



Swallowfield and its Owners.

By Lady Russell.

(Continued from page 17, Vol. III.)

At the end of 13 years Thomas Pitt was recalled from his Governorship of Fort St. George, and was succeeded by Gulston Addison, brother of the poet, who was recommended by the Court "to follow in the same steps as President Pitt." Thomas Pitt's son Robert, who had returned to England seven years earlier, writes to him on this occasion as follows: "The behaviour of the Company towards you has been as surprising to every one here as it will be to you . . . On the other hand your return home is necessary for your own comfort and the peace of your family. Mr. Dolben will inform you of some overtures from the Grand Duke of Tuscany as to your grand concern, but as peace is in all probability imminent, I hope an able chapman will soon be found." "The grand concern" alluded to is the celebrated "Pitt diamond," for the history of which we must go back some years. Thomas Pitt realised a large fortune by mercantile transactions in India, China and Japan, and diamonds were among his chief investments.*

In 1701 his banker and agent, Sir Stephen Evance, suggested to him to try and find some particularly large stone, and in November of that year Pitt first saw the famous diamond which has ever since been associated with his name. It weighed in the rough 410, or, some accounts say, 426 carats, and was probably the largest known diamond in the world. Pitt wrote to Sir Stephen, sending him a model of it. Sir Stephen answers: "Certainly there was never such a stone heard of before," but goes on to say "Wee are now gott in a warr, the French King his hands and heart full, soe he can't buy such a stone. There is no Prince in Europe can buy itt, soe would advise you not to meddle in itt." Pitt, however, was not to be discouraged by this advice, and commenced negotiations on his own

* Col. Yale says "There are in the British Museum transcripts of invoices of merchandise shipped from Madras by Thos. Pitt during his governorship there; these invoices consist of diamonds and a few other stones, piece-goods, opium, brass and tutenague, cotton, chank shells, &c."

responsibility. The price asked was 200,000 pagodas (a pagoda equal to about 10s.), but, after several months' bargaining, Pitt bought it from Jaurchund, the largest diamond merchant in the East, for 48,000 pagodas, about equivalent to £24,000. Pitt sent it to England in October, 1702, in charge of his son Robert, and many and stringent were his directions to ensure its safety. In a memorandum which he gave his son before starting, he says: "If you should have the misfortune, which God forbid, to be taken by an enemy, you must be sure to throw overboard every paper you have, and secure itt (the diamond) in the best manner you can." On his arrival Robert Pitt was to deliver it to Sir Stephen Evance, and was not to stir out of the ship till he or Mr. Alvarez came on board. In December, 1703, Robert Pitt writes from London to his father as follows: "I can now give you full tidings of the safety of your great concern here in England. . . . I hope that something will be done in your grand affair by next spring, and that I shall be able to have a crystal model made of it in its true polite shape, by shewing which as representing a thing that might possibly be found, and by consulting Amsterdam Jews, some insight may be obtained as to its real value. The King of Prussia, if able, is the likeliest chapman at present; though, were peace made, the King of France would certainly be the man. Mr. Cope has the cutting of it. Our present design is a single stone, and we hope to make it a brilliant. It proves the first water, but will be diminished almost one half in cutting. We have so managed it that what is cut off is in great pieces, and will sell for a good sum of money. Mr. Cope says that when finished it will weigh about 280 carats, and will be the wonder of the world. We found means to enter it safely through the Customs, and go on briskly perfecting it for sale. When you write it were better, for fear of the miscarriage of a letter, to say little about it, and what you do say I have a key to; by which means none but ourselves will understand it. On coming near England I thought it not safe to keep it as you delivered it to me; and for better security let Captain Boulton into the secret. We secured it, I think so effectually, that, had he been taken, we had preserved it. I presented him with a large silver punch bowl to the value of thirty odd pounds, on your account, which, for his fidelity ever since in the matter, he deserved."

