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*A complete list of publications can be found on the author's website,
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HORACE FARQUHAR

A Bad Man Befriended by Kings

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ALISTAIR LEXDEN

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A Conservative History Publication

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FOREWORD

This is the story of a bad man, endowed with much talent, who prospered spectacularly in late Victorian England and thereafter. He died exactly a century ago in 1923. If Horace Farquhar ever had a moral compass, he threw it away early in life. One of his elder brothers, writing when he was a child, felt that there was some good in him. That was unduly charitable. He possessed ability, charm and massive self-confidence; few scoundrels succeed without them.

I summarised the remarkable Farquhar story briefly in a short piece on my website in early 2020, and described it rather more fully in an article which was published in the journal *Parliamentary History* in June 2021. I then decided to gather together as much as I could find about this almost entirely forgotten rogue, who amassed considerable wealth and spent lavishly to acquire titles and to retain the friendship of two Kings, Edward VII and George V, which was in itself no mean feat in view of their contrasting characters, the first being extravagant and colourful while the second was worthy and dull.

In his heyday Farquhar combined a prominent position at court with a significant role in the Conservative Party, which no one at the time seems to have thought unseemly or inappropriate, as would be the case today. He was the Party's first Treasurer (1911-23), carrying out his duties without the slightest regard to honesty or integrity.

At his death in 1923, the first and last Earl Farquhar, so successful in life, was found to have left nothing except debts. His private papers seem to have gone the way of his money. None has ever come to light, which is not perhaps surprising since this friend of Kings had done so much that he would not have wished anyone to know. Those with a great deal to hide are under the strongest incentive to destroy their papers.

The internet has yielded a considerable harvest of material to assist me in my quest for detailed information about him. I would, however, have produced a much shorter study without the wonderful help of the staff of the House of Lords Library, who supplied me with obscure books and recondite learned

articles almost immediately after being asked for them. I am very greatly in their debt. I must also acknowledge the kindness of Lord Howard of Rising, the current owner of the estate at Castle Rising rented for many years by Farquhar, who gave me a copy of a book, entitled *The Partnership* (1987), which exposes Farquhar's corrupt relationship with Joe Duveen, the legendary and devious art dealer.

I am no less indebted to three people who have generously provided me with valuable information which I would not otherwise have come across. Simon Peers, author of books on Madagascar where he now lives, put at my disposal his wide knowledge of the Farquhars in the generations preceding Horace's, enabling me to include an account of his family background here. Richard Davenport-Hines, renowned biographer and leading authority on all aspects of this period, sent me some marvellous extracts from unpublished diaries, which I would not have found for myself.

The third person who has deepened my understanding of Horace Farquhar provided his contribution unwittingly long ago. Harford Montgomery Hyde published the first serious historical study of homosexuality in Britain, *The Other Love*, in 1970. The following passage appears in it: "One of the most remarkable homosexuals at the turn of the[nineteenth] century was the first and last Lord Farquhar, whose rapid advancement in business and court circles is said to have been due to his skill in exploiting his physical charms."

Hyde goes on to give a remarkably accurate summary of Farquhar's career, which was then unavailable anywhere in print. He gives as his source "private information." It can only have come from someone who had known Farquhar extremely well, probably as a young man when this self-important friend of Kings delighted in flaunting his wealth and status.

It so happens that I saw a good deal of Harford Hyde in the 1970s. My interest in Farquhar lay long in the future, and I never asked him about the scoundrel before his death in 1989. A serious historian and prolific author, Harford was meticulous in his researches, with which I sometimes helped him. No clue as to the identity of his source can be found in Hyde's voluminous papers in the Public Record of Northern Ireland (he was a devoted Ulsterman and an Ulster Unionist MP in the 1950s), but I have no doubt whatsoever that what he wrote about Farquhar was entirely accurate. As to the identity of the male lovers, no definite statement can be made. It seems very likely that Farquhar's close association with the first Duke of Fife in the 1870s and 1880s before the latter's

marriage into the Royal Family had a sexual element. I have scrutinised the relationship with some care. Nothing much may ever have been put on paper. There are no surviving letters from Farquhar in the Fife archives. Whatever the extent of their intimacy, it did not stop Farquhar at the end of his life from stealing from the family trust established by the man who had lavished kindness and money on him.

An extraordinary life which cannot be traced through its subject's own papers can be illuminated to only a limited extent through relevant unpublished material which has survived in the papers of others. The quantity is not large. I have drawn on a few letters to Farquhar, chiefly from George V, which have turned up in auctioneers' sales. I have also consulted the archives of a number of Farquhar's contemporaries, extracting some valuable information (particularly from the papers of the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury at Hatfield House) to embellish this story of infamy. I have little doubt that my search has not been exhaustive, and that some further material will probably emerge. It is unlikely to change the character of the story as it is told here.

It is a story with a number of unanswered questions at its heart. They will probably never be answered. In a way that adds to the fascination of the quest for Farquhar.

