

A CASTLE IN
BOHEMIA

A CASTLE IN BOHEMIA



BY
DAVID WHITELOW



THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD.
LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK

Государственная
БИБЛИОТЕКА
СССР
им. В. И. Ленина

м5004-55

CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

I. THE HONOURABLE HERBERT DISAP- PEARS	7
II. THE NEW WAITER AT THE "BELVOIR"	16
III. COUNT BORIS	28
IV. THE THRILL	34
V. THE KOSHER RESTAURANT	53
VI. RUDOLPH FERRINGER	72
VII. ENID	82
VIII. ON BOARD THE "MAGDA"	101
IX. AT THE CAFÉ KÖNIG	116

BOOK II.

I. GERNSTEIN	125
II. A LITTLE DINNER IN THE GATE ROOM	138
III. PICTURES IN THE FIRE	152
IV. THE RESCUE	159
V. IN THE CASTLE	170

VI. BERAUN	184
VII. THE RETURN	196
VIII. THE HOUSE ON THE MOLDAU	210
IX. THE GRAVE IN THE FOREST	218

BOOK III.

I. LADY BET—DIPLOMAT	227
II. THE SECRET	239
III. AN INVITATION FROM STEPHEN BARR	251
IV. THE GLASS OF BENEDICTINE	260
V. A TRAGEDY IN GRAFTON STREET	274
VI. CONCLUSION	281

A CASTLE IN BOHEMIA.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE HONOURABLE HERBERT DISAPPEARS.

THE description published in the Press on the morning of the tenth of January, 1911, was, in spite of its undoubted accuracy, calculated to give one a somewhat wrong impression of the person of the Honourable Herbert Epgrave. Fair complexion, average height, slight moustache and blue eyes do not suggest to the mind any great idea of manly strength.

In fact, nine persons out of ten who read at their breakfast tables the description of the missing scion of the house of Epgrave, would have passed that noble gentleman ten minutes later with never a suspicion that they had been within an ace of obtaining the very handsome reward offered by a doting parent to anyone who would supply such information as might lead to the return of an errant son to a certain desolate hearth in Berkeley Square.

Such facts as pertained to the disappearance, meagre as they undoubtedly were, were nevertheless perfectly clear. The Honourable Herbert Prudames Epgrave, third son of the Earl of Tregallick, had, upon the evening of the seventh of January, dined in company with two or three of his friends at the *Hôtel Belvoir*. These friends, however, had taken their departure at the close of the meal, leaving the Honourable Herbert alone with his coffee and his liqueur and his thoughts.

This fact, then, was well established, and would admit of no doubt—there was further evidence that was not quite so conclusive, but which might possibly have some bearing upon the case. Signor Frinelli, the manager of the *Belvoir*, spoke as to a waiter, a temporary hand, with whom he had had cause to expostulate regarding an undue familiarity with a certain diner, a fair young gentleman, whom Signor Frinelli had no doubt, from the description, had been the missing nobleman. Curiously enough, the waiter in question had not since put in an appearance, although there were awaiting him in the office two days' wages and a letter.

The hall porter of the Barbarians' Club spoke to seeing the Honourable Herbert in the foyer of the Club at nine o'clock upon the same evening, a statement, moreover, that was borne out by certain fellow members, the discrepancies in time being merely a matter of minutes. There had been nothing in the manner of Mr. Epgrave to suggest for one moment that the young gentleman was anything but normal, or that his disappearance from

the social firmament was in any way premeditated.

One person, and one person only, could be found who was in a position to add to the above information, and that person was Captain Reggie Darton, of the Guards. In an interview which the gallant officer accorded to a persistent member of the *Daily Courier*, Captain Darton stated that he had been one of the little party dining at the *Belvoir*, and although there had been nothing to raise suspicions as to the sanity of Mr. Epgrave, that gentleman had been somewhat strange and reckless in his manner, had complained of ennui and boredom, and had consumed rather more champagne than was his custom. He had refused to accompany the others after dinner to a place of amusement, and they had left him seated alone at the table. Signor Frinelli was quite right; their waiter had been a strange one, Captain Darton was an habitu   of the *Belvoir* and had never seen the man before—as to any undue familiarity with Mr. Epgrave, it must have taken place after Captain Darton and his friends had left the dining-room. During the meal the man's manner had been beyond reproach.

