

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU AND HER LETTERS FROM TURKEY

There are several reasons why the study of the life and letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is a particularly enjoyable one. To those of us who live here, her letters, written in the short year and a half that her husband was ambassador to Constantinople, and to which perhaps she owes the larger part of her fame, are of unfailing interest, giving as they do a most vivid picture of early eighteenth century Turkey. Her other letters as well, which were more numerous, are of considerable literary and historical ^{value} interest, for they were written in an excellent, well-rounded, English style and reflect admirably the thoughts, manners and opinions of her day. Her name has come down to us chiefly as a letter writer, but she has another very different claim to our admiration. She was the person who ~~first~~ introduced inoculation for smallpox into England, which practice she had ^{first observed} ~~learned of~~, in Turkey. She also was among the few eighteenth century women who advocated higher education for her sex. Through her influence she helped to form a public opinion that did not look down upon the pursuit of learning for a woman. But apart from these things, which were specific achievements, you like the woman herself. She had ^a character, full of contradictions, but always intriguing. You read her letters to find they are the revelation of ~~of~~ a really interesting person. She had her weaknesses, most of them those of an eighteenth century aristocrat living in court circles. She was spiteful and a little coarse; she had a sharp and caustic tongue; she was unpoetic,

arrogant and ambitious. On the other hand, she was industrious and painstaking, much more honest^s intellectually than many of her contemporaries and during the whole of her long life she never lost her passion for learning. She kept her mind alert. As you read her opinions today, you are convinced that she did not^t acquire them from others but that they ~~are~~^{were} the fruit of her own thought.

There was great diversity of opinion regarding her among her contemporaries. To some people she was merely a woman of fashion, a lover of gossip, who spent her leisure time making writing third rate poetry and writing loosely constructed letters. To others she was a bluestocking and a patroness of literature, a correspondent of Pope and Congreve and the person to whom Fielding^{Fielding} dedicated his first play. Horace Walpole, much younger than Lady Mary, who always entertained a really venomous dislike of her, though he never knew her in her earlier and more brilliant days, said: "Her dress and her avarice and her impudence must amaze anyone that never heard her name." Pope, whose quarrel with her, after years of admiration, has never been cleared up, spoke and wrote of her with a serpent's tongue and an acid pen. But the professor of Poetry at Oxford, who met her when she was living in Italy in her middle age, said of her: "She is one of the most shining characters in the world, but shines like a comet; she is all irregularity and always wandering; the most wise, most imprudent, loveliest, most disagreeable, best natured, cruellest woman in the world, "all things by turn and nothing long."

Even modern authors differ widely in their estimation of

Bagehot

her worth. Sir Walter Bagehot says: "she was a miserable, ambitious, wasted woman", while Carlyle paid her high tribute: "She deserves to be remembered, "he said" as the first Englishwoman who combined the knowledge of classical and modern literature with a penetrating judgment and correct taste."

She was born in London in 1689. Her father was Evelyn Pierrepont, later Duke of Kingston, a man of position and wealth, prominent in politics during the reigns of Queen Anne and George I, Her mother was Lady Mary Fielding, daughter of William Fielding, Earl of Denbigh, and cousin of Henry Fielding, the author of Tom Jones. Lady Mary's heritage on both sides was good and she belonged to the high aristocracy. She had two sisters and a brother, Frances, Evelyn and William, all younger than herself. Her mother died when she was still a child, leaving the four little children to the care of their father, who was a gay, pleasure-loving man of the world. He was neither unkind nor consciously neglectful but merely selfish and thoughtless and took no pains to guide his children's education but left them in the care of incompetent subordinates.

