judge by the statue of him on his tomb in Westminster Abbey—and it looks as though it were a good likeness, he was a man of nobility of character and also of intellectual distinction.

He would have liked to entertain the poets and artists, of whom he was the patron, in his house, and his old comrades of the wars, but it was always full of the old housewives his Duchess collected, and their styles of conversation did not mix well. Nor did she do a Duchess's first duty in bearing an heir to succeed to his Dukedom and estates; four daughters succeeded each other and all as they

grew up developed strident voices, so that they were called in society the shrieking sisterhood or the "Roaring Campbells," at last the Duke could stand it no more and built the house behind Sudbrook to segregate the noisy girls. The Duke died in 1744 and his Duchess looked for the last time on his noble, sad face. "Well," said Jenny, "I have been the wife of a great man."

When the Duke died the Duchess made her home at Sudbrook; she regularly attended this church. During her earlier years she had a pew up there in the North gallery, but when ageing legs and increasing weight—I am sure Jenny Warburton put on weight in her old age—made it difficult for her to climb those steps—"on the 27th of May, 1751," the Petersham Vestry ordered, "that the pew the second on the left hand from the Entrance into the Church Be assigned to Her Grace the Duchess of Argyie and Greenwich." She died in 1767.

There were, I have said, four daughters. The eldest, Caroline, whose certificate of baptism we have examined, was twice married, first to Lord Dalkeith, the son and heir of the Duke of Buccleuch, and secondly to Charles Townsend, the brilliant and irresponsible Chancellor of the Exchequer; when she became a widow for the second time in 1767 she was created Baroness Greenwich in her own right.

It was convenient for her that her mother died in the same year as her second husband for it enabled her to make her home at Sudbrook, which had been built by her father between 1726 and 1728. Of her there is not much that need be said. According to Lady Sarah Lennox, who would have become Queen of England if the young King George III had not been under his mother's thumb, she had a cold heart and did not love her children.

She worshipped for several years in this church, occupying the pew in the North gallery in which her mother had sat before 1751. She also rented three pews for her domestic staff. I'll show which they were. The pew on the right side under the gallery was the upper servants' pew; it is a comfortable pew; upper servants in houses like Sudbrook were important people, their comfort must be provided for in the House of God as elsewhere—it is also a roomy pew—the Sudbrook butlers, we may surmise, tended to portliness and presence, and the first housekeeper to be of majestic proportions. Then there was a pew, not quite so comfortable—third on the right—for the livery ser-

vants, and there was a third on the left, right under the gallery, which was labelled "common pew for servants." Society was organised hierarchally in the 18th century from the summit to the base and class distinctions were probably more rigid in the servants' hall than in the drawing room.

The youngest daughter of the Duke and Duchess, Lady Mary Coke, must occupy our attention rather longer. She was a vivid and interesting personality, but there is a further and compelling reason for dealing with her at some length. She had (like several of her contemporaries) a habit most convenient to the social historian of her period, she wrote long and detailed letters. These letters have been collected and published under the title of Lady Mary Coke's Journals—their spelling and grammar are often individual, rather than correct, but then many of us fall down in these respects.

Her letters give us priceless glimpses of the interiors of great houses in the middle years of the 18th century. I have already at another time dealt with her visits to this church and what she saw and heard here, and as that description is in print I am not going to repeat it here and now. But next week, more than once, I am going to ask you to look through Lady Mary's eyes at a quiet domestic scene enacted in this village nearly 200 years ago.

Perhaps the vision of these eyes is a little oblique for their owner was certainly an eccentric personage. What did she look like? Portraits of her exist, but these I cannot show you; however, there exists a vivid pen portrait of her which I can quote: "The skin of her face was dead white, unshaded by any eyebrows and her eyes were fierce; she had fine teeth, an agreeable smile, a handsome neck and a majestic figure—naturally she was known in society as 'The White Cat'."

What about her character? To form a just estimate we must combine three contemporary descriptions; here is No. 1: She was clever, invincibly wrongheaded, full of pride, self-conceit, prejudice, obstinacy and of a violent temper, and love was the only passion that had no place in her composition. This is an unattractive portrait and ought to be supplemented and mitigated by Horace Walpole's description of her in a letter to Sir Horace Mann (written, of course, long before he had his famous quarrel with her). "She is noble, generous and high-spirited, undauntable, most friendly, sincere and affectionate and

above any mean action," and to that we will add Lady Temple's complimentary verse:—

She sometimes laughs, but never loud;  
She's handsome, too, but somewhat proud;  
At Court she bears away the bell,  
She dresses fine, and figures well;  
With decency she's gay and airy;  
Who can this be but Lady Mary!

In her vigorous years she was, no doubt, a combination of all these qualities, virtues and defects.

It was this woman who, at the age of 19, was married to Lord Coke, the excessively dissolute son of the excessively dissolute Earl of Leicester. All the elements (you see) of a really happy marriage! Of course the marriage wasn't happy; in fact it went to pieces at once. As in the case of marriage of this kind, it is not possible to fix the blame for the rupture solely on the shoulders of one party.

Both partners behaved in an unequally unbalanced fashion. The marriage collapsed with many usual accompaniments. There was a court case. Friends took sides; there was a vast exchange of embittered verbiage; the poor old Duchess wept. In the end Lady Mary was interned at Sudbrook and forbidden to come within several miles of her husband. Then, fortunately for her, her husband died and Lady Mary found herself while still quite a young woman, a well-to-do widow with no responsibilities whatever. Having had one taste of marriage she had no mind to incur any risks of further matrimonial disaster. Though in her own peculiar way she did have two very odd conducted uove affairs.

One with no less person than Edward, Duke of York, King George II's brother, a disagreeable youth many years her junior, who she tried to persuade herself and friends was paying court to her; by the way, Lady Mary records having a conversation with this Duke of York one Sunday evening at Lady Harrington's house a few hundred yards from this church; but she doesn't say she was setting her cap at him—but apparently the Duke regarded her as a figure of fun. Anyhow, when the Duke died prematurely she metaphorically wore widow's weeds, to the amusement of some members of the royal family and the disgust of others.

According to Lady Louisa Stuart, she regarded herself for some time as actually being engaged to Lord March—the Queensbury heir—afterwards the wicked old Q Richmond knows so well, but as she and her fiancé were not on speaking terms during the whole course of the engagement and

Lord March was unaware that he was engaged at all, you will understand that she managed her affairs on original lines.

Her attitude to religion was very 18th century. This did not mean that she ignored religion or neglected religious duties. Not at all; she recognised religion—she generally went to church on Sunday morning, but she treated it in a cool very matter of fact way; thus she was able quite comfortably to mix religious observance with things that seem incongruous with it. This is how she spent the evening of Sunday, 22nd March, 1767: She had driven down from London to stay with her mother, the now very aged Duchess of Argyll, at Sudbrook. Now I am going to quote her own words: "Before seven I went to my Mother's . . . At eight I went to the Duchess of Montrose (at Petersham House), where I stayed till nine and then to Lady Harrington's (just across the road at the old Petersham Lodge just inside the park gates) . . . I was glad to set down to Loo; I won six guineas and a half . . . At half-an-hour after eleven I came home, read three chapters in the Bible and went to bed." A full Sabbath. Whether we can say a Sabbath well spent is another matter.

During the latter part of her life she became rather an absurd figure and was not wholly sane; she suffered badly from persecution mania; her persecutors being no less persons than the Empress Maria Theresa and Queen Marie Antoinette, of France; these potentates she believed employed agents to bid against her at local auctions and lure her servants away. I have told before of her strange death bed scene, but it is so characteristic that I think it must have a place here.

She was the inventor of a remarkable top hat somewhat resembling the crown worn by the Pharaohs of Egypt—some authorities think that the 19th century symbol of respectability developed out of this—anyhow, she was extremely proud of her invention and when she felt the chill hand of death on her, she had herself propped up in bed and ordered the hat to be placed on her head, and so adorned passed into the other world. For such a lady there could be but one place of burial; so her mortal remains rest in Westminster Abbey among the good, the wise and the great, and what no doubt gives her spirit great satisfaction, not far from the remains of Edward, Duke of York.

## Aristocratic Petersham

IN the period I want to talk about this afternoon—the middle and last half of the eighteenth century—Petersham gained the reputation of being the most aristocratic village in England. A glance at the names of the pew-holders in this church will show that this reputation was deserved.

There were then four large pews in the chancel. The first, on the north side, belonging to the lord of the manor, the Earl of Dysart; next, between the altar and the Cole monument, the pew of the Duke of Montague, who could stare, if he wished, across the tiny altar of those times at Mr. Hobart, a son of the Earl of Buckinghamshire, who, in turn, could bow to the Duke and Duchess of Queensbury in their pew, lined with blue, at the south entry of the chancel.

Elsewhere in the church the Duchess of Argyll (the Jenny Warburton of whom I spoke at length last week) had a pew, first in the north gallery and after 1751, when increasing weight and ageing legs made it difficult for her to climb the steps of the gallery, the second pew on the left-hand, facing the altar. Her pew in the north gallery, after her death, was occupied by her eldest daughter, Caroline, Baroness Greenwich, while the Earl of Harrington also had a pew (where, I have not been able to discover). A little later, I have found that Lord Hopetown had a pew.

With no certain connection with this church, there were living in the village at this time Lord Brooke (afterwards the Earl of Warwick), Lord John Manners, of Petersham House, where the Duchess of Montrose (Horace Walpole's friend) came to live for some years; and there were others.

The historian of Petersham soon becomes a walking Debreth! Mr. Robert Ord the Chief Baron of the Exchequer of Scotland—we are always close to Scotland in Petersham—who lived in the house in River-lane we now call Petersham Lodge, told Lord Carlisle in a letter that he questioned whether York Races could out-do Petersham in quality. Mr. Ord was, I surmise, a little bit of a snob, and I can imagine his delight when the Duchess of Argyll vacated her pew in the gallery and he was able to occupy it himself.

