Frenchman's Creek

Longman Simplified English Series

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

BY

DAPHNE DU MAURIER

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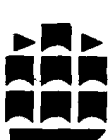

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FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

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Longman Simplified English Series

This book has been specially prepared to make enjoyable reading for people to whom English is a second or a foreign language. An English writer never thinks of avoiding unusual words, so that the learner, trying to read the book in its original form, has to turn frequently to the dictionary and so loses much of the pleasure that the book ought to give.

This series is planned for such readers. There are very few words used which are outside the learner's vocabulary[1]. These few extra words are needed for the story and are explained when they first appear. Long sentences and difficult sentence patterns have been simplified. The resulting language is good and useful English, and the simplified book keeps much of the charm and flavour of the original.

At a rather more difficult level there is *The Bridge Series*, which helps the reader to cross the gap between the limited vocabulary and structures of the *Simplified English Series* and full English.

It is the aim of these two series to enable thousands of readers to enjoy without great difficulty some of the best books written in the English language, and in doing so, to equip themselves in the pleasantest possible way, to understand and appreciate any work written in English.

[1]The 2,000 root words of the *General Service List of English Words* of the *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection.*

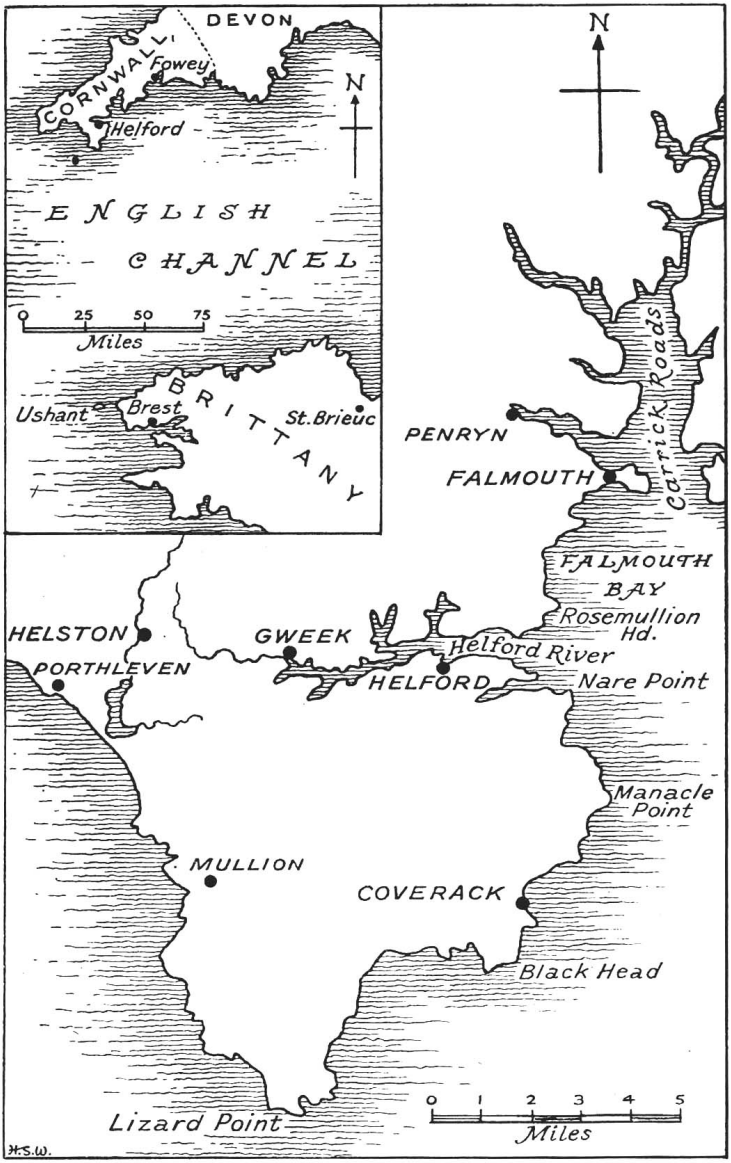
INTRODUCTION

DAPHNE DU MAURIER had a famous father and a famous grandfather. Her grandfather, George du Maurier, was a well-known artist and writer. Her father, Sir Gerald du Maurier, was equally well known as an actor. Daphne du Maurier wrote the story of her family in a book called *The du Mauriers.*

