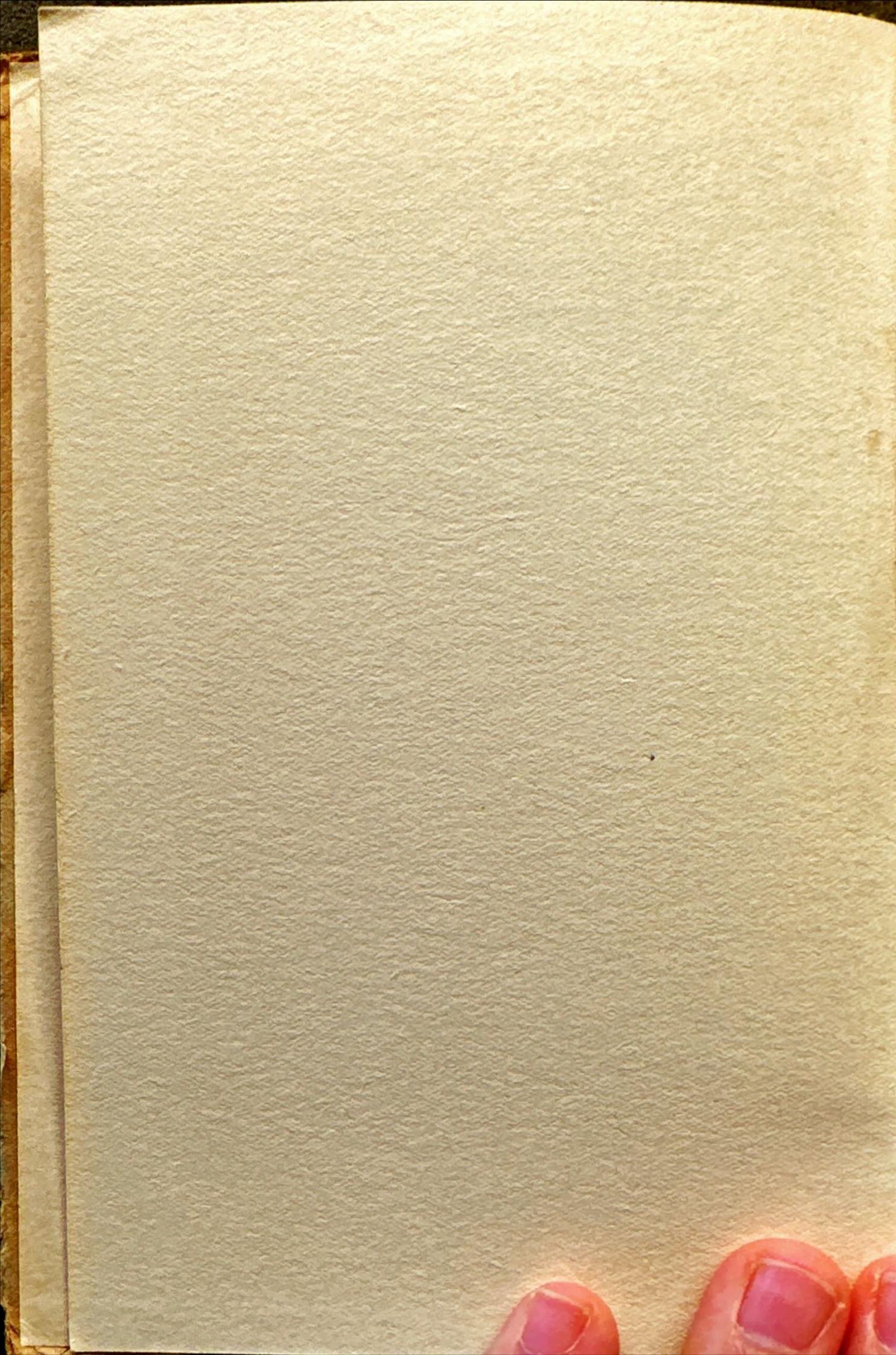


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ROCHESTER

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A CONVERSATION

BETWEEN

SIR GEORGE ETHEREGE AND MR FITZJAMES

BY

BONAMY DOBRÉE

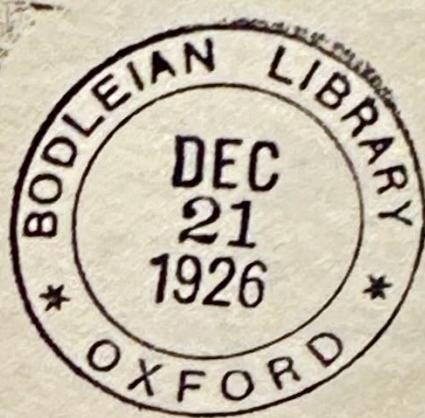
Sir George Etherege was English Envoy at Ratisbon in the reign of James II. Mr Fitz-James, who was sent to the siege of Buda for experience, was the son of James I. and Arabella Churchill, sister of the future Duke of Marlborough. He was afterwards created Duke of Berwick, and became a Marshal of France.



