

PARALLELS

Of the birds that fly in the farthest sea
six are stranger than others be :
under its tumble, among the fish,
six are a marvel passing wish.

First is a hawk, exceeding great ;
he dwelleth alone ; he hath no mate ;
his neck is wound with a yellow ring ;
on his breast is the crest of a former King.

The second bird is exceeding pale,
from little head to scanty tail ;
she is striped with black on either wing,
which is rose-lined, like a princely thing.

Though small the bulk of the brilliant third,
of all blue birds 'tis the bluest bird ;

I mind the fifth, I forget the fourth,
unless that it comes from the east by north.
The fifth is an orange white-billed duck ;
he diveth for fish, like the god of luck ;

he hath never a foot on which to stand ;
for water yields and he loves not land¹

WE can read in Robert Browning's life that his old friend, Madame du Quaire, was a widow ; that whenever he could he came to comfort her in her sorrow and ' discourse of nature, art, the beautiful and all that conquers death.' Madame du Quaire told him she much preferred his poetry to his wife's. ' You are wrong, quite wrong,' he answered ; ' she has genius : I am only a painstaking fellow, a clever sort of angel, she is a star. The true creative power is hers, not mine.' The only written outbursts of Browning's frantic sorrow, after his wife's death, were addressed to his sister and (we are assured) to Madame du Quaire, ' whose own loss most naturally invoked them, and who has since thought it best to destroy the letters in which they were contained.' It

¹ *The Flying Fish* by John Gray. (' The Long Road ' : Blackwell.)

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was a London joke (one heard it not infrequently at Mrs. Wynne Finch's parties—Mrs. Wynne Finch, mother-in-law of Laurence Oliphant, mother of Guy le Strange, herself notable in Paris and in London), a London Aristophanic farce to insist on the uncertainty of Madame du Quaire's late Chevalier du Quaire. None of her friends had seen him or heard of him in his lifetime. One liked to pretend that Fanny Blackett (sister of John Burgoyne Blackett, M.P. for Newcastle-on-Tyne) had invented marriage, widowhood, and Chevalier du Quaire, so as to be freer than a Victorian spinster. How comic to imagine that Madame du Quaire, tall, powerful, red haired, plain of speech, without any human respect whatever, needed widowhood to be free.

Had she not been indoctrinated by Richard Congreve,² the positivist, her brother's friend and tutor?

² Richard Congreve (1818-1899) 'taught history thoroughly, and with a broad mind. He inspired men with a taste for culture and thought. He worked hard and was genial and good-natured. What a transformation have I witnessed in forty years to the arrogant egotist, the fierce intriguer, and the pitiless misanthropist that ambition, vanity, and fanaticism have made the Dr. Congreve of 1892—the would-be High Priest of Humanity—the restless dreamer after a sort of back-parlour Popedom. I could not believe that human nature could undergo such a transformation in the same man, if I had not been a close witness of the whole process. . . . But Richard Congreve at Wadham, 1848-1854, was the best type of college tutor as then understood . . . his energy (at that time) and his decided turn for practical action, even by way of intrigue, placed him head and shoulders above any other tutor of the time, even above Jowett and Pattison.'—Frederick Harrison: *Autobiographic Memoirs*.

'Richard Congreve . . . met Barthélemy St. Hilaire and Auguste Comte in Paris and adopted positivism; founded positivist community in London 1855; studied medicine; M.R.C.P. 1866.'—*D.N.B.*

He seceded from Pierre Laffitte and formed an independent group with himself as director in 1878-79.

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'If I wanted to take poison,' said Augustus Hare, that expert in instructive walks and noble lives, 'I would ask my friend, Madame du Quaire, to give it to me.' A mysterious eulogy! but it stirred some of Augustus Hare's younger friends. 'You know her?' said Hugh Dearborn; 'do make me meet her. Don't you know Augustus Hare? He says she would give him poison if he asked her. You would love Augustus Hare.' Hugh Dearborn has been so sweepingly portrayed by Mr. Osbert Sitwell³ that he would be justified if he prided himself on being 'le plus beau Sitwell,' as a close friend of his on being 'le plus beau Blanche,' and his uncle 'le plus beau Sargent.'

