

**THE HEIRESS OF
HADDON**

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The Heiress of Haddon by Wm. E. Doubleday

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—
1882.

PREFACE.

THE story of Dorothy Vernon's romantic wooing and marriage is known in some legendary form or other all the kingdom over, but more especially in the Midlands, and in Derbyshire, where this interesting drama was enacted some 300 years ago. Few people, however, know more than the merest outline of the event, which is here detailed in a highly interesting form, and offered as a complete and historical romance.

Probably nothing more fascinating exists in the annals of English History than the story, telling how the estates of Haddon became the property of the ducal house of Rutland. This is here fully related, together with an account of the trials which Dorothy and her lover had to undergo, in a courtship which was forbidden on the one hand by the lady's father, Sir George Vernon—the "King of the Peak"—and opposed by the machinations of a jealous lover on the other.

Much of the interest of the tale is centred in the neighbourhood of Haddon and the surrounding district, and scenes of importance are also enacted at Derby, Matlock, Rowsley, Dale Abbey, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, London, and Nottingham. In the course of the story many Old English Customs of that period are described.

The story is already favourably known, having appeared in serial form in the *High Peak News*.

W. E. D.



The Heiress of Haddon.


CHAPTER I.

AT FIRST SIGHT.

There is a spirit brooding o'er these walls
That tells the record of a bygone day,
When 'mid the splendour of these courtly halls,
A pageant shone, whose gorgeous array
Like pleasure's golden dream has passed away.

ANON.

Where both deliberate the love is slight;
Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?
MARLOWE.

 MID the hills of Derbyshire which cluster around the Peak there rises, in a lovely dale slyly peeping out from behind the surrounding trees, the fine old pile of Haddon Hall.

Perhaps the old shire of Derby, with its many rich examples, can present to view nothing equal in historic and legendary interest to this old mansion. Its turrets and towers, its windows and its walls, its capacious kitchens, and its fine halls and banqueting rooms—unspoiled by the hands of the "restorer"—have gained for it the almost unchallenged position of being the finest baronial residence which still exists.

There stand the grey old walls whose battlements have proudly bidden defiance to the storms and blasts of half a thousand winters, and there still stand the gnarled old trees which have gently swayed to and fro while many a baron has ruled the Hall, and whose leaves after growing in superlative beauty, seeming to partake in the grandeur and pride of the "King of the Peak," have drooped and fallen, after having made, with their rich autumnal tints, a succession of beautiful

living pictures which have delighted the lords and ladies of Haddon for almost twenty generations.

When William the Conqueror had invaded England and had succeeded in seating himself upon his somewhat insecure throne, he began to reward his followers with liberal grants of the land he had won. Among these fortunate individuals was one, William Peveril, said to be a son of the Conqueror, and to him, in common with many other estates in and around Derbyshire, was given the manor of Haddon. Part of the fabric which was then erected is still standing, and it is surmised by some that traces are still left of a previous Saxon erection. In the year 1154, the estate was forfeited to the Crown, and it was granted by King Henry II. to the Avenals, from which family, two hundred years later, it was transferred by marriage to the Vernons.

Its fate has been strangely wrapped up in the history of its women, for as it passed from the Avenals to the Vernons by marriage, so again, three centuries later, by a similar process, it passed from the Vernon family to the Rutland, which ever since has retained it in its possession.

Everything around, both inside and out, is fragrant with interest. Everything seems to breathe out the spirit of departed ages. It is one vast relic of "Merrie England's" bygone splendour.

It was the old original "Palace of the Peak," nor was it unworthy of the name. The glory of many royal palaces, of its time, indeed might well have paled beside its splendour, and as a matter of fact the baron of Haddon was a king within his own domain, who wielded a power which few around dared to question, and fewer still resist. Its hospitality was lavish, as the poor of a neighbourhood of no small radius knew full well; and the vastness and riches of the property which accompanied the ownership of Haddon, was enough to maintain its lord in an almost regal state.

What happy scenes have taken place within its walls! How many fair ladies have stepped off the riding stone outside its gate, helped by the gallant, but superfluous aid of chivalrous knights, each striving to outdo the others by gentle acts of courtesy! What brilliant cavalcades have issued from its portals! How many merry hunting parties have started from its iron-studded gate; and what jovial monster feasts have taken place within its rooms. If walls could speak, what a tale would Haddon have to tell.

