

Modern Men Such Lifeless Lovers! Sighs Princess

Is Mrs. Asquith's Temperamental Titled Daughter "Nagging" Her Own Husband, with the Whole World "In on It"?



Mrs. Asquith, Mother of Princess Bibesco, Reading Her Own Famous Book of Memoirs, Which, When Published, Startled the World.

She is not old, she is not young,
The Woman with the Serpent's
Tongue.
With venomous fangs she cannot hide;
Who half makes love to you to-day,
To-morrow gives her guest away.
Hectic and always overstrung—
The Woman with the Serpent's
Tongue.

—William Watson's poetic
excoriation of Violet Asquith.

TWO years married, and she wrote a book of short stories, decidedly hostile, entitled "I Have Only Myself to Blame."

In the stories she pictures a woman married to a person in trousers and bearing other indications of belonging to the male persuasion who utters endless bromides—who knows not the simplest fundamentals of lovemaking—who is one of those impossible persons all too prevalent in well nigh every stratum of society.

The book is dedicated "To My Husband." Her husband is Prince Antoine Bibesco, Rumanian Minister to the United States.

Has Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, daughter of the famous Margot Asquith, followed in her mother's literary footsteps by revealing more of her own private life than the ethics of modern usage sanction?

Has she emulated the example of her half sister, Violet Asquith, whom William Watson, made famous in his poem, "The Woman with the Serpent's Tongue"? Washington society—for the Prince and Princess are living there—is agog over the possibilities. It has read and reread the stories for a solution supposed to be contained between the covers of the highly colored little book.

The stories are self-analytical. The writer lifts the veil on her emotions—she dissects her heart throbs—she transcribes her passions. The book reveals the soul of a woman—the real self—pitilessly—powerfully.

But through the series of short tales there runs a vein of cynicism—of, say, self-pity. In each story the heroine is sorry for herself. She realizes that she is more or less the plaything of a relentless fate, foreordained to do certain things, whether she will or no.

In each story, the man disappoints her. He is a male negation, who smokes, drinks and eats—who has all the attributes of a human being, yet lacks fervor and manly initiative. The heroine is fervent, to say the least. She makes the advances; she opens the door through which the man never enters into the haven of love.

The first story, from which the book takes its name, tells of a beautiful woman who had "only herself to blame" for marrying a man whose sole recommenda-



Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, (C) Harris & Ewing.

Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, Whose Short Stories Stirred Washington Society by Their Nonchalant Cynicism.

tion was that "he adored her body" and she was "the first woman he had ever loved." Here is an excerpt from the story: "And all the time she was bound to him by some indefinable physical tie—not her passion for him, but his reverence for her—or rather for her body. To-night every nerve was trying 'no,' while those eternal six words, 'I have only myself to blame,' hummed an accompaniment. "She was waiting for him in her charming boudoir. He had come home late and was dressing for dinner—he always dressed for dinner. The door opened and he appeared—immaculate. She would have felt more forgiving had he been more untidy. "I must apologize for having kept you waiting." "You shouldn't have changed." "I disapprove of a man who thinks he can be as dirty and untidy as he likes simply because he is at home." "How well she knew this comedy of formality that was his idea of fine manners. Dinner was announced. He gave her his arm. "A very good wine, My Catherine." He sipped his port. "It is always like that. Everything that belongs to him he consecrates by possessing it," she thought. And then she gives a minute, almost microscopic description of the man: "Horace was in his element. He gov-



Prince Antoine Bibesco, Rumanian Minister to the United States, Who May or May Not Feel Uncomfortable at His Wife's Allusion to Husbands.

elled in his duties as host. He enjoyed offering his arm to the lady of highest rank, even if she were one of his wife's supercilious relatives. He liked the sight of diamonds and the sound of high titles—though fortunately he never connected these pleasures with their source. Above all, he liked the moment when, alone with the men, he could push around the decanters, offer cigars of varying lengths and equal, though different, perfection, and



He wasn't in love with me, but I was a revelation to him—a revelation of himself. People said I had invented him. It wasn't quite true, but I emphasized what was uncharacteristic in him and forced my estimate on him, when he was with me—he was nearly always with me. Away from me he relapsed into his own personality, but I didn't know it. I don't know how to describe his personality. He was often considered half-witted. His mind was like a searchlight which overlooked cathedrals, but occasionally lit up some small forgotten chapel.

