

## Victorian Evening at "Wood End". Lady Louisa Sitwell in conversation with Dr. Dale. Summer 1888.

**Prologue.** Lady Louisa was widowed in 1862, upon the death of Sir Reresby Sitwell. She has two children, the elder being Florence born in 1858, and a boy Sir George Reresby Sitwell, Baronet, who succeeded at the age of two, having been born in 1860. Several guests are already present at this summer soiree, and dancing is already in progress. Sir George is now married to Lady Ida, who is a daughter of Earl Londesborough. Sir George is not present, spending the evening canvassing. Lady Ida is present and she is now a mother, having given birth to a girl in November 1887. That girl would become Dame Edith Sitwell. Dr. Dale had a Practise in Huntriss Row and operated this with his Nephew, Dr. Fred Dale. George Peckitt Dale, JP, was educated at University College, London and came to Scarborough from York in 1851, establishing his Practise at Falconer's House, 20 Huntriss Row.

LL. Thank you Hill for letting me know of the arrival of Dr. Dale. You say that he has walked here. Will you make arrangements to coach him back to Scalby, and on the way make sure to see he is accompanied by Lady Hanmer. Make sure too that you help her down and see her safely to her door where Alfred will end your escort. After a long day we should not detain the Doctor beyond nine thirty. Thank you and perhaps you would look out for other guests, particularly those who are approaching through Earl Londesborough's garden. Pickering is on hand to assist them via those rather steep approaches. Would you also ask Lickley to come through for a moment. Ah, Doctor Dale how lovely to again have your company. Twice we meet in a day. Please do sit down.

DD. What a lovely evening this is, and thank you again for the Invitation. I saw Lickley when she called at my Practise with the note and I asked her to especially let you know that I might be a little late as I intended walking but had a call too on St Nicholas Cliff. I have just been there and saw Dr. Barrington Cooke. I arranged to see him in the foyer of The Grand, and then he was going on to another meeting. In fact his coach was standing outside his old Practise premises on St Nicholas Cliff. His coachman was fast asleep, no doubt taken over by the heat of this evening. Now, where is it that he lives?

LL. Yes, I was trying to recall it..... Ah Lickley ..... remind me again of the home of Dr. Cooke..... Ah, yes, 35, Esplanade Gardens, you say it is named "The Haven". I should think it is after his busy South Cliff days. Oh Lickley, just remember to call in on Little E and make sure she is settled, I know Davis was going to read to her, before her evening off. Sir George and Lady Ida have another engagement tonight, more to do with vote-collecting I think since he lost the last election two years ago. Still, if Ida's looks are anything, and now George is a family man he might have more appeal.

DD I was going to have a word about the Hospital where I called this morning. All the patients seem to be as well as can be expected but we might need to use the new Dispensary in Friarage for one of the acutely ill patients, you know the young girl who had to leave The Home Of Hope, where the steam from the Laundry was complicating her recovery from pneumonia. Dr Rablah who is careful of all the hygiene and health there is fully in agreement too. Well, I have discussed it with my nephew Frederic, whom you know is the Honorary Consulting Surgeon at the Dispensary, and he has agreed that a place can be found. In that case we could then admit that young girl with the poisoned foot who needs the kind of rest and care we can offer at King Street. Are you happy with that? Good.

LL I was quite surprised when we were talking recently to find that you have been in the town for almost forty years. No doubt sharing your Huntriss Row practice with Frederic, your nephew, must have eased the load brought about by the increasing population, not to mention the Honorary positions you hold.

DD Yes I am contemplating retirement. The days at Falconer's House are very busy and I think that a quieter life at Scalby and Hay Brow beckons . Just the other day I was noting that we have been at that house for nearly twenty years and I think Eliza would like me to relax somewhat more. Frederic has a good future at the Huntriss Row practise and his aural and ophthalmic talents attract plenty of opportunity for the progression of his surgical skills.

LL It was sad that Cooke's daughter Amy should die early in marriage and just after the birth of Cecilia. It is strange how my late husband's nephew Claude came to marry her, everything seems to focus on Scarborough.

DD.I hear he has been in great danger on his military missions in Africa. Never mind it has been good to see him returning here and seeing his little daughter. No doubt grand-parents Robert and Emily are enjoying the burst of new life in their home. Claude must feel assured, and I like to hear from him of you r in-law Sitwells at Barmoor Castle too, who are all seeking military careers.

LL. Ah, Blanche, we are honoured to have Dr. Dale here tonight. I doubt that you have met. George, this is Blanche Sitwell my sister -in law. My late husband, Sir Reresby, was Blanche's elder brother. In fact Reresby was born at Edinburgh in 1820 and Blanche at Renishaw some twenty three years later,would she mind if I said .... The baby of the family! Of course Scarborough is important again because their mother Susan came to live at Atholl House, the Villa on the corner of Fulford Road and Princess Royal Terrace, just round the corner from me when I lived at Sunnyside in 1867.

