

**ARISTOCRACY.  
A NOVEL**

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Aristocracy. A novel by Anonymous

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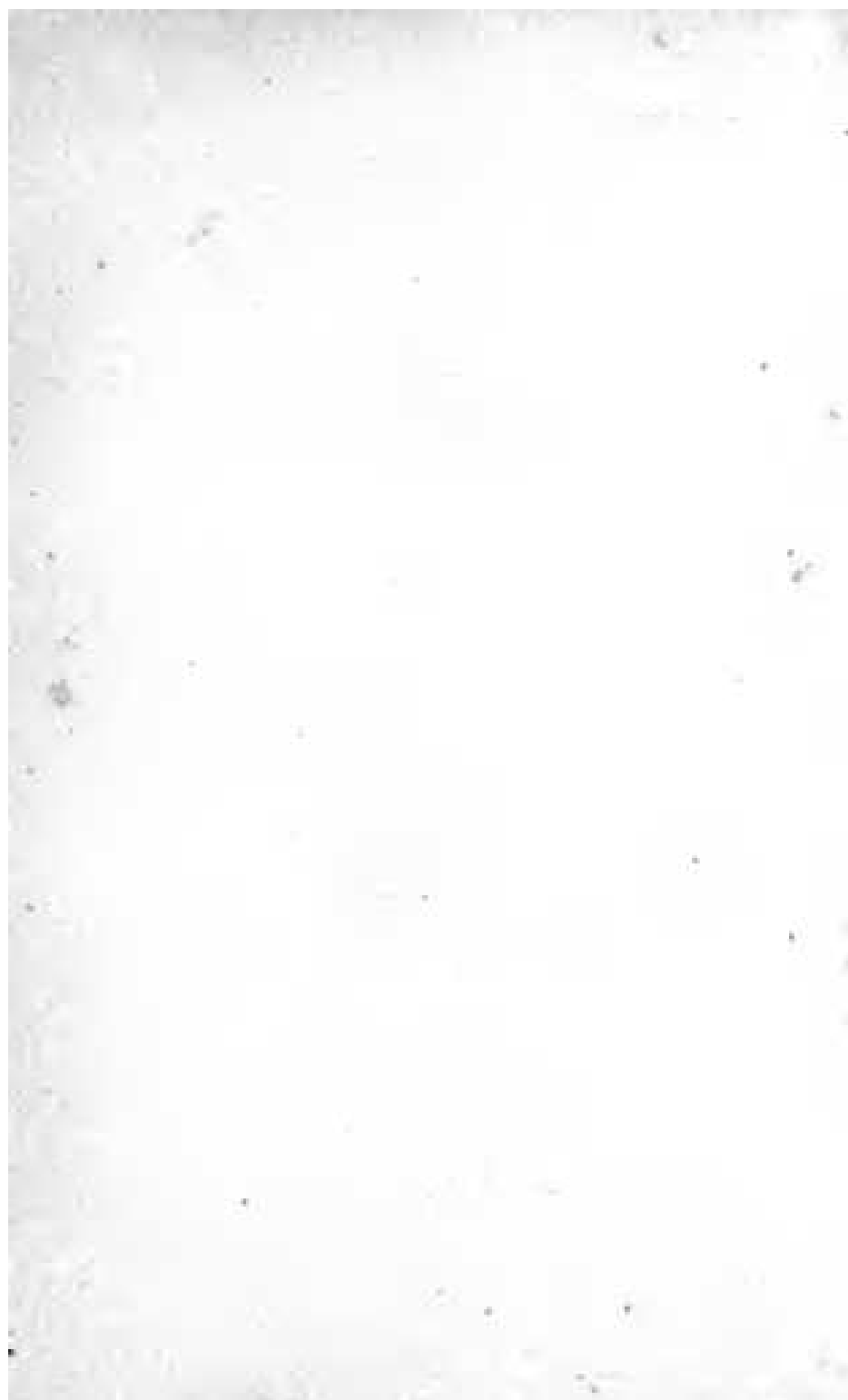
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**ANONYMOUS**

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A NOVEL**



ARISTOCRACY.