Next comes "The Dream," in which the authoress describes her emotions:

"She thought of her husband, who had kissed her as if she were a crucifix, and treated her always as some infinitely fragile thing to be broken by a breath. She thought of the men who had loved her since his death—of how they, too, had approached her on tiptoe, as if her preciousness had made her almost into an invalid. In her bodily loneliness she cried out for roughness, for a primitive disregard of her feelings. She wanted to be 'a' woman to 'a' man; to be mastered and perhaps crushed."

And then she has a day dream of a caveman, only to be awakened by another cavalier, who kissed her hands tenderly.

"I promise I won't do it again," he sighs. "Will you forgive me?" "I wonder," she says bitterly as she tore her hands away.

Another description of a man, as seen by the Princess, is contained in "Tout Comprendre":

"Adrian Rose was perfectly satisfied with life. . . . Having been left money by an aunt, he was able to live in great comfort a life of leisure, lazy without being idle, and occupied without being busy. He was interested in literature, in art, in music and in people. . . . He took an indefatigable interest in what he was going to say next. . . . Adrian believed in light, iridescent emotions. . . . A glove, a fan, a capella—they were to him the symbols of love. . . . Hiding a bleeding heart beneath a gallant smile, he withdrew in favor of his rival, or, sacrificing his happiness for hers, he recalled his beloved with her husband."

And the book containing these descriptions is dedicated "To My Husband." Princess Bibesco is a member of a family boasting Violet Asquith as the former Premier's daughter by his first marriage; Margaret Asquith as her stepmother and Elizabeth Bibesco as the daughter of Margaret. William Watson, when his poem, "The Woman with the Serpent's Tongue," had created an international sensation, made the following explanatory statement:

"My poem is a composite photograph of Mrs. Asquith (Margot) and her step-daughter, Violet. The poem is a portrait of the physical characteristics of Mrs. Asquith. Violet is the voice and rules them all. Violet is the real, official voice speaking with authority. She it is who: "Sighs the worthiest in the land, sneers at the just condemns the brave, and blackens goodness in its gray."

dominate the conversation. He had a rigid sense of honor. He believed in the weakness of women and believed in not believing in God. He was shocked by corporeal punishment and he was never able to make up his mind on vivisection. He thought Freud an impostor. He loved animals and was on the wine committee of his club. He was a good son, a good citizen, a good husband and a good friend.

"Of all these things Catherine was devastatingly conscious. She felt very tired and the evening had been a complete failure. She had absolutely nothing to say to her husband when they were alone. She heard his footsteps on the stairs.

And then, womanlike, she scowls into his arms and cries: "Horace," she said, "I'm so lonely, so terribly lonely."

In another story, "The Web," she tells a tale of a woman who was financially indebted to a man and sought to square herself by giving herself to him. Being a decent sort of chap, he refuses and offers to marry her. She, being she, declines to be a mere wife, and then: "Marriage will modify you," he said. "Marriage might modify me if I married the right man. Marriage to you would bring out everything you hate."

"Helena, do you realize that I love you?" "As always before, at this real, undeniable, important, impossible fact, she stopped. To her it is a brick wall to be surmounted neither by argument—that being unconvincing—nor surrender—that being unattainable. . . .

Another Likeness of the Princess Bibesco, Snapped at a Costume Dance in London Shortly Before Coming to America.

"Helena, do you know what love means?"

"Again she snatches at her opportunity. "Of course I don't. If I did, I might want to marry you." . . .

"She remembers a hundred instances of his insolent, moral magnificence. 'You want me to sign your name, to sit at the head of your table, to dazzle your friends, to eclipse your sisters-in-law, to be a mother to your children.'"

Then there is "An Ordinary Man" in which another love episode is revealed—the writer's soul is apparently again laid bare. There is the usual crescendo and then: "I suppose that I love him," she said to herself, now that I know the very bottom of his shallows. The thought humiliated her, but she faced it with the rest. And then, he marries another girl.

In "Cyclamen" she describes the man once again: "Once upon a time, or rather, just before the war, I knew a man—I don't know how to begin, I wasn't in love with him.