

## EXTRACT FROM *THE BEAUX OF THE REGENCY* BY LEWIS MELVILLE (1908)

### CHAPTER XX

#### LONG-WELLESLEY

WILLIAM POLE WELLESLEY<sup>1</sup>, afterwards fourth Earl of Mornington and second Baron Maryborough, was born on June 22, 1788, and is chiefly remembered for his extravagance, and for having married the "pocket Venus," Catherine Tylney-Long, whose hyphenated name he then inserted before his surname, and became known thenceforth as Long-Wellesley, a name commemorated in the "Loyal Effusion by W. T. F(itzgerald)" in "Rejected Addresses":

*"Bless every man possessed of aught to give; Long may Long-Tylney Wellesley Long Pole live."*

Miss Tylney-Long, who was the sister and co-heiress of Sir James Tylney-Long, of Draycot, Wiltshire, had, besides a large personalty, estates in Essex and Hampshire, which were reputed to be worth more than a million. The lady was consequently besieged, not only by admirers, but also by fortune-hunters; and it is said that when she drove in the Park her suitors rode round her carriage as the Guards surrounded the King's. Especially prominent among those who aspired to her hand were Baron Ferdinand de G eramb and "Romeo" Coates.

There were many who asserted that Baron de G eramb was not a nobleman, and that he was a German Jew who, having married the widow of a Hungarian Baron, assumed her first husband's title; while others believed him to be a French refugee. His rank as a German general, however, gave him the entree to London society, and he attracted much attention in his walks abroad by his ringlets, his superb moustaches, and his immense spurs. Soon the dandies copied him, and moustaches *à la G eramb*, gold spurs several inches long, and tight-laced coats were the fashion - a fashion that Byron noticed in "The Waltz," when he remarked that corsets were

*"Transferred to those ambiguous things that ape Goats in their visage, women in their shape."*

Taken up by the Prince Regent, he became a power in what may be called the costume department of the War Office, and designed for the British army the uniform of the Hussars. After a time, however, he was ordered out of England in April 1812, under the Alien Act, being regarded as an impostor when he offered - at a price - to raise twenty-four thousand Croatian troops to proceed against Napoleon. On the Continent he wrote against Napoleon, who imprisoned him at Vincennes; whereupon the General made a vow that if he was released he would renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and become a monk. He kept his word, entered a Trappist monastery under the name of Brother Joseph, and before his death, in 1848, had become Abbot and Procurator-General of the Order.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Coates, or, as he was always called, "Diamond" or "Romeo" Coates, was an eccentric who must not be passed over in silence, for if some of his contemporaries were as foolish, at least he stands pre-eminent as the vainest man of his day. The son of a sugar-planter at Antigua, he was sent to England to be educated, and returned to his distant home in 1805. On the death of his father, two years later, he inherited a considerable fortune, and at once came back to England. He arrived at the York Hotel, Bath, in 1808, and attracted much attention in that still fashionable watering-place. Though then but six-and-thirty, he looked so much older that Captain Gronow took him for fifty, for, while his figure was good, his sallow face - which, says Gronow, was more expressive of cunning than of any other quality - was seamed with wrinkles.

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<sup>1</sup> William Pole Wellesley, afterwards known as William Pole Tylney Long-Wellesley (1788-1857); succeeded as (fourth) Earl of Mornington, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Larwood : *Story of the London Parks*, vol. i. pp. 279-80 ; Lady Dorothy Nevill : *Reminiscences*; etc.