Aristocracy has snob value, but by

itself it may mean precious little or else a great deal. In this case aristocracy meant a great deal. Here in Petersham, and across the river at Twickenham, linked by the ferry, lived a body of men and women who composed what Lytton Strachey (and Clive Bell seems to agree with him) has called the most civilised society which has existed in English history. That is strong language. Perhaps these distinguished writers are rather prejudiced in favour of a society which treated writers so well.

Nothing like leather, says the leather-seller; how glorious must be a society that really honoured authors! say those who earn a painful living by authorship. Perhaps I, too, who have the honour to serve this church, which was one of the focal points of that society, am rather prejudiced; but quite a good case may be made out for Lytton Strachey's view. These people, who composed this remarkable aristocratic society, had, of course, very serious defects; they were woefully lacking in imaginative sympathy with poverty and misery that was not thrust under their noses; some of them were arrogant, with an arrogance which seems to us distinctly ill-bred, and they were often eccentric.

Eccentric! indeed, they were. How much we all owe to the "Brains Trust," and how much more we learn from answering ourselves the questions that eminent body fails to answer adequately! A short while ago the "Brains Trust" was asked if the conditions of the present time tended to produce brilliant eccentrics. I forget the exact answer, but, communing with my own soul, I decided that the conditions for the production of interesting eccentrics in any society were two: (1) it must be a society in which people are sure of their social position, and (2) that society must be tolerant of eccentricity. Both these conditions were fulfilled in the society we are now considering. Its members lived secure, nobody questioned their position; the eighteenth century was not democratic and didn't want to be, and society tolerated almost anything. Consequently they let their personalities rip, and the result of the exuberant flowering of personality was conduct that diverged often enough a long way from the normal.

There was among these people plenty of arrogance, plenty of eccentricity, but with it a genuine love of the things of the mind and the excellent in the arts. They proved their faith by their works. They drew into their circle all they could find that was distinguished in art and literature, so that the political, social and cultural worlds were knit into one world. And it wasn't only patronage that they bestowed; it rewarded the producers of the excellence it loved with friendship.

In that age when rank and birth were regarded as real things they regarded Gay and Pope, people from nowhere, and Swift, the obscure country parson with friendship, to be cherished as friends—and abused as equals when friendship had turned into enmity, as in the famous quarrel between Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montague and Lord Hervey. Geniuses are notoriously troublesome people, quarrelsome, touchy and only too easy to quarrel with. That tortured genius, Jonathan Swift; that spiteful little toad of a genius, Alexander Pope—these aristocrats valued the products of their genius so highly that they endured them; they required a deal of enduring.

I haven't forgotten that these talks are about people. So I must illustrate these remarks by the behaviour of people. Well, it so happens there was one lady who lived much of her time in Petersham, owner of one of the famous houses (Douglas House) here, a pewholder and frequent worshipper in this church, whose character and conduct illustrate every one of these eighteenth century aristocratic traits. She was on occasion arrogant, frequently eccentric, and a central figure in the world of culture, around whom revolved a whole constellation of literary stars.

You have guessed that I am speaking of Catherine, Duchess of Queensbury; and here I admit that I have pilfered freely and unscrupulously both from Miss Biddulph's book and Mr. Warren's material. She was the granddaughter of that Laurence Hyde of whom I spoke last week, and the younger sister of the Lady Jane Hyde, whose wedding I wanted so much to see.

As a long series of portraits show, she was a very handsome woman, who retained her beauty to old age. She dressed as she pleased, sometimes very simply, sometimes gorgeously. Fashion she treated with characteristic daring; generally she preferred the fashion of her youth. If fashion did not conform to her desires and whims, then so much the worse for fashion. You see, she was a courageous woman! Even on such

formal State occasions as the Coronation of King George III, when she walked in the procession, her splendid attire was in a mode unfashionable at the time.

She was a very courageous woman. The scene that followed the Coronation was characteristic of the lady. Next morning her maids were summoned to her room and, to their surprise, found the beautiful unfashionable garments scattered about the floor; wealthy ladies in those days wore quite a lot of clothes. "There, my good friends" said the duchess, "I hope soon to see another Coronation, so share them among yourselves."

It was in this matter of clothes that she had one of her several quarrels with the Court of King George II. Women's dress through the ages is a fascinating subject, of which I am woefully ignorant, but apparently during the earlier years of George II ladies of high degree still wore aprons, no doubt of fine quality. However, at some time in his long reign the King issued an order that aprons were no longer to be worn by ladies attending drawing-rooms.

For the next drawing-room her whim had guided Kitty, Duchess of Queensbury, to dress with extreme simplicity; indeed, in the dress of a peasant woman. In this garb and an apron she presented herself. On approaching the ante-room the lord-in-waiting informed her that he could not possibly admit her wearing the forbidden garment. The duchess immediately tore off the apron, flung it in the official's face, and marched into the presence chamber in a brown stuff gown and petticoat. Who was this Hanoverian squaretoes that he should decide what Catherine, Duchess of Queensbury, should wear on any occasion? Wasn't she born a Hyde and, therefore, closely related to the last three Stuart monarchs—proper kings and queens, ruling by Divine right, not petty German princelings brought over to stuff up a hole in the British Constitution?

Arrogance directed towards kings and potentates stirs our awed admiration; when social inferiors are its victims, we to-day consider such conduct distinctly ill-bred. We have to record with regret that Kitty was frequently not guiltless of behaviour in relation to people in a less exalted stratum of society than herself that seems to us wanting in proper feeling. She abhorred pretentiousness; she thought that people should be clothed and furnished appropriately to that station of life in which it had pleased God to call them. If one of these inferior folk invited her to join them in a "dish of tea" and adorned their

tea table with china of too superior quality in her judgment, she had a trick of upsetting the table by accident and then apologising profusely when her hostess bewailed her broken crockery. There my sympathies and yours are wholly with her victims; naturally, these unfortunates brought out their best china to honour so distinguished a guest.

She conceived of herself as a missionary of civilisation to the Scots (her courage was of heroic proportions!). As Duchess of Queensbury, she had to spend some of her time in Scotland, and was horrified to find that the neighbouring gentry—in speaking about eighteenth century one can use that work "gentry" comfortably—ate off the end of their knives! This was rather a sign of backwardness than boorishness, for the three-pronged fork was a recent invention, and it was difficult to convey food elegantly from plate to mouth with the two pronged variety. The duchess decided that the Scots must be brought up-to-date. Whenever she saw a morsel of meat delicately balanced on a knife-edge rising to a Scottish mouth she screamed out to the surprised offender to beware of cutting his throat, while a footman pointedly handed him two or more forks. History does not record how popular she was in Scotland.

She was in advance of her time in her ideas of appropriate wear for country walks. On one occasion we are told that when she received a visit from neighbours clothed, in her opinion, too smartly for the occasion, she herself dressed in the garb of a peasant woman, and suggested a stroll. Coming to a farmyard after a short while, she pretended to be tired, and sat down on a manure heap in the yard and invited her guests to share her seat. And such was the power of her personality and prestige that they did not dare to refuse. Again, my sympathies are wholly with the victims. Of course, they put on their best clothes to visit the duchess. Wouldn't you?

Those of you who, like me, listen with devout attention to every word that falls from the lips of the "Brains Trust," will recollect that that august body was recently asked how best to speed the departure of a guest who tarries too long—a question well worth the exercise of brain power. Kitty Queensbury had a method of dealing with that plague, a method that you would probably find effective if you dared to apply it. So listen carefully. When she had had enough of a visitor's company she would get up, take the fire broom and begin to brush vigorously round the

legs of the laggard as if tidying up for the night!

She did most things vigorously, and her vigour did not wane with increasing years. I told you last week that now and again this afternoon we should borrow Lady Mary Coke's eyes to obtain a glimpse of the interiors of some of the large houses of Petersham in the eighteenth century. Let us, then, use those eyes, with their, perhaps, rather oblique vision, to watch a little scene which was enacted at Sudbrook on Tuesday, 23rd of August, 1768. Duchess Kitty who was born in 1700, was then, therefore, 68 years old. Lady Mary Coke is staying with her sister, Lady Greenwich. The time is six o'clock in the afternoon. Neighbours had been dropping in—at half past five Lady Cowper had arrived, then Lady Vere; half an hour after came the Duke and Duchess of Queensbury and a parson. (By the way, Lady Mary, it is to be noted, does not note the names of clergymen; she was a regular churchgoer, and something of what our ancestors called a sermon-taster; but she does not appear to know the names of any of the parsons she sat under. That interests me personally, as an indication of the social position of the clergy in the middle of the eighteenth century; such people, one supposes, like third footmen, had names, but one doesn't bother to find out. But back to Sudbrook and Lady Mary, whose exact words I am now going to quote. She is writing, of course, of the Duchess: "She was in a good humour, but a little comical. I told her I heard she had danced at Gunnersbury" (that is, at a party given by Princess Amelia), "and I was sorry I had not seen her; and that I suppose I was in some of the other rooms at cards. You may see me now, said her Grace, and with that, up she got and sang and danced about the room. They stayed till near our supper time."

My social information is sadly out-of-date. But I fancy that even in these days of suspended old age the sight of a duchess, cold, sober and 68 years of age, capering about a neighbour's drawing-room and singing solos would occasion surprise.

I have given you several examples of this lady's arrogance and eccentricity, but please remember that there is another side to all this. This eccentric, arrogant woman was the patroness, friend and guide of a whole group of famous men of letters, painters, and at least one rising statesman of monumental stature. She might properly be described as the midwife of several masterpieces—she was Prior's "Kitty, ever fair." For her, when yet a young girl, Prior had written the lines by

which she is best known:—

"Kitty, beautiful and young,  
And wild as a colt untamed."

She kept up a regular correspondence with Swift; she was so staunch a supporter of William Pitt in his earlier years that Horace Walpole declared that Pitt was "governed by her Mad Grace of Queensbury," but this was probably one of Horace Walpole's exaggerations. Handel, Dr. Arbuthnot and several painters belonged to the same circle. Pope, as was natural, she knew well, but Pope did not like her (who did Pope really like?); he wrote verses in praise of her beauty and disparagement of her intellect, but I don't suppose Kitty cared.