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ROCHESTER

A HOUSE IN THE *STREET OF THE ENVOYS*,
RATISBON. SUMMER 1686

ETHEREGE. You can little imagine, Mr FitzJames, the pleasure your visit gives to an exile in this gloomy land: for bear it with what fortitude we may, to think of places we love, and of friends we would fain embrace across two hundred leagues, is the most miserable hell the ancients could devise. That it is no laughing matter I am well aware, from this my damnation here in Germany.

FITZJAMES. Your position as Envoy, Sir George, should afford you the most various chances for diversion.

ETHEREGE. If enjoyment were not killed by the plague of punctilio, and

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wit could raise its head above the beer-rummers! But the sole corantos we dance are about the council table, and the only mask the ladies wear is that of ceremony. When your royal father sent me here I little thought I had a grain of love for politics in me, but at this time, I vow, I am more vain of writing a good dispatch, than ever upon my little success in trifles to divert the town.

FITZJAMES. You write no more verses, Sir George?

ETHEREGE. I wear flannel, sir! What have I to do with poetry?

FITZJAMES. My Lord Middleton hoped that here you might find leisure to make us laugh again, and bring to happy birth another Flutter, Dorimant, or Emilia.

ETHEREGE. Alas! I am a fop in my heart, and when removed from the air

ROCHESTER

of the court, the merely natural cannot move me. What are they about in London now, Mr FitzJames, in Sir Christopher Wren's new theatre in Drury Lane? Does Mr Shadwell still make sport with all the follies that are now in fashion?

FITZJAMES. In May I saw a tolerable farce of his, *The Squire of Alsatia*. Sir Charles Sidley, they report, is at a version of Terence's *Eunuch*.

ETHEREGE. I am heartily glad. I have heard him throw off more wit at supper than a dozen trumpery scribblers in five of the longest acts, and hope the world will accord that applause to his writings they have never denied his conversation. Is Mr Betterton as brave upon the boards as ever?

FITZJAMES. Braver! I have heard Mr Pepys call him the finest actor he ever saw, while Mrs Barry improves

ROCHESTER

her talent daily, and ever brings richer pleasure to the sparks and Chédreux in the pit. You look pale, Sir George.

ETHEREGE. A mere vapour! That name awakened memories of a time, Mr FitzJames, when you were still obedient to the fescue, and ran out in your leisure to eat green gooseberries in the arbour. For in every man's life, however much he may have tasted of the fruits of pleasure, and gained or lost by the frailties of the sex, there is one name will make the blood flow to his face or leave it, even when age breeds idle habits, and he hardly dare offer the lightest tribute to Celia.

FITZJAMES. A thousand pardons, Sir George. Had I known. . . .

ETHEREGE. Tut! Tut! It is you who must pardon the consumptive flame of an old lover. Fill your glass, I pray, Mr FitzJames. It is the best

ROCHESTER

I have. Were I not afraid of my canting secretary listening at the door to accuse me afterwards of false quantities, I would venture to quote louder than I now do:

Antehac nefas depromere Caecubum
Cellis avitis.

FITZJAMES. Let me name the toast.
I give you Mrs Barry.

ETHEREGE. Mrs Barry! Admirable creature! It was of her I was thinking when I described Emilia's pretty pouting lips, with a little moisture ever hanging on them, that look like the Provence rose fresh on the bush, ere the morning sun has quite drawn up the dew. How badly she acted at first! No power in her words, no nature in her movements. What a genius Rochester had in teaching her!

FITZJAMES. To most such pupils he taught another art.

ROCHESTER

ETHEREGE. The rogue! Who could resist him? So swift and bright a glance, a face so delicately fair: the grace of his body, like my Lord Buckingham's, caught every languishing eye as he moved, and his laugh was wholly irresistible. But there was an evil humour in him, too, a dark pride like that of Mr Milton's Satan, and I disputed with him when he caused Mr Dryden to be cudgelled in Rose Alley, for some pointed verses upon himself he wilfully authored upon him. For he never could contain the motions of his spirit. Whatever burned in him—love or hate, martial glory or the fire of the muse—burned fiercely, till life itself consumed to ashes in the ardency of that crucible.

FITZJAMES. My sister, the Princess Anne, told me that she saw him once when she was a tiny child wandering

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by herself about Whitehall, where my father had brought her. As she walked along a passage, a door suddenly burst open, as though forced by the hubbub behind it, and King Charles came out, tucking his arm under the quivering one of a tall, handsome young man, whose face was flushed with excitement, and whose eye yet glowed as he swore to the King he had meant him no disrespect. “Wilmot, Wilmot!” the King said, laughing, but serious behind his smile, “by rights this hand I hold ought to be hacked off; but then hell would be cheated of just so much of the fuel that is due to it.” With that he spun him round, and sent him along the corridor away from her; and coming towards her himself, caught her up, and carried her on his shoulder to where my father was laughing with my mother in an ante-room.

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ETHEREGE. We all trembled for Wilmot's hand: he could as well and shrewdly have struck Tom Killigrew out of the King's presence as in it, and the scandal had not yet ceased when I was employed to the Grand Signior at Constantinople.

FITZJAMES. He was of a violent humour then, Sir George?