Notoriety comes easily to those who seek it at any cost, and Coates, being entirely free from sensitiveness, secured it by his costume and equipage. In the day-time, at all seasons of the year, he appeared covered with enormous quantities of fur - for which the fact that he had been born in a tropical country and felt the cold of a more northern land may, perhaps, be accepted as some explanation; but his gaudy evening attire, chiefly remarkable for his diamond buttons and diamond knee-buckles, cannot be excused. But these manifestations of bad taste were entirely eclipsed by his curricle. "Its shape was that of a scallop shell," writes Coates's biographers; "the outside was painted a beautiful rich lake colour, and bore its owner's heraldic device - a cock, life-size, with outspread wings, and over this the motto, "While I live I'll crow." The step to enter the vehicle was also in the form of a cock. The interior was richly lined and upholstered, and the whole mounted upon light springs with a pair of high wheels picked out in well-chosen colours. The vehicle was drawn by two white horses of faultless figure and action, which must have been matched and acquired at great cost. Their trappings were of the latest fashion, and ornamented with the crowing cock in silver. The horses were driven in pair, and the splinter bar was surmounted by a carved brass rod; on top of this stood a plated cock, crowing."<sup>3</sup>

Having now succeeded in focussing the eyes of all Bath upon his unattractive society, Coates sighed for fresh worlds to conquer; and, recalling his success as an amateur actor in Antigua, he was overwhelmed with a desire to repeat his histrionic triumphs. He made the acquaintance of Pryce Lockhart Gordon, who heard him recite some passages from Shakespeare, and, observing that he did not always adhere to the text, at one place ventured to correct him. "Aye," retorted Coates, "that is the reading I know, for I have the play by heart, but I think I have improved upon it!"

Gordon was acquainted with Demond, the manager of the Bath Theatre, who, finding that Scrope Davies and others were willing to take boxes, consented to allow Coates to make his *début* on the English stage at Bath, and announced that on February 9, 1810, "a Gentleman of Fashion would make his appearance for the first time in England " as Romeo.

Pryce Gordon "packed" the pit, but not even this precaution availed, for howls of laughter greeted "the Amateur of Fashion" on his first entrance, when it was seen that he was dressed in "a cloak of sky-blue, profusely spangled, red pantaloons, a vest of white muslin, surrounded by an enormously thick cravat, and a wig a la Charles the Second, capped by an opera hat."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the performance was a dire failure, for Coates's absurd attitudinising, his ridiculous ranting, and his voice, with a metallic twang, produced a most ludicrous effect, which convulsed the audience with merriment. Still, such was "Romeo" Coates's egregious vanity that he thought the majority of the audience was impressed, and he was so delighted with himself that at the conclusion of the piece, he cried from the stage, "Haven't I done it well?"

Unable to realise he had failed, he repeated his impersonation at Richmond and Brighton, and he probably never knew - and would not have cared if he had - that a dramatic critic at the latter place wrote that "the performances astonished the aquatics and submarines of the Sussex coast." Having, in his own opinion, conquered the provinces, he now appeared in London. He made his *début* on December 9, 1811, as Lothario, in Rowe's since-forgotten tragedy of "The Fair Penitent." Shortly after he performed Romeo at the Haymarket Theatre "with such effect, indeed, we are told, that his dying scene - an outrageous burlesque - was encored; and in compliance with the enthusiastic call, as he considered it, the delighted actor died over again."

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<sup>3</sup> J. H. and H. H. Robinson: *Life of Robert Coates*. VOL. II.

<sup>4</sup> Gronow: *Reminiscences*. Lord William Pitt Lennox also gives a description of Coates as Romeo, but probably he saw him at a subsequent performance. "The aspirant for histrionic fame presented himself in the most charming of sentimental dramas with the complexion of a Creole, set off by a woolly head of hair, in a suit of spangled white satin, that made him appear doubly dingy." - *Biographical Reminiscences*.

Coates was most anxious to be presented to the Prince Regent, and when he received a card of invitation to a *fête* at Carlton House, his joy knew no bounds. He purchased a new and more than usually outrageous costume for the occasion, and duly presented himself on the appointed evening, only to learn that the card of invitation was a forgery - the work, it subsequently transpired, of Theodore Hook, then on the eve of his departure for his brief, ill-fated sojourn at the Mauritius. The incident was told to the Prince, who was very angry at the unauthorised use of his name, and, with a kindness foreign to his nature, gave orders that the decorations should not be touched, and sent an invitation to poor, foolish, broken-hearted "Curricle" Coates, to mention another of his nicknames, to come and inspect them before they were demolished.