I A FAMILY ON THE MAKE

Horace Farquhar rose to riches and prominence from the lower reaches of the aristocracy into which the family, originally from small landowning stock in Gilmilnscroft, Co. Ayr, had been introduced by his great-grandfather, Walter Farquhar (1738-1819). This fourth son of a modest manse at Garioch, north of Aberdeen was descended from a 17th century provost of the city, a Gilmilnscroft younger son, the wealthy Sir Robert Farquhar of Mounie (deputy-receiver of Scotland in 1644), who made himself useful both to the covenanters and the royalists during the civil war, earning large sums from both sides and receiving a knighthood from the exiled Charles II in 1651. Over the generations the family did not lack members who were happy to make money by any means at their disposal.

Walter Farquhar MD (Glasgow 1796) took the high road to England, later spending time in Rouen which was then the centre of the best medical training. After some years of medical service in the army, he became the most sought after and successful doctor of his day during a career crowned by his appointment as physician to the Prince of Wales, later Prince Regent, and, a year after Farquhar's death, King George IV. One expert on his life has concluded that "his status at the height of his career was really extraordinary and probably unique. He possessed a remarkably attractive, charismatic character."¹ Not all his descendants were to inherit the full range of those assets, but most were imbued with his ambition for money and status.

He loved high society. He established himself in some style at Cadogan House, set in six acres in Chelsea, moving to other substantial properties in Great Marlborough Street and Hanover Square when the state acquired the Chelsea mansion and replaced it with a military school, which later became the Duke of York's barracks.

"Grateful patients gave him extravagant gifts, such as 'a most magnificent épergne' from the Prince of Wales. He had a healthy respect for money, untrammelled by moral concern." He gave his august patients, like the Prince of Wales, large doses of opium, a treatment which at that time did not attract grave opprobrium. However, Farquhar "undoubtedly knew that [opium] was

addictive, and that many of his patients became dependent on it, though this did not greatly concern him. On the contrary, it helped to make him rich.” His critics within his profession accused him of “consistent drugging.”²

Some fees involved little work. Every duchess in the land, it was said, had her pulse taken by Dr Walter Farquhar, who became a baronet in 1796 with his first large London residence, Cadogan House, as his territorial designation. Many of the great ladies, who paid handsomely for the privilege, remained devoted to him. One day in 1818 the Duchess of Devonshire, the beautiful and promiscuous second wife of the 5th Duke, accompanied by the daughter of the Countess of Erne, went to visit “dear Farquhar” in old age, finding him “in a silk gown and cap, a very altered person, but delightful to see, so well and so cheerful.”³ The Duchess was especially indebted to the doctor baronet for helping to look after her illegitimate children, along with those of her predecessor, the famous Georgiana, a pleasant duty continued by later Farquhars. (In 1913 a number of letters from the Duchess Georgiana to George IV came to light at Windsor. They were “full of appeals for money, to satisfy clamouring creditors—the appeals of a vain and extravagant mistress”. King George V “decided that this fair lady’s letters should be burnt.”⁴)

Dr Sir Walter had other admirers. The great historian, Edward Gibbon, lauded his talents, and had the eminent doctor by his bedside throughout his final illness. According to the rather sniffy author of his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, his one failure was not “to have made any contribution to medical science or literature.” He was too busy climbing the social ladder and accumulating wealth, in which he would be followed by many of his descendants.

The doctor baronet was a reassuring presence at moments of crisis and panic. In November 1811 the newly installed Prince Regent fell seriously ill. “Farquhar”, wrote Lady Bessborough, “says he suffers such agony of pain all over him it produces a degree of irritation on the nerves nearly approaching delirium. What will become of us, if as well as our King our Regent goes mad.”⁵ The skills of the charming, courtly doctor quickly dispelled such fears. His patients usually made a good recovery, as long as they followed his advice.

The greatest statesman of the age did not follow it. The Younger Pitt became Farquhar’s patient in 1795, receiving devoted care during the remaining eleven years of his life. Two parts of the anatomy featured constantly in Farquhar’s lengthy records of Pitt’s terrible health. Examinations showed “functions of the stomach greatly impaired & the bowels very irregular...I thought myself

called upon to urge some relaxation from the arduous duties of office... This Mr Pitt stated to be impossible.... His country needed his services, and [he] would rather prefer to die at his post than desert it." Temporary relief from pain and trouble was all that could be provided. When Pitt died in January 1806 after sipping a glass of champagne from his devoted doctor, Farquhar wrote that he "died of old age at forty-six as much as if he had been ninety."⁶ Pitt, who left only debts, asked in his will that Farquhar's outstanding fees of a thousand guineas should somehow be paid. This seems to have happened. Farquhar was not a man to waive what was owing to him, whatever the circumstances.

