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MEMOIRS OF EMINENT ENGLISHWOMEN

VOLUME 2

LOUISA STUART COSTELLO



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Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen

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Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen

Louisa Stuart Costello (1799–1870) was a poet and artist who supported her family with her paintings. As well as writing a number of historical novels, Costello researched and wrote the biographies of many prominent women, using their letters and diaries to tell their extraordinary stories. This second volume chronicles the lives of eight women including Lucy Harrington, a literary patron who was a friend of John Donne and a muse to Ben Jonson. Also featured is the life of Frances Howard, who was accused of the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, who she saw as an obstacle to her marriage to Robert Carr, a favourite of King James. She was a public hate figure described as a 'murderous, syphilitic sorceress', and was found guilty of the killing and imprisoned. For more information on this author, see http://orlando.cambridge.org/public/svPeople?person_id=costlo

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J. Cook sc.

ELIZABETH,
Queen of Bohemia

FROM A RARE PRINT AFTER THE ORIGINAL BY
MICHAEL MIREVELDE

MEMOIRS
OF
EMINENT ENGLISHWOMEN.

BY
LOUISA STUART COSTELLO,

AUTHOR OF

"SPECIMENS OF THE EARLY POETRY OF FRANCE," "A SUMMER AMONGST THE BOGAGES
AND THE VINES," "A PILGRIMAGE TO AUVERGNE," "THE QUEEN MOTHER,"
ETC ETC. ETC.

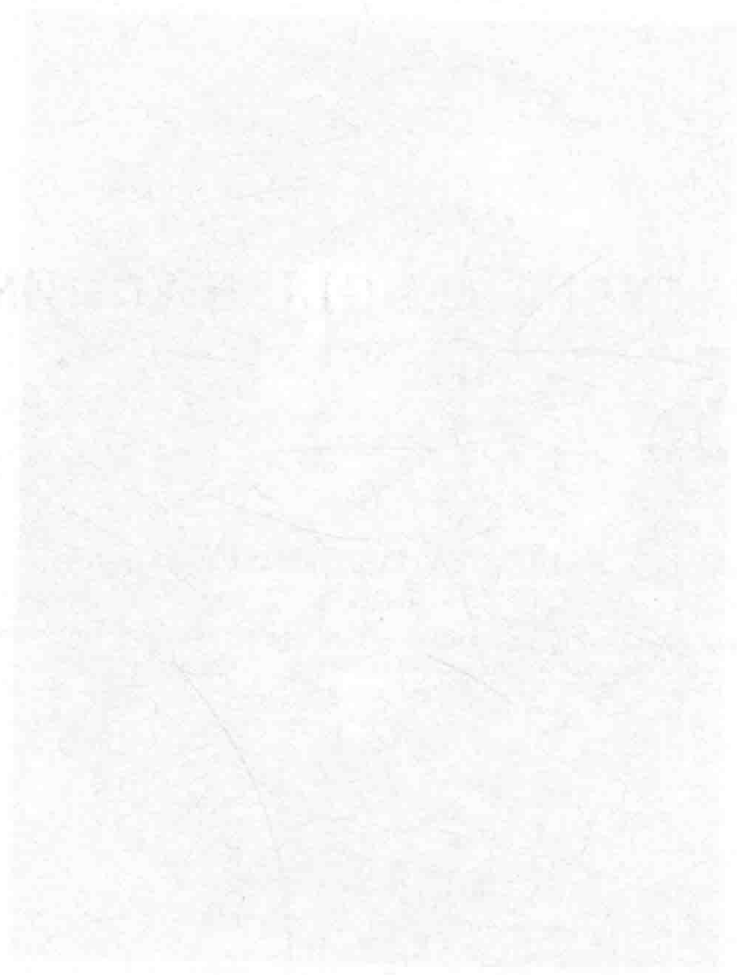
IN TWO VOLUMES.

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* In the title of the Memoir of this lady, through a mistake of the Printer, she is styled *Duchess* instead of *Countess* of Somerset.

MEMOIRS

OF

EMINENT ENGLISHWOMEN.

