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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MRS. HUNGERFORD ***

Produced by Daniel Fromont

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NOTABLE

WOMEN AUTHORS

OF THE DAY, By

HELEN C. BLACK

WITH PORTRAITS

LONDON: MACLAREN AND COMPANY

WAITHMAN STREET, PILGRIM STREET, E.C.

1906

CONTENTS

(...)

MRS. HUNGERFORD

(...)

It is well worth encountering the perils of the sea, even in the middle of winter, and in the teeth of a north-east wind, if only to experience the absolute comfort and ease with which, in these space-annihilating days, the once-dreaded journey from England to the Emerald Isle can be made. You have resolved to accept a hospitable invitation from Mrs. Hungerford, the well-known author of *Molly Bawn*, etc., to visit her at her lovely house, St. Brenda's, Bandon, co. Cork, where a 'hearty Irish welcome' is promised, and though circumstances prevent your availing yourself of the 'month's holiday' so kindly offered, and limit an absence from home to but four days, it is delightful to find that, travelling by the best of all possible routes—the Irish Mail—it is to be accomplished easily and without any fatiguing haste.

Having given due notice of your intentions, you arrive at Euston just in time for the 7.15 a.m. express, and find that by the kindness of the station-master a compartment is reserved, and every arrangement, including an excellent meal, is made for your comfort. The carriages are lighted by electricity, and run so smoothly that it is possible to get a couple of hours' good sleep, which the very early start has made so desirable. On reaching Holyhead at 1.30 p.m. to the minute, you are met by the courteous and attentive marine superintendant Captain Cay, R.N., who takes you straight on board the *Ireland*, the newest addition to the fleet of fine ships, owned by the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company. She is a magnificent vessel, 380 feet long, 38 feet in beam, 2,589 tons, and 6,000 horse-power; her fine, broad bridge, handsome deck-houses, and brass work glisten in the bright sunlight. She carries electric light; and the many airy private cabins indicate that, though built for speed, the comfort of her passengers has been a matter of much consideration. She is well captained, well officered, well manned, and well navigated. The good-looking, weather-beaten Captain Kendall is indeed the commodore of the company, and has made the passage for nearly thirty years. There is an unusually large number of passengers to-day, for it is the first week of the accelerated speed, and it is amusing to notice the rapidity with which the mails are shipped, on men's backs, which plan is found quicker than any appliance. Captain Cay remarks that it is no uncommon thing to ship seven hundred sacks on foreign mail days; he says, too, that never since these vessels were started has there been a single accident to life or limb. But the last bag is on board, steam is up, and away goes the ship past the South Stack lighthouse, built on an island under precipitous cliffs, from which a gun is fired when foggy, and in about an hour the Irish coast becomes visible, Howth and Bray Head. The sea gets pretty rough, but luckily does not interfere with your excellent appetite for the first-class refreshments supplied. The swift-revolving paddles churn the big waves into a thick foam as the good ship *Ireland* ploughs her way through at the rate of twenty knots an hour, 'making good weather of it', and actually accomplishes the voyage in three hours and fifteen minutes—one of the shortest runs on record. The punctuality with which these mail packets make the passage in all weathers is indeed truly wonderful—a fact which is experienced a few days later on the return journey. Kingstown is reached at 6.10 p.m. (Irish time), where the mail train is waiting to convey passengers by the new loop line that runs in a curve right through 'dear dirty Dublin', as it is popularly called, to Kingsbridge, and so on to Cork, where you put up for the night at the Imperial Hotel.

Another bright sunshiny morning opens, and shows old Cork at her best. Cork! the old city of Father Prout's poem, 'The Bells of Shandon', which begins thus: With deep affection and recollection

I often think of Shandon bells,
Whose sounds so wild would in days of childhood
Fling round my cradle their magic spells,
On this I ponder where'er I wander,
And thus grow fonder, sweet Cork, of thee;
With the bells of Shandon
That sound so grand on, etc. etc.

