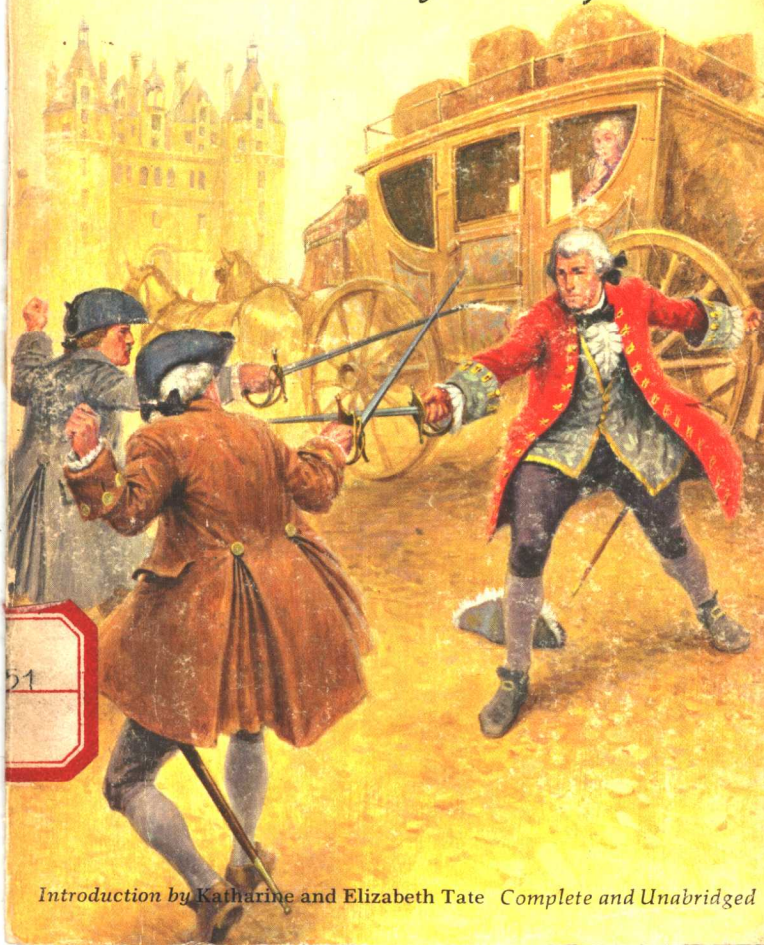


BOOTH TARKINGTON

Monsieur Beaucaire



The Beautiful Lady



Introduction by Katharine and Elizabeth Tate Complete and Unabridged

Monsieur Beaucaire

AND

The Beautiful Lady

BOOTH TARKINGTON



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To H. T. J.

B. T.

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ISBN: 0-8049-0158-9 MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE & THE BEAUTIFUL LADY

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BOOTH TARKINGTON

Introduction

ALTHOUGH known chiefly for his American characters, like Penrod and Alice Adams, Booth Tarkington in *Monsieur Beaucaire* and *The Beautiful Lady* deals with foreign characters and foreign scenes.

Monsieur Beaucaire is laid in eighteenth-century Bath, the famous English resort ruled over by Beau Nash, a pattern of propriety who conducted the public balls with a fine blend of splendor and decorum. In Bath, the reader meets a young French gambler, M. Beaucaire, who requires the seedy Duke of Winterset to introduce him to a reigning beauty, Lady Mary Carlisle. Posing as the Duc de Chateaurien, Beaucaire pays court to the lady and apparently wins her favor, until the vengeful Winterset proclaims him an imposter. Beaten by the Duke's minions, Beaucaire disappears, but shortly returns in his true guise, now a cousin of the French king, Louis XV, and holder of a list of titles so long that "it take' a strong man two day' to say all of them." The effect of his true identity

upon Lady Mary and Beaucaire's 'retort courteous' form the climax of the story.