DD So where is Blanche living now?

LL Oh yes I forgot to finish the story. Well, Blanche now lives at Atholl. Blanche, we find you a very inspiring lady, and I am sure you will enjoy watching the young Edith grow up and of course from you she will learn impeccable manners. No doubt that Davis will play her part since she was formerly the nurse-maid to E's mother, Lady Ida! Quite a nice succession I think.Blanche, I see someone hovering for you in the Gavotte. I have arranged your carriage for 10. You were saying that Atholl is rather large for you. Yes I think it might be good to find a smaller place.

DD Blanche,! hear that in Avenue Victoria there is a smaller property which you might like. It is called Huntercombe Cottage. I am quite sure it would be ideal. If Archibald, and Georgiana ,your sister came there would still be room, and across Filey Road you would be nearer the sea. Give it a look sometime. Passing in the barouche the other day put it in my mind. The same day I saw Countess Edith out in the jockey-cart - not quite the same as the carriage and four in London!

LL Oh, yes. The infant Edith is near walking and the other day she was reaching up trying to catch some finches in the conservatory. Like all children she is inquisitive, but has a stronger temperament than many. Davis is enjoying the open air walks quite near the sea I should think. When I kissed E. the other day her cheek tasted of salt. Well, I suppose it is all part of her early memories.

DD Forgive me, I was wondering how Archibald and Georgiana fit in. I have heard your daughter Florence speak of Aunt Georgie but never asked. No doubt Florence has it all in her diary.

LL. Georgiana is another of my sisters-in- law, married into the Swintons - a well connected Scottish family. Older than Blanche of course, she is a talented artist in water-colour, and interestingly she too keeps a diary. Do you know that in the days when her father, Sir George, the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Baronet took them to

Scotland she kept a personal record. Just think still at Balmoral for holidays in 1846. Just before the big financial ruin engulfed her father and Renishaw itself. Queen Victoria noted in her journal that in 1856 that the old Balmoral had gone, and the new Balmoral was in place. Of course the Prince Consort had his way as usual. Still, I suppose even Queens don't hang on for posterity. Archibald, Georgiana's husband, is a member of the Queen's Guard in Scotland. Somehow Scotland seems second only to Scarborough in the family.

DD When Sir George was reminiscing one day he was saying that Sir George, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, and his grand-father, had only slept in Renishaw Hall for two nights between it being closed in 1847 and his death in 1853. What a tragedy that was. Sir George said the family was ruined too through having all the Scottish ancestors living off the Sitwells at Renishaw. The Scots spent too much on building work apparently. I gave George a thought when I suggested he did not make the same mistake. His head is full of schemes. It sounds as if the dancing is going well through there. It was a bit of a masterstroke combining the three rooms into one, and of course with birds fluttering overhead and the palm in the conservatory the house is much more interesting. I used to visit the Knowles, almost from the time when they moved here in - when was it - about 1837. I was hoping to see the Earl tonight but I gather he has a cricketing occasion at Londesborough Park. I hear a bowler, Alan Siddall from Market Weighton, is gathering wickets there. I hope he is on the right side! At last year's Festival I was taken by the sight of all the carriages of every description standing around the ground. The Earl has made a great financial contribution there - and the presence of W.G. Grace too. I remember the stir as Lady Ida was rushed from there to arrive back in some discomfort for the birth of Edith.

LL Talking of the Earl it reminds me about my visit to see Countess Edith at the Lodge. Even to me she is formidable. Still if you are a daughter of the Duke of Beaufort certain habits will be always somewhat superior. I hear that her family home at Badminton is almost feudal. And as for influence - even had Lizzy playing there in 1830! I gather that the Somerset's family routines are almost set in stone. Still, being Plantagenets! I suppose they are naturally imperious. Well on my visit to her I was trying to make conversation but the parrots, hanging outside in cages, and other birds shrieking from their cages! Well! I hear that any communication by Countess Edith with the servants can only be through the Butler. Pity it didn't apply to the parrots too. No doubt she will be just as anxious as I am to see how little E, her namesake, turns out. Somehow I always feel that with the Countess that I belong to the level of Baronet!

DD I was talking to a surveyor the other day and he was telling me that the Earl is prospecting for a winter shoot and has been seen in Lincoln several times. Word has it that an offer may soon be made for an estate a few miles south of there. Blankney it is called. No doubt that a few more local acres will be on the market to fund that, and then the Christmas Guest List for the shoot. I have to smile when I think of you amidst all the slaughter?

LL Well now that is an overwhelming prospect. If it is true then I know that some of my Advent attendances at St Marys will be useful as an excuse. Wouldn't do to disappoint Archdeacon Blunt. Mind you it would give Florence's diary a novel entry. Perhaps our morning prayers will be for the failure of the project. The Earl is a charming man, the whole town regards him as a "swell" and his generosity is boundless.