The river Lee runs through the handsome little city, and has often been favourably compared with the Rhine. But Bandon must be reached, which is easily managed in an hour by rail, and there you are met by your host with a neat dog-cart, and good grey mare; being in light marching order, your kit is quickly stowed away by a smart-looking groom, and soon you find yourself tearing along at a spanking

pace through the 'most Protestant' town of Bandon, where Mr. Hungerford pulls up for a moment to point out the spot where once the old gates stood, whereon was written the legend, 'Let no Papist enter here'. Years after, a priest in the dead of night added to it. He wrote:

Whoever wrote this, wrote it *well*

The same is written on the gates of *Hell*.

Then up the hill past Ballymoden Church, in through the gates of Castle Bernard, past Lord Bandon's beautiful old castle covered with exquisite ivy, out through a second gate, over the railway, a drive of twenty minutes in all, and so up to the gates of St. Brenda's. A private road of about half a mile long, hedged on either side by privet and hawthorn and golden furze, leads to the avenue proper, the entrance gate which is flanked by two handsome deodars. It takes a few minutes more to arrive at a large, square, ivy-clad house, and ere there is time to take in an idea of its gardens and surroundings, the great hall door is flung open, a little form trips down the stone steps, and almost before the horse has come to a standstill, Mrs. Hungerford gives you indeed the 'hearty Irish welcome' she promised.

It is now about four o'clock, and the day is growing dark. Your hostess draws you in hastily out of the cold, into a spacious hall lighted by a hanging Eastern lamp, and by two other lamps let into the wide circular staircase at the lower end of it. The drawing-room door is open, and a stream of ruddy light from half-a-dozen crimson shaded lamps, rushing out, seems to welcome you too. It is a large, handsome room, very lofty, and charmingly furnished, with a Persian carpet, tiny tables, low lounging chairs, innumerable knick-knacks of all kinds, ferns, winter flowers of every sort, screens and palms. A great fire of pine-logs is roaring up the chimney. The piano is draped with Bokhara plush, and everywhere the latest magazines, novels, and papers are scattered.

Mrs. Hungerford is a very tiny woman, but slight and well-proportioned. Her large hazel eyes, sparkling with fun and merriment, are shaded by thick, curly lashes. She has a small, determined mouth, and the chin slightly upturned, gives a *piquante* expression to the intelligent face—so bright and vivacious. Her hair is of a fair-brown colour, a little lighter than her eyelashes, and is piled up high on the top of her head, breaking away into natural curls over her brow. She is clad in an exquisite tea-gown of dark blue plush, with a soft, hanging, loose front of a lighter shade of silk. Some old lace ruffles finish off the wrists and throat, and she wears a pair of little high-heeled *Louis quinze* shoes, which display her small and pretty feet. She looks the embodiment of good temper, merry wit, and *espièglerie*.

It is difficult to realize that she is the mother of the six children who are grouped in the background. One lovely little fairy, 'Vera', ages three and a half, runs clinging up to her skirts, and peeps out shyly. Her delicate colouring suggests a bit of dainty Dresden china. Later on, you discover that this is actually the pet name by which she is known, being indeed quite famous here as a small beauty. 'Master Tom', a splendid roly-poly fellow, aged sixteen months is playing with a heap of toys on the rug near the fire and is carefully watched over by a young brother of five. The three other girls are charming little maidens. The eldest, though but in her early teens, is intellectual and studious; the second has a decided talent for painting, whilst the third, says her mother, laughing, 'is a consummate idler, but witty and clever'.

By and bye your hostess takes you into what she calls her 'den', for a long, undisturbed chat, and this room also bears the stamp of her taste and love of study. A big log fire burns merrily here, too, in the huge grate, and lights up a splendid old oak cabinet, reaching from floor to ceiling, which, with four more bookcases, seems literally crammed with dictionaries, books of reference, novels, and other light literature; but the picturesque is not wanting, and there are plenty of other decorations, such as paintings, flowers, and valuable old china to be seen. Here the clever little author passes three hours every morning. She is, as usual, over-full of work, sells as fast as she can write, and has at the present time more commissions than she can get through during the next few years. Everything is very orderly—each big or little bundle of MSS. is neatly tied together and duly labelled. She opens one drawer of a great knee-hole writing table, which discloses hundreds of half sheets of paper. 'Yes', she says, with a laugh; 'I scribble my notes on these: they are the backs of my friends' letters; how astonished many of them would be if they knew that the last half sheet they write me becomes on the spot a medium for the latest full-blown accounts of a murder, or a laugh, or a swindle, perhaps, more frequently, a flirtation! I am a bad sleeper', she adds, 'I think my brain is too active, for I always plan out my best scenes at night, and write them out in the morning without any trouble'. She finds, too, that driving has a curious effect upon her; the action of the air seems to stimulate her. She dislikes talking, or being talked to, when driving, but loves to think, and to watch the lovely variations of the world around her, and often comes home filled with fresh ideas, scenes, and conversations, which she scribbles down without even waiting to throw off her furs. Asking her how she goes to work about her plot, she answers with a reproachful little laugh—'That is unkind! You know I never *have* a plot really, not the *bona fide* plot one