But, of course, it was by her friendship, patronage and loving care of Gay that she rendered her best services to literature. She encouraged his genius, fed him, nursed him when sick, superintended his finances. Gay, like many geniuses, had no idea of money, so the duchess impounded his cash and doled it out to him as she thought he required it—somewhat too strictly Gay thought at times. In fact, she treated him as a strong-minded, but affectionate, sister might treat a helpless genius brother.

And she fought his battles. It was in connection with her championship of Gay that she had her most famous quarrel with King George II. Gay had dabbled in politics; he was a popular playwright, and he knew that nothing is so certain to get a laugh as an up-to-date political reference or innuendo. And the politicians didn't like it. And they got at the Lord Chamberlain—the result of their getting at the Lord Chamberlain is with us still. They said that Gay's "Polly" caricatured certain Ministers of State, and persuaded him to veto the production of "Polly"—of course, on the ground that it was generally of an immoral tendency.

The duchess was not going to take this lying down; she appealed, first, to the King, and, being rebuffed, started a campaign for collecting subscriptions to have "Polly" published, canvassing the whole Court. This was insubordination. King George II took offence and sent a verbal message to the duchess that she was debarred from the Court. At this Kitty sat down at once and wrote an extremely spirited reply; the letter she wrote is famous, and there is more than one version. It is only right, therefore, to say that Mr. Charles Warren proved that the *textus receptus* (the text usually given) is inaccurate; but it doesn't matter here and now because I am only going to quote the opening sentences. This is how they run:—"The Duchess of Queensbury is surprised and well

pleased that the King hath given her so agreeable a command as to stay from Court, where she never came for diversion, but to bestow civility on the King and Queen; she hopes by such an unprecedented order as this is that the King will see as few as he wishes at his Court, particularly such as dare to think or speak truth."

The grammar is a little rocky, but the meaning entirely clear, and it is pretty stiff in a letter from a subject to her Sovereign. The duchess found it convenient to stay away from Court for the rest of King George II's reign. Thereby she probably suffered but little loss. George II's Court, as she plainly indicated, was hardly a place of entertainment. But she was successful in her efforts to help Gay. A banned play makes a best-seller. Backed by the duchess's powerful patronage, Gay sold 10,000 copies of "Polly"—an enormous number for those days.

At the time when Catherine Queensbury was living intermittently at Douglas House, the lord of the manor, living at Ham House, was Lionel, fourth Earl of Dysart. I have it on my very high authority that this earl is a misjudged man; he wasn't the old curmudgeon he has often been represented to have been, but a cultured, though eccentric, nobleman, who collected a very fine library; but I feel that I am on safe ground when I say that he was universally unloved. Anyhow Lionel, fourth Earl of Dysart, quarrelled with his next-door neighbour, Kitty, Duchess of Queensbury. This was unwise of Lionel, fourth Earl of Dysart. No wise man ever quarrels with a woman; when the necessity arises he stirs up some other woman to do it for him, thereby saving himself a lot of trouble, and giving great pleasure to the woman he stirs up. Lord Dysart hadn't thought of that.

He quarrelled with the duchess in his own person about a strip of land between their properties, and I have been told that on one occasion, when both these members of the nobility were at the same time on the disputed ground, the altercation between them became so hot that, to end the debate, the lady seized a stout staff and drove the belted earl in disgraceful rout from the field. That story is rather off the record, and I don't want it quoted because I have been able to find no printed confirmation for it. I believe everything I see in print of course. But if invented, it is well invented, for it is quite characteristic of the lady's vigour and undaunted courage, to say nothing of her indifference to conventional behaviour.

I am sure that several of you have been wanting to ask a question for

some time: What about the duke? Well, the duke was the sort of man that a kindly Providence quite often gives to that sort of woman as her husband—a harmless, rather negligible, good man of infinite tact and inexhaustible patience. They lived very happily together, and, what was rare in those times, without the least suspicion of unfaithfulness on the part of either.

In that century, as I have said, the political, social and cultural worlds were one world. And because the cultural world was dominated by a cultivated aristocracy (an aristocracy that really cared for the things of the mind and the excellent in the arts), the characteristic products of that age in literature, art and architecture have a charming aristocratic quality. Was that society the most civilised in English history as Lytton Strachey has claimed? I don't know. But if good manners are the foundation of civilisation, then I feel that a very strong case can be made out for that daring assertion. What good manners have the writing produced in that society and for that society—by Swift, Gibbon, yes, and Boswell? And to come closer home, what good manners have the noble group of dwelling-houses that surrounds this church?

A gentleman, said Beau Brummel, does not obtrude, he blends. Aristocratic art does not obtrude, it does not strive nor cry, it does not make a violent assault on the emotions, but it charms, and its charm lasts. We feel that these people really had standards—standards which they imposed on the professionals who secured for them the excellence they sought. Rather formal standards, like their society, manners and their stately dances. . . . Yes, one cannot help feeling that with all their failings, they deserved the title then accorded them of "The Quality." And one cannot help asking whether a cultivated leisure class is not a necessity in any society to keep its standards from falling to pieces. (By the way, the "Brains Trust" discussed that question too, and, in my judgment, fell down very badly on it.) It is no use, of course, looking wistfully back with nostalgic longing (with my passion for being up-to-date, I had to drag in those words). Those aristocratic works were wrought by men living in a certain society for that society, themselves saturated with the spirit of that society—that society has gone past recall. Nobody to-day could paint portraits as good as those of that eminent parishioner of Petersham, Sir Joshua Reynolds, in the style of Reynolds. And don't try to write the Decline and Fall of the British Empire in the style of Gibbon; that must be done in the

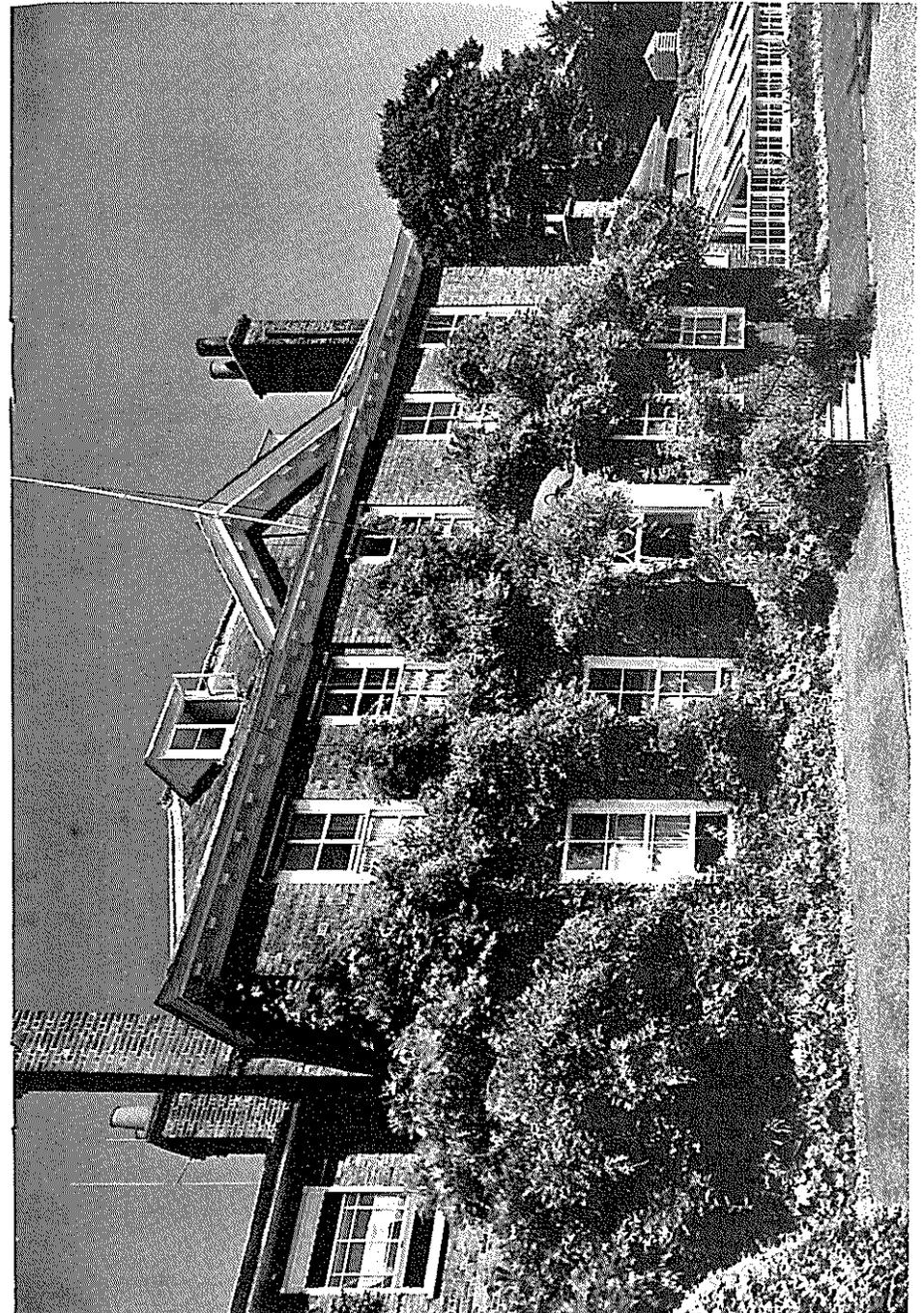
style of Winston Churchill; it probably has been.

Now for a change. Suppose we again claim the aid of Lady Mary Coke's eyes in getting a glimpse of some quiet little domestic scenes in the houses of eighteenth century Petersham, in which Kitty, Duchess of Queensbury, has no part.