# ARISTOCRACY

*A NOVEL*



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# ARISTOCRACY.

## CHAPTER I.

It is half-past ten on a dull November morning at Ashwynwick \* Park, the seat of the Marquis of Oaktorrington, † in Hertfordshire. ‡

Ashwynwick is one of the show-places of the county—if, indeed, not of England—and shares fairly the local position of honor with Hatfield. The estate, some twenty-odd thousand acres in extent, has been in Lord Oaktorrington's family since the Conquest. An ancestor, the first of the English line, one Brian de Vesci, came over with William of Normandy, and thereafter faithfully attending him "in his wars," as the family chronicle put forth by Burke, that obliging servant of the British aristocracy, hath it, was granted the property by his royal master "in recognition of his services."

There are some ill-natured rumors current that these services consisted of those of valet and body-servant to the conqueror, combined on occasion with the

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\* Pronounced *Assick*.

† Pronounced *Otton*.

‡ Pronounced *Harfudsherr*.

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duties of cook. It was all, however, so long ago that the family has had time to considerably improve its condition. The house was built in the time of Queen Elizabeth, during whose reign the head of the family became a court favorite, and in due time was created a baron by the Virgin Queen. Its massive gray, moss-grown walls and ivy-covered gables of ancient days are relieved by the plate-glass windows and gas-lamps of modern times. It is a combination of past and present both in its exterior and interior. It has a picture-gallery, from whose walls scores of pointed-bearded and villainous-countenanced men, and pink-checked, immodestly *décolleté* women, look down upon you; a banqueting-hall whose carved-oak wainscot is lined with the armor of every knightly De Vesci who fought under his sovereign's banner from Cressy to Agincourt; and a haunted room, in which the ghost of the Sir Roderick de Vesci who was beheaded by Charles II on Tower Hill for treason, is wont to hold high jinks as the fit seizes him—just as it has a billiard room, a sanitary system of drainage, and a gasometer. The gardens, conservatories, and greenhouses cover ten acres of ground, and the pleasure-grounds twice as much more. The establishment is one of the grandest in the kingdom. There are between thirty and forty servants, irrespective of gardeners and game-keepers who, together, number as many more. In the stables and coach-houses which form a quadrangle round a paved yard, and resemble in their exterior a pretentious human residence more than an equine abode, are upward of thirty horses and a dozen carriages. And Ashwynwick is not Lord Oaktorington's only residence. He has, besides, two other country-

houses: Campsottin \* Court in Bedfordshire; and Tewtorlock † Towers in Devonshire; as well as a town-house in Eaton Square. He is the fourteenth baron (creation of Elizabeth, 1565), eighth viscount and earl (creation of Charles I, 1642), and fifth marquis (creation of William III, 1701) of his line, and from rent-roll, coal-mines, pensions, and invested money in the funds, is in receipt of the reputed income of one hundred and twenty thousand pounds per annum. So far as exalted rank, long line of ancestry, and the possession of large estates and this world's goods are concerned, he is as fair a sample of the five hundred and thirty-odd gentlemen who compose the peerage of Great Britain as one could pick out.

Breakfast has been over about a quarter of an hour, and the Marchioness of Oaktorrington is seated at her writing-table in her boudoir, reading again the letters she had but hastily glanced over at the breakfast-table. There is an air of solid comfort about the apartment, rather than gilded decoration and display. The walls and ceiling are not frescoed, and the furniture is plain, unvarnished oak like that of the rest of the house, and has—with the title, jewels, plate, pictures, and wine in the cellars—been in the family a very long time. A bright fire burns in the grate, and sheds a look as well as a sense of warmth over the room. Without, a chill November fog hangs about and clings to the leafless trees and sodden turf, and dims the window-panes into the resemblance of ground glass. The Marchioness has taken one letter from an envelope with a foreign stamp and postmark, and holds it long before her with

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\* Pronounced *Capston*.

† Pronounced *Tellück*.