Lady Mary soon showed that she had remarkable intellectual ability and she began to study for herself at a very early age. She had the run of her father's great library, at Thoresby, their country estate on the edge of Sherwood forest in Nottinghamshire. There she greedily devoured book after book. It was a haphazard way of acquiring knowledge but there is a good deal to be said for it. In after years she spoke of her education as "one of the worst in the world." She did not merely browse in a library, however, she really worked. By infinite labor and patience, and with the help of her brother's tutors, she taught herself Latin. Most of her early

Years were taken up with the study of that language, as well as French and Italian, which she learned to speak with ease. Very early in her career, she made the painful discovery that it was not customary for girls to enjoy rigid study of any kind, so she kept her work much to herself and in later life was a little shy of acknowledging her real love of learning. When she was twenty, she translated the Enchiridion of Epictetus, and sent it with a letter to Thomas Burnet, a learned man of the day and master of Charterhouse, who was very kind to her from that time on and encouraged her in her literary pursuits. She tried her hand at various imitations of authors she admired and wrote essays in French. When you consider how small her audience was, how unusual her position of young scholar in a fashionable household, where there was very little sympathy with any of her efforts, you are filled with respect for her perseverance and industry. Only a very deep love of the written word could have survived such bleak surroundings.

She had several girl friends whom she met when the family lived in their town house on Arlington Street, London, during the season, but of all her friends, the one with whom she was most intimate was Anne Wortley, daughter of the Hon. Sidney Montagu, whose country home was Wharncliffe Lodge, thirty miles from Thoresby, the Pierrepont home. Anne had a brother, Edward Wortley Montagu, who was a good deal older than Lady Mary, but who, on first meeting her, while she was still in her teens, was much struck with her natural wit and unusual education. Anne Wortley and Lady Mary wrote long letters to each other. Anne's answers were often dictated

by her brother, Edward, and it is beyond question that Lady Mary knew this and really answered him and not his sister when she replied. Edward Wortley Montagu was a cultivated, rich, much travelled young man with scholarly habits. It is difficult to estimate his character and abilities for we always see him through some one else's eyes. Baghot said he was a slow, orderly rather dull person with a taste for quick companions. It is true he had distinguished friends for Steele, Addison, Garth and Mainwaring were his intimate associates. Lady Mary and Edward Wortley saw something of each other and when Anne Wortley died, they corresponded directly but it was a long time before their friendship ripened into love.

Then began a strange courtship...mostly by correspondence. The letters of both of the lovers were written in a business-like spirit and are a quaint mixture of subdued passion and obstinate wrangling. Lady Mary, I think, showed more feeling than her cool and determined lover. They admired each other intensely and Lady Mary, in after life, never failed to respect her husband though she ceased to love him. When the marriage was contemplated, her father refused his consent, because Edward Mantagu would not settle a definite sum upon a son, should one be born to them. As both were obdurate, the question hung fire for some time, until Lady Mary's father, like the typical eighteenth century ^{parent} ~~father~~, proceeded to find a husband for his daughter regardless of her sentiments. The lovers grew alarmed; Edward Mantagu decided to forego his wife's portion, and with the help of Richard Steele and his wife and a certain Mrs. Thistlethwayte, a good friend, they eloped in 1712

when Lady Mary was 24. The marriage was doomed eventually to unhappiness. They had many tastes in common, but their natures were too much alike to be congenial, both cold, a little hard, obstinate and exacting.

The young bride, instead of going to the fashionable London world, which she would have liked, was taken to a small furnished house near Huntingdon and later to other furnished houses near York. Her husband was often away on business and she was lonely and sometimes bitter. Three months after her marriage she wrote to him: "I am alone, without any amusements to take up my thoughts. I am in circumstances in which melancholy is apt to prevail over all amusements, dispirited and alone and you write me quarreling letters." The following year their son, Edward, was born and Lady Mary's letters are full of her child and his growth.

In 1715 she and her husband returned to London, where Edward Montagu was rising in the political world, having been made M.P. for Westminster and one of the Commissioners of the Treasury. Lady Mary was easily one of the most brilliant ladies of fashion, a friend and relation of nobles and a patroness of literary men. It was during this period that she met Alexander Pope, with whom she exchanged many gallant letters. He was first her devoted admirer and later her bitterest enemy. In after years he maligned her character in public and in private. He was a wonderfully clever poet but a touchy and spiteful man, who quarrelled with many of his friends:

It would be well to recall at this point the historical atmosphere ^{in the England} of the early eighteenth century. Queen Anne was on the throne from 1702 till 1714 and she was followed by the Hanoverians..