Pitt was remembered within the family as a man who enjoyed fun and games when time and health permitted. One of Sir Walter's daughters accompanied her father to a small dinner party in about 1796 at which Pitt was a fellow guest. She later told her son, Edward Hamilton (Liberal MP for Salisbury 1865-9), about it. "After dinner a variety of games were played, among others 'Blind man's Bluff' [more usually Buff], and in the latter Mr Pitt took a prominent part." Hamilton added: "This anecdote has always appeared to me to have special value as showing how genial & joyous Mr Pitt's nature was, & how entirely misrepresented he was by those who only knew him as he appeared in the H[ouse] of Commons."⁷

Dr Sir Walter left an estate valued at some £40,000 (equivalent to £4 million today), to which the ownership of 57 slaves in Jamaica made some contribution; his wife's family had substantial interests in the West Indies, but he disposed of the stake that came to him long before his death. He sought to put his wealth to good use. He acted rather like the head of a highland clan, constantly seeking to assist the material interests of everyone related to him, no matter how distantly, showing great generosity to them all. His son-in-law became the Prince of Wales's chaplain, which cannot have been an arduous post. He doted on his three sons, and pulled every possible string to assist their progress in life.

The eldest, Sir Thomas (1775-1836), took the family into high finance as a partner in the Herries Farquhar Bank, in which the upper classes invested with perfect confidence. The bank was established in 1770, and had the astute Sir Thomas at the helm from 1797 onwards. It flourished initially by supplying the sons of aristocratic families doing the Grand Tour with money through an early form of traveller's cheque. After the Napoleonic wars it became one of the first banks to lend abroad, buying large quantities of French government bonds. With fine premises in London's St James's Street, it was regarded as a pillar of financial rectitude, eventually merging with Lloyds Bank in 1893.

The family's social progress continued. In 1835 Gladstone sought permission to propose to Sir Thomas's daughter, Caroline, even though he hardly knew her; in rejecting the suitor, Sir Thomas said it was unlikely that she would reach his high standards of Christian piety. This baronet's children and grandchildren almost invariably found wealthy and well-connected spouses among the offspring of senior clergy and the landed classes. They married into several great families, including those of Earl Grey (of tea and Reform Bill fame), the Duke of Beaufort, and Lord Shaftesbury, the famous philanthropist, an alliance which brought the family kinship in the twentieth century with Lord Mountbatten's rich and promiscuous wife, Edwina. It was the insufficiently pious Caroline who joined the Grey family; her husband became Queen Victoria's private secretary while she served for many years as a woman of the bedchamber. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the thriving and successful direct heirs of Sir Thomas inherited the ancestral family property at Gilmilnscroft in Co.Ayr. They presided over substantial country residences in England and a large town house in Grosvenor Square.

Sir Thomas, the successful banker, had two younger brothers, Robert and Walter. They followed a very different course, rejecting the family's ambition to retain a good reputation as it improved its fortunes. Both sought riches by working for the East India Company, untroubled by scruple of any kind. Walter, the youngest, died in St Helena in 1813 after a controversial spell as collector of revenues in Penang where Robert (1776-1830) was governor, a post from which he was sacked in 1805, causing his loving father, Sir Walter, much anguish. An extraordinarily complicated system of book-keeping, and reckless proposals for Penang's development, raised doubts about his honesty and judgement.

Robert stirred controversy wherever he went. He wanted to transport Chinese people to Tobago to help swell the workforce on the sugar plantations. He discovered the kind of suspect financial ventures in which his grandson, Horace, was to excel. His long career in the East India Company, of which he eventually became a governor in 1826, brought him many opportunities to gather wealth in reprehensible, and sometimes illegal, ways. The slave trade was amongst them, involving him in bitter political battles with parliamentary opponents, led by Thomas Fowell Buxton, one of the leading campaigners against slavery, who harried him unceasingly during his years as a Tory MP (under the patronage of the Duke of Wellington and his brother, the Marquess Wellesley) for two small boroughs (one of which, Newton in Lancashire, had 50 voters) between 1825 and his death in 1830. He constantly solicited favours from his patrons, under whose wing he lived his entire life; the services he supplied in return included

the provision of women for the Marquess's bed.

Robert Farquhar spoke in 1829 of the misery he had endured as a result of the “long and unprecedented persecution” to which he had been subjected by Fowell Buxton, who was insistent that the slave trade, abolished by Britain in 1807, “had been carried on to a most enormous extent”⁸ illegally when Farquhar was the first British Governor of Mauritius between 1811 (when he helped conquer it from the French) and 1823. Farquhar denied it vehemently, but parliamentary commissioners who investigated the matter sided with Buxton. His critics exaggerated. The real charge against Robert Farquhar was that he claimed to have given the slave traders no peace, while he had in reality conducted a rather leisurely campaign against them in Mauritius to his own financial profit. He infuriated the government in London by arguing against “any sudden alteration in policy” on the slave trade in the island.

His difficulties multiplied in the 1820s. Reckless investments helped ruin him; he died a bankrupt in 1830, owing large sums to the Herries Farquhar Bank where his elder brother, Sir Thomas, had treated him with fraternal indulgence. None of this found its way into the principal public records. *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, for example, praised his meritorious services to his country. In one respect, however, he deserved his praise. While failing to take sufficiently prompt action to suppress the slave trade in Mauritius, he persuaded the native rulers of Madagascar to prohibit it. For that he came to be greatly honoured in the island, where as a result British influence increased throughout the 19th century. According to the author of his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, when he called in at Madagascar on his way back to Britain from Mauritius in 1823, “he was received with great ceremony, and thousands of the natives from the interior brought free-will peace-offerings, as a recognition of the efforts of the ex-governor on behalf of the native population.” There was some good in him.