ELIZABETH STUART, QUEEN OF BOHEMIA.

AMONGST the many interesting female characters who are conspicuous in the reign of James the First, one of the most remarkable is his beautiful daughter, whose early life began so prosperously, and who was destined to experience so many reverses. Her father, indeed, may be considered the only member of the ill-starred house of Stuart who enjoyed any continued happiness, and the changes in whose life were for the better. As his sensibilities were far from delicate, those untoward events, which to another would have been fraught with sorrow and regret, made but little impression on his mind: as *self* was his ruling passion, his own good fortune, in inheriting the most powerful throne in Europe, and all the advan-

tages which such a position gave, quite compensated for his mother's wrongs and misfortunes ; and, like an upstart suddenly enriched with the spoils of a miser's hoard, which he could hardly hope to obtain, he gave way to a vulgar delight, and determined to enjoy "the goods the gods provided him," which he contrived to do to the end, leaving the remaining scenes of the Stuart tragedy to be played by other actors.

When Elizabeth, the great Queen, had breathed her last, and her silence had conferred the inheritance of England on James, the exulting prince lost no time in hastening to clutch his new possessions ; and, although his ungraceful appearance and ungentlemanlike manners disgusted all the subjects of his magnificent predecessor, there were not wanting those in his train whose grace and beauty made up for his defects. His Queen and her children excited that interest and admiration which James himself failed to create ; and, above all, the lovely child, Elizabeth, was a fairy vision, calculated to win all eyes her way as she appeared to the gazing multitude, seated in her carriage, surrounded by her young attendants ; and, though it was by some objected that the more noble mode of travelling on horseback adopted by the Virgin Queen was disused by the new sovereign and his family, it was impossible to withhold from the youthful princess her due meed of praise, more particularly when it was understood that she was,

even at the very early age at which she first appeared in England, an excellent horsewoman.

Elizabeth was born in the palace of Falkland, on the 19th August, 1596, and was brought to England at her father's accession, in 1603, and, according to a somewhat absurd custom then prevalent, instead of being retained by her mother in her own home she was given up to the care of the Countess of Kildare: that is to say, the princess's establishment was kept at that lady's house, as was that of each of the royal children at different noblemen's dwellings. It would seem as if they were to be held as hostages for the good behaviour of the King, for what the advantages of separating the children from their parents and each other were does not appear.

There is no reason to think that Lady Kildare was selected by Anne of Denmark as her daughter's governess, or protectress, for any remarkable qualities she possessed. She is only known as Frances Howard, third daughter of the Earl of Nottingham, and married, in the first instance, to Henry Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare; after his death she became the wife of the unfortunate Lord Cobham, who was, soon after James's accession, involved in the suspicions under which Sir Walter Raleigh suffered. Her devotion to her husband was not very great, for she totally abandoned him in his distress, and declined offering him any sort of consolation or sympathy.

The princess was not, however, long under her influence, but was removed to the exclusive care of Sir John Harrington, newly created Baron of Exon, who accepted the charge of her education as a labour of love, and gave her his utmost attention, according to the testimony of his cousin-german,—the “witty” Sir John Harrington, the translator of Anacreon, and favourite of Queen Elizabeth, who is somewhat sarcastic in his remarks on the “fatigue” his relative endures for his royal charge; by which it would appear the late Queen’s friend felt no very cordial esteem for those actually in power—a circumstance by no means rare in the history of Courts and courtiers.

The poor little princess of eight years old, who was greatly attached to her brother, Henry, was quite inconsolable at being separated from him, and deplores the event in the following brief letter:—

“My dear and worthy brother,

“I most kindly salute you, desiring to hear of your health; from whom, though I am now removed far away, none shall ever be nearer in affection than your most loving sister,

“ELIZABETH.”

King James, pedant as he was, and born a schoolmaster, made a judicious selection for his daughter in her present protector; he had before

applied himself to her instruction and encouraged her correspondence with her brother as soon as she was able to hold a pen. As most young people of any intelligence are naturally disposed to communicate their ideas to each other, it is certainly an indulgence which cannot too soon be granted, and one which is likely to be of much service in forming a good and easy style, as in the case of young Elizabeth ; for, though scarcely so pleasing as that of her cousin, Arabella, still her correspondence is very agreeable when undictated.

