



Lola Montez: An Adventuress of the 'Forties

Edmund B. d'Auvergne

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The story of a brave and beautiful woman, whose fame filled Europe and America within the memory of our parents, seems to be worth telling. The human note in history is never more thrilling than when it is struck in the key of love. In what were perhaps more virile ages, the great ones of the earth frankly acknowledged the irresistible power of passion and the supreme desirability of beauty. Their followers thought none the less of them for being sons of Adam. Lola Montez was the last of that long and illustrious line of women, reaching back beyond Cleopatra and Aspasia, before whom kings bent in homage, and by whose personality they openly confess themselves to be swayed. Since her time man has thrown off the spell of woman's beauty, and seems to dread still more the competition of her intellect. Lola Montez, some think, came a century too late; "in the eighteenth century," said Claudin, "she would have played a great part." The part she played was, at all events, stirring and strange enough. The most spiritually and æsthetically minded sovereign in Europe worshipped her as a goddess; geniuses of coarser fibre, such as Dumas, sought her society. She associated with the most highly gifted men of her time. Equipped only with the education of a pre-Victorian schoolgirl, she overthrew the ablest plotters and intriguers in Europe, foiled the policy of Metternich, and hoisted the standard of freedom in the very stronghold of Ultramontane and reactionary Germany. Driven forth by a revolution, she wandered over the whole world, astonishing Society by her masculine courage, her adaptability to all circumstances and surroundings. She who had thwarted old Europe's skilled diplomatists, knew how to horsewhip and to cow the bullies of young Australia's mining camps. An indifferent actress, her beauty and sheer force of character drew thousands to gaze at her in every land she trod. So she flashed like a meteor from continent to continent, heard of now at St. Petersburg, now at New York, now at San Francisco, now at Sydney. She crammed enough experience into a career of forty-two years to have surfeited a centenarian. She had her moments of supreme exaltation, of exquisite felicity. Her vicissitudes were glorious and sordid. She was presented by a king to his whole court as his best friend; she was dragged to a London police-station on a charge of felony. But in prosperity she never lost her head, and in adversity she never lost her courage. A splendid animal, always doing what she wished to do; a natural pagan in her delight in life and love and danger—she cherished all her life an unaccountable fondness for the most conventional puritanical forms of Christianity, dying at last in the bosom of the Protestant Church, with sentiments of self-abasement and contrition that would have done credit to a Magdalen or Pelagia

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