He left at least two illegitimate children, as well as one legitimate heir, Walter Minto, named after the first Earl of Minto⁹, Governor-General of India, whom he had served and admired. His widow, the long-lived Maria (1782-1875), daughter of a Madras merchant, Francois Joseph Louis Lautour, sensibly remarried immediately after his death, gaining much greater security with her second husband, Thomas Hamilton, a Scottish author and friend of Walter Scott. Living in the Lake District in old age, she may perhaps have noticed her grandson Horace's uncanny resemblance to her reprobate first husband, who brought a second baronetcy, with Mauritius (where he insisted in defiance of the

evidence that he had behaved impeccably) as its territorial designation into the family, styling himself Townsend-Farquhar to distinguish his section of it from the main line (his grandson would drop the barrel in the 1890s).

The intervening generation avoided scandal and disaster. Sir (Walter) Minto (1809-66), the father of Horace, who on Sir Robert's death was left penniless when serving in Vienna early in his career as a diplomat, recouped his fortunes by marrying Erica Katherine, the only child, an illegitimate but acknowledged daughter, the heiress of the bachelor 7th Lord Reay, who left her substantial wealth accumulated from the slave trade and from the sale of his estates in remote Sutherland. He was paid compensation of £17,205 in 1835 (nearly £2.5 million in today's values) when his 331 slaves in Guyana were given their freedom.

Unlike his father (and his son Horace), Sir Minto seems to have been a man of integrity and upright character. He had a house in Gloucester Square, off Hyde Park in London in the 1850s, but no country residence of his own. He left Christ Church, Oxford with a third in classics in 1829. Abandoning diplomacy, he stood unsuccessfully in 1839 as a Conservative at a by-election in Hertford, then a two-member seat in which the Tory Lord Salisbury, who owned many houses in the town, and the Whig Lord Cowper, who had much property there too, effectively divided its parliamentary representation between them after Salisbury had been forced to admit defeat in his campaign to control both seats. The constituency became accustomed to returning one member from each of the two main parties. Eighteen years after his 1839 defeat, Sir Minto, a man highly regarded by the second Marquess of Salisbury (father of the prime minister), returned to Hertford with its 530 electors to become a rather interesting and unusual Conservative MP, alongside a Liberal, from 1857 until his death in 1866.

He was well-known in Hertfordshire, where he had lived until 1847, taking an active part in local affairs. Education and the church were particular interests, on which he worked closely with Lord Salisbury, as their surviving correspondence shows.¹⁰ "We shall all miss you extremely"¹¹, Salisbury told him when he left in 1847 to live abroad for a time. The local Tory election agent, Philip Longmore, sought him out in London as the 1857 general election approached. Sir Minto agreed to stand as the Tory candidate "although at much personal inconvenience to meet the wishes of my old friends". He stipulated that if defeated, or unseated on petition, he should pay nothing towards his election expenses; if successful "I agree to pay not more than £400"

(over £50,000 today)¹². Longmore decided to run an economical campaign. “I will not allow any public house expenses”, he told Salisbury.¹³

Throughout his nine years in the Commons Sir Minto described himself as an “independent Conservative”, a designation on which he had insisted when he agreed to stand. Dod’s *Parliamentary Companion* for 1857 records his open admiration for Lord Palmerston, the hugely popular swashbuckling Liberal premier, a former Tory whom he referred to as “a Conservative at heart.” It is unclear how much trouble his pro-Palmerston views caused the Tory whips in the division lobbies. By 1866, his last year when he was living in Berkeley Street, off Berkeley Square (not far from where his son Horace would reside a few years later with a close male friend), he had put himself in the vanguard of parliamentary reform, declaring that he was “in favour of admitting the working classes to a large share of the franchise.”¹⁴ Though perfectly compatible with official Tory policy which was extremely flexible, his position was much more radical than that of most of his parliamentary colleagues including Disraeli, who had no thought of creating a working-class urban electorate until 1867 when he introduced it in order to keep the Liberal Party in the Commons in a state of abject confusion.¹⁵

Here was a man of firm, decided opinions who did not want a prominent position in the limelight. Sir Minto was no mere party hack. He set an example of principled conduct which his son was to reject.

While their cousins in the main Farquhar line prospered steadily, the Townsend-Farquhars lived rather more precariously. Their reputation was tarnished by the recklessness of the first baronet, Sir Robert, who left his heir nothing. A modest recovery occurred under the thoroughly decent second baronet, Sir Minto. The true spirit of the ambitious doctor Sir Walter, the family’s founding father, would be seen again spectacularly in the career of his Townsend-Farquhar great-grandson, Horace, who worked unwaveringly for wealth and position. But in the end, like his grandfather, Sir Robert, he lost everything.