looks for in a novel. An idea comes to me, or I to it', she says, airily, 'a scene—a situation—a young man, a young woman, and on that mental hint I begin to build', but the question naturally arises, she must make a beginning? 'Indeed, no', she replies; 'it has frequently happened to me that I have written the last chapter first, and so, as it were, worked backwards'.

'Phyllis' was the young author's first work. It was written before she was nineteen, and was read by Mr. James Payn, who accepted it for Messrs. Smith Elder & Co.

Mrs. Hungerford is the daughter of the late Rev. Canon Hamilton, rector and vicar choral of St. Faughnan's cathedral in Ross Carberry, co. Cork, one of the oldest churches in Ireland. Her grandfather was John Hamilton, of Vesington, Dunboyne, a property thirteen miles out of Dublin. The family is very old, very distinguished, and came over from Scotland to Ireland in the reign of James I.

Most of her family are in the army; but of literary talent, she remarks, it has but little to boast. Her principal works are *Phyllis*, *Molly Bawn*, *Mrs. Geoffrey*, *Portia*, *Rossmoyne*, *Undercurrents*, *A Life's Remorse*, *A Born Coquette*, *A Conquering Heroine*. She has written up to this time thirty-two novels, besides uncountable articles for home and American papers. In the latter country she enjoys an enormous popularity, and everything she writes is rapidly printed off. First sheets of the novels in hand are bought from her for American publications, months before there is any chance of their being completed. In Australia, too, her books are eagerly looked for, whilst every story she has ever written can be found in the Tauchnitz series.

She began to write when very young, at school taking always the prize in composition. As a mere child she could always keep other children spellbound whilst telling them fairy stories of her own invention. 'I remember', she says, turning round with a laugh, 'when I was about ten years old, writing a ghost story which so frightened myself, that when I went to bed that night, I couldn't sleep till I had tucked my head under the bedclothes'. 'This', she adds, 'I have always considered my *chef d'oeuvre*, as I don't believe I have ever succeeded in frightening anyone ever since'. At eighteen she gave herself up seriously, or rather, gaily, to literary work. All her books teem with wit and humor. One of her last creations, the delightful old butler, Murphy, in *A Born Coquette*, is equal to anything ever written by her compatriot, Charles Lever. Not that she has devoted herself entirely to mirth-moving situations. The delicacy of her love scenes, the lightness of touch that distinguishes her numerous flirtations can only be equalled by the pathos she has thrown into her work every now and then, as if to temper her brightness with a little shade. Her descriptions of scenery are specially vivid and delightful, and very often full of poetry. She is never didactic or goody-goody, neither does she revel in risky situations, nor give the world stories which, to quote the well-known saying of a popular playwright, 'no nice girl would allow her mother to read'.

Mrs. Hungerford married first when very young, but her husband died in less than six years, leaving her with three little girls. In 1883 she married Mr. Henry Hungerford. He also is Irish, and his father's place, Cahirmore, of about eleven thousand acres, lies nearly twenty miles to the west of Bandon. 'It may interest you', she says, 'to hear that my husband was at the same school as Mr. Rider Haggard. I remember when we were all much younger than we are now, the two boys came over for their holidays to Cahirmore, and one day in my old home "Milleen" we all went down to the kitchen to cast bullets. We little thought then that the quiet, shy schoolboy, was destined to be the author of "King Solomon's Mines"'.