ETHEREGE. He ever had too scant respect for whatever seemed a check upon his heat. My Lord Dorset told me that once when he and Wilmot and others were returning to Whitehall after some night frolic, he broke the astronomical crystals under the nose of the sentinel who stood there as stonily as the statues at the gates of Bedlam. As they fell to work, Rochester cried out: "What! Dost thou stand there to debauch time!"—the word he used I spare your younger ears—breaking a

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jest to vent the anger of impotence.
You never saw him?

FITZJAMES. Some years ago, when I was but a boy with my father at Newmarket. He was pale and a little bent, biting his nether lip in the intervals between his boisterous laughs. "There," said my father, "goes the man who *was* the bravest I ever saw. At the sea fight near Bergen he was the only one who would carry a message in the heat of the action, and his cockle-boat tossed among the fountains made by Dutch shot, as a leaf in the basins of the Mulberry Garden. Yet, lately, on the eve of a fight with Lord Mulgrave, he sent him a letter to say he was sick, and would not meet him. I pray nightly," my father added, "courage may not moulder in my breast, as it has in that man's, as must ever happen to him who not only acts

ROCHESTER

wickedly but aspires to argue with his Maker."

ETHEREGE. God forbid! A Stuart was never a coward, and enemies are as likely to see your father's back as I am to catch a Gothic Elector dallying with a vizard. But, Mr FitzJames, John Wilmot was no coward either, and if he would not fight John Sheffield it was for some fantasy he would not give the world, for his mind was ever too high to gratify with reasons the callow emptiness of fools and knaves.

FITZJAMES. I trust I have not offended you, Sir George.

ETHEREGE. 'Fore God, no! I was but warm to hear the idle chatter of the town which you have yet no reason to mistrust, and are too honourably frank to withhold. There were men, Mr FitzJames, who would fawn upon Wilmot in his glory, running like

ROCHESTER

spaniels to his hand when he was made Ranger of Woodstock, and afterwards scuttled about like breathing libels, living lampoons, dropping their poisonous offal on sofas and in court corners, when he withdrew too darkly into himself, and let them see his scorn. They said he skulked away from his friends when the watch was beaten up: but we were together in such an affray near Epsom shortly before his death, and it was not he who turned aside, nor wilted at the sight of blood.

FITZJAMES. I remember a line of his which seems to belittle courage, suggesting each man would be a coward if he durst; and it has been said that with my Lord Mulgrave he was putting his verse to the test.

ETHEREGE. Like any Royal Society fantastic? Come, sir! But, in truth, in all his actions he seemed ever to be

ROCHESTER

seeking something others could not see, and would have fled from had they seen it. I have heard him when he was plying the bottle with the rest, all at once quote some lines of Homer—as he told me afterwards they were—and seem to concern himself with ancient heroes and gods, with Telemachus and Pallas, rather than with the company about him. He had powerful parts, and I, who have but gathered my philosophy in the wide world, thinking it more full of flowers than the garden of Epicurus, could never reach his highest thoughts. Indeed, his mind brooked questioning as little as his mood. If he professed atheism—which I detest as much as does your royal father—it was because he would not be governed as much as because he was eager to take his thoughts to the uttermost verge: but he dared also return.

ROCHESTER

FITZJAMES. Dr Burnet says that had he lived he would have been the delight of all who knew him.

ETHEREGE. He was, of all who did know him. That babbling busy-body! You have met him?

FITZJAMES. I saw him at The Hague, when I visited my sister on my way hither. He sidled up to William as though he thought that, if my sister were ever to become Queen of England, the patent for a bishopric would tumble out from her husband's pocket into his hand.

ETHEREGE. Nay, Mr FitzJames, should the Queen unfortunately give his Majesty no son, there are too many English gentlemen who would rise to resist the Dutchman, and make way on the throne for someone I need not name.

FITZJAMES. Sir George, I beg! Such

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thoughts as these sent my cousin Monmouth to a last sad hiding-place among the fern, and his head to an unyielding pillow. Fight for my father I would willingly: to succeed him I would not raise a finger. I love my country; I could not wish to mangle it.

ETHEREGE. You are wise, sir, beyond your years: but as for our plat-banded friend, you are not yet cool enough in blood to see the merit of a man of a kidney foreign to your own. I would trudge a score of miles on the dirtiest night to see John Wilmot once again, and not a yard at noonday to see our Burnet, for he cares for poetry as a fanatic does for prelaty, only to despise it. But he looks you in the face, and if you struck him would strike you back, and in his own way he has wit. He could never choose between two

ROCHESTER

rights, but he knows what is downright foolish.

FITZJAMES. He wept for Russell.

ETHEREGE. His tears were for his friend, his judgment did not gloze his faults. You think it odd in me, Mr FitzJames, to speak thus, for a badger to applaud a basset. But, in truth, my thoughts were full of Rochester, and my mind often returning to inquire why it was for Burnet that he sent in his last sickness, I have come to see the merits of the priest. For Rochester would seek no porridge faith: it was always meat he hankered after, and there was bone in Burnet to give it him. Wilmot would like his religion to be like his wine, plentiful and strong: he would prefer the vials of wrath to the bosom of Abraham, howsoever warm and downy. He might have been a martyr; he could never have been a saint.

