

# **THE LADY OF BRANTOME**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649623761

The Lady of Brantome by Percy Fitzgerald

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**PERCY FITZGERALD**

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OF BRANTOME**



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LADY OF BRANTOME

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," ETC.



London  
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1884

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THE  
LADY OF BRANTOME.

CHAPTER I.

"I SHOULD never turn back, or be repentant, if I failed; I should go through with it to the end—work out my fate, be it bad or good! No beginning once more, or returning like the prodigal. No! let me retire into some quiet corner, put my head under my broken wing, and die!"

This was Morna Brantome's profession of faith, often uttered vehemently at some astonished dinner party at her father's house. It is a key to the disposition of the young lady, before whose eyes was a sort of indistinct ideal of life, hopeless to be looked for in the life she herself was destined to lead. An ignoble one

it seemed to her, and the very worst fashion of chronicling small beer; while sisterhoods, district visiting, and other serious departments were never likely to languish for want of followers.

Morna Brantome, the only daughter of Sir John Brantome, of Brantome House, was a handsome, Greek-faced, thoughtful girl. On account of this "thoughtfulness," indeed, many were rather "shy" of her, as it is called; and she was, perhaps, regarded with what Fielding calls "a distant and awful respect." Still, she was interesting, from her fitful impulsiveness, having, for instance, a vehement admiration for persons she had never seen; for some poet, for instance, who had written wild and weird lines that had taken hold of her sympathies. Her father was one of those hale, gentlemanly squires who delighted in the country and in hunting, was ever neatly dressed and neatly trimmed, with a cordial

manner to all, but highly aristocratic in his ideas; his wife, now long dead, had been "Lady Mary," an earl's daughter, coming of one of the great governing Tory families. She had given her daughter this rather uncommon name, being of a romantic turn, and at the time of her illness was whiling away the weary hours with "the Works of Ossian" in which she found this melodious name. From her Morna inherited this heroic strain.

Sir John's estate was heavily mortgaged, but this appeared to make little difference in his mode of living, which was as lavish and sumptuous as though he did not owe a shilling: a state of things which suggests some ancient building on the verge of tumbling down, but which is left alone, and continues secure enough, owing to the serious character of the repairs that would be necessary.

The standing members of the household were the father and daughter, with a worthy



maiden aunt, Miss Hester Brantome ; but, like the *cadre* of a regiment, this could be augmented to the fullest establishment by profuse invitations to guests, for shooting and hunting parties, and sometimes for theatricals, of which Morna Brantome was passionately fond. It may be added here that the family name furnished our heroine with much chivalric association, and she took pride in tracing it back to the quaint and amusing old French chronicler.

Sir John never relished what he called her "exhibitions," when, on the pressure of friends and admirers, she would stand forth and recite, in picturesque fashion, Lord Lytton's fine "Aux Italiens," or the well-trodden "Bridge of Sighs," or some piece which seemed to represent her *principles*, and into which she put her very soul. More annoyed still was her father at what he called her "Radical notions," and he did not soon forget the occasion when

he had the Lord Lieutenant of his county and other "grandeurs" to dinner; when during a lull in the conversation the melodious tones of his daughter were heard expressing her theories on the arrogance of caste, a favourite topic with her,—the oppression of the poor by the rich.

"Mr. Smith, our neighbour, last year stopped a path—a right of way. I warned him. I told him, 'If you will not mend it, it will be mended for you.' So it *was* done in the night. It was these fatal claims of caste that brought about the French Revolution."

"Terrible heresies these," said her shocked neighbour.

"Is it not," she went on, "better to descend yourself than to let others come up? There is little difference between first and second class, or between second and third class, on a railway; yet what a gulf is set up between first and third."

"So, on a race day," a cynical guest struck in, "Miss Brantome would *invite* the roughs into her first-class carriage."

She answered, laughing, "You will then have only a few. Better than having them breaking in *en masse* and standing or sitting on the other passengers. We have enough of rising in the world; it would be a great change if we tried going down instead."

"The lower class have a warm advocate in you."

"How I loathe the term!" she answered vehemently. "There are no lower classes in *that* sense. Heaven knows there are plenty of high travellers in the third class, and low ones, as they are called, in the first."

"Where do the hounds meet on Monday?" asked Sir John Brantome abruptly.

This little scene gives a fair idea of what Morna's disposition was. It was enacted, as may be conceived, to interchanged glances of