She is the author, too, of a number of very successful stories. Three of them can be read in *Longman's Simplified English Series.* They are: *Jamaica Inn* (written in 1936), *Rebecca* (1938) and *Frenchman's Creek* (1942).

In 1932 Daphne du Maurier married a distinguished soldier, Lieut.-General Sir Frederick Browning. She uses the name du Maurier only for her writing. Although she was born in London, she has lived in Cornwall for many years, and she knows and loves the places described in this book.

Most of the events in this story happen in the district round the Helford River (Map: page viii) and at Fowey (Map: page 45). The time is when Charles II was King of England (1660–1685). There was a great deal of foolish behaviour in London and round the King's Court at that time, and it was from her own foolish life there that Dona St. Columb was escaping when she went to Cornwall. In Cornwall she found her great adventure.



Map of Cornwall

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NOTE

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1

THERE have been many changes at Navron and round the Helford river since Dona St. Columb went there long ago.

She was running away from her life in London, taking the two children and their nurse with her. It was the result of a sudden idea, of course. She had always acted on sudden ideas. She had married Harry without careful thought, because of his laugh—its funny lazy quality had attracted her—and because she had thought that the expression in his blue eyes meant more than it did—and now she had realised that after all . . . But no, it was not poor Harry with his drinking and stupidity who was to blame, nor even the senseless life they led, nor their friends, nor the heat and dirt of summer in London, nor the empty talk of the Court, the dirty nonsense Rockingham whispered in her ear. It was herself who was at fault. She was running away from herself.

*

Probably the window fastening had not been touched for months. It was stiff through lack of use, and Dona had difficulty with it for a moment. Then she threw the window wide open and let in the fresh air and the sun.

In the glass of the window she saw the reflection of the manservant standing behind her. She could have sworn that he was smiling, but when she turned, he was as solemn as he had been from the first moment of their arrival, a thin little man, with a button mouth and a curiously white face.

"I don't remember you," she said. "You were not here when we came before."

"No, my lady," he said.

"And your name?"

"William, my lady."

She had forgotten that the Cornish people spoke in so

strange a way—foreign almost; at least, she supposed it was Cornish.

"We must have caused a great deal of trouble," she said, "with our sudden arrival, the opening of the house. The place has been closed far too long, of course. There is dust everywhere; I am surprised that you have not noticed it." Was the fellow laughing at her?

"I had noticed it, my lady," he said, "but as you never came to Navron it scarcely seemed necessary to see that the rooms were cleaned. It is difficult to take pride in work that is never seen."

"In fact," said Dona, amused now, "lazy masters make lazy servants?"

"Naturally, my lady," he said solemnly.

"Will you please see that every room in the house is swept and dusted," she said, "that all the silver is cleaned, that flowers are placed in the rooms, that everything is done, in fact, as if I had not been lazy, but had been living here for many years."

"It will be my special pleasure, my lady," he said, and then he bowed and left the room, and Dona realised with some annoyance that he had laughed at her once again, not openly, but as if secretly, behind his eyes.

She stepped out of the window and on to the smooth grass in front of the house. The gardeners had done their work, at least, perhaps in a great hurry yesterday or the day before, when the news came that she was returning. What a nuisance she must seem to them, breaking into their quiet lives, disturbing this curious fellow William—was it really Cornish, his way of speaking?—and upsetting his lazy freedom.