"With two thousand a year, he might be comfortable as a domestic man; what he is as a *fashionable*, or a sportsman, is known to everybody," said a writer in *The Scourge*. "Unfortunately, the flattery of Bacchanalian dependants, the puffs of dramatic parasites, and the indulgence of the easy and unintelligent part of the community, have converted a simple and well-meaning clown into a victim of dissipation and a professor of absurdity. With a fortune that, prudently expended, might purchase every necessary comfort, and every elegant pleasure, he lives on the scale of a banker's clerk, and, mean at home, is miserable abroad.

"In the account of the *levée* contained in the morning papers, it is asserted, and asserted, as I am informed, with truth, that Mr. Coates attended in a dress, of which the ornaments were valued at more than five thousand pounds. Nothing need be said of the contemptible vanity of wearing appendages so comparatively trifling in value, merely for the purpose of displaying his finery in the newspapers. It is better to throw aside the use of diamonds altogether than to swagger before a splendid circle of spectators, in the despicable obtrusion of needy splendour. But what will be the surprise of yourself and your readers to be informed that this Mr. 'Romeo' Coates, who expends five thousand pounds on a gala dress, and plies the convenient Dr. Williams with Sabbath bribes, resides in a petty lodging-house in Craven Street, and condescends to dine at a stinted board, that he may adorn his person, support a theatrical critic, and feed his horses! He attends at Barnet races, and after *running away* (as he expresses it) with the palm of 'Tittism,' returns to partake of his limited number of cups of tea, and his prescribed proportion of the family slops."<sup>5</sup>

No economies of this sort could counterbalance his extravagances, and when his income was in 1825 seriously affected by the troubles in the West India Islands in the previous year, Coates was compelled to retrench.

*"And see! where everybody notes  
The Star of Fashion, 'Romeo' Coates  
The Amateur appears. But where? Ah! where, say, shall I tell,  
Are the brass cocks and cockle-shell?  
I'll hazard rouge et noir,  
If it but speak, can tales relate  
Of many an equipage's fate.  
And may of many more."*<sup>6</sup>

Coates subsequently retired to Boulogne, pending the arrangement of his affairs, and whilst there he married. He returned to London after some years, and lived in turn in Connaught Square, at 13, Portman Square, and 28, Montagu Square, at which last residence he died from the result of an accident, in 1848, in his seventy-seventh year. The Duke of Clarence was also among those who desired to marry Miss Tylney-Long, and he proposed to her in 1811.

*"And since no female can withstand  
The tempting offer of your hand,  
On fair Miss T\_\_\_\_y L\_\_\_\_g bestow*

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<sup>5</sup> August, 1812.

<sup>6</sup> *The English Spy*. The verses have this footnote attached to them: "Poor Romeo's brilliancy is somewhat dulled, and though not quite a fallen star he must not run on black too long lest his diamond-hilted sword should be the price of his folly."

*Title and equipage and show."*

So ran a doggerel rhyme of the day; but Miss Tylney-Long knew that his Royal Highness wooed her mainly, if not entirely, on account of her possessions, and as, in addition, she had realised the drawbacks of a morganatic alliance, with many thanks she declined the offer. It may have been the fear lest pressure would be brought to bear upon her to reverse her decision that induced her to put this out of the question by engaging herself to marry Pole Wellesley, who had long sought her hand. Certainly, after the Prince had avowed his matrimonial intentions, she listened more gently to Wellesley, whose overtures before this time she had repeatedly rejected.