Nothing less than a genius is Mrs. Hungerford at gardening. Her dress protected by a pretty holland apron, her hands encased in brown leather gloves, she digs and delves. Followed by many children, each armed with one of 'mother's own' implements—for she has her own little spade and hoe, and rake, and trowel, and fork—she plants her own seeds, and pricks her own seedlings, prunes, grafts, and watches with the deepest eagerness to see them grow. In springtime, her interest is alike divided between the opening buds of her daffodils, and the breaking of the eggs of the first little chickens, for she has a fine poultry yard too, and is very successful in her management of it. She is full of vitality, and is the pivot on which every member of the house turns. Blessed with an adoring husband, and healthy, handsome, obedient children, who come to her for everything and tell her anything, her life seems idyllic.

'Now and then', she remarks laughing, 'I really have great difficulty in securing two quiet hours for my work'; but everything is done in such method and order, the writing included, there is little wonder that so much is got through. It is a full, happy, complete life. 'I think', she adds, 'my one great dread and anxiety is a review. I never yet have got over my terror of it, and as each one arrives, I tremble and quake afresh ere reading'.

April's Lady is one of the author's lately published works. It is in the three volumes, and ran

previously as a serial in *Belgravia*. *Lady Patty*, a society sketch drawn from life, has a most favourable reception from the critics and public alike, but in her last novel, very cleverly entitled *Nor Wife Nor Maid*, Mrs. Hungerford is to be seen, or rather read, at her best. This charming book, so full of pathos, so replete with tenderness, ran into a second edition in about ten days. In it the author has taken somewhat of a departure from her usual lively style. Here she has indeed given 'sorrow words'. The third volume is so especially powerful and dramatic, that it keeps the attention chained. The description indeed of poor Mary's grief and despair are hardly to be outdone. The plot contains a delicate situation, most delicately worked out. Not a word or suspicion of a word jars upon the reader. It is not however all gloom. There is in it a second pair of lovers who help to lift the clouds, and bring a smile to the lips of the reader.

Mrs. Hungerford does not often leave her pretty Irish home. What with her incessant literary work, her manifold domestic occupations, and the cares of her large family, she can seldom be induced to quit what she calls, 'an out and out country life', even to pay visits to her English friends. Mrs. Hungerford unhesitatingly declares that everything in the house seems wrong, and there is a howl of dismay from the children when the presiding genius even suggests a few days' leave of absence. Last year, however, she determined to go over London at the pressing invitation of a friend, in order to make the acquaintance of some of her distinguished brothers and sisters of the pen, and she speaks of how thoroughly she enjoyed that visit, with an eager delight. 'Everyone was so kind', she says, 'so flattering, far, far too flattering. They all seemed to have some pretty thing to say to me. I have felt a little spoilt ever since. However, I am going to try what a little more flattery will do for me, so Mr. Hungerford and I hope to accept, next Spring, a second invitation from the same friend, who wants us to go to a large ball she is going to give some time in May for some charitable institution—a Cottage Hospital I believe; but come', she adds, suddenly springing up, 'we have spent quite too much time over my stupid self. Come back to the drawing-room and the chicks, I am sure they must be wondering where we are, and the tea and the cakes are growing cold'.

At this moment the door opens, and her husband, gun in hand, with muddy boots and gaiters, nods to you from the threshold; he says he dare not enter the 'den' in this state, and hurries up to change before joining the tea table. 'He is a great athlete', says his wife, 'good at cricket, football, and hockey, and equally fond of shooting, fishing, and riding'. That he is a capital whip, you have already found out.

In the morning you see from the library window a flower garden and shrubbery, with rose trees galore, and after breakfast a stroll round the place is proposed. A brisk walk down the avenue first, and then back to the beech trees standing on the lawn, which slopes away from the house down to a river running at the bottom of a deep valley, up the long gravelled walk by the hall door, and you turn into a handsome walled kitchen garden, where fruit trees abound—apple and pear trees laden with fruit, a quarter of an acre of strawberry beds, and currant and raspberry bushes in plenty.

But time and tide, trains and steamers, wait to for no man, or woman either. A few hours later you regretfully bid adieu to the charming little author, and watch her until the bend of the road hides her from your sight. Mr. Hungerford sees you through the first stage of the journey, which is all accomplished satisfactorily, and you reach home to find that whilst you have been luxuriating in fresh sea and country air, London has been wrapped in four days of gloom and darkness."