Madame du Quaire: a woman who lives for pleasure,⁴ said Oscar Wilde. Madame du Quaire: Matthew Arnold's friend, was another definition. 'Madame du Quaire,' said Sidney Colvin, 'she is not real. I wish you to know some real people.' And he introduced me to his future wife and to her great friend, Mrs. X, six weeks before Mrs. Sitwell and Mrs. X quarrelled openly, decisively. 'If Mr. and Mrs. X are coming to you, I cannot come,' said Colvin. Madame du Quaire shone in contrast with real people. She did not quarrel; she received celebrities and others in her Mayfair house; she befriended fashionable beauties in distress; she allowed lovely Mrs. Y to say farewell to Captain W in her dining room; she saved Sir Z Z from eloping with Mrs. W, that dark pearl. How often have I heard Mrs. W sing (not with Sir Z Z) *et nous dirons bien des choses que les myrtes et les roses n'entendront pas*.

According to my moods I nicknamed Madame du Quaire *Don't care*, *Dull care*, or *the Happy Warrior*. But I never wearied of hearing her rebuke anyone

³ In *Triple Fugue*.

⁴ Dr. Congreve also had 'a stately person and a generous habit of life.'—F. Harrison.

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who posed as *issu de la cuisse de Jupiter*. 'I should say,' our friend would growl, '*c'est un produit incestueux d'une carpe et d'un lapin.*'

She was a cousin of the Catholic Lady Duff Gordon (daughter-in-law of the one who wrote the *Letters from Egypt* and mother-in-law of *Lucile* of Titanic fame), and a friend of Miss Charlton of Hesleyside. The latter tried to get her to abjure Positivism during her last illness.

Miss S was not striking like Madame du Quaire; there was no suggestion of 'the hawk exceeding great' about her; just a member of what is sometimes called *general society*. She was lively, friendly, one of the chorus, never a principal. She went on a journey to Canada, and returned a few months later as a widow, Mrs. S. Her name was shorter, more euphonic; the initial letter was identical. 'So convenient,' smiled her acquaintances. They pretended to believe that Mr. S had neither lived nor died, that she had romanced. This occurred two generations later than Madame du Quaire's return to England; but how 'exceeding pale' is this second bird of memory. To conjure up any colour for Mrs. S I have to place her in the *milieu* where I usually saw her, in the drawing room of Sir Julius Raines, surrounded by his innumerable Japanese masks. I linger most near the Empress Dowager of China's great seals of jade, I touch the yellow knots tied by the Great Llama of Thibet, and for the tenth time I tell Lady Raines and her sister, Mrs. Davis, those intrepid horsewomen, those passionate vegetarians, how I am fascinated by the General's collections.

Ailsa Cassilis sat in Bond Street, semi-Sicilian, semi-Hindoo, and yet blond, a rosy creature with spangles and sequins. For a sovereign she held your hand for a quarter of an hour or so, and prattled prettily about you. She was a *clairvoyante*. I escorted

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two women friends to her bower. The elder of the two was not impressed: she had neither been kept fifteen minutes nor given a sovereign's worth. 'You prefer doing things yourself rather than asking others' was all she thought apt. The younger friend did the traditionally foolish thing: she took off her wedding ring. Ailsa cooed: 'You are married!' She also mentioned a tall fair man: who could see my charming friend without knowing there was a tall fair man, tall fair men, in her entourage?

Ailsa granted me a round quarter of an hour. I succeeded in appearing hit whenever her diagnosis erred; the further she wandered the more I lowered my eyes. She held forth to me, contentedly, about my University, she warned me of various risks I ran.