ROCHESTER

FITZJAMES. The poet Flatman, I remember, in a pastoral on his death, prayed us “Live not like Strephon, but like Strephon die.”

ETHEREGE. Flat man indeed! for where would be the virtue of dying like Strephon if you had not lived like him?

It has been hinted by the pious, Mr FitzJames, that my Lords Rochester and Dorset, Sir Charles Sidley and myself, lived only for the flesh—and if even now I have not altogether achieved a perfect chastity I must blame the goodness of my constitution—but indeed, as you will in time regretfully discover, the flesh is but food for children. My religion—which I ponder in my heart, and prefer to keep there rather than in my tongue, unlike some who make about it as much clack as the water passing through the paper mills of old London Bridge—tells me that to

ROCHESTER

enjoy our faculties is no sin. But, alas! we soon weary of the enjoyment, and seek the flesh only to escape from ourselves. A single amour becomes as dull as a single plot in a play, and there is more pleasure in seeing a woman break her fan in anger than her vows in joy. For love is but the reflection of our own youth, in a pond spangled with lilies, and the image is shattered when we grasp at a bloom, or even by our breath alone as we approach our faces to see the image closer.

If Wilmot's death was premature, his life was always in advance of his years, and in his thirty-three his thoughts held the compass of a larger life. When after leaving Oxford at fourteen he went abroad in the company of a tutor, he was already too much a man to be ruled. If the tutor encouraged his love of the Muses, he also gave him his

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taste for opposition, for he thwarted his pranks, and by his severity taught him boldness and cunning. But of cunning he soon tired; an intrigue to him became as insipid as a dismal dinner in a country house, where the gayest noise in the vast rooms within is the shuffling of the butler's steps, and nothing is heard without but the melancholy cawing of the rooks. For it came to seem as though for him where fear was absent the dishes lacked salt. When he dwelt at Blackfriars, in the guise of a German Nostradamus, he found the aldermen's wives too easy to be worth his taking: and at eighteen he ravished Mrs Malet from her coach as it was passing Charing Cross, because she resisted his flame. But she married him two years later.

FITZJAMES. The spicing of that dish must have seemed a trifle too high, for

ROCHESTER

I remember hearing that my uncle Charles was most incensed by this, and sent him to the Tower.

ETHEREGE. Not for the only time, but never for many days together. Who could be angry with Wilmot for long? Indeed he feared nothing, not the Dutch, nor the devil, nor even the King, for his wicked rhymes scathed even royalty. He climbed to the top of daring, and I have sometimes thought that in his pagan vows, his argued worship of Bacchus or the sun, he only sought for something against which to pit himself: and I have even wondered whether in his repentance he did not seek for God only that sin might have a savour.

FITZJAMES. Sir George, you frighten me! Look! I cross myself. But indeed I have heard that he once took one of Mr Quarles' religious poems, and

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writing the word “love” wherever the name of God occurred, sent it to his mistress to declare his ardour. What infamy!

ETHEREGE. I grow too grave. Would you have some music? I have by me a thing of Mr Purcell’s which Mr Betterton sent me out of his pity, and four of my house can hold the parts tolerably true.

FITZJAMES. I have little ear for music; my fingers could never follow my father’s on the guitar: and as my journey has tired me, I beg you not take my excuses ill.

ETHEREGE. Pardon me! I fear I have talked too much, and have been wanting in civility to engross more than my share of speech. My long abstinence has made me over-greedy, for I am weary of entertaining myself with solitude and silence. I abstain.

ROCHESTER

FITZJAMES. By no means, Sir George :
pray continue. Nothing could more
gratify me than to hear your recollec-
tions of your old friends, especially of
such a one as my Lord Rochester.
Pray favour me.

ETHEREGE. We will have another
bottle. How do you like my German
Caecuban? But I beg you, even if it
be a little harsh, do not allay it with
over-much Danube, which I have
already to thank for a distressing bout
or two of tertian ague. I will con-
tinue with pleasure, though one is
indeed old if one can find the best
amusement only in the memory, or dull
if the present holds no great delight
but the past.

Your mother, Mr FitzJames, would
remember the strange tales of Miss
Hobart that used to be bandied about
the court. She was tall, vivacious, and

ROCHESTER

her eye, though hard, had fire: but her manner was masculine, and from her behaviour to the *beau sexe* it was thought by some that she had more fitly worn the pantaloon than the farthingale. In any case, the Mother of the Maids, of the Duchess of York's, I mean, feared her attentions to her niece, whom she put under the protection of Rochester.

FITZJAMES. As though a wolf in wolf's clothing were less harmful than one in a fleece! Was the wench comely?

ETHEREGE. Comely enough, though then she was barely even in her salad years, and she became the most moving of creatures, with the most swimming figure, the best for—— But our business is not with Sarah, let us call her here. It is with Miss Temple, another of the Duchess' maids of honour.

FITZJAMES. The one who is now Lady Littleton?

