

# **A PLOT AND A PEERAGE**

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A Plot and a Peerage by A. A.

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**A. A.**

# **A PLOT AND A PEERAGE**



A P L O T  
AND  
A P E E R A G E .

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Blame we this man his proud aspirings? No:  
Distinctions make a world of difference.  
What citizen would not kneel down to kiss  
The coronet, he loveth as his child?  
What tender parent, but is strangely mov'd,  
When his charm'd ear drinks in those liquid sounds—  
'Your daughter, sir—the Countess?'

TRUTH IN A TITLE.

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## PREFACE.

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THOUGH a great book has, by the patriarch of reviewers, in a fit of critical despondency, been classed among those stupendous evils, which the over-productiveness of human ingenuity inflicts alike upon the lover of romance, and the manufacturer of Manchester, we are not quite certain that a duodecimo, by virtue of its small specific gravity, is utterly incapable of producing that oppression on the chest of thought, from which a 'constant reader' must in silence often so acutely suffer. Such being our state of honest incertitude, we do not rest our anticipations of public support, solely upon our little cubic feet, nor consider ourselves deserving of a larger measure of indulgence than Tom Thumb, simply because our presence is so much less conspicuous. The proudest distinction known to the Lilliputian world, our youthful alacrity altogether repudiates—that of being 'little and old.' We

deem it important to make this candid avowal, lest we might be suspected of knowingly and wilfully flattering a popular delusion, which often renders it difficult to distinguish clearly between a merit and a misfortune.

There is one grave complaint, however, which we fear a discerning public will prefer against this plain, unvarnished tale—it is not illuminated by the popular torch of art. May we, with deferential delicacy, suggest to our indulgent patrons, that the omission is a negative compliment to their apprehensive sympathies?—confiding in which, we felt assured that our conceptions, however poor or infirm (being nevertheless of good character and repute), would meet with as prompt and cordial a recognition, as could be secured for them by the most graphic card of a mutual artistic acquaintance.

A. A.



LORD VISCOUNT PETERSHAM;  
OR,  
A PLOT AND A PEERAGE.

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CHAPTER I.

A politician, sir! your true chameleon—changing his many-coloured coats, as if with cunning malice to set philosophers together by the ears, and make them vow that black is not so black as oft 'tis painted; the hinges of whose soul, so lubricated, a breath will stir them.—  
POPULARITY.

It was a calm moon-lit night, and the little old-fashioned town of N—— lay sleeping in the partial shade of its venerable church spire, which, perched on a commanding eminence, threw a changeful mantle over the brazen image of St. Agatha, who, with her noseless infant in arms, occupied the centre of the market-place. The last misguided votary of Bacchus, under convoy of his censorious consort, with her oft-required hand-lantern, had been safely towed into his own peculiar alley; and the only specimen of animated nature which remained in the broader thoroughfare was a vagrant dog, who, with his fore legs stretched up to the balustrades of the ancient bridge, listened fearfully to the splash of the water-rats among the bulrushes, adjoining which a barge was moored, laden with nutritious grain, upon which they were probably meditating an organized invasion.

Suddenly, and while from the old clock-tower Time's herald, announcing the ghostly hour of midnight, imposed momentary silence upon the guardian owl of some neighbouring turret, there rattled over the balustraded bridge, whose irregular causeway was the object of universal execration, a travelling chaise, with four horses and two postillions, who, plying their whips with such fierce enthusiasm as to endanger the equilibrium of several doctors' ruby gas-lamps, turned with masterly skill the acute angle at the extremity of the high street, and pulled sharp up at the Doric portico of an hotel, over which the truncated effigy of a red lion, assuming a pugilistic attitude, might have served, had it not already fulfilled that office, as the figure-head of a man-of-war.

Notwithstanding the advanced hour, a tall, clerical-looking waiter, in deep mourning, was promptly in attendance; and, opening the door of the chaise, a gentleman alighted, wearing a Spanish cloak, with a newspaper in his hand, which he carried into the hotel, leaving the clerical waiter to exercise the high privilege of his calling by searching the pockets and cushions of the vehicle; from which he extracted a rosewood case that suggested the idea of pistols, an ivory paper-cutter, and a Court Guide.

During these operations, the knock-kneed ostler of the establishment was assisting the tri-coloured postboy—whose white hat contrasted nicely with his blue jacket and scarlet cheeks,—in unstrapping and transporting a buff leathern portmanteau, the brass plate to which announced not only the title, but, as if to strike all lingering professors of larceny with salutary awe, presented also the armorial bearing of Lord Viscount Petersham.

And now a serious difficulty arose: excepting a double-bedded room on the second floor, every chamber (and the Red Lion boasted of fifteen) was pre-occupied. For once the self-possessed waiter, whose powers, owing to his mistress being a widow, were nearly co-extensive with those of landlord, betrayed a painful feeling of irresolution. Never had truth appeared to him before in such odious colours;—to make a candid confession—to throw the house, as it were, upon his lordship's indulgence, and thereby risk a forfeiture of his lordship's patronage, was worse than death; it was dishonour. Necessity, however, is the parent of enterprise as well as of invention; and assuming an austere expression, which was in keeping with the rigidity of his white cravat, he ascended the grand staircase, and tapped softly at a blue-pannelled door. The operation produced its desired effect.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir," said the Major-domo, opening the chamber door in compliance with a half-smothered summons which issued from the cavernous recesses of a mountain of blankets.

"Hang your sorrow!—why did you, then?" grumbled the invisible.

"Why, sir," replied the head-waiter, clearing his throat to command an additional emphasis, "a nobleman has just arrived quite unexpectedly, sir, and all our single-bedded rooms are engaged by gentlemen of family, sir."

"Well," returned the unseen, "I'm not to blame for that, am I? Let your nobleman sleep on a couple of chairs, or on the hearth-rug; his bones are neither softer nor harder than other people's, I suppose."

"But, Mr. Shuttleworth," cried the mellow-toned