CHAPTER IX

LADY JANE GREY

It seemed upon the whole even absurd that after a shock so awful and a panic wild enough to cause people to expose their very souls--for there were, of course, endless anecdotes to be related afterwards, illustrative of grotesque terror, cowardice, and utter abandonment of all shadows of convention--that all should end in an anticlimax of trifling danger, upon which, in a day or two, jokes might be made. Even the tramp steamer had not been seriously injured, though its injuries were likely to be less easy of repair than those of the Meridiana.

"Still," as a passenger remarked, when she steamed into the dock at Liverpool, "we might all be at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean this morning. Just think what columns there would have been in the newspapers. Imagine Miss Vanderpoel's being drowned."

"I was very rude to Louise, when I found her wringing her hands over you, and I was rude to Blanche," Bettina said to Mrs. Worthington. "In fact I believe I was rude to a number of people that night. I am rather ashamed."

"You called me a donkey," said Blanche, "but it was the best thing you could have done. You frightened me into putting on my shoes, instead of trying to comb my hair with them. It was startling to see you march into

the stateroom, the only person who had not been turned into a gibbering idiot. I know I was gibbering, and I know Marie was."

"We both gibbered at the red-haired man when he came in," said Marie. "We clutched at him and gibbered together. Where is the red-haired man, Betty? Perhaps we made him ill. I've not seen him since that moment."

"He is in the second cabin, I suppose," Bettina answered, "but I have not seen him, either."

"We ought to get up a testimonial and give it to him, because he did not gibber," said Blanche. "He was as rude and as sensible as you were, Betty."

They did not see him again, in fact, at that time. He had reasons of his own for preferring to remain unseen. The truth was that the nearer his approach to his native shores, the nastier, he was perfectly conscious, his temper became, and he did not wish to expose himself by any incident which might cause him stupidly and obviously to lose it.

The maid, Louise, however, recognised him among her companions in the third-class carriage in which she travelled to town. To her mind, whose opinions were regulated by neatly arranged standards, he looked morose and shabbily dressed. Some of the other second-cabin passengers had made themselves quite smart in various, not too distinguished ways. He had not changed his dress at all, and the large valise upon the luggage

rack was worn and battered as if with long and rough usage. The woman wondered a little if he would address her, and inquire after the health of her mistress. But, being an astute creature, she only wondered this for an instant, the next she realised that, for one reason or another, it was clear that he was not of the tribe of second-rate persons who pursue an accidental acquaintance with their superiors in fortune, through sociable interchange with their footmen or maids.

When the train slackened its speed at the platform of the station, he got up, reaching down his valise and leaving the carriage, strode to the nearest hansom cab, waving the porter aside.

"Charing Cross," he called out to the driver, jumped in, and was rattled away.

. . . . .

During the years which had passed since Rosalie Vanderpoel first came to London as Lady Anstruthers, numbers of huge luxurious hotels had grown up, principally, as it seemed, that Americans should swarm into them and live at an expense which reminded them of their native land. Such establishments would never have been built for English people, whose habit it is merely to "stop" at hotels, not to LIVE in them. The tendency of the American is to live in his hotel, even though his intention may be only to remain in it two days. He is accustomed to doing himself extremely well in proportion to his resources, whether

they be great or small, and the comforts, as also the luxuries, he allows himself and his domestic appendages are in a proportion much higher in its relation to these resources than it would be were he English, French, German, or Italians. As a consequence, he expects, when he goes forth, whether holiday-making or on business, that his hostelry shall surround him, either with holiday luxuries and gaiety, or with such lavishness of comfort as shall alleviate the wear and tear of business cares and fatigues. The rich man demands something almost as good as he has left at home, the man of moderate means something much better. Certain persons given to regarding public wants and desires as foundations for the fortune of business schemes having discovered this, the enormous and sumptuous hotel evolved itself from their astute knowledge of common facts. At the entrances of these hotels, omnibuses and cabs, laden with trunks and packages frequently bearing labels marked with red letters "S. S. So-and-So, Stateroom--Hold--Baggage-room," drew up and deposited their contents and burdens at regular intervals. Then men with keen, and often humorous faces or almost painfully anxious ones, their exceedingly well-dressed wives, and more or less attractive and vivacious-looking daughters, their eager little girls, and un-English-looking little boys, passed through the corridors in flocks and took possession of suites of rooms, sometimes for twenty-four hours, sometimes for six weeks.