But that was not the last time that Captain Darton had seen the Honourable Herbert upon the evening of the seventh of January. It must, as far as the Guardsman could remember, have been a few minutes after eleven, when he had been entering the Barbarians, that a taxi had drawn up at the curb and Epgrave had alighted. He had shown some excitement in his manner and had requested the loan of a

hundred pounds. Darton had been able to accommodate his friend with sixty, handing over to him that amount mostly in notes, of which, unfortunately, he had no memoranda as to the numbers. Herbert had expressed his gratitude and had crushed the notes into his pocket uncounted. He had appeared satisfied, and after hurriedly drinking a whisky and seltzer, had bidden Captain Darton good night and had returned to the waiting taxi.

No, Captain Darton could offer no explanation to the reporter from the *Daily Courier*. It was not the first time that his pal, Epgrave, had been in the public eye, and there was little doubt but that he would turn up in a day or so chuckling at the consternation which he had caused. . . . Yes, it was a little strange that a gentleman should want to raise so large a sum of money late on a snowy night in mid-winter. . . . Perhaps Count Boris Posneff. . . .

The reporter from the *Daily Courier* had acted upon the gallant captain's suggestion and had hurried from the *Albany* to Park Lane. Sir Boris himself was not at home, but the reporter being a man who was most keen upon his work and possessed with an abundance of impudence and the staying powers of the limpet, had succeeded in obtaining a few minutes' speech with Miss Enid Posneff, the financier's niece, whose approaching marriage to the missing Honourable, all the world and his wife were looking forward to as one of the most brilliant functions of the near future. The reporter had learnt nothing, but an interview with Enid Posneff was in itself somewhat of a triumph, and from the insuffi-

cient straw at his disposal the *Daily Courier* man had been able to fashion a few journalistic bricks and to erect an attractive and romantic structure.

The suburban breakfast tables were delighted. Miss Posneff, "in whose large eyes could be seen the traces of a sleepless night," was able to throw no light upon the strange disappearance. She had received the representative of the Press in the "great drawing-room, rich in its treasures of painting and sculpture and articles of vertu." She had not seen her fiancé since the afternoon of the sixth, when they had driven together as far as Richmond in Mr. Epgrave's new car. The young lady had made "a pathetic figure, seated in the embrasure of one of the noble windows, looking out over the leafless trees of the Park. . . ."

All of which, together with a photograph of Miss Enid taken two years previously with her pet Siamese dog, may have proved interesting enough to the readers of the *Daily Courier*, but, it must be confessed, did little to clear up the mystery surrounding the disappearance of the Honourable Herbert Prudames Epgrave.

It was not alone the editorial staff of the *Courier* that made much of the strange event, for the Honourable Herbert was of a type beloved in Fleet Street. Since the days, but a few short years ago, when, as prime mover in a disgraceful but eminently entertaining "rag," he had been sent down from Baliol, the young man had scarcely allowed a month to pass without providing "copy" such as the public loves, and more than one editor had had cause to bless the

name of Epgrave as being the means of saving from utter stagnation what had promised to be a particularly dull season.

Indeed, there had been little that this versatile young sprig of nobility had left undone that could add records to the annals of sport or increase the mirth of nations. At the early age of six and twenty the world lay at the feet of the Honourable Herbert—a sucked orange. He had ridden his own horse to victory in a hotly-contested National, had figured, by no means discreditably, as an “unknown,” in a bout with the “Bermondsey Hope” at a fighting hall in Whitechapel, and had twice provided the runner up for the Waterloo Cup.

He had, at the express desire of his father, the Earl, and the landed gentry in the constituency of Stoke Epgrave, entered Parliament, and had, to the pride of his parents and of the aforesaid landed gentry, delivered himself in due season of a promising maiden speech upon the housing problem, which had been favourably commented upon by the Press of the party to which he had sworn allegiance, carefully ignored by the journals of the Opposition, and had brought a letter of subdued eulogy from the Premier himself. . . . And after that, for the remainder of a gruelling session the Honourable Herbert had been seen no more at Westminster.

Later, it transpired that upon the evening of the speech, he had turned into the club to drink a brandy and soda and, perhaps, to escape the congratulations of the lobby and the attentions of persistent journalists, and had met Eddie Drummond. It was not

Herbert's fault that Eddie should have been at that moment arranging the details of his shooting trip to Mombasa, nor that Eddie should be gifted with so persuasive a tongue. . . .