Pitt wrote several irate letters about the cutting of the diamond. He wished that "the magnitude of the stone had been preserved though there had been some speck or flaw," but his son answered

that Mr. Cope found that "the flaws in the outside went so deep," that it was necessary to saw off pieces which reduced it to $136\frac{3}{4}$ carats, and it was the opinion of Mr. Alvarez and all that it was better to make it a pure stone of a less weight than to keep it greater and have it foul, for the reason that its being at once the largest stone in the world, and without flaw, makes it more valuable," and his son goes on to say "I cannot imagine that you were in any way cheated, for there was never a piece sawed off that I did not myself put on the place whence it was taken, and see if it exactly fitted. Mr. Alvarez was the chief manager in the sale of the pieces, and he protested that he would not have given so much for them.* It has been finished ever since March last, and locked up in an iron chest which stands in Sir Stephen's back shop†; he keeps the key of the padlock, and I keep 2 large keys which unlock the chest. I have been asked about it by a hundred people, and all the answers I ever made was that I wished it were true."

In 1708 Pitt had fresh alarms and thinks the safest place for the chest containing his "grand affair," is the Bank of England, but ultimately it was placed in the keeping of his kinsman, George Pitt, of Stratfieldsaye.‡

At the end of the year 1709, Thomas Pitt left Madras, delivering up his government, according to his own account, "in the most flourishing state that ever any place of the world was in, vastly rich, and famous for honourable and just dealings."

On his return journey he stopped at Bergen, Copenhagen, and Amsterdam, and wrote to his son to send him a model of the stone to Copenhagen, and says, "as I may sell something considerable abroad, enquire what goods from Denmark, Hamburg, or Holland turn to good account in England, or how returns may be made to the best advantage, and whether money is to be got by buying silver in Holland, and whether better in dollars or ingots." He also told his son to send him a letter of credit for £1,000, to the care of our envoy at Copenhagen and the same at Amsterdam.

It was from Bergen that Pitt wrote the true history of his purchase of the great diamond. He was induced to do this on account of the

* The clearance and dust were valued at from £7,000 to £8,000, but the cutting and polishing cost £5,000. The cutting treated by the slow hand process of the 18th century, occupied two years.

† In Lombard Street.

‡ George Pitt, of Stratfieldsaye, M.P., was son of his second cousin, George Pitt, by Jane Lady Chandos, daughter of Lord Rivers. He married first Lucy, daughter of Thomas Pile, of Beverstock, and secondly Lora, daughter of Audley Grey, of Kingston.

various scandalous stories that were spread concerning the means by which he became possessed of it. One of the stories was that the diamond formed one of the eyes of the god Jagrenat, and that Pitt stole it from Chandernagor. Another story was that it was found at Partaal, 45 leagues south of Golconda, by a slave who concealed it in a gash which he made in the calf of his leg, until he had an opportunity of escaping to Madras. There the poor wretch was said to have fallen in with an English skipper, who by his promises lured him on board, murdered him, then sold the diamond to Jamchund for £1000, and after running through the money, hung himself. Pope alluded to these reports when he wrote the following lines :

“ Asleep and naked as an Indian lay,
An honest factor stole a gem away ;
He pledged it to the Knight, the Knight had wit,
So kept the diamond and the rogue was bit.”

(“ Sir Balaam.” *Moral Essays*).

Streeter in his history of the Great Diamonds of the World, says, “ There is no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of this characteristic beginning of the adventures of the great diamond, with this exception : the sea captain sold it in all probability for £1,000, not to Mr. Pitt, but to Jamchund, who it will be seen in the course of our history, sold it to Mr. Pitt.”

Pitt's own explanation which he sent to the *European Magazine* for October, 1710, and which was republished in the *Daily Post* of November 3rd, 1743, seventeen years after his death, is as follows : “ Since my coming into this melancholy place of Bergen, I have been often thinking of the most unparalleled villany of William Fraser, Thomas Frederick, and Sampa, a black merchant, who brought a paper before Governor Addison in council, insinuating that I had unfairly got possession of a large diamond, which tended so much to the prejudice of my reputation, and the ruin of my estate, that I thought necessary to keep by me the true relation how I purchased it in all respects, that so in case of sudden mortality, my children and friends may be apprised of the whole matter, and so be enabled thereby to put to silence and confound those and all other villains, in their base attempts against either. About two or three years after my arrival at Madras, which was in July, 1698, I heard there were large diamonds in the country to be sold, which I encouraged to be brought down, promising to be their chapman, if they would be reasonable therein, upon which Jamchund, one of the most eminent diamond merchants in these parts, came down about December, 1701, and brought with him a large rough stone,

