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LORD AND LADY ABERDEEN: A CHARACTER SKETCH.

BY W. T. STEAD

I. THE MIST OF CENTURIES AND OF SONG.

WHATEVER grudge the New World may bear the Old, for its heritage of ill, it cannot complain that it is stinted in the counterbalancing dower of reminiscences of its romantic past. In the midst of the metallic clink of the coin on the counter and the eager babel of operators in the markets, echoed and magnified by the journalistic sounding boards of the press until the atmosphere seems vocal with dollars and cents, can be heard now and then stray notes of melody from out, "the purple past, the dusk of centuries and of song." These wandering echoes of the clarions of the bygone time come and go like the breath of the zephyr on the Æolian harp. Sometimes it is a name, a place, a date or a person which unloosens the latent music of the world, but whenever it is heard it carries us back in imagination to the vanished centuries which poet, novelist and historian have irradiated with their genius, until they glow with the splendor with which the dawn illumines the Eastern sky.

The name of the present Governor-General of Canada is one of the keys which unloose these chords of the fairy music of old romance. When I was in Chicago the boardings blazed with the ornate posters announcing that a popular actor would shortly appear in one of the theatres of the city in his famous impersonation of Richard the Lion Heart. To-day there lives in the Government House at Ottawa, the direct lineal descendant of the warrior whose arrow slew King Richard before the castle of Charles in Perigord. A chasm of seven centuries yawns between the fatal shot of Bertrand de Gourdon and our own day, but it is bridged by the history of a single family; and the sighing of the Canadian wind amid the pines seems to bring with it far-away echoes of Blondel's song and the fierce clash of Christian sword on Moslem helm in the Crusaders' war. The legendary origin of the Gordons of Haddo, of whom Lord Aberdeen is the living representative, does not lose its value from our present point of view because its authenticity is a subject of antiquarian dispute, or because there are authorities who trace the Gordon genealogy much further back than the days of the lion-hearted Plantagenet. Antiquaries question everything, and if the Gordons were in Aberdeen before the Norman William conquered England, that in no way detracts from the romantic interest that associates their name with the tragic fate of one of the few English monarchs whose story has become an heirloom of the world of old romance.

If the family history of Lord Aberdeen recalls the

ancient glories of the Plantagenets, that of Lady Aberdeen revives memories not less glorious, in the opinion at least of one great branch of the English-speaking world. The Governor-General is a Gordon of Scotland, but his wife claims descent not only from the ancient kings of Scotland but also from those of Ireland through the O'Neills of Tyrone. To the Anglo-Saxon, Irish history is very much of a sealed book. To an Irish patriot it is like those illu-



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minated manuscripts which still attest, in European museums, the glory of Celtic art and the ancient splendor of the Irish race. And among the heroes whose exploits furnish the illuminations to the gilded page, the O'Neills occupy a leading place. They were, it must be admitted, no friends of the English. Nor, indeed, was it possible for them to regard the invader as other than the common enemy of their family and of their race. Had there been a few more O'Neills in Ireland, the course of the history of that distressful isle might have been very different. For the axe and sword and musket thinned their ranks, and although the story of the O'Neills is as fuel for the brooding imagination of the patriot, it resembles all other Irish histories in its record of unavailing valor and of the pathos of despair. In these later days, however, the cause of Irish liberty and Irish nationality has found a repre-