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⁶William Hague, *William Pitt The Younger* (Harper paperback ed., 2005), pp 373,576

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⁸D.R. Fisher, "Townsend-Farquhar, Sir Robert" in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1820-1832* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), read online

⁹For Minto's achievements in India, see Martin Thomas, *My Dear Hamy: Insights and Intrigues from the Court of Caroline, Princess of Wales* (Bridge Books, 2017), chapters XX, XXV, and XXIX. Ann Hayman, the subject of this massive book packed with recondite information, and Lord Minto were intimate friends, possibly lovers

¹⁰Hatfield House, 2M/ZM/I/1/54/27 and other letters

¹¹Salisbury to Sir Minto Townsend-Farquhar, draft reply to the latter's letter of 14 September 1847(2M/ZM/I/1/71/47) thanking Salisbury for "your kindness and attention to us during our residence in Hertfordshire...the happiest years of our lives"

¹²15 March 1857, 2M/ZM/I/1/129/26

¹³Longmore to Salisbury, 16 March 1857, 2M/ZM/I/1/129/25

¹⁴*Dod's Parliamentary Companion* 1865

¹⁵For an account of Disraeli's triumphant tactics in 1867, see my article "At the top of the greasy pole: Disraeli's first premiership, February – December 1868" in the *Conservative History Journal*, Vol. II (9), 2021-22, p.7

II A GAY ROGUE'S PROGRESS

Horace Brand Farquhar was born on 19 May 1844 at Goldings, then a fairly modest country house near his father's future Hertford constituency, rented by his grandfather Lord Reay (in the 1870s after the family's departure it was replaced by a vast Elizabethan-style mansion). The choice of his first name may have been influenced by his father's undistinguished classical education, to which curiously he gave prominence in reference books. The second was probably chosen to add a touch of high aristocratic lustre. Since the days of the doctor baronet, the ambitious Farquhars seem to have had a social connection with the Brands, who had held the Dacre barony since the 14th century. The two families appear to have been involved together in bringing up sundry aristocratic illegitimate children in need of homes. The connection between them was reinforced in 1862 when Alice, daughter of Sir Henry Thomas Farquhar (in the man line), married Henry Brand, who became Viscount Hampden after twelve years as Speaker of the House of Commons, succeeding later as the 23rd Baron Dacre.

Horace was the fifth of six sons, all of whom died childless (four never married), the Townsend-Farquhar baronetcy passing down the fraternal line before becoming extinct in 1924 on the death of the fourth son, Robert (Horace and the last brother, Gilbert, having predeceased him). The first of this curious band of brothers, Sir Eric-Robert, a diplomat, succumbed to fever in 1867 at the age of 31 while serving as Secretary in the British legation in Peking. The next, Sir Minto-Walter, seems to have led a life of complete obscurity, dying in 1872 when he was 35, the one married man among these bachelor baronets. He was succeeded by Sir John Henry, a lieutenant with the 7th Light Bengal Cavalry during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, later earning promotion to captain in the 20th Hussars, with praise for his "cheerful manliness".¹ His courage was tested as an eighteen year-old at the Battle of Chinhath where he was badly wounded and again at Lucknow, in whose defence he was involved from the start of the six-month siege until the final relief of the garrison by Sir Colin Campbell. He later helped to run the Bengal Light Cavalry's stud.

Johnny to his family, he wrote long letters home during the siege of Lucknow, which reveal a young man of deep feeling and sensibility, the reverse of the

hearty officer of the Flashman type. The letters, which were later privately printed along with a journal, do not disguise the true horrors of war: a fellow officer driven to suicide, a priest dying of cholera, amputations (“poor fellow, he did not live long after his arm was cut off”). His family was constantly in his mind (“not a day passes that I do not think of you all”), leaving a clear impression of an affectionate and closely knit group of siblings. “Bobby and Horace are, I suppose, getting on all right at their respective academies”, he writes. “Uncombed” is his description of Horace, presumably then a scruffy youth, but, he adds “good at bottom.”² About that, this brave and kind man, the best of the baronet brothers, was sadly mistaken.

On Johnny’s death in 1877, Sir Robert (Bobby of the letters), a Royal Artillery lieutenant turned artist, musician and versifier (his publications included *A Shilling for My Thoughts*), became the sixth and last Townsend-Farquhar baronet. He seems to have been particularly proud of having served for twenty years on the committee which organised the Grasmere and Lake District athletic sports, giving it prominence in his *Who’s Who* entry. He lived at a house called The Wray in Grasmere. He composed a march for Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee and had paintings accepted for autumn exhibitions at the Dudley Gallery in Liverpool.

The brothers’ marked propensity to avoid marriage fosters the suspicion that Horace was not the only homosexual among them. Two sisters completed the family. One of them, Edith, married into the Westmoreland landed gentry and had six children, three boys and three girls. It seems unlikely that she would have seen much of her snobbish, selfish brother, Horace, as he rose to his earldom. Her children were, however, his sole surviving relatives, apart from increasingly distant Farquhar cousins in the main line. One of her sons, Humphrey Minto Wilson, who died in 1961, gained some prominence as a print collector. His two children are also now dead, and I have been unable to trace any further descendants.