George I ,II ,III and IV, who reigned for more than a century. The changes which took place after the death of Anne, owing to the new dynasty were briefly: the secure establishment of protestantism in England, the growth of the power of Parliament during the reigns of the "foreign German" kings, the final overthrow of the Stuart pretenders, the war in France, when the power of Louis XIV was first broken and Marlborough was the great hero. A new period of reason, of security..a short Augustan age..was being inaugurated, for the French Revolution was still some sixty years in the future. All this was taking place when Lady Mary had reached maturity.

London, in those days was a small city of some 700,000 but it was the absolute literary and political center. The streets were narrow and badly lighted; ladies were carried about in sedan chairs; servants of all kinds were numerous. The court was the nucleus of all style and culture. Coffee houses abounded. Newspapers were scarce though Addison and Steele had made a brave beginning with the Spectator and the Tatler . Aristocratic men and women wrote verses and pamphlets, lampoons and satires which were circulated in manuscript among their friends and sometimes pirated by unscrupulous printers. Pope was the admitted leader in verse making and satire. It was an age of good letter writing (witness the letters of Lord Chesterfield and Horace Walpole). Copies of letters were made and touched up for public perusal. Lady Mary's letters were thus "edited" and amplified from her diary.

In 1716 Edward Wortley Montagu was appointed by the crown, ambassador to Constantinople and consul-general for the

Levant. Lady Mary proceeded to astonish her friends by determining to accompany her husband to Constantinople and to take with her, her little son, then three years old. The journey in those days was one fraught with innumerable hardships, but it was part of Lady Mary's independent nature to want to brave them. On this journey and during her stay in Constantinople she wrote her most famous letters. These have been many times published and were circulated during her lifetime in manuscript. Her correspondents were many but the most important were Mrs. Thistlethwayte, Mr. Pope, certain country ladies and her sister, Frances, countess of Mar.

While she was in Turkey her second child, a daughter, was born, who later became the Countess of Bute and who was a comfort to her mother in her old age, when her son had forfeited all her affection by his dissolute life. Lord Bute, Lady Mary's son-in-law was a favorite of George II, held several important posts ^{in the government} and was, even for a time, Prime Minister:

Edward Wortley Montagu was recalled to England in 1718. The ^{return} journey by man-of-war was via Tunis and Genoa, proceeding from thence by carriage to Turin, Lyons and Paris. To the period between her return from Turkey in 1718 and her departure for the continent in 1739... a stretch of 21 years... belongs the most important part of her life as a fashionable lady, a writer of satirical verses and a companion of literary men. In 1720 the Montagus went to live in a villa in Twickenham on the Thames, not far from the home of Pope, who was at that time still a great admirer of Lady Mary's wit and beauty. She lived the life of a great lady in the society of London. Her eastern adventures made her a marked figure. People flocked to hear her talk of her travels and to hear of this new marvel

the "engrafting" against smallpox. She became involved in foolish quarrels, was persecuted by some people and much admired by others. She had domestic troubles. Her son was ^{her} the chief source of anxiety. He ran away from school twice, the last time being found in Oporto and returned by the British Consul. Her sister, Lady Mar, went out of her mind though she recovered years later. Her only brother, William, had died at the age of twenty ~~by~~ ^{from} this terrible scourge, smallpox, so that Lady Mary had more than one reason for wanting to fight the disease. In the letters of this period we find a growing tendency towards cynicism and dissatisfaction with the life in London. The quarrels and intrigues of the court wearied her. She was made for better things...for serious pursuits, the formation of real friendships, for a leadership, devoid of petty jealousies. Yet with all this disillusionment, she kept her mind open and her faculties keen. She still loved a good book not did her desire for knowledge diminish a whit.