The pride of the Epgraves had returned to London in three months time, bronzed, and with one arm hanging helpless in a sling, and had expressed himself as somewhat hurt when his father passed over with scant notice the remarkably fine skins and trophies of the chase that his son had wrested from the wild places of the earth. The Earl's remarks had been cool and pointed, tinged with a fine sarcasm, and directed more to the fact of an Epgrave having deserted his post at the country's helm on the eve of an important division, than to the glories of big game shooting. A Party Whip is generally a man of resource, but even a man of resource is apt to find Mombasa a little inaccessible. . . .

Herbert had been duly impressed. He had not looked upon it in that light at all ; he was somewhat flattered to find that the august assembly at Westminster had missed him. The antlers and skins were packed away in a garret of the house in Berkeley Square, and their young owner threw himself with renewed vigour into the arena of political activity.

At the next election he was defeated in a three-cornered contest by a Labour candidate, and celebrated the occasion by ducking in the village pond a certain Socialist orator, who, had he been aware that the Honourable Herbert was among his audience, would perhaps have tempered his remarks upon the ancestral tree of the noble line of Epgrave

with a little discretion. The episode may be said to have closed the legislative career of the third son of the Earl of Tregallick.

The disappearance, therefore, of such a person as the irresponsible Herbert, whilst causing little wonder, provided a rich field for speculation. The wildest conjectures were rife, the most absurd rumours gained a ready credence. The missing gentleman had been seen in earnest conversation with a Lascar in Ratcliff Highway—had been a passenger on the night boat from Folkestone to Flushing—had been recognized dressed as a tramp upon the high road near Canterbury . . . here, there, and everywhere. . . .

And then, before the proverbial nine days allotted to wondrous happenings had passed, public anxiety was set at rest, and perhaps a certain amount of disappointment felt, by a short letter in the Press from the Earl of Tregallick himself, thanking in courteous terms the kindly efforts of the newspapers on behalf of his son. The nobleman begged to give notice of the withdrawal of his offer of a reward, information having come to hand which had, for the present, allayed the anxiety of the family, information which, being of a private nature, could be of no possible interest to the public.

All of which was far too vague and unsatisfactory to suit the *Daily Courier*, a journal which had ideas of its own upon the wants of the public. The paper considered that it had a duty to perform towards its readers, and performed that duty must be. The able reporter who had succeeded in interviewing Miss

Enid Posneff was despatched to haunt the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square, returning to Fleet Street by no means empty handed, as was evidenced by an amazing story in a subsequent issue of a cloaked woman who had been seen to drop a letter over the area railings of No. 101A, Berkeley Square, at midnight on the twelfth—which letter being opened by the Earl himself in the presence of the under-footman who had discovered it, had been found to contain a note in the undoubted handwriting of the Honourable Herbert, to the effect that he was in the best of health and that his family might expect him when they saw him, which would be in all probability within the next few days. . . . If, by any chance, he should be delayed, his relations and friends were, please, not to worry.

And if one were to substitute for the Earl and the under-footman, a certain Mrs. Jessie Macgreggor; for the cloaked woman, an ordinary middle-aged postman; and for midnight of the twelfth in Berkeley Square, the morning delivery in Belsize Gardens of the thirteenth . . . the *Daily Courier* would have been, for once, fairly near the truth.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW WAITER AT THE "BELVOIR."

Now, what really had happened was this :—

On the evening of the seventh, three days before the news of the disappearance of the Honourable Herbert had burst upon a startled world, that young gentleman was seated, as we know, with Captain Reginald Darton, in the luxurious dining-room of the *Hôtel Belvoir*. With them were Sir Harry Bridger and Nigel Mainwaring, two cadets up from Sandhurst, charming boys, both of them, but of no importance to this story.

The dinner had not been altogether a success. Herbert Epgrave, who in his character of host should have known better, had been moody and apt to regard the world through the frosted glass of cynicism, a point of view not calculated to impress two cadets up for a joy-jaut in town. In the handsome eyes of the Honourable Herbert one could trace a settled depression, and little lines of boredom had graven themselves about his brow and at the corners of his mouth.

There was nothing to account for it. The dinner had been excellent, the vintages old and rare, the society of Captain Darton and the two cadets, if not