ROCHESTER

ETHEREGE. With an ever-growing brood of children. Then she was fetching, with soft brown hair, a perfect figure, lingering eyes, a skin like creamy satin, and a welcoming smile that showed even teeth as white as lilies of the valley. But she was vain, gullible, at once confiding and suspicious, prudish and artfully coy, complacent and empty-headed. But in love, so long as the eyes sparkle and the cheek receives a thousand sweeter graces, we do not always tarry to ask what lies behind ; and Wilmot and Miss Hobart became rivals in the same race.

FITZJAMES. But did Miss Temple rejoice at so strange a commerce ?

ETHEREGE. Poor innocent ! she never saw behind the fleece. Miss Hobart's tall-boy of jams and comfits was the lure she stooped to, and neglecting the barbadoes, orange waters, and other

ROCHESTER

chafers of the blood the cupboard entertained, crammed her little mouth as full of sweetmeats as Gargantua his belly with pork.

FITZJAMES. But did not the Duchess or my father take any heed?

ETHEREGE. Your father, if I may say so at this distant date, was the too active in attentions to *la belle Jennings*, your uncle Churchill's wife's sister, to bestir himself in domestic policy; especially as his vows were, to say truth, ill received: for the Jennings would tumble his unopened *billets-doux* out of her sleeve in the very drawing-room, like an apple-tree showering blossoms. And Her Highness, with a steadiness that did honour to her virtue, though no credit to her knowledge, was constant in regarding the whispers about Miss Hobart as old wives' tales and malicious libels. She

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not only brought her closer to herself, but helped the devil by giving Mistress Temple into her charge, to screen her from Rochester and Sidney, a mighty pretty youth, a task from which Hobart was as much averse as a hungry hobnol from plum pottage.

One day in the summer of '64 or '65, in any case before I was as free of the court as I afterwards grew to be, so I can only speak from hearsay, Temple came back from a ride as hot as new-baked dumpling, and asked leave to shift in Hobart's chamber, where she could, as she cooled, bury her pretty teeth in the candies. You may be sure Hobart gave no refusal, and highly commending Temple for her cleanly manners—so different, she protested, from those of Jennings, who only washed what could be seen, and that for fashion's sake—made haste to

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unlace her with her own hands while her Hebe was abroad. When Temple stood up only in the scant livery of her shift, she invited her to come to a couch in the bathing-room within, where, she said, they could speak at their ease, without fear of disturbance from fops or farce-fools.

FITZJAMES. Was my Lord Rochester in Miss Temple's graces, or did she, rather, harbour a *tendre* for Sidney?

ETHEREGE. Where Rochester bent his mind, a dozen Sidneys might bend their waists in the most courtly bows in vain. The rogue, seeing Temple mounted on her small acquirements, swore he was dazzled by her brain rather than by her beauties, and would bring his verses to her conquering eyes as though they were the judging ones of Apollo. He would say that had Heaven fashioned him of the stuff that

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falls victim to outward charms, he would have been lost indeed: but that as, by God's grace, it was only by his soul he could be snared, he was happy to be able to indulge with her in the sweetest converse under the sun without the smallest danger. With such hearty, sincere prologues——

FITZJAMES. Sincere, Sir George?

ETHEREGE. In faith, I believe he was sincere, in one sense, for without he could make an amour serious, it was none at all to him. Thus his frank air of honesty ruined many a reputation, and this he cared for more than to gain a kindness. After such prologues, I say, asking humbly for approval, swearing that all that might rival Miss Temple's talents was kneeling there before her in apology, he would present her with his last wrought satire or song. Such notions turned her pretty, vacant

ROCHESTER

head: but as yet she gave him merely commendation, little thinking he sought only for kisses. But let us return to the bathing-room, which you will find, Mr FitzJames, not lacking in matter for diversion.

For little Sarah had wheedled permission from Hobart's chamber-wench to wash herself there on occasion, and on this very day was so occupied. Or, rather, having filled a bath with cold Thames water, was about to proceed to the business, when she heard Hobart and Temple coming in upon her. She could only in the nick of time draw the curtains that shrouded the baths and slip into the water, when the ladies came in and settled down to the prettiest *tête-à-tête* in the world. And Hobart had a plaguy long sermon to preach, on the wicked perfidy of men, on their lust to prey on weakly innocence, and on all

ROCHESTER

the horror and faithlessness of wedlock. She told how my Lord Oxford had cheated Mrs Marshall with a sham Levite and a suborned witness, and drew the conclusion that court marriages were a snare. How much better to keep one's bosom aloof from the springes of men! Poor Temple, who smelt no rat in Hobart's plaints, so could not smoke the game, lent her ears with as much zeal and alacrity as a dean does to the offer of a mitre: and so did little Sarah, who shivered with the cold water up to her neck, till she was as blue as the ribbon of the Garter.

"Look," said Hobart, "at your suitors. Sidney casts moonlike eyes upon you: Rochester is alert to please, and even Littleton's ponderous sighs grow lighter for your glances. But Sidney is penniless, and would never do for you, apart from things about

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him you are too young for me to tell you. As for Rochester, if he is the man of most wit in all England, he is also the man of least honour. He is dangerous, but only for our sex, for if we fly from his embraces we are caught by his libels. He is as cunning as an Oliver-man, worming himself into our breasts with his flatteries, for he follows our tastes and desires, likes what we like, and without saying a syllable of what he thinks, makes you believe every word he utters."