The Worthingtons took possession of such a suite in such a hotel. Bettina Vanderpoel's apartments faced the Embankment. From her windows she could look out at the broad splendid, muddy Thames, slowly rolling

in its grave, stately way beneath its bridges, bearing with it heavy lumbering barges, excited tooting little penny steamers and craft of various shapes and sizes, the errand or burden of each meaning a different story.

It had been to Bettina one of her pleasures of the finest epicurean flavour to reflect that she had never had any brief and superficial knowledge of England, as she had never been to the country at all in those earlier years, when her knowledge of places must necessarily have been always the incomplete one of either a schoolgirl traveller or a schoolgirl resident, whose views were limited by the walls of restriction built around her.

If relations of the usual ease and friendliness had existed between Lady Anstruthers and her family, Bettina would, doubtless, have known her sister's adopted country well. It would have been a thing so natural as to be almost inevitable, that she would have crossed the Channel to spend her holidays at Stornham. As matters had stood, however, the child herself, in the days when she had been a child, had had most definite private views on the subject of visits to England. She had made up her young mind absolutely that she would not, if it were decently possible to avoid it, set her foot upon English soil until she was old enough and strong enough to carry out what had been at first her passionately romantic plans for discovering and facing the truth of the reason for the apparent change in Rosy. When she went to England, she would go to Rosy. As she had grown older, having in the course of education and

travel seen most Continental countries, she had liked to think that she had saved, put aside for less hasty consumption and more delicate appreciation of flavours, as it were, the country she was conscious she cared for most.

"It is England we love, we Americans," she had said to her father. "What could be more natural? We belong to it--it belongs to us. I could never be convinced that the old tie of blood does not count. All nationalities have come to us since we became a nation, but most of us in the beginning came from England. We are touching about it, too. We trifle with France and labour with Germany, we sentimentalise over Italy and ecstacise over Spain--but England we love. How it moves us when we go to it, how we gush if we are simple and effusive, how we are stirred imaginatively if we are of the perceptive class. I have heard the commonest little half-educated woman say the prettiest, clumsy, emotional things about what she has seen there. A New England schoolma'am, who has made a Cook's tour, will almost have tears in her voice as she wanders on with her commonplaces about hawthorn hedges and thatched cottages and white or red farms. Why are we not unconsciously pathetic about German cottages and Italian villas? Because we have not, in centuries past, had the habit of being born in them. It is only an English cottage and an English lane, whether white with hawthorn blossoms or bare with winter, that wakes in us that little yearning, grovelling tenderness that is so sweet. It is only nature calling us home."

Mrs. Worthington came in during the course of the morning to find her standing before her window looking out at the Thames, the Embankment, the hansom cabs themselves, with an absolutely serious absorption. This changed to a smile as she turned to greet her.

"I am delighted," she said. "I could scarcely tell you how much. The impression is all new and I am excited a little by everything. I am so intensely glad that I have saved it so long and that I have known it only as part of literature. I am even charmed that it rains, and that the cabmen's mackintoshes are shining and wet." She drew forward a chair, and Mrs. Worthington sat down, looking at her with involuntary admiration.

"You look as if you were delighted," she said. "Your eyes--you have amazing eyes, Betty! I am trying to picture to myself what Lady Anstruthers will feel when she sees you. What were you like when she married?"

Bettina sat down, smiling and looking, indeed, quite incredibly lovely. She was capable of a warmth and a sweetness which were as embracing as other qualities she possessed were powerful.

"I was eight years old," she said. "I was a rude little girl, with long legs and a high, determined voice. I know I was rude. I remember answering back."

"I seem to have heard that you did not like your brother-in-law, and that you were opposed to the marriage."

"Imagine the undisciplined audacity of a child of eight 'opposing' the marriage of her grown-up sister. I was quite capable of it. You see in those days we had not been trained at all (one had only been allowed tremendous liberty), and interfered conversationally with one's elders and betters at any moment. I was an American little girl, and American little girls were really--they really were!" with a laugh, whose musical sound was after all wholly non-committal.

"You did not treat Sir Nigel Anstruthers as one of your betters."

"He was one of my elders, at all events, and becomingness of bearing should have taught me to hold my little tongue. I am giving some thought now to the kind of thing I must invent as a suitable apology when I find him a really delightful person, full of virtues and accomplishments. Perhaps he has a horror of me."

