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LADY CHARLOTTE BURY'S MEMOIRS* (QUEEN CAROLINE)

The history of all courts and all princes, from the time of Jehu until the present day, shows them full of corruption and vices: their very stations lead them into sin. Yet, when lately France tried to exist under an ideal form of government, greater misery ensued, and the convulsion only subsided when a more despotic

*The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting. By Lady Charlotte Bury. Two volumes. New York: The John Lane Company.

power than any king's gradually subdued the tumult, and restored order by enforcing obedience. Why then should we seek for imaginary perfectibility in the laws of man? It suits not with his imperfect essence. . . . The old king had many faults—I say had, for in fact he is dead to this world—but then he was a good and a pious man; and the example of such has always been of powerful influence. When he dies I fear much harm will ensue; for there is a fermentation in men's minds, and a general system of deceit prevails, which, in regard to things temporal and spiritual, the coming power is not likely to dissipate. May God avert the evil! It will be laid to the charge of *one* when it does come, but it is the consequence of the hollowness and immorality of *all*.

Probably the early readers of *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*—it was given to the world as long ago as 1838—were more interested in the scandals it revealed than in the moral reflections of the author. Yet the passage quoted above is characteristic enough, and it serves as no ill text for a sermon on George IV of England and his unhappy Queen. The accusations and counter-accusations brought by the royal pair, the divorce proceedings, the efforts of Caroline to assert her rights—all these things were in fact so many blows to the prestige of royalty. Bitter passions were aroused on both sides, and even to-day it is difficult to contemplate the story patiently. Had Caroline herself been more free from blame, or had the divorce which George sought been granted, the throne itself might have been imperilled. As it was, popular sympathy was with the injured wife, and even her own indiscretions did not seriously impair it. Whether they were more than indiscretions it is needless to attempt to decide. Nor does this diary add much to our knowledge. It is exceedingly frank, and it certainly does not idealise the chief character in it. Indeed, the Princess Charlotte is quoted as saying, "My mother was wicked, but she would not have turned so wicked had not my father been much more wicked still." But this was one of those judgments of youth which are so much severer than the judgments of age. With all her improprieties and vulgarities, Caroline seems to

have retained to the last the somewhat pitying affection of those about her.

Lady Charlotte Bury—born Campbell—was a considerable figure herself in her day; and it is not likely that she thought, when she wrote the diary, that it would be remembered when all her novels were forgotten. She may not have been concerned in its publication. Her name was not attached to it at the time, and it is said that her husband, wanting money, took possession of the manuscript, made a few additions, added some "very pharisaical notes" and gave it to the world. No one who reads it now can doubt the assertion that it had *un succès de scandale*. After this lapse of time, however, when the clamour of those who felt themselves injured by its plain-speaking has died away, the work may be more leniently treated. Lady Charlotte was certainly imprudent in her use of private letters; but it does not appear that she deliberately or maliciously wounded any one or was actuated by improper motives in setting down occurrences of much interest to her and to us. Of course the work as it stands is not continuously interesting to readers who have no intimate knowledge of the history of the time. But there is no livelier, or perhaps truer, picture of the wretched consort of George IV in existence. In its new form—two handsome volumes, illustrated with portraits—it should secure a fresh popularity and be valued at its real worth. There is much more than gossip and court scandal in these pages. Lady Charlotte had a distinguished position in society; she met many people of eminence; and her comments upon these were usually acute and illumining. "I passed nearly an hour with Madame de Staël. That woman captivates me. There is a charm, a sincerity, a force in all she says and looks. I am not disappointed in her." The portrait of the Duke of Brunswick, Caroline's brother, is admirably drawn. He is a man, she says in one place, "who has no notion of different sexes associating together *merely* for the sake of conversation and society." Yet she feels the force of his "frankness and enthusiasm," and admits that she likes him very much, despite his *ton de garnison*. When he came to take leave of his sister on his

departure to the war, she sees him in a new light:

There never was a man so altered by the hope of glory; his stature seemed to dilate, and his eyes were animated with a fire and an expression of grandeur and delight which astonished me. I could not help thinking the Princess did not receive him with the warmth she ought to have done. He detailed to her the whole particulars of the conversation he had had with the ministers, and mimicked them all admirably. . . . He really looked a hero. The Princess heard all that he said, in a kind of sullen silence. . . . I felt a wish to express something of the kindly feeling I felt toward him; but, I know not why, in her presence, who ought to have felt so much more, and who seemed to feel so little, I felt chilled, and remained silent. I have often thought of that moment since with regret. When the Duke was fairly gone, however, she shed a few tears, and said emphatically, "I shall never see him more."

Unfortunate Caroline! She was her own worst enemy—ever saying and doing the wrong thing, making friends of those she should have kept at a distance, and making enemies of those who might have helped her. "All day long her Royal Highness continues to talk of wishing people dead. . . . I cannot describe how wearisome, how unavailing and injudicious the subjects of her conversation now are in general."

Regret must and ever will have place in my thoughts, when I look back on the past and think of the pleasant days I have spent with the Princess of Wales, and recollect how cruelly she has been treated; and how recklessly she has played into her enemies' hands by going on in a course which must ruin her character and happiness. The persons who have gained undue influence over the Princess have cunningly persuaded her to renounce all her former friends; and she herself has too much sense not to be aware that the respectable individuals who were a short time ago proud to frequent her society would not do so now.

The loss of friends was not, however, entirely the Princess's fault. There were not a few who feared the wrath of Carlton House and stayed away on that account. A prudent woman in Caroline's place, knowing the anxiety of her hus-

band to damage her character, would have conducted herself with particular discretion. But Caroline was perpetually, to the despair of those around her, doing things which a censorious world could hardly fail to misconstrue. Lady Charlotte Bury's affection for her may have been slightly patronising, but it was obviously genuine; at least she stood by her when others deserted her. And the ultimate impression one derives from her pages is that the Queen of the Fourth George was more sinned against than sinning. With such a husband, what could be expected of her?

One reader, at least, must confess to a certain guilty satisfaction in seeing Miss Burney's "sweet Queen" portrayed in an odious light. The mother of George, the wife of the mad old king, who, unlike his son, was at least a gentleman, must share no small part of the responsibility for the disgrace her children brought upon themselves and her. Perhaps she appears to worse advantage in Miss Burney's pages than in these; for Miss Burney is trying to say the best of her. Her lack of consideration for others, her meanness, her affectation of superior virtue, her tyranny over her household—all these deserve far harsher reprobation than the pitiful weaknesses of her daughter-in-law. Lady Charlotte Bury doubtless had her feminine prejudices, but, as has already been intimated, there seems to have been no malice in her comments. The later Georgian era was not one which appears to advantage—so far as its higher circles are concerned—even under the most flattering brush.

Edward Fuller.