It was terribly cold at Sudbrook on Sunday, November 27th, 1774; it had been cold and dismal all the week, and Lady Mary Coke had had a cold drive from Notting Hill to visit her sister, Lady Greenwich, and, though she had an excellent dinner, it did not make up for the coldness of the room—Lady Greenwich (as we saw last week) was said to have had a cold heart; she apparently had warm feet, Lady Mary, with chattering teeth, complained, and this is how she goes on:—"Lady Greenwich proposed to carry me off to Lady Tweedale at Ham, which I consented to; but was still worse off there than at Sudbrook. She received us in a room where the fire was but just lighted, and where there was not above a handful of coals upon the grate. I am really not able to keep company with these ladies; their warm constitutions make me perish with cold. I told Lady Tweedale that, unless she would order her fire to be made up, it was impossible for me to support the cold, upon which she got up and drew a stick of wood from one side of the grate which she laid upon the few coals, and had the good effect of making a blaze, which was a charming sight, and before it quite expired we took our leaves and went to the Duchess of Montrose (at Petersham House, opposite), who had an admirable warm room, and Miss Howe sitting into the fire. She thanked Lady Greenwich for her dinner, which, upon inquiry, proved a single mutton tail, which, she told us, had been stewed with onions and carrots—a very slight repast. She has desired Lady Greenwich will send her all the tails she kills, and particularly says a bullock's is an admirable thing."

Knowing what she was like, we may doubt whether Lady Mary suffered her freezing quite so calmly as the tone of her narrative suggests. I picture her, myself, storming, stamping and screaming.

It is odd that Lady Mary Coke makes no mention of Ham House in her visits of Petersham; never records seeing anybody from Ham House in the family pew in this church; makes no mention of calls paid at Ham House, or visits received at Sudbrook, from the wife of the lord of the manor, or of any meetings with her at any of the large houses in the village—Petersham House, Douglas House, or



A front view of Douglas House.

Lord Harrington's Old Petersham Lodge in the park. This is really strange, because from 1770 onwards the mistress of Ham House was Charlotte, Countess of Dysart, the charming niece of Lady Mary's great friend, Horace Walpole, with whom in her peculiar way (and his peculiar way) she kept up a permanent sort of flirtation. Perhaps the curious story with which I am going to close this talk had something to do with it. When you visit Ham House, which, of course, you will do as soon as it is open to the public, you will see, unless the museum authorities have seen fit to remove it, hanging in the hall a portrait of this lady, Countess Charlotte, dressed in white satin, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds very soon after her marriage to Lord Huntingtower, Lord Dysart's son and heir.

It is a daunting thought that the most casual action of any one of us may have the most unexpected and far-reaching consequences. Perhaps some one of you has this very morning quite light-heartedly done something which has set up a train of consequences which will cause a war 200 years hence.

If one morning in the year 1728 Mrs. Secker, the wife of that rising young clergyman, Prebendary Secker, had been confined to her bed in her Vicarage with a severe chill, that portrait and, perhaps, a dozen other portraits by Sir Joshua of lovely aristocratic ladies would never have been painted; moreover, the nation would never have had the services of H.R.H. William, Duke of Gloucester (known in Royal and other circles as "Silly Billy"), and it is at least likely that the Royal Marriage Act, which controls the marriages of the Royal Family and came into operation this very week, would not have been passed. But Mrs. Secker was not confined to bed that fateful morning; she was up and about, occupied in those multifarious duties, domestic and parochial, which a vigorous and ambitious clergyman's wife finds to do when she is determined that her able young husband shall one day mount the throne of St. Augustine (which he eventually did). So engaged, she happened to look out of the window and gave an exclamation of surprise. Opposite the Vicarage she saw a rag and bone cart standing by the roadside, and sitting among the rubbish, like a queen on her throne, the loveliest young girl she had ever set eyes on. Then did Mrs. Secker perform that act which was to have such remarkable consequences. She flung open the window and, with an imperious gesture, beckoned to the girl to come in. In the year 1728 young persons on junk-carts generally obeyed

the imperious gestures of vicars' wives, and closer inspection confirmed Mrs. Secker's first impression—the girl was, indeed, a very beautiful creature. Kindly, but firmly, questioned, she said that her name was Dorothy Clement, that she was the daughter of a porter in Darlington, and her age 15 years. To Mrs. Secker—that excellent clergyman's wife—it became immediately apparent that a junk-cart was no place for a young woman of such striking and dangerous beauty. She happened to know a highly respectable couple, called Rennie, who kept a millinery establishment in Westminster and who needed an assistant. To them Dorothy was confided as an apprentice. And there, working in the Rennie's shop, she stayed for 18 months. What had fate in store for Dorothy?

Above the Rennie's shop was a large suite of apartments. There to live came Edward Walpole, handsome, stylish and the son of the Prime Minister. Well—a handsome, stylish young beau upstairs, a lovely apprentice downstairs—the inevitable happened. They met; he gave her small presents. Dorothy was scolded and warned: how much better and wiser to look forward to a solid marriage to a substantial tradesman than to encourage the attentions of a young beau who neither would, nor could, marry her! It is said that papa, the porter, was sent for all the way from Darlington to add to his parental admonitions. Poor man! A porter from Darlington. Anno Domini 1730 would be an odd figure in the world into which his daughter was passing. This was not the way to treat a high-spirited girl, doubtless by this time fully aware that she was the possessor of the kind of beauty that turns men's heads. And one day, to escape the noise, Dorothy ran upstairs. As she entered his apartment Edward Walpole was just sitting down to dinner. He ordered his manservant to lay another place. And there Dorothy stayed, the mistress of his house. Sir Edward became very fond of her and was anxious to marry her, but his father, the formidable Sir Robert, imposed his peremptory veto upon the match, and as Edward was entirely dependent upon the jobs—some of the nice eighteenth century jobs with which the powerful endowed their younger sons—his father provided him with, he was obeyed.

So when, some nine years afterwards, Dorothy died, still under the age of 30, the five children she left behind had no legal name. One of the girls died young; the son who entered the Army also died, unmarried, a handsome lieutenant-colonel—promotion was rapid in the Army of

those days for young men with Walpole blood in their veins. Sir Edward proved himself a model father to his three motherless little daughters. Edward, there is no doubt, was much the nicest of the Walpoles. He never married, and, by careful living and some self-sacrifice, succeeded in amassing a sum of money sufficient to provide a marriage portion of £10,000 for each of the girls.

As they grew up to beautiful womanhood, Dorothy's daughters made the following marriages:—The eldest, Laura, married the Hon. Frederick Keppell, a son of the Earl of Albemarle, who became Bishop of Exeter; the second, Maria, married Lord Waldegrave, and when he died, leaving her with three little girls—the subjects of another of Sir Joshua's famous pictures—she married as her second husband William Henry, Duke of Gloucester, brother of King George III. The King was so annoyed by this marriage, at the same time that another brother, the Duke of Cumberland, married the flighty Mrs. Horton, that he caused the Royal Marriage Act to be passed.

The third daughter, Charlotte, is the lady of the portrait in Ham House, and the mistress of that house when Lady Mary Coke came visiting her sister at Sudbrook. But what has this story to do with Lady Mary? In her opinion, a great deal. She had taken the marriage of the Duke of Gloucester to Maria, Charlotte's sister, very hardy. She was infuriated that a member of the Royal Family should disgrace himself by making such a marriage, all the more because, as we have already noticed, she had herself set her cap very markedly at yet another of George III's brothers, Edward, Duke of York, a disagreeable youth, years her junior. It was intolerable that Maria should succeed in securing a Royal Duke while she had failed. She made no secret of her detestation of the Duchess of Gloucester—that woman! as she invariably called Maria—and you know how much venom one woman can impart to those two words when applied to an-

other woman. Poor Maria did not deserve venom—charming, good and unassuming. It may be that Lady Mary's silence about Ham House and its mistress was only part of her deliberate ignoring of the whole of this illegitimate, but all too successful, branch of the Walpole family. Or it may simply be due to the fact that Charlotte did not go into society. She seems to have been unhappy and fretted, so her Uncle Horace declared, "in her gloomy prison at Ham." She had a fearful boor of a husband, who lived in complete seclusion. It was this Lionel, fifth Earl of Dysart, who, when King George III graciously sent a message from Windsor that he proposed to drive over and have breakfast with him one morning, boorishly replied to his Sovereign that when his house became a public spectacle he would be pleased to give His Majesty the first view! But this is all another story for which we have no time.

We have been talking about aristocracy. About the value of aristocracy to the cultural life of a nation there will always, I suppose, be debate. Some hold that it is a necessity; that without a cultivated leisure class standards of excellence disintegrate; that no price is too high to pay for the charm aristocracy introduces into the products of the age in which it is dominant. Others hold that the development and sustenance of an aristocracy is a wasteful way of obtaining admittedly good ends which can be procured less expensively by other methods. I don't know which is the correct answer, but of one thing I am fully convinced—that it is both more inspiring and more agreeable to live in a country and a *fortiori* in a little place that has an aristocratic past, and where the charming flavour of aristocracy still lingers.

We, who have the felicity to live in Petersham should think, with gratitude, of those dignitaries of the past whose taste has made Petersham what it is and what may it long remain—a visible and continuing lesson in good manners.

## Early Nineteenth Century Petersham and the Berry Sisters

AT various times in the first half of the 19th century, Petersham must have been an extremely interesting place in which to live. There was then in residence here, or very closely associated with Petersham, a group of people of remarkable gifts of character or intellect.

At Elm Lodge lived Mr. William Robert Spencer, who had a great reputation in literary circles. A poet of much sweetness, he is said to have been the friend of all sorts of literary and political personages. He was a descendant of the great Duke of Marlborough. He married the widow of a foreign count. It is said that her first husband showed his extraordinary devotion to her by committing suicide in order that she might marry Mr. Spencer (divorce was more difficult in those days!). But this story rests on no secure foundation and is probably not true. Mr. Spencer was brilliantly and variously gifted, but he achieved but little so we are told on account of his extreme indolence. Mr. Spencer was not the only person of brilliant parts who, on coming to live at Petersham, relapsed into a state of extreme indolence.