Farquhar omitted all reference to his education from his entry in *Who’s Who* and other works of reference. Older brothers went to Westminster and Haileybury; the youngest of them, Gilbert, known as Gilly, who became a well-known actor on the London stage (noted in the 1890s for “his pictures of a middle-aged beau”³) went to Eton, subsequently becoming a friend of James McNeill Whistler. (Later he was often to be seen in the company of a fellow actor, Arthur Cecil, “and as they both became stout were called by their friends ‘the brothers bulge’ ”.⁴)

The decennial censuses for 1851 and 1861 provide some information about Horace's education.⁵ In 1851, when he was seven, he was living at 4 Douro Villas, Cheltenham, along with his brother, Robert. The two boys were in the care of a retired doctor, William Briggs; his daughter, Mary Jane Briggs, one of the first campaigners for women's suffrage, had recently established a small school next door at number 6, the forerunner of a very successful preparatory school.

Ten years later, the seventeen year-old Farquhar was in Edlingham, a small Northumberland village near Alnwick, whose vicar, the Rev Matthew Buckle, a former grammar school headmaster, supplemented his stipend by taking on a few pupils. In his hands Farquhar completed his studies without acquiring much in the way of intellectual interests, or even the habit of serious reading. But this seems unlikely to be the full story. It would be distinctly odd for a boy from an established upper-class family to be sent to a remote part of Northumberland for the whole of his secondary schooling while a younger brother went to Eton. In 1857, when Horace was thirteen, his brother Johnny, writing from India, refers to him and Robert being at "academies". Someone of his class could be expected to finish his education as the pupil of a clergyman in a remote vicarage because something had gone wrong at his public school, and he had to leave it. Expulsion 'for the usual reasons' would fit Farquhar in view of his sexual preferences. That would account for his suppression of all information relating to his education.

His Northumbrian exile did not damage the immense self-confidence which was the central feature of his character. It struck all those who had dealings with him. The 11th Marquis of Huntly (he used the Scottish variant of Marquess), a married man without children, met him in the 1860s when he was languishing in his first, unpromising job, which had brought him to Scotland. Huntly wrote later: "he was an impecunious clerk in one of the Government offices." That did not last long. His physical charms and suave, confident manner soon began to bring him what he wanted. Huntly was both impressed and rather appalled: "dark-haired and good-looking, with plenty of assurance and push, he became acquainted with the Forbeses and, leaving the [government] service, wormed himself into the house of Sir Charles Forbes & Co., India merchants. His rise to be a manager was rapid."⁶ A profile of him in *Vanities Fair* in 1898 accompanying his 'Spy' cartoon referred to him as "the managing partner of the firm." It is probable that the Forbes and Farquhar families were friends, which would have helped pushy Horace on his way.

It was not by showing conspicuous merit, but through bold self-advertisement that he “wormed himself”—the crucial words—into a lucrative post in a firm with impeccable credentials. The company, the first of its kind in India, established in 1767 (and still in business today), dominated the commercial life of Bombay, with wide interests ranging from cotton to ship-building and banking. The extensive influence exerted in Scotland by cousins prominent at the Herries Farquhar Bank also made a contribution to his swift progress. By the early 1870s Farquhar, not yet thirty, was beginning to accumulate serious wealth.

His Forbes success was eclipsed by an infinitely greater triumph which occurred during the 1870s, opening the way to ever growing riches, titles and honours. He insinuated himself into the life (and probably the heart) of the sixth Earl Fife, who became a Duke in 1889 when he married into the Royal Family. This wholly unremarkable man had little to commend him apart from a quite prepossessing appearance (his ‘Spy’ cartoon depicts a debonair, moustached figure in evening dress) and huge estates. He was uninterested in holding government office. Gladstone made him Chief Whip in the Lords in 1880, but he gave it up eight months later to be succeeded by Huntly, who departed after six months because of financial difficulties. (Later, Huntly asked to be made Governor of either Bombay or Madras, but Gladstone said he was quite unsuitable.) In later life, the birth of the territorial army provided Fife with a modest niche in public life : he became the assiduous President of the County of London Territorial Force Association, summoning representatives to its inaugural meeting in November 1907.

Fife was captivated by Horace Farquhar and “an intimate friendship”⁷, closely observed by Huntly, was rapidly established. It would lead ultimately to one of Farquhar’s greatest betrayals; after Fife’s death he stole large sums from a family trust, of which he was a trustee. In the heady days of their intimacy, however, Fife seemed entirely well-served by a man who displayed impressive financial acumen. On his friend’s recommendation Fife, the owner of fourteen homes (though not one of them was in the county from which he took his title) and a Liberal MP from 1874 to 1879 (before inheriting his title), sold his estates in Morayshire and Banffshire (altogether he owned some 250,000 acres in Scotland) and invested the bulk of the proceeds in the private banking house of Sir Samuel Scott, Bart & Co, founded in 1824, which occupied imposing premises in London’s Cavendish Square.