FITZJAMES. It was not for nothing, then, he read Ovid and Juvenal.

ETHEREGE. I compliment you, Mr FitzJames, upon your learning, and Hobart might have found you as dangerous. "There," she went on to say into Temple's yawning ear, "I'll wager that from the things he has said to you, you believe him the sincerest and best

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man in the world; but when he has conquered the loveliest creature about the court, he will not know how to treat you otherwise than he does the wretches all the orange-women in the town are under commission to supply him with. Moreover, he is so eaten up with malice, that already he has paid you court only the more easily to lampoon you. You have reason to look astonished, you may well doubt me, but see here!" With that she pulled from her corset a copy of scurrilous papers Wilmot had written upon Miss Price, who had angered him, accusing her of bodily deformities which Hobart made haste to assure her friend she was by no means guilty of, and would have verified with her own eye had she not feared to startle her modesty. Poor Temple, who up till now had swallowed it all down as greedily as she did the

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raspberry jam in the cupboard, was almost in tears with shame and mortification, and left as soon as she could, while her protector toasted herself in barbadoes on the pretty progress she had made.

Sarah, her teeth chattering like the watchman's rattle, also ran off as soon as might be to warm herself in arms that were used to hold her more closely than is required from those of protectors, and Wilmot was soon made free of the whole tale, without a detail being lost or smudged in the telling.

FITZJAMES. The wolf had already, then, devoured that lamb?

ETHEREGE. I have not heard that the lamb ever repined at it: she even came to have a taste for such sacrifices, and grew to an arrant jilt. Wilmot wasted a thousand hells and furies, and would willingly have passed his sword through

ROCHESTER

the man-woman. He swore revenge, and commanding Sarah, bade her ever and anon bring her what private news she could discover.

Such a change that day came over poor Temple as made the whole court wonder at her, and think her sickening for the veil. She showed gloomy and morose, and when a compliment was paid her, sharpened her eyes to daggers. She thought every gallant kept in his pocket those libellous verses of Wilmot, and had in his mind that some vile curiosity was hid by her corsage or farthingale. Her fevered fancy made her suppose each compliment concealed a sneer. When Wilmot came in that evening she flushed scarlet, then went white as her colberteen scarf, tottered towards him, checked, pulled her gloves up to the elbow, opened and closed her fan, and when he came to salute her,

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twisted around and offered him her back. Wilmot only smiled, and walking about her to make her manner the more remarkable, said: "Madam, it passes thought how you can thus shine after so fatiguing a day. To bear a three hours' ride, and then to undergo Miss Hobart without an eyelid fluttering for weariness, is indeed a proof of spirit." Temple's eyes blazed like exploding grenades, and Hobart's pinching her arm made them glow so hot that a deluge of reproaches seemed like to follow. But Wilmot, without stopping to thank Hobart for the turn she had done him, withdrew to await, while Temple vowed to herself never again to speak with so false a villain.

A few days later, Sarah came post to Wilmot with a story of a merry frisk that Temple, against Hobart's counsels, was determined to play at, which was

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that the two fillys should swap dresses and parade the Mall in vizards. Wilmot sent for Killigrew—whom he had not yet slapped—and asked for his help to revenge himself. So that evening there was a meeting in the Mall, and Wilmot, pretending to mistake Hobart for Temple, drew her off, while Killigrew, walking with the lively innocent, rated her soundly under the name of Hobart. He told her that all was known of their conversation, that Littleton had sworn to repay her, that the Duchess was incensed at some confidences she had made public, and that Wilmot, the most *bonnête homme* in the world, would never dream of casting eyes at Miss Temple unless he meant sober marriage. What was more to the purpose, he made so plain to Temple what it was Hobart designed to her, that the poor girl was filled with dreadful

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confusion, and made off to St James' in very near a swoon. There she tore off Hobart's dress as fast as her trembling fingers would let her, and in fear of some abhorred contamination, at once sent the infected garment back to its owner by her maid. Hobart, bewildered by Temple's manner since their parade, kept the chamber-wench, and herself hurried to her charge's room, where, thinking to surprise her by some delicate token of friendship, she clasped her from behind and saluted her on the lips. Temple, in horror at finding herself caught in the arms that in all the world she now most loathed, and with what she believed a satyr's eyes leering at her, set to screaming, and alarmed all the household. The first to arrive were Sarah and the Mother of the Maids, who seeing Temple *en déshabillé* struggling in the embraces of

ROCHESTER

Hobart, eager only to wrest some explanation from a mouth obstinately mute except for screaming, believed all she had ever been told, and poured such a cascade of vituperation over Hobart as is rarely heard outside Billingsgate.

In two days the story was in every salon and chocolate house, and all the gallants tumbled over one another to tell Miss Temple that she had no need to fear that the raillery intended to Price were meant for, or believed of, the most beautifully formed of all the maids of honour; so that in her contrition she resolved to do all in her power to make amends to Rochester. But, alas! he was unable to profit by her softened humour, for at that time he once more incurred the displeasure of our royal master, and was banished to the deserts of Oxfordshire.