305 mangelins, and some small ones, which myself and others bought. But he asking a very extravagant price for the great one, I did not think of meddling with it : when he left it with me for some days, and then came and took it away again, and did so several times, insisting upon not less than 200,000 pagodas (£85,000) and as I best remember, I did not bid him more than 30,000, and had little thought of buying it for that. I considered there were many and great risks to be run, not only in cutting it, but whether it would prove foul or clean, or the water good. Besides, I thought it too great an amount to venture home in one bottom, so that Jamchund resolved to return speedily to his own country, so that I best remember it was in February following he came again to me (with Vincatee Chittee, who was always with him when I discussed about it), and pressed me to know whether I resolved to buy it, when he came down to 100,000 pagodas and something under before we parted, when we agreed upon a day to meet and make a final end thereof one way or another. When we accordingly met in the consultation room, where after a great deal of talk I brought him down to 55,000 pagodas, and advanced to 65,000, resolving to give no more, and he likewise resolving not to abate, I delivered him up the stone and we took a friendly leave of one another. Mr. Benyon* was then writing in my closet with whom I discoursed on what had passed and told him now I was clear of it ; when about an hour after my servant brought me word that Jamchund and Vincatee Chittee were at the door, who, being called in, offered it for 50,000. I offered to part the 5,000 pagodas that was between us which he would not hearken to, and was going out of the room again, when he turned back and told me that I should have it for 49,000. Presently he came to 48,000 and made a solemn vow he would not part with it a pagoda under, when I went again into the closet to Mr. Benyon and told him what had passed ; so I closed with him for that sum, when he delivered me the stone for which I paid very honourably, as by my books appear, and thereby further call God to witness, that I never used the least threatening word at any of our meetings to induce him to sell it to me.

As this is the truth, so I hope for God's blessing upon this and all my other affairs in this world, and eternal happiness hereafter.

Written and signed by me, in Bergen, July 29, 1710.

THOMAS PITT.

* Daniel Benyon, father of Richard Benyon, Governor of Fort St. George, and great grandfather of the present Richard Benyon of Englefield.

From Bergen Pitt also wrote to his son Robert, saying : " If there be any vacancy for a Parliament man get me chosen if you can do so honourably ; but let my intimating it be a secret. Have your eye on some good and reputable lodgings for me in the city, and provide me with two footmen and a valet, trusty and such as have lived in good families, brisk and cleanly fellows, and give them my livery in plain and good cloth. Pray get me a neate campagne perwigg* not too bushy nor too long.

In October, 1714, Thomas Pitt writes from Pall Mall to his son Robert, " I was this day above an hour with the King and Prince ; certainly their aspect promises prosperity to England. I showed them the great diamond, which they admired, and seemed desirous of it, but I believe and hope the nation will give it."

In 1715 there are several letters to the same son expressing his anti-Jacobite sentiments, in the most forcible language and denouncing his son for his Jacobite proclivities.

One written in September, 1715, says : " I reached home (Pall Mall) last night after a pleasant journey from Vale Royal.† On my way, at Coventry, news met me of the arrest of three and six members of the House of Commons, among the latter being your bosom friend the Esquire of Combe (Mr. Harvey), who yesterday morning stabbed himself in three places. I hear that letters from his friends have been found among his papers, and hope there are none that can compromise you. I have heard that you are strooke in with your old hellish acquaintance, and in all your discourse are speaking in favour of that villainous traitor Ormond. The design of these packs of villains that are now taken up, was noe less than to cutt off the whole Royal family, and sett the cursed Pretender on the throne, in which miserable tragedy I should have had my share. God still avert it ! " And two days later he writes, " Since last post, I have had it re-iterated to me that in all company you are vindicating Ormond and Bull (ingbroke), the two vilest rebels that ever were in any nation, and that you still adhere to your cursed Tory principles, etc."

* The Campaign Perriwig was imported from France. It was made very full, was curled, and eighteen inches in length in the front with drop locks.

† Vale Royal, Cheshire, belonging to Mr. Charles Cholmondeley, who married Essex, daughter of Governor Pitt and was grandfather of the first Lord Delamere.

(*To be continued.*)