For no apparent reason, though inquiring critics have done their best to find one, Lady Mary decided in 1739, quite suddenly, to leave her husband and England and make her home on the continent. The reason she gave herself was "people had grown so stupid she could no longer endure their society." It was well known that her marriage was not happy. There was no open quarrel nor, strange to say, ^{any} no scandal, notwithstanding her many admirers. Her daughter had ^r married in 1738; her son was lost to the family these many years; there seemed to be no reason why she should stay in England. Her husband had inherited a large fortune on the death of his father and he willingly made her an allowance.

So off she went, a woman of fifty, to Venice. For the next twenty-three years she lived in various places on the continent, moving from time to time, now in Venice, now in Rome, in Florence, in Avignon or renovating a house in Lovere, where she had her dairy, her bees and her poultry. Often she met distinguished friends, sojourners in foreign parts. During this time, she carried on a regular correspondence with her husband to whom she wrote with every expression of respect and sometimes of affection. She did not see him again, however, and although he went to the continent twice, he did not visit her. She ^{had} numerous other correspondents, chiefly her daughter, the Countess of Bute, Lady Pomfret, Sir James Stuart and his wife, and Lady Herford. Her daughter sent her boxes of the latest books, which Lady Mary read with eagerness, sending in return clever searching criticisms. The letters of this period are exceedingly entertaining and full of amusing descriptions of her surroundings.

In 1761 in Venice, Lady Mary heard of the death of her husband. She came back to England at the request of her daughter, and to settle the estate. She had a trying and uncomfortable journey. For two months she was detained at Rotterdam, where she met Mr. Sowden, the English chaplain, to whom she gave the manuscript of her letters from the east. In January 1762 she arrived in England but she only had a few months to live as she was suffering from an incurable disease. She concealed her trouble for some time, and received as in the early days, the great of the land. But she was sadly changed. If we can trust Horace Walpole's account (which I doubt) she had grown slovenly in her dress and

careless in her manners. Her last letters were written from bed and they are pathetic efforts to keep up flagging spirits. On August 21st 1762 she died, in her seventy-fourth year and was buried in Grosvenor Chapel, London.

Such is the briefest possible sketch of the life of this gifted and strongminded woman. Her letters from the east were published the following year after her death by a man called Cleland, who is supposed to have received them from her relations, who bought them from the English chaplain at Rotterdam for 500 pounds. In 1837 her great grandson, Lord Wharncliffe, published all her letters, many minor poems, satires and polite essays. These volumes were re-edited and revised in 1861 and 1887.

Her contemporaries are unanimous in crediting Lady Mary with a considerable amount of personal beauty. She was rather small with an oval face, ^{rich} ~~dark~~ black hair and sparkling, vivacious eyes. Of her likenesses, the painting by Kneller is the best. In this she looks the high-born lady she is, with fine features, shapely hands, and a proud bearing. A miniature painted of her in Turkish costume is rather charming.

I should now like to take you back to the year 1716 when Lady Mary was 27 years old and her husband had just been appointed ambassador to Turkey. He was appointed for a specific duty, which was to mediate between Turkey and the Imperialist (Austrian Hapsburgs) who were then at war. A battle had been fought at Peterwaradin between the Turks and Prince Eugene of Austria in which the former had been repulsed. Thus Austria was in the ascendancy but the war

was still on. While Montagu was appointed by the crown, he was also in the service of the Levant Company, a powerful group of British merchants, who had all British interests, commercial and political, in their hands in the Near East. This interesting company was formed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth in 1583 and every ambassador to Constantinople was appointed jointly by the Crown and the Company, though he received his pay from the Company only, but had to send reports to both. So that Montagu was at the same time ambassador from the Crown and agent of the Levant Company. This form of procedure lasted until 1825 when the company was dissolved.