It is possible, however, that the heiress's feelings towards Wellesley underwent a change when he fought a duel, as it was generally supposed, in which she was the cause of the quarrel. There were words between Wellesley and Lord Kilworth at an assembly at Lady Hawarden's on August 6, 1811, and three days later a meeting took place on Wimbledon Common, at which the seconds intervened, and everything was "amicably adjusted." On the 14th inst., however, a letter appeared in *The Morning Post* asserting that Wellesley had apologised, and this led to a second meeting on the next day at Hounslow Heath, when, after an interchange of shots, the seconds again intervened, and the matter was arranged. The cause of the quarrel was not divulged, but, as the following *jeu d'esprit* goes to prove, it was, at least, generally surmised. Byron has a reference to it:

*"Hail, spirit-stirring Waltz! - beneath whose banners  
A modern hero fought for modish manners;  
On Hounslow's heath to rival Wellesley's fame,  
Cock't - fired - and missed his man - but gained his aim."*<sup>7</sup>

A contemporary rhymester also had his say in the matter:

*"AN IMPROMPTU  
"On Leaving Wanstead House fête."<sup>8</sup>  
"By Mr. W\_\_\_\_\_ P\_\_\_\_, jun.*

*"Though my feet capered first with the smart Emma L\_\_g,  
My eyes danced in chase of her sister,  
And salt tears never failed in their sockets to throng,  
Whene'er for a moment they missed her.*

*"So bewitching her jewels, - attractive her self,  
Titled Lads throng in troops to ensnare her;  
But by J\_\_\_\_s ! I vow, by my own precious self,  
That a W\_\_\_\_s\_\_y shall win her, and wear her!*

*"Mid the tumult of waltzing, and with wild Irish reels,  
As prime dancer I'm sure to get at her;  
And by Love's graceful movements to trip up her heels,  
As the Long and the short of the matter!"<sup>9</sup>*

From the first young Wellesley had wanted, not the lady, but her fortune. In his teens he had been sent to Russia, and when he returned to England, at the age of one-and-twenty, he was so wild that he was sent as an ensign into the Suffolks to keep him out of mischief. He went to Portugal on the staff of his uncle, the "Iron Duke," and was present at the battle of Vimiera. He came home, and one day as he lay in bed he began to consider what he should do. George Elers has recorded, "He was in debt and difficulties. A sudden thought struck him. His mother was on terms of great intimacy with Lady Catherine Long, the mother of the rich heiress. He wrote to his mamma, and

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<sup>7</sup> *The Waltz.*

<sup>8</sup> Wanstead House, near Hackney, was the residence of Miss Tylney-Long.

<sup>9</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, August 16, 1811.

conjured her to do all in her power of putting him in Miss Long's company. He proposed six times and was refused. He proposed a seventh time and was accepted."

The marriage took place in 1812, and was celebrated with great splendour: a contemporary account describes the bride as attired in a gown of real Brussels point lace. The design was a spray, draped over a skirt of white satin, and wearing a cottage bonnet of the same lace, with two ostrich feathers, a deep lace veil, and a satin pelisse trimmed with swansdown. "The gown cost seven hundred guineas, the bonnet one hundred and fifty guineas, and the veil two hundred guineas." The chronicler continues: "The lady's jewels consisted principally of a necklace and earrings of brilliants, the former cost twenty-five thousand guineas; eight hundred wedding favours were distributed, worth a guinea and a half each, besides others of an inferior quality and price."

It was a sorry union for the heiress. Having until now lived in luxury entirely in inverse ratio to his means, and having run through his own fortune, the happy bridegroom, now the possessor of a life-interest in his wife's great fortune, squandered vast sums. He was a well-known figure about town, where he drove a plain black Tilbury with a superb grey "with action high as the Monument," says Lord William Pitt Lennox; and he now became famous for his magnificent suppers after the Opera at Wanstead House<sup>10</sup> No fortune could stand the inroads made upon it by this spendthrift, and, when he had raised all the money that could be obtained upon the security of his life-interest in his wife's property, the end was inevitable.

"Where's Brummell? Dished. "Where's Long Pole Wellesley? Diddled,"

wrote Byron in 1822; and on July 8 of that year appeared the announcement of the sale of the furniture of Wanstead House.