Disguised identity and true worth provide also the main themes of *The Beautiful Lady*. This time, it is a first-person account, the narrator, Ansolini, being a young Italian of gentle birth and breeding, but in desperate financial straits. He appears first "as a living advertizement of the least amusing ballet in Paris." He is clad in fine clothes, but his head is shaved and painted in "a most singular advertizing," to promote the revue of the Théâtre Folie-Rouge. Sitting in profound shame at a table in the Café de la Paix, he hears the laughter and jeering caused by his appearance, and catches a contemptuous glance from his half-brother, Prince Antonio Caravacioli. (Ansolini hopes Caravacioli has not recognized him; anyway, at the moment, it hardly matters.) Dejected, with downcast eyes, Ansolini perceives henceforth only the lower limbs of the passers-by. Presently, "this divine skirt presented its apparition to me. A pair of North-American trousers accompanied it." The two beings thus represented soon turn into major characters in Ansolini's drama. The trousers belong to young Lambert Rufus Poor, Jr., and the skirt to Alice Landry, the young lady Poor has courted in vain. Ansolini becomes involved in their relationship, which eventually includes his rascally half-brother, Prince Caravacioli. The story moves to Lucerne, to Milan, and, last, to Naples. In a big disclosure-scene, the issue between Ansolini and Caravacioli and the true character of the prince are both clarified. Young love wins the day, and a more promising future looms ahead, too, for the gentle and generous Ansolini. His own tender sentiments about *The Beautiful Lady* play a muted, faintly mournful second fiddle to the main romance.

These two short novels are early works of Tarkington. *Monsieur Beaucaire*, first published in 1900, has had a wide-ranging success in three forms: as fiction, as a play and as a film. The historic setting and the French characters may have been partly inspired by two famous stories of Robert Louis Stevenson: *A Lodging for the Night* and *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*. In writing highly romantic fiction, Tarkington was following a literary mode very popular in his formative years. He admired the swashbuckling romances of Dumas and enjoyed Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. Though nothing like Twain's comic spirit appears in the two early Tarkington tales, humor is not entirely absent. In fact, he even manages a bi-lingual pun. Ansolini, speaking of his quest for a job at the theater, says:

Knowing the English tongue as I do, I may afford the venturesomeness to play upon it a little; I asked for bread and they offered me not a rôle, but a sandwich!

In later works, Tarkington mined a broad vein of popular humor. His *Penrod* introduced an imaginative twelve-year-old whose normal habitat, at home and at school, seemed to be hot water. Three volumes were required by the public appetite for *Penrod*, and *Penrod* himself, though not a rival of Huck Finn, in the phrase of Edward Wagenknecht, "comes close to folklore." Tarkington's *Seventeen* created Willie Baxter, an adolescent smitten by a visiting charmer, Miss Lola Pratt, who talks incessant baby-talk to him and to her pet-dog, almost indistinguishably. *Seventeen* had the same sort of success as *Monsieur Beaucaire*. It was made into a play and a film, and—as late as 1951—into a musical comedy.

Though exotic romance and farce-comedy brought him lasting renown, Tarkington's serious fiction began and ended, as it were, at home. His first published work was a novel called *The Gentleman from Indiana*. The title seems appropriate for the author himself. It was in Indianapolis, Indiana, that Tarkington was born, on July 29, 1869. Christened Newton Booth—his first name is rarely used—he was the son of a lawyer and legislator, and grew up in a respected and prosperous family. Tarkington was educated at Phillips Exeter, Purdue and Princeton. He had a considerable talent for drawing and caricature, and thought of a career in art. Later, his eye for visual detail and visual impressions helped him to sketch his literary characters and their settings.

Instead of becoming a professional artist, Tarkington chose to write, and achieved early success both as a novelist and as a playwright. His fiction appeared frequently in the popular magazines of his time. Sketching remained his pastime, and he became a collector of paintings and art objects, some of them gathered during his travels in Europe. Though married twice, he had no children. Much of his affection was invested in his sister and his nephews, and his letters to the nephews, written during his first trip to Europe, appeared after Tarkington's death, in a volume called *Your Amiable Uncle*.

Tarkington viewed Europe as an American bred in the democratic tradition and consequently disturbed by what he deemed undue American veneration for European titles. In *The Beautiful Lady*, Ansolini says of Americans:

And myself, to my astonishment, I had often seen parties of these republicans become all ears and whispers when somebodies called a prince or a countess

passed by. Their reverence for age . . . had often surprised me by its artlessness, and of all strange things in the world, I have often heard *them* admire old customs and old families. It was strange for me to listen, when I had believed that their land was the only one where happily no person need worry to remember who had been his great-grandfather.