Complement:

Helen C. BLACK, *In memoriam The late Mrs. Hungerford* from *The Englishwoman* April 1897 pp. 102-105

"The sad news of the death of the popular and well-known author, Mrs. Hungerford, has caused a universal thrill of sorrow, no less to her many friends than to the large section of the reading public, in every part of the globe where the English tongue is spoken, who delight in her simple but bright and witty love-stories, so full of pathos, so replete with tenderness and human interest. The melancholy event took place on Sunday morning, the 24th January, after many weeks' illness from typhoid fever, and has deprived what the beloved little writer was wont to call 'a perfectly happy and idyllic Irish home' of its chiefest treasure.

The late Mrs. Hungerford came before the public at the early age of eighteen, when she made an immediate success with her first novel, *Phyllis*, which was read and accepted by Mr. James Payn, then reader for Messrs. Smith Elder & Co. Her natural bent towards literature had, however, manifested itself in childhood, when she took at school all the prizes in composition, and used to keep her playfellows enthralled by the stories and fairy-tales she invented and wrote for them. On leaving school

she at once decided to adopt the pen as a profession, in which she has had so successful a career. The tone of *Phyllis* was so fresh and ingenuous that it soon found favour with the public, and was shortly followed by the far-famed *Molly Bawn*—a title which was peculiarly associated with her, inasmuch as it was the name by which many friends called her—and a long series, numbering over forty novels, besides countless short stories for home and American magazines, where, together with Australia and India, she enjoyed a vast popularity. In America everything she wrote was rapidly printed off, first sheets of novels in hand being bought from her for Transatlantic publications long before there was any chance of their being completed, while every story she ever wrote can be found in the Tauchnitz series. Among her earlier works are *Portia*, *Mrs. Geoffrey*, *Airy Fairy Lilian*, *Rossmoyne*, etc., which were followed as years rolled on, by *Undercurrents*, *A Life's Remorse*, *A Born Coquette*—where her creation of the delightful old butler, Murphy, is equal to anything ever written by her compatriot Charles Lever—, *Nor Wife, nor Maid*, *The Professor's Experiment*, etc. The latest work that she lived to see published is a collection of clever, crisp stories, entitled *An Anxious Moment*, which, with a strange and pathetic significance, terminates with a brief paper called 'How I Write my Novels'. Two posthumous works were left completed, bearing the names, respectively, of *Lovice*, just issued, and *The Coming of Chloe*, which will shortly be brought out.

Thoroughly wholesome in tone, bright and sparkling in style, the delicacy of here love-scenes and the lightness of touch that distinguishes her character sketches can only be equalled by the pathos, which every now and then she has thrown in, as if to temper her vivacity with a little shade. Here and there, as in the case of *Nor Wife, nor Maid*, she has struck a powerfully dramatic note, while her descriptions of scenery are especially vivid and delightful, and very often full of poetry.

The late Mrs. Hungerford was the daughter of the late Rev. Canon Hamilton, Rector and Vicar Choral of St. Faughman's Cathedral, Ross Carberry, co. Cork, one of the oldest churches in Ireland. Her grandfather was John Hamilton, of Vesington, Dunboyne, a property thirteen miles out of Dublin. The family is very old, very distinguished, and came over from Scotland to Ireland in the Reign of James I. She was first married when very young, but her husband died five and a half years later, leaving her with three little girls. In 1882, *en secondes nocces*, she married Mr. Thomas Henry Hungerford, of St. Brenda's, Bandon, co. Cork, whose father's estate Cahirmore, of about eleven thousand acres, lies nearly twenty miles to the west of Bandon. By this most happy union, she has left three children—two sons and a daughter.

Thoroughly domestic in all her tastes, with a love of gardening, and a practical knowledge of all the details of country life, which tend to make the home so comfortable, her unflinching sweet temper, ready wit and *espièglerie*, her powers of sympathy and strong common sense, caused her to be the life and center of her large household. Tenderly attached to her husband and family, by all of whom she was adored, she used often to say, with joy and pride, 'They came to her for everything, and told her everything, and it was a union of perfect love, confidence, and peace'. In social life she numbered a large circle of friends, to whom she was deservedly endeared by her many engaging qualities; she possessed, indeed, a magnetism which drew all hearts towards her. But seldom could Mrs. Hungerford be induced to leave her picturesque Irish home, even to pay visits to her friends in England. Her manifold duties, the cares of a large family, and her incessant literary work filled up a life that was complete, useful, and congenial, and leaves behind an irreparable blank.