"I should like to be present at your first meeting," Mrs. Worthington reflected. "You are going down to Stornham to-morrow?"

"That is my plan. When I write to you on my arrival, I will tell you if I encountered the horror." Then, with a swift change of subject and a lifting of her slender, velvet line of eyebrow, "I am only deploring

that I have not time to visit the Tower."

Mrs. Worthington was betrayed into a momentary glance of uncertainty, almost verging in its significance on a gasp.

"The Tower? Of London? Dear Betty!"

Bettina's laugh was mellow with revelation.

"Ah!" she said. "You don't know my point of view; it's plain enough. You see, when I delight in these things, I think I delight most in my delight in them. It means that I am almost having the kind of feeling the fresh American souls had who landed here thirty years ago and revelled in the resemblance to Dickens's characters they met with in the streets, and were historically thrilled by the places where people's heads were chopped off. Imagine their reflections on Charles I., when they stood in Whitehall gazing on the very spot where that poor last word was uttered--'Remember.' And think of their joy when each crossing sweeper they gave disproportionate largess to, seemed Joe All Alones in the slightest disguise."

"You don't mean to say----" Mrs. Worthington was vaguely awakening to the situation.

"That the charm of my visit, to myself, is that I realise that I am rather like that. I have positively preserved something because I have

kept away. You have been here so often and know things so well, and you were even so sophisticated when you began, that you have never really had the flavours and emotions. I am sophisticated, too, sophisticated enough to have cherished my flavours as a gourmet tries to save the bouquet of old wine. You think that the Tower is the pleasure of housemaids on a Bank Holiday. But it quite makes me quiver to think of it," laughing again. "That I laugh, is the sign that I am not as beautifully, freshly capable of enjoyment as those genuine first Americans were, and in a way I am sorry for it."

Mrs. Worthington laughed also, and with an enjoyment.

"You are very clever, Betty," she said.

"No, no," answered Bettina, "or, if I am, almost everybody is clever in these days. We are nearly all of us comparatively intelligent."

"You are very interesting at all events, and the Anstruthers will exult in you. If they are dull in the country, you will save them."

"I am very interested, at all events," said Bettina, "and interest like mine is quite passe. A clever American who lives in England, and is the pet of duchesses, once said to me (he always speaks of Americans as if they were a distant and recently discovered species), 'When they first came over they were a novelty. Their enthusiasm amused people, but now, you see, it has become vieux jeu. Young women, whose specialty was to be

excited by the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey, are not novelties any longer. In fact, it's been done, and it's done FOR as a specialty.' And I am excited about the Tower of London. I may be able to restrain my feelings at the sight of the Beef Eaters, but they will upset me a little, and I must brace myself, I must indeed."

"Truly, Betty?" said Mrs. Worthington, regarding her with curiosity, arising from a faint doubt of her entire seriousness, mingled with a fainter doubt of her entire levity.

Betty flung out her hands in a slight, but very involuntary-looking, gesture, and shook her head.

"Ah!" she said, "it was all TRUE, you know. They were all horribly real--the things that were shuddered over and sentimentalised about. Sophistication, combined with imagination, makes them materialise again, to me, at least, now I am here. The gulf between a historical figure and a man or woman who could bleed and cry out in human words was broad when one was at school. Lady Jane Grey, for instance, how nebulous she was and how little one cared. She seemed invented merely to add a detail to one's lesson in English history. But, as we drove across Waterloo Bridge, I caught a glimpse of the Tower, and what do you suppose I began to think of? It was monstrous. I saw a door in the Tower and the stone steps, and the square space, and in the chill clear, early morning a little slender, helpless girl led out, a little, fair, real thing like

Rosy, all alone--everyone she belonged to far away, not a man near who dared utter a word of pity when she turned her awful, meek, young, desperate eyes upon him. She was a pious child, and, no doubt, she lifted her eyes to the sky. I wonder if it was blue and its blueness broke her heart, because it looked as if it might have pitied such a young, patient girl thing led out in the fair morning to walk to the hacked block and give her trembling pardon to the black-visored man with the axe, and then 'commending her soul to God' to stretch her sweet slim neck out upon it."

"Oh, Betty, dear!" Mrs. Worthington expostulated.

Bettina sprang to her and took her hand in pretty appeal.

"I beg pardon! I beg pardon, I really do," she exclaimed. "I did not intend deliberately to be painful. But that--beneath the sophistication--is something of what I bring to England."