DD Talking to Sir George the other day he was saying that his projects at Renishaw are going well. Apparently he is in constant correspondence with Peverill Turnbull, his Land Agent, and has Lutyens in tow as well. The new lake is filling I hear, and he has a mass of ideas, including a new Golf-Course and

Clubhouse. He said he hoped soon to complete the purchase of the "Scarborough Post" and is working on a book about medieval history. I mildly counselled him about the strain on his nerves, and possibly too on Lady Ida.

LL Yes I understand your point. Since the Bolsover mines are now paying us royalties on all that coal below Renishaw we are growing quite rich again. We enjoy our few weeks in the summer there, but somehow the pull of this town never recedes. It is a bit like the tide - it brings us back all the time! Ida is making her mark with the Conservatives but I hear a story or two about her excessive generosity. An admirer only has to say a kind word about her jewellery and they are given as a gift!

DD You know I was reading an interesting suggestion the other day to the effect that Londesborough Lodge saved Royalty in this country. It sounds extraordinary but when you think how low esteem was for Victoria and The Prince of Wales in the early 1870's. The republicans were having a field day. She, allegedly hiding away at Osborne and Balmoral, counting her money, and he astride the gaming tables gambling the Nation's gold. Sounds very hysterical and scurrilous but at the time "Reynold News" was selling like hot cakes! Largest circulation in the world. When Typhoid had the Prince at death's door at Sandringham and the Queen was told he would not last the night all the horrors of her late Consort must have been present. Well well, when he recovered the public outpouring of sympathy was enormous and the Institutions of the country heaved a huge sigh of relief. Everything just turned on the ravings of the Prince, and turned out well. Hopefully the Londesboroughs turned the drains out as well.

LL Yes, and when Lord Chesterfield died on the same visit, and a groom, I thought the roof of the Lodge would fall in. But there you are - our second Baron is now an Earl, all part of the Golden Jubilee awards. With his successor Raincliffe now achieving his majority the succession is all in place. Aren't the Londesboroughs tall - and thin! One evening I overheard the remark that the Denisons are built like a comb, all backbone and teeth! Am I envious? Not a bit. Of course here we are a quite formidable unit and after prayers each day Lickley always stays behind to keep me informed of her intelligence gathering on her rounds. Nice to hear that the fisherfolk are finding the extended Club and Reading Rooms up to expectations. I thoroughly enjoyed performing the opening, though after my back was sore - that train accident has pulled me down a measure or too.

DD Yes I was wondering about the effects of that. Just as well you are not adding the complications of the hunting life. Sir George too I hear likes his country but not on a horse. Talking of horses, now, when I go home tonight in the carriage in the company of Lady Hanmer would you like to give me her background. How does she fit in, and what about the name "Weston" a fine house on Westwood she has had built for herself? I know she is your eldest sister but that is all.

LL Ah, yes. Forgive me I should have explained. It is strange but our family home, Weston Hall in the village of that name in Northamptonshire, always passes down through the female line. So she is the owner. Being a widow she came here; so we are mutually supportive. Florence and George know her affectionately as Aunt Puss. In her house she has a wonderful cabinet which our father obtained in Paris in 1814 during the Napoleonic Wars. Harriot, my mother, comes from the Wrightsons who have a family House, Cusworth, near Doncaster. You should see Weston village - it is truly medieval and in a carriage one wonders if the place will ever be found. The family Church is at Lois Weedon, just down the road, and there are all manner of family memorial there. My father was the brother of the 8<sup>th</sup>. Lord Donoughmore.

DD I was interested to see that Sir George does not claim any degree, and in conversation with him he said that he did attend Christ Church College, Oxford, but chose not to do his Finals. Apparently all the Sitwells attended Oxford, including your late husband Sir Reresby.

LL Yes, in a way I am sorry that George chose that path. However it has not held him back, largely due to the influence of Archibald Tail, the brother of Susan, whom I told you loved in Atholl House. He has, like her, passed away, but achieved great things, the first Scot to become Archbishop of Canterbury. With George having no father Archibald willingly took on the role of Guardian and wrote over forty letters of introduction such that George soon found himself in good company. Indeed, Earl Londesborough who was MP for both Beverley and Scarborough has been equally helpful on the political front.

DD I remember when it was that great celebration at Londesborough Park, the coming of age of Francis, eldest son of the Earl. Sir George was called upon to make a speech and chose to give support to woman taking a greater role in public life. Ruffled a few more feathers that day. Ah, yes, now it fits in. I remember it was Blanche who was most enthusiastic in her applause. Incidentally I learn that Randall Davidson who was Chaplain to Archibald married Catherine, Archibald's daughter. Keeping it in the family - since I hear that Randall is on course to take the top post himself.

LL Well, well, if I don't move into the Conservatory and announce the introduction of food some will drink a little too much. Come through Doctor, can't have any one falling over in your presence - you must have had enough of ailments for one day.

(Composed by James Bantoft on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2011) (Words 3,211)

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