Of the family into which the princess was adopted, and amongst whom she became the most important personage, a very flattering picture has been drawn, and it would seem that every advantage of learning, taste, and refinement, was combined with more solid good to render Combe Abbey a fitting abode for a royal child. This fine domain had come into the possession of Lord Harrington by marriage with an heiress whose accomplishments and virtues made her a very appropriate person to take charge of a young lady of the high rank of Elizabeth ; her own daughter, Lucy, afterwards Countess of Bedford, whose countenance is familiar to most persons, through numerous portraits, was a promising girl, of great abilities, some years older than the princess ; an intimacy naturally ensued between them, and the charming Anne Dudley, niece of Lord Harrington,

who resided under his roof, made the third of these young graces.

Of Lucy Harrington's taste and imagination there can be no question, but of her prudence in expenditure the less inquiry there is made the better; for she became as notorious for the enormous and ruinous expense in which she indulged, as for her talent in planning elegant gardens and erecting beautiful structures. As King James, at this period, seemed to think himself in possession of a magical purse, which could never be exhausted, it was not likely that he restrained the extravagance of his daughter, who, even at this early age, displayed a great fondness for show and splendour, in which she, doubtless, was encouraged by her profuse friend, the gay and clever Lucy, who had the propensity for building of Bess of Hardwick, without her economy and management.

They must have been a happy party at Combe Abbey at this period, for, besides those already mentioned, the dear friend of Prince Henry, young John Harrington, enlivened them with his brilliant talents, so much appreciated by his royal companion, whose tastes were in many respects congenial to his own, except that the prince far excelled him in martial exercises and feats of agility.

Almost all writers concur in representing Prince Henry as a model of all manly and engaging virtues; and though the friends of that party which he was said to espouse probably exaggerated his

good qualities, yet there is no reason to believe that he was altogether so little interesting as an eloquent and, generally, impartial historian* represents him, when, in speaking of his untimely death—which important event he dismisses in a few careless words—he says :—

“ Henry, the heir apparent, had reached his eighteenth year. There existed but little affection between him and his father. James looked on him with feelings of jealousy, and even of awe ; and the young prince, faithful to the lessons which he had formerly received from his mother, openly ridiculed the foibles of his father, and boasted of the conduct which he would pursue when he should succeed to the throne. In the dreams of his fancy he was already another Henry V., and the conqueror of his hereditary kingdom of France.”

This scarcely agrees with the respect and regret expressed for him by Henry IV. of France, who lost no opportunity of praising both his talents and virtues · the historian continues—

“ To those who were discontented with the father, the abilities and virtues of the son became the theme of the most hyperbolical praise : the zealots looked on him as the destined reformer of the English Church ; some could even point out the passage in the apocalypse, which reserved for him

* Dr. Lingard.

the glorious task of expelling antichrist from the papal chair."

"Harrington tells us, that the following rhyme was common in the mouths of the people:—

' Henry the Eighth pulled down the abbeyes and cells,
But Henry the Ninth shall pull down bishops and bells.'

"With the several matches prepared for him by his father, it were idle to detain the reader; his marriage, as well as his spiritual and temporal conquests, were anticipated by an untimely death, which some writers have attributed to poison, * * * and others, *with greater probability, to his own turbulence and obstinacy.*

"In the pursuit of amusement he disregarded all advice. He was accustomed to bathe for a long time together after supper, to expose himself in the most stormy weather, and to take violent exercise during the greatest heats of summer."

These habits, which are here imputed as a crime, are not unfrequently brought forward as a proof of heroism and manly qualities worthy of admiration, and they are generally named by the eulogists of the young prince as circumstances in his favour; however correct his physician might have been for blaming his hardihood, an impartial historian is scarcely to be excused for imputing it to him as an offence.

"In the spring of 1612," continues Dr. Lingard, "a considerable change was remarked both in his