ROCHESTER

FITZJAMES. The Hobart, too, I suppose, was banished?

ETHEREGE. By no means, for Her Highness was still incredulous, and did all she could to cleanse her reputation, though without avail. On the contrary, the Mother of the Maids was dismissed for making an idle tumult and acting the garrulous fishwife. Thus Rochester did not go to Woodstock alone, for she companioned him, as did also, I need hardly add, Miss Sarah.

FITZJAMES. It is an odd matter, Sir George, that Rochester's most exquisite poems—for I have read them—sing praise of constancy, and vaunt the undying singleness of his flame.

ETHEREGE. Few of us, Mr FitzJames, have the gift to be constant to ourselves, and I, who have often looked into myself as I idly rolled about the town, have failed to find what I would. Only the

ROCHESTER

present moment is our own; the past has slipped from our grasp, while the future is not yet, and we cannot claim it—the thought is Wilmot's—and though we may wish our vows were eternal, we have no more right to gird at our fortune if we change, than others have to fleer at our faith.

FITZJAMES. Is not that, Sir George, too easy an excuse for disloyalty? Must men always be reeds shaken in the wilderness of their feelings?

ETHEREGE. Unfaithful Rochester may have been, disloyal never. If he betrayed his wife, he would not suffer her to be insulted, and in his care for his mother he deserved the love she gave him.

FITZJAMES. Even the wolf sometimes remembers his dam.

ETHEREGE. But Wilmot was no wolf, though you have three times called him

ROCHESTER

such. Where trust was given him he gave trust: when he offered loyalty, he was pained at its refusal or betrayal. When the Duchess of —, but that name I will cloak, without foundation suspected his integrity (and in truth he had given her the best that was in him), such rebellion was raised in his heart against her that he never forgave. If he was proud, it was with the pride of the magnanimous that can well forget a blow but cannot pass over a slur. It was easy to open his heart: despite closed it for ever, for the deepest wounds produce the hardest cicatrice.

FITZJAMES. He must indeed have been various.

ETHEREGE. Wilmot had every gift, and what was constant in him was a craving for discovery. Often on some frolic, when as a mountebank or merchant, or as companion to the King, he seemed

ROCHESTER

borne on the wings of enjoyment, his face would cloud over: and once at a debauch, when all his wit, his spirit, his abundant grace were more intoxicating than the wine, and he seemed himself to be Pan or the young Bacchus, he clasped my arm till the fingers wounded me, and whispered passionately into my ear: "It isn't that: it isn't there."

FITZJAMES. Unhappy soul to be foiled of even the mean profit of pleasure!

ETHEREGE. Sometimes, indeed, he complained to us that all life was like the fruit growing by the Dead Sea, which seems so fair a melon when taken in the hand, but when carried to the mouth is more bitter than the Jesuits' powder.

FITZJAMES. There is a fierce intensity in his satire I have found in no other.

ROCHESTER

ETHEREGE. Mr Marvell rightly said he had the true vein of it, and he himself was no mean inditer of iambics: but, indeed, Rochester never rose to the height of my friend Mr Dryden, though he informs me his *MacFlecknoe* does no good. But even in his lighter verse he was stubborn to reach a conclusion, a virtue most of us lack. His thought does not falter, so his stanzas are not weak about the loins like Sir Charles Sidley's. My Lord Dorset is the best-natured man—many a frolic I have had with him after the draggle-tailed nymphs can vouch for it—and for that very reason has not the worst-natured muse: but when Rochester wrote, a cold fury directed him; and, always too passionately dissatisfied, he came even to the strife of love coldly though furiously. For five years without a stop he warmed his thought with

ROCHESTER

wine, but in truth there was little difference between Wilmot drunk and Wilmot sober, for lodged within him there was an icicle no fumes could thaw, a demon no extravagance could beguile. Sweetness in verse he learned from Cowley, correctness from Boileau, but his thought he drew from the founts of Bandusia, and his fire was of his own most private fuel.

But I see, Mr FitzJames, your head nods, and I weary you with my old beaux's chatter. It has been for me so happy a relief from sixpenny ombre with martial ladies prouder of their quarterings than of their colour, and who have never flirted a fan. Allow me to fill your glass! No? I cannot leave this ruby to my lacqueys to swill down their throats, as sensible to flavour as a plumber's conduits. I drink to your royal father, Mr FitzJames, and

ROCHESTER

may you earn all the honours that are so undoubtedly due to your valour and your merit.

FITZJAMES. I thank you, Sir George. Indeed, I trust that with the army I shall not disgrace either my blood nor those precepts my uncle Churchill has taught me, who, they say, should occasion arise, is like to make a passably good general.

ETHEREGE. I do not doubt it. Is his wife's hair always as wonderfully gold and abundant? I am glad to think it. I admit her temper would cool my ardour, but I am no soldier, and seek for quiet rather than for conquest.

FITZJAMES. With your permission, Sir George, I will retire.