There is not very much record of the actual work that Montagu accomplished as his mission was really a failure, for he and his colleagues could get no satisfaction out of either belligerent. Peace was not made till after his recall, when the Turks were driven to it by the capture of Belgrade by the Austrians. The failure of Montagu's mission does not necessarily reflect upon his merits as an ambassador, though from all accounts he must have figured much more successfully as a scholar and a country gentleman than as a diplomat. While we have little material to draw upon for information about Montagu's activities, I have had access to some very interesting papers, letters which were written to the Levant Co., in the form of official reports by Montagu and others at that time. The late Mr. Arthur Baker of this city spent many hours during the first World War copying interesting Levant Co. letters in the Record office, and among these are several written by Montagu himself, which of course have never been published. These deal with negotiations for peace, with petty troubles between the Dutch and British ambassadors and with the

heavy expenses incurred by a diplomat of a powerful country, who is forced to use great ceremony. Here is a list, for instance, of expenses incurred which Montagu turned in ^{to} the Levant Co. ~~after his return.~~

Quote:

Edward Wortley (Montagu), ambassador Extraordinary to the Grand Signior humbly craves allowances of expenses made in that service pursuant to His Majesty's instructions till his arrival at the Ottoman Port, 28th May 1717:

	Pounds
For the charges of several persons sent to meet me at Philippopolis and of my entry into Adrianople	40
For several saddle horses and furniture for them, for liveries for all my livery servants, those I had on the ship not being arrived and for fitting up and furnishing a house.,,.....	250
For an audience of the Grand Signior and 2 audiences of the Vizir and visits to the Grand Signior's son-in-law and favorite.....	100
For diverse presents to several particular persons that I was obliged to make use of while I stayed in Adrianople.....	80
For several entertainments during my abode there.....	40
For my expenses for my journey thence to Consple.....	80
For several presents to the Aga and Chaoush that accompanied and waited upon me in Constantinople.....	85
For presents to court officers over and above the usual presents of the Company, though they were of considerable value, among those I bought was a repeating watch asked by the Grand Signior's son-in-law and supposed to be for the Grand Signior's daughter and other expensive presents which in all come to more than.....	200
Exchequer fees and other charges in the receipt of several sums of money directed to be paid.....	130

	960

But to get the picturesque element of the journey of the Montagus, we must turn to the vivacious letters of Lady Mary. The travellers started out with a good many servants, a nurse, a doctor, a cook and valet. Sometimes they used their own private carriages, at others, post coaches, and of course river boats wherever possible. They took their own food and tents with them. They crossed the Channel to Rotterdam on August 31, 1716 in a sailing vessel and it was very rough. They went on from Holland to Cologne, Frankfurt, Wurzburg, Nuremberg, Ratisbon and down the Danube to Vienna, which they reached in September. Here they stayed a month and more, then went on a special mission to Prague, Dresden, Leipzig, Brunswick and Hanover, where they ~~was~~ saw the Prince of Wales, George I's son. They returned to Vienna in Jan. 1717, where they spent their time visiting at court and being entertained by the high of the land. They started from Vienna in the dead of winter Jan. 30, 1717, went to Peterwaradin and to Belgrade and across what is now Bulgaria to Adrianople where they stayed three months, for the Grand Signior, as the sultan of Turkey was called by foreigners in those days, ^{often} made that city his headquarters.

The sultan of Turkey, when Lady Mary and her husband came to this country was Achmet III. He had been on the throne for 14 years and was to reign another 13 years before he had to abdicate in favor of his nephew. He has been accused of leading a dissolute life, but he ^{was peace-loving & against his will} was involved in wars which he did not want. Peter the Great of Russia was his contemporary; it was during Achmet III's reign that Turkey first began to fear the power of Russia. Turkey had also to fight Austria...indeed Edward Wortley Montagu had

Show tempo
7 Three days

been sent to mediate in this very war. Achmet III was very much at the mercy of the Janissaries, who held the real power. He trembled at their commands as much as the humblest of his subjects. They were becoming more and more arrogant and cruel; every sultan feared them. It was not till a century later that they were abolished.