Somewhere, from an open window in another part of the house, she could hear Prue's scolding voice, demanding hot water for the children, and a loud roar from James—poor little boy, why must he be washed and bathed and undressed? —and then she walked across to the gap in the trees that she remembered from the last time, and yes—she had been

right—it was the river down there, shining and still. The sun was still on it, and a breath of air moved the surface. There should be a boat somewhere—she must remember to ask William if there was a boat—and she would get into it, let it carry her to the sea. James must come too. They would both dip their hands and faces in the water, and fishes would jump out of the water, and the sea-birds would cry around them. Oh, how wonderful, to have got away at last, to have escaped, to have broken free, to know that she was at least three hundred miles away from London and the Court of King Charles, and Rockingham's hateful smile and Harry's sleepy puzzled eyes. Hundreds of miles, too, from the worthless Dona she hated.

Now the sun was setting behind the trees, the river below was a dull red, and William was lighting the candles[1] in the hall. She had supper late, and she ate with a new enjoyment, sitting alone at the head of the long table, while William stood behind her chair and waited silently.

"William," she said.

"My lady?"

"My nurse tells me that the servant girls upstairs are new to the house, that you sent for them when you heard that I was arriving?"

"That is quite true, my lady."

"What was the reason, William? I believed—and I think Sir Harry thought the same—that Navron always had a full staff."

"It seemed to me, my lady, possibly wrongly—that is for you to say—that one idle servant was enough to have in the house. For the last year I have lived here entirely alone."

She looked at him over her shoulder.

"I could dismiss you for that, William."

"Yes, my lady."

"I shall probably do so in the morning."

"Yes, my lady."

She went on eating fruit, thinking about him, rather

[1]Candle: a wax light.

annoyed and yet interested to find that a servant could be so difficult to understand. But she knew that she was not going to send him away.

"Supposing I do not dismiss you, William—what then?"

"I will serve you faithfully, my lady."

"How can I be sure of that?"

"I have always served faithfully the people I love, my lady."

And to this she could make no answer, because his small button mouth showed no more sign of feeling than ever, and his eyes said nothing, but she felt in her heart that he was not laughing at her now; he was speaking the truth.

She left the room without a word, knowing that in this curious little man she had found a friend. She laughed secretly to herself, thinking of Harry and how he would look at her wide-eyed, without understanding: "The fellow has no respect; he needs whipping!"

After a time she went upstairs to her bedroom, first passing through the children's rooms to see if all was well. Henrietta looked like a little wax figure, her fair curls framing her face, while James, with his eyebrows drawn together in his sleep, looked like a fat and angry little dog. She moved his hand inside the cover, kissing it as she did so, and he opened one eye and smiled. She left the room quietly, ashamed of her tenderness for him. He would no doubt grow up to be fat and coarse, making some woman miserable.

Somebody—William, she supposed—had cut some flowers and placed them in her room under the painting of herself. They filled the room with scent, strong and sweet. The picture of herself looked down at her with interest. Have I that dissatisfied mouth, she thought, that impatient look about the eyes? Did I look like that six, seven years ago? Do I look like it still?

Then, in bed and half asleep, watching the moon play patterns on the floor, she wondered what other scent it was that mixed itself with the flowers—a stronger smell. It seemed to come from the drawer beneath the table, and she stretched

out an arm and opened the drawer and looked inside. There was a book there, and a pot of tobacco. It was the tobacco that she had smelt, of course. She picked up the pot. The stuff was brown and strong and freshly cut. Surely William would not dare to sleep in her bed, to lie there, smoking, looking at her picture? That was really unforgivable. There was something about this tobacco, something very unlike William; surely she must be mistaken—and yet —if William had lived here at Navron, for a year, alone?

She opened the book—was he, then, a reader, too? And now she was more puzzled than before because the book was a book of poetry, French poetry, by the poet Ronsard, and inside the cover somebody had written "J.B.A.—Finistère" and underneath had drawn a very small picture of a sea-bird.

2

WHEN Dona came downstairs in the morning, the children called her with delight, Henrietta dancing with joy, and James, still very unsteady, rolling after her like a bottle-happy sailor, and the three went into the woods to gather wild-flowers.