It was one of a select group of West End private banks closely associated with

the landed classes, who were notoriously prone to squander their money without the assistance of such gentlemanly experts (sometimes even the best advice could not curb the squandering). Places for Fife and Farquhar were found on the bank's board. According to Huntly, Farquhar's plan was particularly congenial to Fife because he "had become impressed with a dread of the fate of landowners, declaring to me that the majority of people in the north-eastern counties of Scotland were Socialists."⁸ It was the comment of a man without political judgement or even sense. Socialism was not on the march in late nineteenth century Britain.

The deal with Scott's Bank was sealed at the end of 1883. "Horace Farquhar dined with me at Brooks'[s Club]", Edward Hamilton, one of Gladstone's private secretaries and a cousin of Farquhar, recorded in his diary on 31 December 1883. "He told me a good deal about the banking business (S Scott & Co) on which, in company with Fife, he has embarked."⁹ Huntly, who always viewed Farquhar with suspicion, noted that "he soon obtained a controlling interest"¹⁰ in the bank. He became a partner, along with the pliant Fife, and a major shareholder. Their joint capital in the bank amounted to some £400,000 (equivalent to some £57 million today). In 1894 Farquhar played the leading role in the merger of Scott's with Parr's Bank, then the country's sixth largest, on whose board he sat for the next 21 years (it was eventually absorbed by the NatWest).

Fife's money turned Farquhar into an important man in the banking world as the 1880s progressed. The benefactor had no cause for regrets. One of Fife's frequent guests, the Liberal (later Liberal Unionist) lawyer and minister, Henry James, ennobled as Lord James of Hereford, was struck by the "enormous income" Fife enjoyed. "Under the guidance of Lord Farquhar he had by sale of land and very remunerative investments greatly increased his revenues."¹¹ Perhaps in old age the scoundrel felt justified in dipping into the Fife family trust, which owed so much to his advice.

Could there have been a sexual element in his lifelong relationship with Fife? The anonymous author of *Uncensored Recollections*, published in 1924, recalled Farquhar "then one of the handsomest and most charming men in London" (the same compliments appear in other publications of the period) as the "*fidus Achates* of the late Duke of Fife in their salad days" when they "were living together near Berkeley Square." Are there inferences to be drawn from this? (The male writer, generally accepted to have been a notorious Anglo-American member of Edward VII's circle and later convicted criminal, Julian Osgood

Field, hated Fife with the intensity associated with a jilted lover: “He was essentially a coarse man, extraordinarily selfish and utterly contemptuous of the feelings of others”.¹²) Fife and Farquhar were well-known as companions among the Paris demi-monde, where Fife was remembered as “le petit Ecosseis roux qui a toujours la queue en l’air”.¹³ A taste for gay adventure in addition to other indulgences would not seem impossible.

Farquhar treated Fife’s houses as his own. The many mansions included East Sheen Lodge, a fine 18th century house with grounds that extended into Richmond Park. Farquhar used it to entertain his growing circle of well-connected friends. On 29 August 1883 Edward Hamilton recorded in his diary: “Went down this evening to dine at East Sheen with Horace Farquhar - quite a party—Lady Alfred and Miss Amy Paget, Arthur Ellis’s, Arthur Pagets, Gordon-Cumming, Lascelles, &.” On 3 September he “went down to East Sheen again and had a pleasant *teletete* dinner with Horace Farquhar.”¹⁴ The food was always outstanding. “The best dinner in London”¹⁵, Hamilton said of a party in March that year attended by the Duke of Teck, the future Queen Mary’s impecunious father.

The entertainments were not always so respectable. Farquhar and Fife both saw much of one of the most unusual officers in the army, John Palmer Brabazon. Lord Huntly had his eye on this handsome man from Ireland too. “He was a dandy, very good-looking, with a short, neatly-trimmed brown beard, and fine eyes. He was tall, with a good figure, always wore a well-fitting frock-coat... drawled his words and pronounced the letter ‘r’ as ‘w’, so that he was universally known as ‘Beautiful Bwab’ ”.¹⁶ He had a very modest income from a small property in Co. Meath, but always lived expensively. A recent summary of his career noted that he was “unconventional, foppish, and made many enemies in the military establishment.”¹⁷ This unmarried fop showed remarkable bravery in Britain’s colonial wars, and ended up a major-general. For some years Fife and Huntly took a house together for Ascot week; Farquhar and ‘Bwab’ were regular guests.

It is impossible to be sure what exactly went on in Berkeley Square, Paris, Ascot or elsewhere when these men and others got together. In the absence of any relevant private letters and diaries, the details of Farquhar’s gay life remain hidden as effectively from posterity as they were from the high social circles to which he gained entry and where he was to flourish.

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It was as a highly respectable and successful banker with impressive social connections including royalty that Farquhar presented himself to the world in the late 1880s and thereafter. This well-edited version of his *curriculum vitae* was extremely plausible to those, the vast majority, who did not probe the full range of his financial activities. Scott's Bank continued to do well under his effective control. The last member of the Scott family to be involved with it was the fifth holder of its baronetcy, Sir Edward Henry Scott. He died in 1883 at the age of forty, having largely retired from banking in favour of life as a landowner at Amhuinnsuidhe Castle with its estate of nearly 60,000 acres on North Harris in the Outer Hebrides, acquired when the Earl of Dunmore who built the stately pile handed it over to the bank when told to end his huge overdraft. The family had long owned a more conveniently situated and magnificent mansion at Sundridge Park in Kent, designed by Nash and Wyatt, to which they gave much attention. The two estates absorbed much of the time that the sixth baronet, Sir Samuel, could spare from his military career (he would later take over Farquhar's seat in the House of Commons). The investment of Fife's money in 1883, superintended by Farquhar, occurred at just the point when the Scotts were taking their final leave of their family bank.