From Europe, Tarkington wrote to his nephews:

When you speak of an 'old family,' you mean that it is an unenterprising family; sticks like a mud turtle to one place, because it is too fat, or too stupid, or too timid to try any other place.

Then he described to them the 'old' families of Capri who have lived two thousand years in the same place and are employed as dishwashers in the hotels.

The scenes of *The Beautiful Lady* are places Tarkington visited on this first European trip. From Capri he wrote to his sister:

Over here, if you stay awhile, in this gentle, excitable, feverish, decadent, lovely corner of the world, you learn to care for soft, faded, quiet, reminiscent poetic effects . . . a strip of gray and a bit of dull silver.

The skirt which offers his first glimpse of *The Beautiful Lady* is "a strip of gray," a color which he favors in other stories also.

In Tarkington's view, the snobbery observed by Ansolini is not confined to Americans. He describes an Englishman's view of Americans: "They were noisy, without real confidence in themselves; they were restless and merely imitative, instead of inventive." In *Monsieur Beaucaire*, Tarkington ridicules an English social climber, who pretends to have visited a non-existent chateau. "Mr. Bicksit . . . dared not,

for his fame's sake, have failed to have seen all things and had visited Chateaurien under the present Duke's father."

In *The Beautiful Lady*, Prince Caravacioli is described as a type of several evils: vanity, selfishness and fortune-hunting, while the young Americans are mere innocents abroad, in the tradition of Mark Twain (after a fashion) and the early Henry James.

Except for one term in the legislature, Tarkington's life in Indiana was devoted to writing. Though he wrote many plays, he is best known for the novels, whose titles include two Pulitzer prize-winners: *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Alice Adams*. Most of his settings are in the Middle West, and the vein is realistic, with occasional touches of melodrama. In the view of some critics, his best work is *Alice Adams*, a study of an engaging young girl and the crash of her matrimonial hopes. Tarkington admired the French masters, Balzac and Daudet, and was undoubtedly influenced by their combination of realism and romance. In addition to the two Pulitzer awards, Tarkington was the first recipient of the Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters for "general distinction in the field of literature." This medal was awarded in 1943, three years before his death.

The best people in all of Tarkington's stories are, like Beaucaire and Ansolini, primarily concerned with conflicts between true values and false ones, rather than with deep-seated psychological struggles. He urges an appreciation of honesty, generosity and kindness, above wealth or rank. Some critics have felt that, with the talent he possessed, he ought to have written books of greater tragic significance. Instead, he de-

scribed life as he saw it, with sentiment, patience and humor.

Monsieur Beaucaire carries a dedication to Tarkington's "dear sister," Haute Tarkington Jameson, which says, in part:

While . . . I have ever observed your courtesy towards a person in poor raiment to be of an even finer quality than your treatment of a gentleman in a fine coat, yet no one conversant with your character could fail to be aware of the mighty liking you have for a pretty fellow in brocades and satin, with brilliants shining from every buckle.

It is Beaucaire the man—not the prince—whom the story celebrates. Yet Tarkington's own "mighty liking" for the brocades and the satin, for the glitter of the scene, infuses the work, and communicates itself with irresistible zest to the reader.

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Monsieur Beaucaire



CHAPTER 1

THE YOUNG Frenchman did very well what he had planned to do. His guess that the Duke would cheat proved good. As the unshod half-dozen figures that had been standing noiselessly in the entry way stole softly into the shadows of the chamber, he leaned across the table and smilingly plucked a card out of the big Englishman's sleeve.

"Merci, M. le Duc!" he laughed, rising and stepping back from the table.

The Englishman cried out, "It means the dirty work of silencing you with my bare hands!" and came at him.

"Do not move," said M. Beaucaire, so sharply that the other paused. "Observe behind you."

The Englishman turned, and saw what trap he had blundered into; then stood transfixed, impotent, alternately scarlet with rage and white with the vital shame of discovery. M. Beaucaire remarked, indicating the silent figures by a polite wave of the hand, "Is it not a compliment to monsieur that I procure six large men to subdue him? They are quite devote' to me, and monsieur is alone. Could it be that he did not wish even his lackeys to know he play with the yo'ng Frenchman who Meestaire Nash does not like in the

pomp-room? Monsieur is unfortunate to have come on foot and alone to my apartment."

