



The Mooring & Wedding of Mary Denton.

1659-1660.

By Lady Verney.



AMONGST the Verney MSS. at Claydon House are many letters referring to their friends and neighbours, the Dentons, of Hillesden, Bucks ; a younger branch of the Dentons, of Ambroseden, North Marston, and Fowler, in Oxfordshire.

The story of the siege and destruction of Hillesden House by Cromwell, in 1644, has been told in the Verney Memoirs. Mary Denton was one of the younger children of the large family left orphaned and homeless when their father, Sir Alexander, died of a broken heart in the Tower of London. Their maintenance and education fell chiefly on their excellent uncle, William Denton, the physician, who laboured hard to save something for the girls out of the wreck of the family fortunes.

Claydon House, which had been a second home to the Denton children in the time of their aunt, Dame Margaret Verney, was shut up ; the estate had been sequestered, and Sir Ralph Verney was in exile.

A melancholy family party assembled there in November, 1650, for the funeral of his wife, Dame Mary Verney, whose body had been brought with much difficulty and delay from Blois.

The "waies" were so muddy that it was considered better "to take several coaches with four horses and soe load them the lighter rather than fewer with six horses heavier loaden and with luggage, and soe sticke in the Vale." It was a great mortification to the housekeeper left in charge that she could not show that hospitality to the guests for which Dame Mary had been famous. But "Besse Heath," a former servant and annuitant came to her aid, and "lay at charges 20 daies or longer out of Zeale to performe the last duties to her Lady." The husband, who was so truly the chief mourner, had not dared to return ; the relations who came shivered and suffered ; those who were not invited took offence (just as they do in these days), and there were some unseemly disputes about "the blacks" that were to be given away.

All this appears remote enough from Mary Denton's wedding, but it is not really so. At the gathering of Verneys and Dentons other matters seem to have been discussed and settled, which were vitally to affect Mary's future. A few days later there was a quiet little wedding in the same church, and the kind old Rector, Mr. Aris, who had known the Denton children from infancy, and had christened some of them, joined the hands of Robert Townsend and Susannah Denton for better or worse. These were days when the Church of England and her ministers had nothing but the worst to look forward to, but Robert Townsend was very loyal to her fortunes. He had been appointed two years previously to the living of Radcliffe, which he held for 58 years, and his wife's little sisters ever found welcome and shelter in the pleasant Rectory. The Manor House at Radcliffe had belonged to Susannah's grandfather, Sir Thomas Denton ; it was at this time owned by William Smith, afterwards a baronet, and M.P. for Buckingham. His wife was a daughter of Sir Nathaniel Hobart, a Master in Chancery, the dearest friend of the Verneys, whose cousin, Ann Leeke, he had married. Doll Smith was a good and capable woman who helped her husband bravely during the time of the Commonwealth, when he was decimated, imprisoned, and otherwise tormented. Lady Hobart came down to the births and christenings of her many grandchildren, and the families at the Manor House and at the Rectory lived on terms of friendly intimacy.

In such society Mary Denton seems to have spent much of her childhood. Sir Ralph Verney, now re-instated at Claydon, was her guardian ; she made a will on coming of age, and left the bulk of her small possessions to "Sister Susannah."

Robert Townsend had a younger brother John, described as a merchant and alderman of Oxford. The Rector did various commissions for Sir Ralph in that city ; in September, 1669, he writes "The way of selling Cushioneale, as the Apothecary tells me, is to weigh silver against it, the weight of one for the other, this Quantity sent cost 4s. 6d., and I am told it is good." Something more than cochineal, however, was in question when the Rectory party made an expedition to Oxford ; Alexander Denton, the lawyer, writes to Sir Ralph from Hillesden, "I should be very glad to see you about my sister Mary, who hath had some transactions from Oxon." What the legal mind called "transactions" deserved a more romantic name.

"Sir Ralph," writes Robert Townsend, "you desire that some-

thing may be sent in writing concerning my brother Townsend, and to that purpose this is sent, and first I know him to be an Honest and Industrious and a Discreet man ; One of a good Reputation, and he lives with credit ; and such a One, I am sure is very suitable, whensoever my Sister Mary changes her Condition, to make her happy. As for his Estate I know him to be worth in Houses, Goods, and Debts upon his booke which I believe good, £2,000 and more, whereof his Houses in Oxford are worth about a £1,000 ; Besides his Norwich or Western Trade which is very considerable. And if he may be admitted a Servant to my Sister Mary (for without the approbation of her Friends I am sure he never intends to prosecute this business farther) he will be bound to secure her £1,000. And this I think well : Joyntures of Land (if at all) being but rarely to be found among Young Tradesmen ; for Tradesmen trust, and they that marry Tradesmen, must trust them. And this is all I have at present to impart, Only give me leave to say this, as to my own particular ; and I say it in the presence of God, I had much rather my hands were off than sett on one Letter to promote this Match, But that I confidently beleve if they meet, they may live with much content and comfortable together.