The same is reported of William Stanhope, Earl of Harrington, he who built the third of the three large houses which succeeded each other on the same site just inside the park gates. Of him, Queen Caroline, King George II's wife, who we have already had occasion to note, was the bright spot among the early Hanoverian royalties, of him, when Secretary of State, the Queen said, "There is a heavy insipid sloth in that man that puts me out of all patience. He must have six hours to dress, six more to dine, six more for his lady, and six more to sleep . . . and there for a Minister are the four and twenty admirably well disposed of; and if now and then he borrows six of these hours to do anything relating to his office, it is for something that might be done in six minutes and ought to have been done six days before." If this royal estimate of her husband's Secretary of State is correct, Lord Harrington was a very lazy man. It is the Petersham air, of course. But to return to Mr. Spencer. His indolence had the result the copybook says idleness will have; he sank into

poverty and had to leave Petersham and live in France, where he died, so he is not buried in the Spencer family vault in our churchyard.

The Earl of Harrington seems to have got away with it; his indolence did not result in poverty—but then he was a politician!

From 1823 onwards those celebrated ladies, the Miss Berrys lived intermittently at Petersham or just outside. First in the double house now known as "The Glen-Craigmyle," where earlier we believe Captain Vancouver lodged, and later at Devoushire Cottage, which has grown into Devonshire Lodge. But as I propose to devote a considerable portion of the latter part of this talk to these once famous sisters, I shall say no more now than to remind you that they were fitting about the village then.

At Douglas House lived Lady Scott, a granddaughter of the Lady Greenwich of Sudbrook, of whom I have said a considerable amount in the two previous talks. If a woman, as well as a man, is known by her friends, she was clearly a cultivated woman who made Douglas House a cultural centre. She certainly took a great interest in this church and was the donor of the window in the chancel, which was smashed and finally ruined by a bomb on 29th November, 1940. No, we are not mourning the loss of a beautiful thing. Lady Scott's window was no joy for ever. That criminal in high places, Field-Marshal Goering, has many atrocities to answer for at the bar of history. Let us then record as an incredibly small mitigation that he quite unconsciously, and without intention, did us a service in enabling us, thanks to the generosity of another lady, to substitute the present much better one for Lady Scott's.

In spite of that window, put in perhaps at the worst period of English architecture, I still believe the donor to have been a cultivated lady; she is known by her associates.

At Douglas House the intellectual Miss Berrys competed for her friendship with another blue stocking lady who was a frequent visitor there, Lady Louisa Stuart. Whether Lady Louisa can properly be called a Petersham person or not, it is impossible to give a series of talks on Petersham people

without some account of her, for her writings are a chief source of information about 18th century inhabitants of Petersham. Any of you who are acquainted with her writings will at once recognise the source of all the best stories I have amused you with.

She was the youngest of the eleven children of the Earl of Bute, King George III's well-meaning and amiable but ineffective and unpopular Prime Minister, and therefore the sister of the General Sir Charles Stuart, whose memorial table stands on the right of the entrance of the church.

A very distinguished and able soldier, who, had he not died at the early age of 47, would probably have led the British forces in the Peninsular War and might have eclipsed the fame of the Iron Duke.

In early youth Lady Louisa suffered a love disappointment—broken hearts, I may interject are a recurring theme in this afternoon's talk—I am going to mention no less than four certainties and one doubtful before I have done—and hereafter she remained single apparently from choice. She had literary aptitudes and there is no doubt very considerable literary gifts. She was a close and intimate friend of Sir Walter Scott; Scott leaned heavily upon her judgment and she is described as the very best critic he ever had; hers were the first eyes except the author's to read "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake"; it was she who provided Scott with the information about John, Duke of Argyll, that he used in the moving passage in the Heart of Midlothian which describes Jeannie Dean's journey.

It is a pity that she thought that authorship was beneath the dignity of a lady of her rank, for she had a real gift for the delineation of character—her sketch of Lady Mary Coke, for example, written originally for her young relations is a most vivid portrayal of that extraordinary lady. Her brilliant sketches were actually written in 1827, but it was not until the very end of the 19th century that they appeared in print, and then only in a very limited edition meant for private circulation among the members of her family. Since then they have in various ways become available to a wider public and have been of considerable assistance to several worthy makers of books and, incidentally, to me.

She met the Miss Berrys frequently at Douglas House, but in no friendly spirit. It is abundantly clear from her references to them in her letters that she thoroughly disliked the

sisters. "Kettledrums" and "Quacks" are among the names she calls them. How these gifted ladies do love one another!

Another of Lady Scott's friends who in this church deserves very special mention, was Lady Katherine Halkett—her memorial tablet is that one on the left hand as you enter the church. She was born a Douglas, daughter of the Earl of Selkirk, and therefore some sort of cousin of Lady Scott, who was also born a Douglas. Our vestry minutes make it clear that Lady Katherine was a lady of considerable force of character, with a special interest in music. She was for several years organist and choirmaster of this church and compiled a special hymn book for use in the services here, which she published with an introduction and notes.

She was somewhat constricted in her choice, for the organ was a barrel organ and only hymns written in a metre which would fit the tunes which the barrels could play could be used. However, she made a competent selection of about 150 hymns. I am the proud possessor of the actual copy of her hymn book which she presented "to the Hon. Lady Scott with sincere regards." Petersham, too, was proud of the distinction of possessing a hymnbook all of its own. On the 14th April, 1841, the vestry passed a resolution that "The Vestry feel that the possession of this Book has added importantly to the respectability of the Parish."

Next to Lady Katherine Halkett's memorial tablet, and belonging to this same period, is one erected to the memory of Caroline Maria, Duchess of Montrose. This is the lady from whom Montrose House, where she lived for several years, gets its name. She is not to be confused with the 18th century Duchess of Montrose, who was Horace Walpole's friend and has been several times mentioned in these talks. It was the house now known as Petersham House that Horace Walpole's Duchess hired and lived in for some years. I think it quite significant that the monument to the 19th century Duchess claims that among many other admirable qualities, she possessed "a mind of high intellect." Proof of that claim I lack, but that it was made shows (doesn't it) that ladies living at Petersham then were expected to be intelligent, and that it was felt that even a Duchess was none the worse for "exercising the little grey cells."

It would be satisfactory to be able to report that taking part in the vigorous intellectual life of Petersham of that period, was one or more of

the Ministers who served this church. I regret that I cannot do this. Our ministers have in general been a dim lot. This is understandable. This church, in spite of its wealth of historical associations and its aristocratic congregation at some periods, was after all only a little wayside chapelry, and the income attached to it very small. In the 18th century it was precisely the £40 a year on which Goldsmith's country parson was passing rich, and in the period we are now considering it was still less than £100 a year.

It happens, however, that for several years at the beginning of the 19th century the nominal Minister of Petersham was a man who, if his character had been of as high a standard as his literary capacity, might have held his own with the Miss Berrys and Lady Louisa Stuart, and even with the brilliant but indolent Mr. Spencer. This was the Rev. Caleb Colton, Vicar of the combined benefice Kew-cum-Petersham, and author of the once famous "Lacon," a book of aphorisms, of which the most famous and one that has passed into current popular use is "Imitation is the sincerest of flattery" (Yes! that is how Colton wrote it; not "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery"—a distinctly inferior edition). Colton, I say, was the nominal minister of Petersham, but he did not think it necessary to visit his charge; he did occasionally put in an appearance at Kew, but generally he was living a disorderly life in London or Paris or New York; there is no evidence that he ever performed one ministerial act in this church, took a service, baptised an infant, took a wedding or a funeral. So we can hardly call him a Petersham person.

In his absence the duty was taken generally by Mr. Delafosse, who has a memorial tablet in the chancel, a schoolmaster in Richmond, who also has a Flaxman memorial in Richmond Parish Church; and for two years by Rev. Henry Raikes, who was the son of Mr. Raikes, a banker who lived at Sudbrook. Now this Mr. Henry Raikes was quite a considerable person; he was an author and afterwards a Chancellor of the Diocese of Chester. Lady Louisa Stuart clearly knew him well; she calls him "our Mr. Raikes" in a letter, but she and her circle did not approve of Mr. Raikes; he held advanced ideas upon the permissible activities of women; he even seems to have thought that a woman might sometimes minister in church to a congregation. Certainly in the 1820's Mr. Raikes was a very advanced person. No wonder Lady Louisa and Lady

Scott held up pious hands of horror at his heresies!

After the Raikes, Lady Horton was in residence at Sudbrook. I do not know whether she joined at all in the intellectual life of the parish, but she had literary associations; she was some sort of cousin of Lord Byron and the heroine of his poem:—  
"She walks in beauty like the night."

It is said that when she was in half-mourning she met Byron at a ball, clothed in a black star-spangled dress and inspired the poet to write his well-known verses.

Another characteristic of the inhabitants of Petersham at this period besides intellectual activity (and broken hearts) is remarkable longevity. For 26 years of our period the Lady of the Manor in her own right was Louisa, Countess of Dysart. As she did not succeed to the title until she was 70 years of age it might have been expected that she would have had but little influence on affairs. This was not the case. She enjoyed a vigorous old age and was clearly an effective mistress at Ham House. Several stories of her doings have survived, all of them representing her in a favourable light, and I fancy she must have had a charming personality.

One story tells how skilfully she reconciled the Duke of Clarence (afterwards King William IV) and the Bishop of London, with whom the Duke had had a political quarrel, at a private little dinner party she gave at Ham House. To this lady when she was 60 years of age, Tom Moore, the poet, paid a most graceful compliment in verse:—

Thou still art so lovely to me,  
I would sooner, thou beautiful mother,  
Repose in the sunset of thee  
Than bask in the noon of another.

In her time the ghost of some feudal custom still lingered in the uses that obtained in this church. At the conclusion of every service at which the Countess was present the minister bowed from the altar to her, sitting in the family pew immediately in front of him; nor did he presume to leave the altar until the countess had acknowledged his bow with an answering curtsy and the whole congregation remained standing while she followed in his wake down the aisle. For myself, I rather regret the passing of such customs; the reality of feudalism was no doubt often disagreeable; its dying aroma can be very pleasant. I think I should enjoy a little formal interchange of bowing and curtsying with a nice old countess up there in the chancel.

Another nice old lady who had a pew in this church at this time

frequently worshipped here, subscribed to parish funds and lived nearly as long as Lady Dysart, was the Countess of Pembroke, who has given her name to Pembroke Lodge. She was a close personal friend of King George III, who gave her the smallish house which has since grown into Pembroke Lodge, as a residence when her husband died at the end of the 18th century.

