

**TALES AND NOVELS. IN
EIGHTEEN VOLUMES, VOL.
IX. CONTAINING TALES OF
FASHIONABLE LIFE. VOL. IV**

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Tales and Novels. In Eighteen Volumes, Vol. IX. Containing Tales of Fashionable Life. Vol. IV
by Maria Edgeworth

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MARIA EDGEWORTH

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MARIA EDGEWORTH.

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VOL. IX.

CONTAINING

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FASHIONABLE LIFE.

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1832.

THE ABSENTEE.

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CHAPTER I.

"ARE you to be at lady Clonbrony's gala next week?" said lady Langdale to Mrs. Dareville, whilst they were waiting for their carriages in the crush-room of the opera-house.

"O yes! every body's to be there, I hear," replied Mrs. Dareville. "Your ladyship, of course?"

"Why, I don't know; if I possibly can. Lady Clonbrony makes it such a point with me, that I believe I must look in upon her for a few minutes. They are going to a prodigious expence on this occasion. Soho tells me the reception rooms are all to be new furnished, and in the most magnificent style."

"At what a famous rate those Clonbronies are dashing on," said colonel Heathcock. "Up to any thing."

"Who are they?—these Clonbronies, that one hears of so much of late?" said her grace of Torcaster. "Irish absentees, I know. But how do they support all this enormous expence?"

"The son *will* have a prodigiously fine estate when some Mr. Quin dies," said Mrs. Dareville.

"Yes, every body who comes from Ireland *will*

have a fine estate when somebody dies," said her grace. "But what have they at present?"

"Twenty thousand a year, they say," replied Mrs. Dareville.

"Ten thousand, I believe," cried lady Langdale.

"Ten thousand, have they?—possibly," said her grace. "I know nothing about them—have no acquaintance among the Irish. Torcaster knows something of lady Clonbrony; she has fastened herself by some means, upon him; but I charge him not to *commit* me. Positively, I could not for any body, and much less for that sort of person, extend the circle of my acquaintance."

"Now that is so cruel of your grace," said Mrs. Dareville, laughing, "when poor lady Clonbrony works so hard, and pays so high, to get into certain circles."

"If you knew all she endures, to look, speak, move, breathe, like an Englishwoman, you would pity her," said lady Langdale.

"Yes, and you *can't* conceive the *peens* she *teekes* to talk of the *teebles* and *cheers*, and to thank Q, and with so much *teeste* to speak pure English," said Mrs. Dareville.

"Pure cockney, you mean," said lady Langdale.

"But does lady Clonbrony expect to pass for English?" said the duchess.

"O yes! because she is not quite Irish *bred and born*—only bred, not born," said Mrs. Dareville. "And she could not be five minutes in your grace's company before she would tell you that she was *Henglish*, born in *Hoxfordshire*."

"She must be a vastly amusing personage—I should like to meet her, if one could see and hear her incog.," said the duchess. "And lord Clonbrony, what is he?"

"Nothing, nobody," said Mrs. Dareville: "one never even hears of him."

"A tribe of daughters too, I suppose?"

"No, no," said lady Langdale; "daughters would be past all endurance."

"There's a cousin, though, a miss Nugent," said Mrs. Dareville, "that lady Clonbrony has with her."

"Best part of her, too," said colonel Heathcock—"d——d fine girl!—never saw her look better than at the opera to-night!"

"Fine complexion! as lady Clonbrony says, when she means a high colour," said lady Langdale.

"Miss Nugent is not a lady's beauty," said Mrs. Dareville. "Has she any fortune, colonel?"

"'Pon honour, don't know," said the colonel.

"There's a son, somewhere, is not there?" said lady Langdale.

"Don't know, 'pon honour," replied the colonel.

"Yes—at Cambridge—not of age yet," said Mrs. Dareville. "Bless me! here is lady Clonbrony come back. I thought she was gone half an hour ago!"

"Mamma," whispered one of lady Langdale's daughters, leaning between her mother and Mrs. Dareville, "who is that gentleman that passed us just now?"

"Which way?"

"Towards the door.—There now, mamma, you

can see him. He is speaking to lady Clonbrony—to miss Nugent—now lady Clonbrony is introducing him to miss Broadhurst."

"I see him now," said lady Langdale, examining him through her glass; "a very gentlemanlike looking young man, indeed."

"Not an Irishman, I am sure, by his manner," said her grace.

"Heathcock!" said lady Langdale, "who is miss Broadhurst talking to?"

"Eh! now really—'pon honour—don't know," replied Heathcock.

"And yet he certainly looks like somebody one should know," pursued lady Langdale, "though I don't recollect seeing him any where before."

"Really now!" was all the satisfaction she could gain from the insensible, immoveable colonel. However, her ladyship, after sending a whisper along the line, gained the desired information, that the young gentleman was lord Colambre, son, only son, of lord and lady Clonbrony—that he was just come from Cambridge—that he was not yet of age—that he would be of age within a year; that he would then, after the death of somebody, come into possession of a fine estate by the mother's side; "and therefore, Cat'rine, my dear," said she, turning round to the daughter who had first pointed him out, "you understand we should never talk about other people's affairs."

"No, mamma, never. I hope to goodness, mamma, lord Colambre did not hear what you and Mrs. Dareville were saying!"