The Duke's mouth foamed over with chaotic revilement. His captor smiled brightly, and made a slight gesture, as one who brushes aside a boisterous insect. With the same motion he quelled to stony quiet a resentful impetus of his servants toward the Englishman.

"It's murder, is it, you carrion!" finished the Duke.

M. Beaucaire lifted his shoulders in a mock shiver. "What words! No, no, no! No killing! A such word to a such host! No, no, not mur-r-der; only disgrace." He laughed a clear, light laugh with a rising inflection, seeming to launch himself upon an adventurous quest for sympathy.

"You little devilish scullion" spat out the Duke.

"Tut, tut! But I forget. Monsieur has pursue' his studies of deportment amongs' his fellow-countrymen."

"Do you dream a soul in Bath will take your word that I—that I——"

"That M. le Duc de Winterset had a card up his sleeve?"

"You pitiful stroller, you stableboy, born in a stable——"

"Is it not an honor to be born where monsieur must have been bred?"

"You scurvy foot-boy, you greasy barber, you cut-throat groom——"

"Overwhelm!" The young man bowed with imperturbable elation. "M. le Duc appoint' me to all the office' of his househol'."

"You mustachioed fool, there are not five people of quality in Bath will speak to you——"

"No, monsieur, not on the parade; but how many come to play with me here? Because I will play always, night or day, for what one will, for any long, and al-ways fair, monsieur."

"You outrageous varlet! Every one knows you came to England as the French Ambassador's barber. What man of fashion will listen to you? Who will believe you?"

"All people, monsieur. Do you think I have not calculate', that I shall make a failure of my little enterprise?"

"Bah!"

"Will monsieur not reseate himself?" M. Beaucaire made a low bow. "So. We must not be too tire' for Lady Malbourne's rout. Ha, ha! And you, Jean, Victor, and you others, retire; go in the hallway. Attend at the entrance, François. So; now we shall talk. Monsieur, I wish you to think very cool. Then listen; I will be briefly. It is that I am well known to be all, entire' hones'. Gamblist? Ah, yes; true and mos' profitable; but fair, al-ways fair; every one say that. Is it not so? Think of it. And—is there never a w'isper come to M. le Duc that not all people belief him to play al-ways hones'? Ha, ha! Did it almos' be *said* to him las' year, after when he play' with Milor' Tappin'ford at the chocolate-house——"

"You dirty scandal-monger!" the Duke burst out. "I'll——"

"Monsieur, monsieur!" said the Frenchman. "It is a poor valor to insult a helpless captor. Can he retort upon his own victim? But it is for you to think of what I say. True, I am not reco'nize on the parade; that my frien's who come here do not present me to their ladies; that Meestaire Nash has reboff me in the pomp-

room; still, am I not known for being hones' and fair in my play, and will I *not* be belief', even I, when I lif' my voice and charge you aloud with what is already w'isper'? Think of it! You are a noble, and there will be some hang-dogs who might not fall away from you. Only such would be lef' to you. Do you want it tol'? And you can keep out of France, monsieur? I have lef' his service, but I have still the ear of M. de Mirepoix, and he know' I never lie. Not a gentleman will play you when you come to Paris."

The Englishman's white lip showed a row of scarlet dots upon it. "How much do you want?" he said.

The room rang with the gay laughter of Beaucaire. "I hol' your note' for seven-hunder' pound'. You can have them, monsieur. Why does a such great man come to play M. Beaucaire? Because no one else willin' to play M. le Duc—he cannot pay. Ha, ha! So he come' to good Monsieur Beaucaire. Money, ha, ha! What I want with money?"

His Grace of Winterset's features were set awry to a sinister pattern. He sat glaring at his companion in a snarling silence.

"Money? Pouf!" snapped the little gambler. "No, no, no! It is that M. le Duc, impoverish', somewhat in a bad odor as he is, yet command the *entrée* any-where—onless I—Ha, ha! Eh, monsieur?"

"Ha! You dare think to force *me*——"

M. Beaucaire twirled the tip of his slender mustache around the end of his white forefinger. Then he said: "Monsieur and me goin' to Lady Malbourne's ball to-night—M. le Duc and me!"

The Englishman roared, "Curse your impudence!"

"Sit quiet. Oh, yes, that's all; we goin' together."