Whenever the King was in the Richmond neighbourhood he was very careful to pay a visit to Pembroke Lodge. But this isn't all the story. As you all know, this King suffered from recurring attacks of insanity, and during the last 10 years of his life and reign he was permanently mad. Now, whenever the King went mad he suffered from the delusion that he was married to Lady Pembroke. King George III was the impeccably faithful husband of Queen Charlotte. Lady Pembroke was a lady of the highest character. Why this particular delusion should have distressed the poor, blind old King is a problem that alienists might make a guess at. Anyhow "distress" is the right word, for it added greatly to his unhappiness that he was not allowed to go to her. Perhaps it was a harking back to the days of his youth.

Horace Walpole speaks of the grace and dignity with which Lady Pembroke led the procession of the Countesses at his Coronation. Walpole also calls her one of the most beautiful creatures in Europe and says that she had the face of a Madonna. Had she a broken heart? She is the doubtful case; I don't know. Anyhow, the poor lady's heart had a shattering blow in her youth. Very soon after the King's Coronation, her husband, of whom (again according to Walpole) she was "doatingly fond," ran away from her with another lady, disguised as a sailor with a black wig. But she took him back, so perhaps her heart was mended again. In any case her husband was dead before she became a parishioner of Petersham. It may be that broken hearts conduce to longevity.

Anyhow, Lady Pembroke lived to be 93 years old, not quite so long as Louisa, Countess of Dysart, who died at the age of 96, and Lady Louisa Stuart, who was 95. Petersham air may induce extreme indolence, but it also encourages longevity; perhaps the two are connected!

Don't you agree with me that in that period Petersham must have been a remarkably interesting place in which to live? On most Sunday mornings in this church might have been seen perhaps one, perhaps several, of these, in

their own way quite unusual people. And then in the late thirties of the last century Charles Dickens turned up for two summers, first at Woodbine Cottage and then at Elm Cottage, now Elm Lodge. I shall have one rather interesting and hitherto (I think) unnoticed incident in Dickens' residence here to mention at the end of this talk, but I am not going to be so bold as to claim Dickens as a Petersham man; that would be unblushing theft.

About the next person, Theodora Jane Cowper, I have some qualms, but as she is buried in our churchyard, I think I am justified in briefly including her. After all, all that is mortal of her has resided longer in Petersham than anywhere else. The Cowpers had connections with the neighbourhood. Her and William Cowper's cousin, General Cowper, lived for several years at Ham, where he was visited by the poet, and the same General Cowper was, I find, a trustee of the Petersham Highways Trust at the end of the 18th century. I expect the General was often in this church—the Cowpers were religious people and Petersham Chapelry served the Ham district for centuries. Theodora Jane also, I cannot help thinking, was often a worshipper here. Over that story, so often told and by so many pens, I am not going to dally.

Theodora was William Cowper's cousin and first love, the Delia of his youthful poems. Very properly, her father, Ashley Cowper, a little man who wore a green hat with a yellow lining which William said made him look like a mushroom, objected to the match. Very properly for Cowper early developed a tendency to the insanity which afterwards afflicted him, and moreover was plainly incapable of earning a sufficient income to keep himself, without the addition of a wife. Cowper did not greatly object to being objected to, though all through his life dependent upon the loving care and sympathy of women friends, he was not of a passionate temperament. Theodora took her disappointment more hardily; she grieved for William all her life; undoubtedly she qualifies as one of the broken-hearted whom we spoke of earlier as certainties, but it did not shorten her days, for she survived the lover of her youth by very many years, and when she died in 1824 and was buried in our churchyard she was in her 90th year, as her tombstone records. Not so old as the three previous ladies mentioned, but still of a ripe old age.

Of all the people I have mentioned this afternoon, far the best and most widely known in their own day were

the two Miss Berrys—Mary and Agnes. London Society knew no two people better during the whole of the first half of the 19th century. I suppose everybody here knows the outline and main elements of their story. Petersham people at any rate have only themselves to blame if they are ignorant for I have been serialising that story in our Petersham Leaflet. Well, these are the often told facts.

When he was 72 years old, in the year 1788, Horace Walpole, still a bachelor, met these two sisters, aged then 25 and 24 years respectively. They were not, you observe, very young and they had travelled considerably. Almost at once a firm friendship sprang up between the old man and the girls, which lasted until Walpole's death eight years after the first meeting. He wrote to them a number of his most brilliant letters, full of endearments; he put his second house, "Little Strawberry Hill," at their disposal; he sang their praises to his friends and introduced them to his circle.

Portraits of the young women go far to explain the reasons for Walpole's attraction to them—they were both physical and intellectual. Mary was undoubtedly at this period a decidedly handsome young woman with splendid dark eyes and a vivid clever face—the face of a girl with a good and well-trained mind behind it. Agnes was less obviously good-looking and with a paler personality—she was destined to be all through her long life the complement and foil of her more emphatic sister.

This friendship between Walpole and the Berry sisters has often been described as strange. It was certainly unusual. It is not often that an old bachelor well on in the seventies and two girls in their middle twenties are able to sustain a firm friendship for several years. Yet it had much to recommend it. All parties to the friendship were gainers. Walpole got two pretty and appreciative girls to listen to his stories. Can an elderly man ask for anything more delightful? And Walpole availed himself fully of his opportunity. Into the girls' receptive ears he poured the treasures of his anecdote.

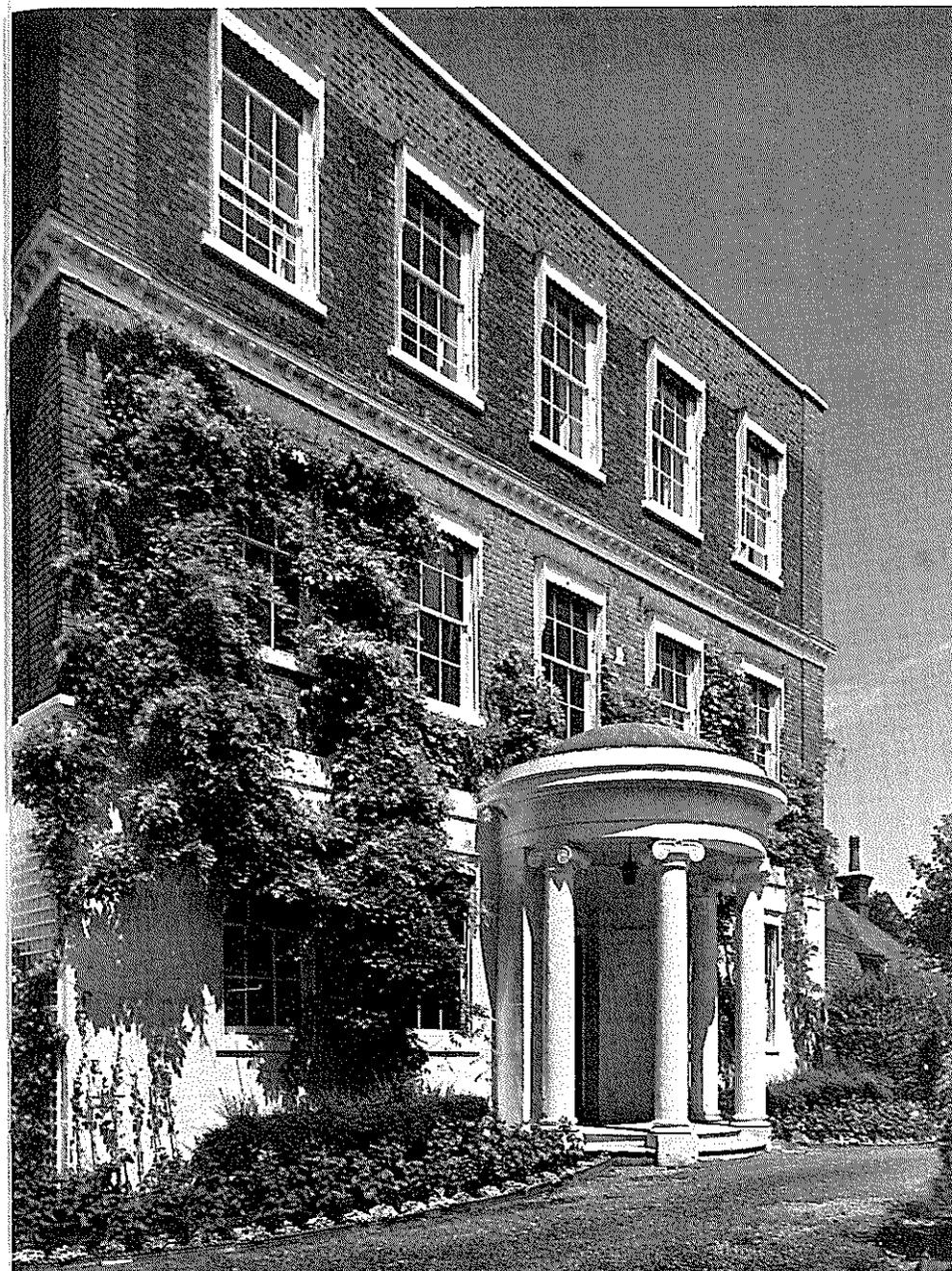
Many of his reminiscences survive to this day only because he recollected them to amuse Mary and Agnes Berry. The Berrys too gained considerably. There were material advantages: a house, Little Strawberry Hill—picturesque and charming—and the prospect of benefiting from the will of the old man. But far more than this; by Walpole's friendship and patronage they were translated from the middle-class circle to which they belonged by

birth to the very heart of the Great World. And what a world was that, in which Walpole was a brilliant and prominent figure! Then the political, social and cultural worlds were one and in it, as Walpole's friends, the Berry sisters moved freely, received everywhere.

