

**POET AND PEER, IN
THREE
VOLUMES, VOL. III**

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Poet and peer, in three volumes, Vol. III by Hamilton Aïdé

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VOL. III.

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BY

HAMILTON AÏDÉ

AUTHOR OF

“PENRUDDOKE,” “RITA,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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POET AND PEER.

CHAPTER I.

IF by "history" is meant a bare narrative of events, the history of my poet-peer during the next year can be comprised in a sentence or two. To indicate the gradual changes which these successive months wrought in him and others, until we take up the story of his daily life once more, is a somewhat longer process, for which I must claim the reader's patience.

Immediately after his marriage, he took his bride to Athelstone, and there they remained, chiefly alone, the entire summer. Wilfred con-

stantly affirmed to himself, and in his letters to his mother, that he was perfectly happy. He rather gloried at first in the difficulties of his wife's position. There was novelty, and he liked novelty; there was excitement in watching for the first moves of the county magnates towards his bride, and he liked excitement of the combative kind. He read to her; he recited his poetry as they walked through the woods; he indoctrinated her with his various theories. She was only too willing to learn of him—to drink in the words of wisdom that fell from his lips; she was almost perfectly happy. Some neighbours called, some kept aloof. The first were prompted by a variety of human motives—respect for his father, kindness towards the foolish young man himself, a desire to shoot the Athelstone coverts the ensuing autumn, a curiosity to “interview,” and, if possible, turn into ridicule, this peasant-peereess. The faction of non-callers, on the other hand, was actuated by a singleness of purpose—that of resolving not to countenance so dangerous and immoral a precedent. If such offence against all social

laws was to be condoned, what was there to prevent their sons from marrying the gamekeepers' daughters, or, for the matter of that, their daughters from marrying the gamekeepers' sons?

You must draw a line somewhere. Once open the door, and you cross the threshold into sheer socialism. Lord Athelstone for two or three years, ever since his Oxford days, had been no better than a socialist, and this was the end of it!

The dowager had not visited her son's home—indeed, she had not been invited. The tactless manner in which she had opposed his marriage up to the very last rendered this almost inevitable. Time, the great healer of all wounds, would soften his mother's heart towards Nellie, and make her accept the inevitable, Wilfred hoped. At present, he could not subject his young wife to the pain and restraint of the dowager's presence. He did not go to London; he would not attend a single debate in the "Lords;" he was, as his mother piteously sighed, "sunk in the lap of idleness in the

country, as was only natural after his unfortunate marriage."

To two or three intimate friends, Lady Bannockburn among the rest, she spoke without reserve. The effect of her son's sacrifice to a mistaken sense of honour (for as such she persisted in regarding it, rather than as the passionate compensation to pique) could not but be prejudicial to a character which needed every stimulant to ambition, as his mother understood the word. He would not go to Court; he shrank from coming to take his proper place among his peers; he even avoided all the great county meetings, the agricultural shows, and other gatherings where his presence would be of weight. He made no effort to conciliate opinion by entertaining hospitably those who had called upon his wife; he preferred to wander about the woods with her, writing poetry, and satirizing the outside world. He was afraid even to ask *her*, his own mother, down to Athelstone. Such was the enervating result of his *mésalliance*, in the poor dowager's eyes.