Soon afterwards she married—an undergraduate, I fancy. She could have worn the bluest of plumage, the most azure gauzes. Not so Miss Yorke, the fourth on this list. Did she 'come from the east by north'? I daresay. She struck me as a cross between a New Englander and a civil servant's orphan. Nathaniel Hawthorne might have called her undesirable, but not even he could reproach her with being composed of solid English beef alone. She half claimed (her friends were not content with half a claim) to help the police: so gifted was she, so 'psychic.' I met her in Sloane Square, at one of George Power's parties. She routed out hidden cards, and after some facial display she uttered convincingly *Five of Clubs* or *Eight of Hearts*! as the occasion required. I (not usually a tease) set myself to impede her progress. I willed as hard as I could against her. She paused, she hesitated, she fumbled, she said falteringly *Seven of Clubs*. She corrected herself: *Seven of Spades*. I had lost. During the final congratulations of her host and audience, I apologised for my secret oppo-

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sition. 'I knew there was someone against me,' she said very simply. She gave me her address, somewhere in Bayswater, and in due course I found myself in her small square room, a finger-bowl between us. 'Hold it tight,' was her command. She meant to crystal-gaze in the water. I did not wish to befog her, I was too curious about myself, those far-off days; but after some minutes she shed a few tears, or seemed to, and said: 'I can't.'

Cheiro reigned in Bond Street, 'diving for fish like the god of Luck.' His vogue lasted until he left for Paris to be a wine merchant. His rivals accused him of clairvoyance and of using short cuts to knowledge instead of the slower road of scientific palmistry. He was shrewd, entertaining. With his glass rod he pointed out islands and mystic crosses, and pleasantly 'curdled the blood and agonised the mind' of self-seekers. I have outlived my island as I have just noticed; but my mystic cross remains. 'Why don't you go in for palmistry?' he said to me; 'you would succeed.' I was flattered.

It was Cheiro who told Oscar Wilde that he would die in prison. When Wilde was released someone reminded Cheiro of his unfulfilled prophecy. I admired Cheiro's cool answer: 'Wait.'

All birds are not enclosed in the marvellous aviary of Hang's adventures. I have known two white peacocks: the one from her golden chair, in the (perhaps) largest drawing room in Piccadilly, listened, every Friday evening, between Maria Marchioness of Ailesbury and a princely foreigner, to the rarest, the most recent music. The other (more like a peahen than a peacock) in the (surely) tiniest drawing room on the edge of Park Lane, presided over a *bureau d'esprit*. The youngest, the most ornamental (she collected an escort of pretty youths) had to pay with an epigram

a seat at her table, a stall at the first nights she could not do without.

No white peacock can compare with the peacock in his glory I saw the other day. It was Juno's peacock; he rustled and shimmered, in the sun; he came nearer and nearer; his peahen soberly intent on shrubs in the shade turned away from his magnificence, from the clatter of his quills. A little girl ran between them, stopped in front of the regal bird, and burst out laughing: it was stupid, blind, unforeseeing laughter. I moralised: she will not laugh when she has seen the Lord of Terrible Aspect, the love inspired by a thoroughly vain man

Without ever attending a *séance* it was impossible one London season not to hear that an Afghan and a nun were to be met just then in the company of the favourite medium of that year. And when one evening the drawing room door opened, without any introduction by the abashed man servant, and we saw first a nun, then an Afghan, then a Spanish ecclesiastic, then an Englishman, we all stared. Of course, we were expecting a Dominican nun from Zanzibar with a young Catholic Zulu. Ah! Mtembu was the Afghan! The Spanish Father had escorted them from Africa—but they had lost their way in the Brompton Road, and a very English stranger had taken charge of the interesting trio. He was warmly thanked, and departed. Mtembu wore a sailor suit; he shuddered when offered a pear; he had been that day to the British Museum, and with his pocket statuette of St. Joseph and his gestures he conveyed to us the conviction that he had seen the Elgin Marbles. The following day, in the garden, he shot arrows in the air; and when Father Gray undertook to photograph him, he whispered, tugging at his sailor suit, 'I can take them off.'

ALEXANDER MICHAELSON.