There are many roads to fame—Mary and Agnes planted their feet firmly on the path to celebrity by listening patiently to the interminable stories of a queer old man. It must not, of course, be supposed that they simply endured his conversation; both the sisters, and Mary in particular, had minds. For young women with minds of good quality, Walpole's conversation must have had great attractions. For more than half a century he had lived at the centre of what has been described as the most civilised society that has existed in English history; he had known everybody worth knowing and everything that had happened and the inside histories, yes (and it must be added), plenty of things that had never happened at all, for he was not only the gossip of gossips, but the often mendacious purveyor of scandal. His conversation must have had considerable charm for well educated young women with minds.

Many years afterwards Mary Berry told Greville, the diarist, and Thackeray, and no doubt a whole host of other eminent persons, that Walpole in his last years had offered to marry her, in order to leave her a countess (at the very end of his life by the death of his nephew he had succeeded to the Earldom of Orford) and a jointure. Maiden ladies (so I am told) not infrequently recollect proposals of marriage by gentlemen long dead which have not in fact been made, and quite a lively little controversy has taken place as to whether or not he did so propose. It is obviously one of these many matters upon which from the nature of the case certainty is impossible, and therefore lovely stuff for controversy . . . At this point, if I were addressing, say, the Women's Institute, I might be tempted to enlarge (from inside knowledge) upon the thought processes of an elderly man, not yet senile, in such cases.

Here and now in the presence of this distinguished audience I can only state my conviction that Mary Berry was quite truthful to the letter but not to the spirit. It is highly improbable that Walpole ever proposed to her with the intention of being taken seriously. It is more than probable that he quite often told her in fun that he would make her his countess and his heiress. That was his way. That was the fashionable way of talking to ladies of his time. So in his



A front view of Petersham House.

middle years he had talked (and written) to Lady Mary Coke, and Mary Berry knew very well that he was just paying her a compliment—not making a serious proposal of marriage . . . but it was agreeable to recollect and talk about at one of those cosy little dinner parties at No. 8, Curzon-street, 30, 40 or 50 years afterwards.

The Berrys reaped many advantages from the friendship and patronage of Walpole. But suppose either or both fell in love, their relationship to the elderly earl might have serious disadvantages. And Mary Berry did fall in love, at the age of 31. Her association with Walpole seems to have given her a taste for men very much her senior in age. General O'Hara, the hero of her one serious love affair, was more than 20 years older than she, and certainly a survival. Style, manner, clothes marked him as belonging to an age that was past. The world had changed considerably since he had acted as the Marquis of Granby's aide-de-camp at the battle of Minden in 1759, but he still wore the double row of sausage curls that projected on each side of his topee, the huge military boots and a remarkable hat which had been fashionable in his youth.

The winds of democracy were blowing—the American Revolution had taken place, in which the general himself had served and been a prisoner-of-war, the French Revolution was in full tide, but these storms had not disturbed the courtly, old-fashioned manners of the general. He had had a distinguished but not very successful military career when he met the Berrys in 1791. When in 1793 Toulon raised the flag of Louis XVII and Admiral Lord Hood took possession of the city, O'Hara was made military governor; but a certain then unknown commander of artillery serving the French Republic, called Napoleon Bonaparte, sited his guns so as to command the entrance to the port, thus denying the British Navy access to it, and O'Hara had to surrender and become a prisoner-of-war once more. It was two years before he was released, but in August, 1795, he arrived back in England and went to Cheltenham, where he again met the Berrys; and towards the end of the month Mary Berry and he became engaged, but secretly; only Mrs. Damer, Mary's greatest friend was told of it.

The general, in spite of his old-fashioned manners, perhaps because of them, certainly knew the way to a woman's heart—he was an amorous old gentleman and probably had had a great deal of practice. His courtship of Mary Berry seems to have been largely conducted through Mrs. Damer. It is evident that Mrs. Damer thoroughly enjoyed playing the part

of go-between (what woman doesn't?) and was more than a little in love with O'Hara herself. What a joy very old letters often are! . . . suppose we select one letter from a packet written nearly 153 years ago and extract just one revealing paragraph.

This is how the Hon. Mrs. Damer wrote to Mary Berry on Sunday morning, October 18th, 1795. . . . She is writing, of course, of O'Hara: "He put up his hand to his dark eyes after listening to me and turning away his head, took hold of my hand, which he pressed with that tenderness of expression that goes directly to my heart and seems to me from such a being a more binding assurance of protection and friendship than a thousand promises on parchments from another." Very touching! But I can't understand, can you, why when she read that letter Mary Berry did not see a red light?

It was delightful to be wooed by such a man, but—? Indeed, there was a But and an awful question to be answered. What would the Earl of Orford think of it? What would he do and say when he learnt that his pet, his treasure, his Queen of Hearts, almost the sole interest of his old age, was to leave him to become the wife of another man? He was bound to be hurt, and if hurt he might become nasty—very nasty. Horace Walpole's pen (Mary knew) might be one of the nastiest things in the 18th century . . . and then there was his will.

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middle years he had talked (and written) to Lady Mary Coke, and Mary Berry knew very well that he was just paying her a compliment—not making a serious proposal of marriage . . . but it was agreeable to recollect and talk about at one of those cosy little dinner parties at No. 8, Curzon-street, 30, 40 or 50 years afterwards.

The Berrys reaped many advantages from the friendship and patronage of Walpole. But suppose either or both fell in love, their relationship to the elderly earl might have serious disadvantages. And Mary Berry did fall in love, at the age of 31. Her association with Walpole seems to have given her a taste for men very much her senior in age. General O'Hara, the hero of her one serious love affair, was more than 20 years older than she, and certainly a survival. Style, manner, clothes marked him as belonging to an age that was past. The world had changed considerably since he had acted as the Marquis of Granby's aide-de-camp at the battle of Minden in 1759, but he still wore the double row of sausage curls that projected on each side of his topee, the huge military boots and a remarkable hat which had been fashionable in his youth.

The winds of democracy were blowing—the American Revolution had taken place, in which the general himself had served and been a prisoner-of-war, the French Revolution was in full tide, but these storms had not disturbed the courtly, old-fashioned manners of the general. He had had a distinguished but not very successful military career when he met the Berrys in 1791. When in 1793 Toulon raised the flag of Louis XVII and Admiral Lord Hood took possession of the city, O'Hara was made military governor; but a certain then unknown commander of artillery serving the French Republic, called Napoleon Bonaparte, sited his guns so as to command the entrance to the port, thus denying the British Navy access to it, and O'Hara had to surrender and become a prisoner-of-war once more. It was two years before he was released, but in August, 1795, he arrived back in England and went to Cheltenham, where he again met the Berrys; and towards the end of the month Mary Berry and he became engaged, but secretly; only Mrs. Damer, Mary's greatest friend was told of it.

The general, in spite of his old-fashioned manners, perhaps because of them, certainly knew the way to a woman's heart—he was an amorous old gentleman and probably had had a great deal of practice. His courtship of Mary Berry seems to have been largely conducted through Mrs. Damer. It is evident that Mrs. Damer thoroughly enjoyed playing the part

of go-between (what woman doesn't?) and was more than a little in love with O'Hara herself. What a joy very old letters often are! . . . suppose we select one letter from a packet written nearly 153 years ago and extract just one revealing paragraph.

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of the famous Parisian salons. They rapidly acquired the technique of lion-hunting and lion-entertaining. Every fresh but undoubted reputation was sealed at a little dinner party at No. 8, Curzon-street—at Petersham they seem to have been on holiday.

They were far from being wealthy women; after their father's death they had about £700 a year to live on. They could not afford to entertain lavishly; but to Curzon-street, year after year, a procession of the smart, the wise and brilliant came to dine. Agnes arranged the armchairs and sofas, an accomplishment for which she had a special talent; Mary, darkly handsome, heavily rouged and garnishing her conversation with eighteenth century oaths, presided. In an atmosphere much less restrained than that usual during the first half of the nineteenth century the lions performed and were stimulated and petted by the expert sisters. Not everybody liked them.

As we have noted, Lady Louisa Stuart's pen spits venom whenever it has occasion to write Mary Berry's name. Mary antagonised many women by her stridency and patronising airs. No doubt in the company of women she was often an aggravating and overbearing personage who made no attempt to disguise her conviction that she was intellectually superior to her less gifted sisters. With men it was different; she had a handsome presence and very fine eyes; men, I have found, start with a prejudice in favour of women with fine, dark eyes. Mary was essentially a man's woman and an intellectual man's woman in particular. To men she could listen as well as talk; men of high intelligence she could handle and make pleased with themselves and therefore with their hostess.

(A short while ago I happened to remark to a friend of mine by way of compliment that it was a great pleasure to have a conversation with a woman who was at once intelligent and nice to look at . . . "Which just means," replied by candid friend, in her very sweetest tones, "that you enjoy showing-off before a good-looking woman—all men do." There, I fancy, we have one of the secrets of Mary Berry's success; she encouraged men to show-off before a good-looking woman. What a lot of tips I am giving you ladies this afternoon).

The sisters, I say, were pertinacious lion-hunters. They made sure that no talk-about person should escape their acquaintance. Now in the summer of 1839 a new literary star had arisen above the horizon and was shining with peculiar brilliance, a brilliance undimmed yet. Charles Dickens had written Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist, and was writing Nicholas

Nickleby . . . Charles Dickens, who that very summer had hired Elm Cottage, Petersham, for a summer residence and was living there. The Miss Berrys were at Richmond, at Devonshire Lodge, a few yards outside the historic boundaries of our parish.

It is revealing and interesting to discover Sydney Smith writing, June, 1839, to Dickens in these words: "My dear sir, nobody more, and more justly, talked of than yourself. The Miss Berrys, now at Richmond, live only to be acquainted with you, and have commissioned me to request you to dine with them Friday, 29th, or Monday, July 1st, to meet a Canon of St. Pauls, the Rector of Coombe Flory and the Vicar of Halberton—all equally well known to you; to say nothing of other and better people. The Miss Berrys and Lady Charlotte Lindsay have not the smallest objection to be put in a number, but on the contrary would be proud of the distinction; and Lady Charlotte in particular, you may marry to Newman Noggs. Pray come; it is as much as my place is worth to send them a refusal."