Expecting at your leisure to let me heare from you, I am Sir,

Your Very humble servant

ROBT. TOWNSEND.

Radc. Oct. 24. 1659.

For the much Hond. Sir Ralph Verney, These.

The list of houses follows ;

A Particular of the Houses Mr. John Townesend hath in Oxon and their severall vallues per ann.

Imps.	The House hee dwells in well worth thirty pounds per an.	30. 00. 00
Itm.	The house hee hath in the high street to wch Mr. Good is his Tenant and payes him twenty one poundes per an.	21. 00. 00
Itm.	The House hee hath in Beare Lane to wch. Lawrence Reynolds is his Ten ^t and payes him Seven pounds and ten shillings per an., but hee knows it to be worth Ten pounds, and the Reason why hee setts it but att 7£. 10s. is ber. ye present Ten-	

ant was his servant, and hath noe
Lease.

10. 00. 00

Itm. The House and malt house hee hath
in St. Toles to wch. John Sharman
is his Tenant and payd him a Fine
of twenty pounds, and in Rent twelve
pounds per an. The which House
and mault house the present Ten^t
holds by Lease and when his Lease
is expired, the Rent thereof is very
improvable.

12. 00. 00

All the wch. foresd Houses are free-
hold and he gives under his hand
this to be the true Estimate of their
yearly vallue.

JOHN TOWNESSEND.

The Civil War and the unsettled times that followed it had naturally brought the profession of arms once more into prominence ; a generation of younger sons had grown up in Royalist houses who held every other calling to be unworthy of a gentleman. The clamour raised in some contemporary letters against the marriage of a young lady of quality to a clergyman, a doctor, or a merchant, is most amusing, and Mary Denton could not expect to escape criticism.

"I wish my Cusan Mary Denton much joy of hur marig," wrote Betty Verney sarcastically, "and am confident if shee had not bin veri umbil minded, shee would not have had a shoppkeeper in aney plas but London, espesially haveing a fortin to live mor lick hur self then I thinck shee wil doo as his Wif."

The younger members of the family might scoff, but a prudent guardian like Sir Ralph had every reason to welcome so substantial a suitor. England was in the throes which preceded the Restoration. Monk had not yet declared his policy, and the outlook was dark and dubious ; yet at Hillesden there were none but halcyon days, though the almanack told November. Even the barrister confessed that he could have informed Sir Ralph "of many pretty fancies and passages" concerning the lovers ; he would have come to Claydon "had not the weather bin so bad and my legg in a little disorder" ; but if his cousin would ride over to dinner they might "chatt a little before others come." He will not tell his sister, for Sir Ralph shall not be entertained as a stranger, they are "att

dinner by a little past 12 commonly." Doctor Townsend and John, who had come over from Oxford on approval, were to meet him.

"Sir Raphe," writes the worthy Rector (Nov. 7th, 1659), "Fairely to proceed in the businesse, and to prevent any tedious delay, (which to zealous Lovers is like the expectation of a Repreeve to a Dying man ; and sometimes through the stay of the Post, the death of the Prisoner) upon the receipt of your letter to quicken and put life to their desires, I presently dispatcht a messenger to my Brother ; and a little invitation secured him, who but lissened for a Call. So now he is arrived at Radcliffe and I wish he may so succeed in his Suit, as from my Soule I desire they may both be happy."

The bride-elect wrote to her guardian on New Year's Day, 1660, "Being to be married on the 3d. of January." . . . "to declare my will to be void and of none effect, being myselfe at the will of Another and all my worldly goods at his dispose. . . . youre moust dutifull goddaughter and humbly servant to command, Mary Denton."

"Sweete Cozen," Sir Ralph writes just after the wedding, "I wish you all the joy imaginable . . . and dqubt not of your Hapinesse, my Cozen your husband (to whom I pray present my service) being generally reputed a very Honest Man ; and now you are his wife, I am confident your discreation will incline you to live within the Limits of his Fortune and in some measure agreeable to one of his Profession ; well-knowing that Meeknesse and Modesty, Providence and Pietie are the infallible markes both of a prudent wife and a good Christian . . . - your most affectionate kinsman and humble servant, R.V."

MARGARET M. VERNEY, Claydon House.

[Lady Verney would be glad to receive any information concerning John Townsend, who plays so important a part in the above interesting romance. Probably some record concerning him is known at Oxford.—*Editor.*]

INTERESTING FIND AT HEDSOR.—At the meeting of the Society of Antiquaries, on November 21st, Mr. J. Parker reported the discovery by Mr. A. H. Cocks of a supposed pile dwelling at Hedsor, on the margin of the Thames. Mr. Cocks spoke of the circumstances of the discovery, and exhibited a large number of animal bones and pieces of late Roman pottery found during the excavations, which have, so far, been of a very limited character, owing to the site of the dwelling being beneath a large orchard.