To remember Achmet III we can recall the monuments which he left behind in this city. He built a beautiful mosque in Üsküdar, ⁽¹⁷¹⁰⁾ in memory of his mother, the Yeni Valide, in the market place. It is in the best style of ~~the~~ early 18th century architecture, with lovely stencilling, ^{and} an interesting inner courtyard with cloisters. He also built the charming street fountain behind Aya Sofia near ~~the~~ outer Seraglio grounds. Mr. Dwight calls it the "king of the fountains of Stambul."

In those days the streets of the city were narrow and dark, and filled with people in the most diverse and interesting costumes. Every man still wore a turban; his rank or office could be gauged by the size or shape ^{or} color of his turban. Women wore the becoming old fashioned costumes, not the later "charshaf." Most people rode on gaily comparisoned horses, but sedan chairs were used for ladies up and down the steep hills of Constantinople. All these things were recorded by Lady Mary. Before reading a few extracts from her letters (only small samples as the time is far too short) I would like to summarize some of the things described by her concerning her visit to the east. She learned enough of the Turkish language to translate Turkish poems into English; she was entertained by the ladies of the Imperial Harem and described their lavish

*Gilrain
nemetschak
d. 1717
mother of
2 sultans*

manner of living; she attended a Turkish bath when she was in Sofia on her way to Adrianople; she described the Bosphorus, the monuments of the city, processions of turbanded and much ornamented soldiers, janissaries and officials ; she recorded the beliefs of various religious sects and she dressed in a Turkish costume and went about the city to mingle with the crowds. In short, she showed all her ~~customary~~ energetic characteristics, her courage, her vitality, her inexhaustible curiosity and her consuming love of life.

Our travellers did not get to Constantinople till May 1717.

- Begin quotations: 1. P. 64 Down the Danube
 2. P. 80 Over the mountains near Leipzig
 3. P. 93 start from Vienna a second time
 4. P. 124 observation of inoculation in Adrianople
 5. P. 143 stay at Buyukdere
 6. P. 154 dinner with the sultana
 7. P. 156 slaves of the sultana
 8. P. 162 description of the Bosphorus

On her return to England, as I have said, Lady Mary had the temerity to introduce inoculation into England, as she said she would: Her generous impulse opened the way to all kinds of persecution. She was denounced from the pulpits on the impiety of thus seeking to take events out of the hands of Providence. She triumphed in the end, however. The Princess of Wales championed her and by 1724 the practice was fairly common. Much later a cenotaph in Lichfield Cathedral was erected to commemorate this service to her countrymen. It was put up by an admirer 27 years after Lady Mary's death and a hundred years after her birth. The monument represents the figure of Beauty weeping over the ashes of her preserver, supposed to be enclosed in the urn and inscribed with the

initials M.W.M. It reads as follows:

Sacred to the memory of
 The Right Honorable
 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
 who happily introduced from Turkey
 into this country
 the salutary art
 of inoculating the smallpox.
 Convinced of its efficacy
 she first tried it with success
 on her own children
 and then recommended the practice of it
 to her fellow citizens.
 Thus by her example and advice
 we have softened the virulence
 and escaped the dangers of this malignant disease.
 To perpetuate the memory of such benevolence
 and to express her gratitude
 for the benefit she herself received
 from this alleviating art
 this monument was erected by
 Henrietta Inge
 relict of Theodore William Inge Esq.,
 and daughter of Sir John Worttesley Bart.
 In the Year of our Lord MDCCLXXXIX 1789

In conclusion I would like to quote part of the preface to a third ~~first~~ edition of Lady Mary's Letters, which I own. It was published the year after her death in 1763. The preface however was written many years before. It was a comment by Mary Astell, a ~~blatant~~ ~~stocking~~ of the period in 1724, when she had read the letters in MS. Mary Astell was much older than L.M. but admired the latter greatly as you will see. She had hoped to publish the letters herself. She had written a book some long years before with the beguiling title: "A serious Proposal to the Ladies wherein a method is offered for the Improvement of their Minds."

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