Long-Wellesley was saved from the vengeance of his creditors by being given a post in the Household, duly announced in the *London Gazette* of August 6, 1822, as "Gentleman Usher, daily waiter to his Majesty," which exempted him from arrest; but in the same year he left England for the Continent, where, from 1823, he lived with Helena<sup>11</sup>, widow of Captain Thomas Bligh of the Coldstream Guards. On September 12, 1825, died Mrs. Long-Wellesley, who had filed a bill for divorce, and had taken the precaution to make the five<sup>i</sup> children of the union wards of Chancery. Three years later Wellesley married Mrs. Bligh, but this lady fared as badly at his hands as his first wife. She, too, was deserted, and for the last twenty years of his life lived apart from him, almost penniless, compelled to live in a garret, and from time to time forced to apply, as Countess of Mornington, to a police magistrate or to the parish for temporary assistance.

Obituary notices are almost invariably tempered with mercy, and bad indeed must have been the man of whom it was written : "A spendthrift, a profligate, and gambler in his youth, he became a debauchee in his manhood, and

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<sup>10</sup> "The mansion at Wanstead, standing in an extensive park, was a very large and magnificent structure. The front was 260 feet long; the entrance in the centre being beneath a grand portico of six Corinthian columns, having a flight of steps on each side, and in the tympanium the arms of the Tylney family finely sculptured. The architect was the well-known Colin Campbell, who received great praise for the science and judgment displayed in this work. The great hall, fifty-one feet by thirty-six, was decorated and furnished with all the splendour of the last century; the ball-room, seventy-five feet by twenty-seven, was magnificently fitted up, and the dining-room and saloons were furnished with corresponding taste and luxury. Most of the ceilings in the grand apartments were painted by Kent, a portrait of whom hung in the hall. The mansion also contained some fine paintings: among these were a Raphael, a Correggio, and a Lely, also several by Cassali and other eminent old and new artists. The grounds contained a curious and interesting grotto, constructed by the second Earl Tylney, which cost some £2,000 to erect, independent of materials." - J. H. and H. H. Robinson: *Life of Robert Coates*.

<sup>11</sup> Helena, third daughter of Colonel Thomas Paterson, claimed "a direct royal descent from the Plantagenets."

achieved the prime disgrace of being the second person whom the Court of Chancery deprived of paternal rights, and withdrawing out of his care his children, whose early tutors and whose morals he wickedly endeavoured to corrupt, from a malicious desire to add to the agonies of their desolate and broken-hearted mother. Redeemed by no single virtue, adorned by no single grace, his life has gone out, even without a flicker of repentance - his 'retirement' was that of one who was deservedly avoided by all men. We have no wish further to illustrate such a theme by writing what should be his epitaph."<sup>12</sup>

For years before his death on July 1, 1857, Long-Wellesley had lived in lodgings. He was a member of parliament from 1812 to 1832, representing in turn Wiltshire, St. Ives, and Essex; and he was one of the Tories who, on November 15, 1830, succeeded in defeating the Wellington Ministry. Otherwise, his career in the House of Commons was uneventful, though a misdeed of his brought him into temporary notoriety. In July 1831 he removed his daughter from the guardian appointed by the Court of Chancery; whereupon Lord Brougham, then Lord Chancellor, committed him to the Fleet for contempt of court, officially informed Mr. Speaker Sutton of his action, and refused the application of the Sergeant-at-Arms to surrender his prisoner, who claimed privilege as a member of parliament. Long-Wellesley was permitted to remain at his house in Dover Street in charge of two officers of the Court of Chancery, and further trouble was averted by the girl being restored to the authorities.

In 1845 the third Earl of Mornington died, and Long-Wellesley came into the title; but by this time he had disappeared from society - which, indeed, was no longer inclined to receive him. He spent the last years of his life in lodgings in Mayer Street, Manchester Square, London, deeply involved in debt, and subsisting on a small allowance, the bounty of his cousin, the second Duke of Wellington. His wife outlived, but can scarcely have regretted, him; while the news of his decease was welcomed by his numerous creditors, who were secured by large insurances on his life.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Actually, the couple had three children - RJA

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<sup>12</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, July 4, 1857.

<sup>13</sup> He was succeeded by his eldest son, William Richard Arthur Pole Tylney Long-Wellesley, who was born in 1813, and died unmarried in 1863, when the Irish earldom of Mornington passed to the Duke of Wellington, and the English barony of Maryborough became extinct.