So those near neighbours, the old ladies of the past and the young man of the future, journeyed up to London to meet each other. I cannot find that as a result of that dinner party just 110 years ago the acquaintance ripened into friendship. Dickens, despite Barnaby Rudge, was not 18th century-minded; the Berrys were.

Before we close we must, I think, take one glimpse of the Berry sisters in their extreme old age, which brings them into very close connection with this church. There was almost exactly 100 years ago—to be precise on July 25th, 1849—a grand wedding in this church, at which both Mary and Agnes Berry, aged 86 and 85 years respectively, were present. I have tried to see that wedding with the eye of the imagination, and with the help of Miss Agnes Berry I want you to see it too; that is possible because with the exception of the modern screen and the altar ornaments this church presents exactly the same appearance as it did 100 years ago.

I have looked up old pictures and I find that in the year 1849 fashionable ladies wore their dresses draped over a contraption which I am informed is called a farthingale; these old pictures also remind us that there are fashions in feminine demeanour as well as in dress, and this was the period when ladies liked to be thought modest and meek. So we must see all the feminine participants in this wedding, and there were many, looking very demure, with hair neatly parted in the middle and down-cast-eyes, and their farthingales sticking out behind.

The bride was Lady Frances Kerr, a daughter of the Marquis of Lothian; she had the additional distinction of being a god-daughter of King George IV. She was being married, I am practically certain, from Douglas House. Now let us listen to Miss Agnes Berry as she describes the wedding in a letter written to her friend, Kate Perry, from Devonshire Lodge on Sunday, July 29th, 1849. The letter was clearly written in a state of considerable agitation; it abounds in italics and bristles with exclamation marks . . . "We have just had our Petersham marriage with all its forms and ceremonies, a breakfast of about 80 people, 10 bridesmaids (10 bridesmaids, can you see them down there?), healths drunk and speeches made, and the bride and the little ugly bride-

groom in the middle of it all! In my mind very bad taste for such a marriage. For our dear Lady Scott's sake we are very glad it is over."

Clearly, a deplorable event—one's heart bleeds for Lady Scott, but Miss Agnes Berry doesn't tell you the worst, the full horror of the situation will be apparent to you when you know that the bridegroom, the little ugly bridegroom, was a clergyman . . . it was as bad as that. Rather snobs I fear the dear old ladies were, but remarkable women, and when in 1852 the last scenes which connect them with this church were enacted and the famous Dean Milman read the burial service first over Agnes and then a few months later over Mary's remains, two of the last candles of the 18th century had gone out. . .

## The Unsung Visitor

How pleasant it is to be in possession of a little piece of information about a famous person, known only to a very few! It gives its possessor a sense of belonging to an elect circle and can be used with effect in all sorts of ways. It can be used as a gambit to restore the flow of conversation in knowledgeable circles or to prick the pretension of the loquacious altogether-too-well-informed. "How very interesting," you exclaim, "but do you know that the famous X once did Y." He won't know and you will have worship with all who sit at meat with thee.

Such a piece of esoteric information which came into my possession quite by accident a short while ago I am going to share with you in this article. It concerns a man of world-wide fame, about whose work tens of thousands of words in diverse languages have been spilled; whose painful life and tragic death have lately provided subject matter for a much discussed film and it shows him engaged in an activity which all but the knowing ones would suppose to be wholly out of character; moreover it adds one more small pebble to the mountainous pile of Petersham historic fact and rescues from oblivion something which should be preserved. Oblivion has almost overtaken the memory of a Wesleyan Methodist chapel that once served a congregation as a place of worship in Petersham. When recently in connection with the subject of this article, I was questioned about its site, I was obliged to admit that I had never heard of it, and on examination I found that the voluminous notes and papers about Petersham's history, collected by Mr. C. D. Warren, contained no mention of it. It has almost been forgotten—but not quite; two of the oldest inhabitants of the parish, upon my enquiry dug deep in their memories and there found a recollection of a small conventicle which stood almost on the site of the house known as "The Poplars" near the Petersham-Ham boundary. Pursuing the clue they gave me, I found the chapel clearly marked on two maps of the nineteenth century, standing where they said it stood on the right of Petersham Road opposite the extreme corner of Sudbrook Park. It has ceased to exist for over sixty years.

When on a day in the year 1877 the congregation of this little chapel learnt that their circuit superintendent, The Rev. William Jones, of Isleworth, was sending a young theological student of foreign extraction to conduct the morning service on the following Sunday, it is improbable that the announcement aroused any particular interest. To the young student, however, his mission was something of an adventure, sufficiently noteworthy to be described at some length in a letter to his brother in Holland. He tells how he started from Isleworth walking on foot, for he was too poor to be able to afford any sort of conveyance, how he crossed the bridge at Richmond and passing under the hill came to a place called Petersham. Then he walked for some way with a park on one side and green fields on the other and turning down a short lane came to the chapel.

The congregation he met and ministered to that Sunday morning consisted we may assume for the most part of humble folk drawn rather from the largish village of Ham than from Petersham. In 1877, there were very few houses belonging to Petersham near the site of the chapel. How did the visiting preacher appear in their eyes as they surveyed him with mild curiosity as he prayed and expounded the scriptures? Several portraits of him are in existence, two by masters, but they belong to later periods in his life; what I think the congregation saw was a young man looking rather older than his 24 years, stockily built, with a figure that suggested that his forebears earned their living by cultivating the good Dutch soil, with strong features and brooding melancholy eyes and a mouth that seemed to indicate that he already found life a difficult and perplexing business.

For his discourse he chose a text from St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. It would be profoundly interesting to know something of the quality of his preaching and of the impact it made upon his hearers. A fire burned in *this man*. It was said of him afterwards "that he carried a sun in his head and a hurricane in his heart." Did the flame communicate itself to his words and make the hearing of them a memorable experience to some at least of the members of the congregation of that little wayside chapel? Eighty years after the event it is highly improbable that any one lives who could tell us or that any written record survives to inform us.

His message delivered, the young man walked back by the way by which he had come, to Isleworth. From there he wrote of the events of the day to his brother Theodor and amused himself by illustrating his letter with two small sketches, one of Mr. Jones' Church at Isleworth and, by its side, one of the front of the little chapel in Petersham. They are admirable little drawings, which is hardly surprising since the artist who drew them was—Vincent Van Gogh!

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### MORE ABOUT VINCENT VAN GOGH AT PETERSHAM

The story of Vincent Van Gogh's visit to Petersham and of his preaching in the little Methodist chapel which formerly stood by the Ham-Petersham boundary, published in the leaflet for last November, created a considerable amount of interest by no means confined to Petersham. I am glad that thanks to the researches of Sir Anthony Blunt, director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, and the kindness of Mrs. Blunt of Ham in sending me the results of her son's researches, I am able to publish the following interesting letter written by Van Gogh to his brother Theodor in Holland, from Isleworth on November 25th, 1876:—

Dear Theo,

Last Sunday evening I went to a village on the Thames called Petersham. In the morning I had been at the Sunday school in Turnham Green and went from there after sunset to Richmond, and from there to Petersham. Soon it became dark and I did not know the right way. It was a very muddy road, across a kind of dyke, the slope of which was covered with gnarled elm trees and bushes. At last I saw a light in a little house and climbed and waded through the mud to reach it, and there they showed me the right way. But there was a beautiful little wooden church with kindly light at the end of the dark road. I read Acts V, 14-16 and Acts XII, 5-17, Peter in prison; and then I told the story of Johannes and Theogenes once more. There was a little organ in the church that was played by a young lady from a boarding school, the pupils of which were all there. At Petersham I told the congregation that they would hear bad English, but that when I spoke I thought of the man in the parable who said, "have patience with me and I will pay you everything."

This letter would seem to invite comment. It is not the letter published in a Dutch collection of Van Gogh's letters, of which I had a passing view some 18 months ago and which inspired the November article; the visit described in the Dutch letter was clearly subsequent to the one Van Gogh writes about in the letter of November 25th, 1876.

At this time he was making himself generally useful to the Methodist minister, Mr. Jones, who besides serving a church at Turnham Green, ran a small boarding school at Holme Court, Isleworth, to help his family finances. Van Gogh was employed to teach and supervise the pupils at the school and collect school fees; he also helped Mr. Jones as a lay preacher at Turnham Green and Petersham.

It is rather difficult to see how coming from Richmond to Petersham he managed to lose himself in a muddy wood. It would seem that all he had to do was to follow the road along which the Brighton coach regularly ran in 1876. I surmise that as he had been at Turnham Green in the morning and was walking back, he cut up Queen's Road and descending from the Hill by what used to be known as "the causic," strayed on to Petersham Common. In 1876 those parts of the parish were probably not lighted and on a dark November evening it is quite credible that he suffered such an adventure as he describes. It is satisfactory to read that he eventually arrived at "a beautiful little wooden church with kindly light"—beautiful perhaps rather because of its spiritual than its aesthetic quality. The oldest inhabitants tell me that 60 odd years ago when it was still in existence and functioning it was known as "the tin tabernacle." Because of his association with it Van Gogh sketched it more than once; a drawing of it, kindly lent to me from the Courtauld Institute of Art by Sir Anthony Blunt, is not the same as that I had a glimpse of the summer before last in the Dutch book; though both are clearly sketches of the same plain little building with a porch standing among bushes and scattered trees. In the November article I suggested that it would be interesting to know something of the quality of Van Gogh's preaching. Sir Anthony's researches perhaps throw some light on this matter. He has discovered that "in the summer of 1879 the Belgian Protestant Church decided that Van Gogh was not a suitable person for evangelical work, on the grounds that he could not preach properly." So Van Gogh abandoned further thought of training for the ministry to become a world famous painter. It is probable that the congregation gathered that dark November night in the little conventicle was not so critical. It is likely enough that the young lady organist from the boarding school, accompanying the singing of the old evangelical hymns on the little organ found that the stranger addressing them in broken English had an interesting face and the pupils, if the story of Johannes and Theogenes had any dramatic quality, listened with rapt attention. At least we may be sure that none of their minds was visited by the thought that more than 80 years on, the service in that humble little chapel in which they were taking part would be the subject of scholarly research and an article in a parish leaflet.