A brief description of the well-beloved little author and her pretty home will be interesting to those who knew her not, save through her works. She was a very tiny woman, but slight and well-proportioned, with baby hands and feet. The large hazel eyes, that sparkled with fun and merriment, were shaded by thick curly lashes; a small, determined mouth and slightly upturned chin gave a piquant expression to the intelligent face—so bright and vivacious. Her hair, of a fair brown colour, a little lighter than the eyelashes, was worn piled up on the top of her head, and broke away into natural curls over a broad and intellectual brow.

Driving up the hill, past Ballymoden Church, in through the gates of Castle Barnard, Lord Bandon's beautiful old place covered with ivy, out through a second gate and over the railway, the gates of St. Brenda are reached. A private road, about half a mile long, hedged on either side with privet, hawthorn and golden furze, leads to the avenue proper, the entrance gate of which is flanked by two handsome deodars. It takes a few minutes more to arrive at the large square ivy-clad house and grounds, where beech trees stand on the lawn sloping away down to a river running at the bottom of a deep valley. The long gravelled walk by the hall door turns into a handsome walled kitchen garden, where apple and pear trees abound, together with a quarter of an acre of strawberry beds, currant, gooseberry, and raspberry bushes in plenty. From the library window can be seen the flower garden and shrubbery and a large variety of rose trees. Close by is her own special plot where she delighted to work with her own little implements, spade, trowel, hoe, and rake, planting her seeds, pricking her seedlings, pruning, grafting, and watching with deepest eagerness to see them grow. In spring-time her interest was alike divided between the opening buds of her daffodils and the breaking of the eggs of the first little

chickens in the fine poultry yard, in the management of which she was so successful. But among all these multifarious and healthy outdoor occupations in which she delighted, Mrs. Hungerford invariably secured three hours daily for her literary pursuits, when everything was done with such method and order, the writing included, that there was little wonder that she got through so much.

Her own writing-room bears the stamp of her taste and her love of study, where the big log-fire burned in the huge grate, and lighted up a splendid old oak cabinet that reaches from floor to ceiling, which, together with four other bookcases, are literally crammed to overflowing, while the picturesque is not wanting, as the many paintings, old china, ferns, plants and winter flowers can testify.

On the great knee-hole writing table lies the now silent pen where last she used it, with each big or little bundle of MSS. methodically labelled, and a long list of engagements for work, extending into future years, now, alas! destined to remain unfulfilled!

With so active a brain she was a bad sleeper, and always planned out her best schemes during the night, and wrote them out in the morning without difficulty. Driving, too, had a curious effect upon her; the action of the air seemed to stimulate her, and she disliked talking, or being talked to, when driving. She loved to think and to watch the lovely variations of the world around her, and would often come home filled with fresh ideas, scenes, and conversations, which she used to note down without even waiting to throw off her furs. If questioned how she went to work about a plot she would reply, with a reproachful little laugh, 'I never have a plot really, not the *bona fide* plot one looks for in a novel. An idea comes to me, or I to it—a scene, a situation, a young man or a young woman—and on that mental hint I begin to build, and it has frequently happened to me that I have written the last chapter first, and so, as it were, worked backwards'.

But in whatsoever form the gifted writer composed her novels the result was the same, and she will be widely mourned by the many, who in hours of sickness, of carking care or sorrow, owed a temporary respite from heavy thought, or the laugh that banishes ennui, to her ready pen—grave and gay by turns, but in every mood bewitching. During her long illness, with its constant relapses, its alternations of now hope, now despair, her patience and unselfishness were exhibited to a remarkable degree. Ever fearful to give trouble, hopeful and wishing to encourage the loved ones around her, she maintained a gentle cheerfulness and resignation, and finally passed away so peacefully that her sorrowing husband and children scarcely realised the moment when her spirit winged its flight to the better land, whence she, being dead, 'yet speaketh', for 'to live in hearts we leave behind is not to die'."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MRS. HUNGERFORD ***

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