ETHEREGE. I will light you to your chamber, and to-morrow will accompany you in the coach half a day's journey.

ROCHESTER

I wish you a successful issue of your first campaign.

FITZJAMES. My second, your Excellency; and though last year the Duke of Lorraine would barely let me smell black powder, I hope on this occasion to prove the temper of my sword.

ETHEREGE. A veteran at sixteen! A true Stuart! The fate of Buda is in no doubt. But yet I confess I would not see the starched and solemn Germans too successful. I bear a happy memory of the Turks, and, moreover, our gentlemen of the Diet here will prate so excessively in their High Dutch as to bring despondency into the faces of my good friends Monsieur and Madame de Crécy, who in bringing something of Paris here have helped me not a little to live. The stairs are steep: pray beware of your footsteps. I will hold the candle higher—tallow, filthy tallow! I

ROCHESTER

hate the smell of frying grease, but wax
is as rare here as wit.

FITZJAMES. There is one question
I would ask you, Sir George. What
became of little Sarah, the niece of the
Mother of the Maids? I would fain
see the features of a wench who could
silently endure freezing.

ETHEREGE. You have indeed seen
her, Mr FitzJames. Her name is Mrs
Barry.

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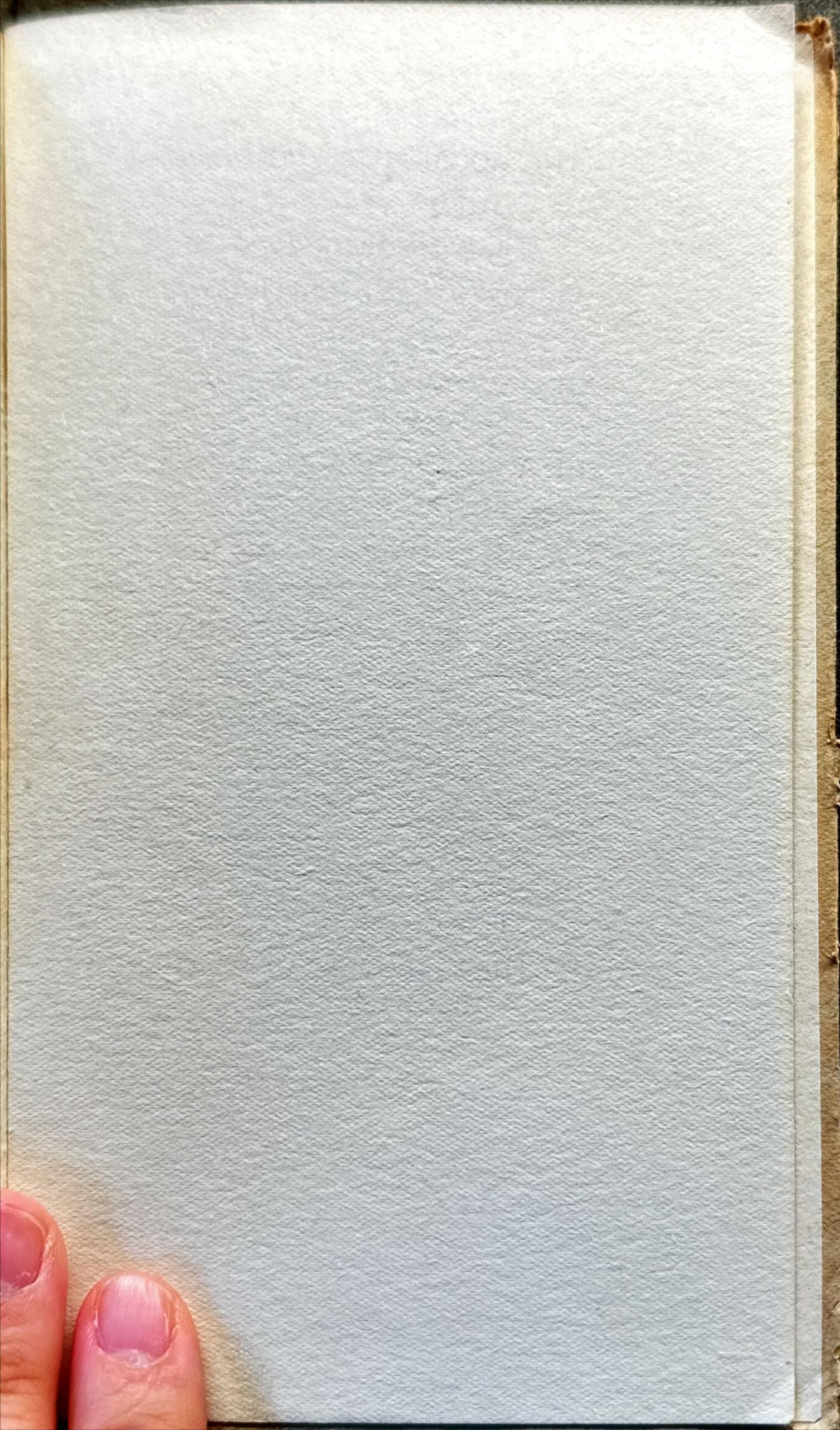
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