So the first day passed, and the next, and the one after, Dona rejoicing in her new-found freedom. The days were glorious and long; the children were becoming brown and healthy. Even Henrietta was losing her town ways, and was willing to run with bare feet on the grass, to play games and to roll on the ground as James did, like a young animal.

They were playing in this way one afternoon, jumping around and falling over Dona, who lay on her back with her dress and hair in mad disorder (the disapproving Prue safely inside the house), warm and happy and foolish with the sun. Suddenly she heard the sound of a horse coming

towards the house, and then a great noise in the courtyard, followed by the loud call of the great bell. And worse and worse, there was William coming towards her on the grass, and a stranger following him, a large fat man with a red face and ugly swollen eyes, his wig[1] over-curled, striking at his legs with his gold-topped stick.

"Lord Godolphin to see you, my lady," said William solemnly, not in the least disturbed by her appearance, so untidy, so unladylike. She rose to her feet at once, trying to straighten her dress and her hair: how annoying, how dare he come and break in on her. Then she smiled and said: "I am delighted to see you," at which he bowed solemnly and made no reply. She led the way into the house, catching sight of herself in the looking-glass on the wall; there was a string of flowers behind her ear; she did not care; she left it there. They sat down on chairs and looked awkwardly at each other, while Lord Godolphin bit at the gold top of his stick.

"I heard you were here," he said, "and I considered it a duty, or rather a pleasure, to make a visit as soon as possible. It is many years since you and your husband came to Navron. In fact, I may say you have become strangers. I knew Harry very well when he lived here as a boy."

"Indeed," said Dona, unable to take her eyes off the lump at the side of his nose; she had only just noticed it. How unfortunate, poor man. And she looked away quickly for fear that he should realise that she was looking, and "Yes," he continued, "I may say that I used to count Harry as among my dearest friends. But since his marriage we have seen so little of him; he spends his time in London."

He blames me, she thought, very naturally, of course, and "I am sorry to say that Harry is not with me," she told him. "I am alone here with my children."

"That is a great pity," he said, and she answered nothing. What was there to say?

"My wife would have come with me," he continued, "but

[1] Wig: false hair. (It was the fashion at that time for men to wear wigs like those worn today by judges in England.)

"Lord Godolphin to see you, my Lady."

she does not enjoy very good health at the moment. In short . . ." He paused, uncertain how to continue, and Dona smiled. "I quite understand. I have two small children myself," at which he became even more red, and bowed. "We hope for a son," he said, and "Of course," said Dona, unable again to take her eyes off the lump on his nose. How terrible for his wife. But Godolphin was talking again, saying something about his wife being glad to welcome her at any time, there were so few neighbours, and so on, and so on. How dull and heavy he was, thought Dona; was there no middle way between this solemn ceremonious stupidity and the careless evil of Rockingham? Would Harry become like this if he lived at Navron? "I was hoping," Godolphin was saying, "that Harry would give us some help down here. You have heard of our trouble, no doubt."

"I have heard nothing," said Dona.

"No? Perhaps you are too far away here for news to reach you, though there has been a great deal of talk about it. We have suffered more than we can bear from the actions of a pirate.[1] Goods of great value have been lost at Penryn and along the coast. The property of a neighbour of mine was attacked a week or so ago."

"How annoying," said Dona.

"It is more than annoying. It is disgusting!" declared Godolphin, his face becoming redder and his eyes coming farther out than ever, "and nobody knows how to deal with it. I have sent complaints to London and get no reply. They send us a few soldiers from Bristol, but they are useless. No, I can see that I and the other land-owners in this part of the country will have to join together and deal with the danger. It is very unfortunate that Harry is not at Navron, very unfortunate."

"Can I do anything to help you?" asked Dona, pressing her nails into her hands to stop herself from smiling: he looked so angry, almost as if he blamed her for the deeds of the pirate.

[1] Pirate: a sea robber.