The spring of the year of grace 1567 had just commenced, and the trees were beginning to adorn themselves once again in

their green array, when the Knight of Haddon, Sir George Vernon, led out a merry company for the first hawking expedition of the year. The winter had been unusually long, and more than extraordinarily severe; and whilst the knight and his sturdy friends had been enabled to pursue their sport by submitting to a more than usual amount of inconvenience, yet the ladies had been almost entirely confined within the limits of the Hall. Winter at Haddon was by no means a dreary imprisonment, for *fêtes* and balls were continually taking place, and however rough the weather might be, and whatever the condition of the miserable tracts which in those days did duty for roads, there were not a few cavaliers, both old and young, who would gladly adventure the discomforts of a journey to Haddon, even were it to be only rewarded by a smile, or perchance a dance with the two daughters of the host, whose beauty, though of different types, many were ready to swear, and to maintain it, if need be, at the point of the sword, could not be surpassed in all the counties of the land.

Indeed, the beauty of Margaret and Dorothy was almost as famous as the reputation of the "King of the Peak" himself, and the old knight, owner as he was of immense wealth, was often heard to assert that his two daughters were the greatest treasures he possessed.

Many eyes were cast upon these two fair maidens, and many hearts were laid at their feet. Margaret, the elder, was already being wooed by Sir Thomas Stanley, and some gossips even went so far as to say that she had already plighted her troth to him. The younger sister, however, had kept her heart intact, and in spite of the persuasions of Sir George and the threats of Lady Maude, had refused to comply with their request to accept Sir Henry de la Zouch as her betrothed.

Although by no means dreary, yet the continual round of winter feasts had at last begun to assume an aspect of staleness, and lords and ladies alike had for some time past been eagerly anticipating the time when they might once more pursue their noble sports. As the winter had gradually withdrawn its ice and snow, and occasional gleams of sunshine appeared, heralding the advent of spring, the excitement had increased. Dancing was discarded, the tapestry work was laid aside, and all with one mind began to make preparations for the coming excursions.

And now the long wished for day had come. The number of guests at the Hall had been largely augmented by fresh arrivals, and as the jovial baron looked round the table at the feast of the previous evening, he declared that a better company could not be found in all the land.

The scene as they started out was animated in the extreme. The ladies, in their many-coloured dresses, riding on horseback, were gracefully coquetting with the knights and squires who surrounded them and dutifully paid their court to them with all the reverence of a fast-departing chivalry.

The chase was to be on foot, and in the rear followed a number of pages, each leading his dogs and carrying his own as well as his master's jumping pole. Everything promised well. The turf had dried, after the recent floods, with a pleasing elasticity. The sun shone brilliantly upon the gold-trimmed jerkins of the hawks; and the hum of conversation, with the occasional outburst of merry ringing laughter, added to the tinkling of the sonorous little falcon bells, or the bark of the dogs every now and again as they ineffectually tried to break away from the leashes in which they were held, all tended to put the party in the best of spirits.

Dorothy Vernon, as usual, was surrounded by a circle of admirers, each of whom was anxious to bring himself under her especial notice by anticipating her wishes, or quickly fulfilling her slightest commands.

Sir Henry de la Zouch was there, as a matter of course. He was most assiduous in his attentions, and although it was plainly visible that his presence was as little appreciated as his suit, yet he still kept by her side.

"Methinks, fair demoiselle," he began, "thou art hardly so sprightly this morning as the occasion might warrant. Now Mistress Margaret there——"

"Aye, Margaret again, Sir Henry," interrupted the maiden; "thou art for ever placing me beside my sister Margaret. He bears too hardly upon a simple maiden, does he not, Sir John?"

Sir John de Lacey, a little fidgety old man on the wrong side of sixty, nervously played with his collar, and delighted at the opportunity thus afforded him of paying back a grudge of long standing, he summoned to his aid all the dignity he was capable of assuming, and declared that the whole of Sir Henry's conduct was ungallant to the last degree.

De la Zouch darted a look of intense wrath at the old man, but as the latter was yet re-arranging his collar the effort was lost.

"Nay, nay, sweet Dorothy," he said, "I meant to say naught that would vex thee, for I would have thee smile upon me and not frown; and if my words have not been pleasing to thee in the past I am sorry for it, and will endeavour to amend my ways in the future."

"Where do we go to-day?" asked Dorothy, not noticing his