Farquhar associated himself firmly with the bank's former dynasty by marrying Sir Edward's popular and good-looking widow, Emilie, in January 1895 at St George's, Hanover Square, with the future Edward VII as the principal guest (Fife was of course there too, along with many other titled grandees). He was then fifty-four; his bride was four years older. She was the daughter of Henry Packe, a colonel in the Grenadier Guards, who sold a large family house, Harlestone Park in Northamptonshire, and acquired Twyford Hall, near Dereham in Norfolk (which Prince Harry was to consider buying in 2017). The marriage was a great success. They had long been closely attached. Her second Scott son was given the names Henry Farquhar. Born in 1875, he was killed in the Boer War at the age of twenty-six while serving as a lieutenant in the Royal Berks Regiment. Plainly, Farquhar did not restrict his charms to other men, at least when he stood to profit financially. Oddly, the couple waited over eleven years after her first's husband's death before formalising their relationship. His charming wife was an asset to him in every way, strengthening his apparent respectability and adding greatly to his wealth. She was a rich woman in her own right with a huge house in Grosvenor Square, where they were to hold endless glittering parties during the years ahead. He himself said that the marriage brought him another fortune to manage, in addition to his own and Fife's.¹⁸

Farquhar made a mint of money of his own through his financial dealings. The man who would later rob the Fife family trust does not seem to have helped himself to funds deposited in the bank which he ran in the grandeur of Cavendish Square, where he also lived before his marriage. He did not need to be dishonest as a West End banker. He had ample scope for very dubious and highly lucrative ventures in the City of London. He started to dabble, probably in a modest way at first in the 1870s, as a shady financier some years before Fife enabled him to begin operating as a respectable banker, which helped draw attention away from his discreditable City activities. After “a regular banquet of many courses” at Farquhar’s house in March 1916, Asquith, then Prime Minister of a Liberal/ Conservative coalition (of which Farquhar was a minor member), wrote to tell his beloved Venetia Stanley of his conversation with his host, whom he described as “a survivor of the mid-Victorian beaux”. Farquhar spoke of “how in his young days in the City he used to sell pearls to old Baron Lionel Rothschild [who died in 1879]—the father of Natty, Leo etc. The old Jew always used to have on his table in his office in New Court a little chest in which he hoarded his pearls, and in the intervals of business handled & fondled them. A good investment too—H.F. told me that a necklace of pearls which he gave his wife 20 or 30 years ago, having paid about £7000 for it, is now worth from £40,000 to £45,000.”¹⁹

The pearls helped him create a lifetime’s profitable connection with N. M. Rothschild and Sons. The dominant figure at its head, Natty, first Baron Rothschild (1840-1915), was a significant presence in Farquhar’s life, assisting him in both finance and politics. The benefits were perhaps at their greatest when Rothschilds “took the lead in mining in the British Empire [particularly] in diamond and gold mines in South Africa.” It established an Exploration Company, of which Farquhar was chairman from 1889 until 1896, a period in which it was heavily involved in promoting highly suspect mining ventures at a time when “on the London Stock Exchange there were few restrictions on speculation” and no one thought insider trading should be a crime. The Exploration Company was so constructed that Farquhar and a few other select investors “not only took a disproportionate share of the profit, but also kept the plums of the business of mineral exploration for themselves... [which was] thoroughly iniquitous, entitling men who put in a minute portion of capital to a greater share of the profit produced by the capital of other men.”²⁰ Farquhar was included among the select favoured few as the founder of three finance corporations: United States Debenture, Imperial Colonial Finance, and South American and Mexican Finance (the latter specialising in a part of the world notorious for financial malpractice).

Natty Rothschild was after mining rights in Matabeleland and Mashonaland, where rich deposits of gold were believed (wrongly) to lie. Farquhar thought there might well be “a gold producing area of some 400 miles” in Mashonaland, where railway lines were laid in 1891-2 “at £2300 per mile”.²¹ As Chairman of Rothschild’s Exploration Company Farquhar was able to get the his mentor what he wanted because he was also on the board, along with the ever-faithful Fife, of the British South Africa Company (BSAC), the highly controversial and much criticised body, established in 1889, which owned them. The BASC “cast the mantle of empire over a gigantic speculation in mineral futures. It gave to extensive and sometimes dubious stock-exchange operations a gilt of patriotism which lured the British investor.”²² Fife, its vice-chairman, and Farquhar were among the largest shareholders. The latter was wholly unabashed by a flagrant conflict of interest, happily chairing one company that was seeking to buy valuable mining rights from another company of which he was a director, alongside a vice-chairman who always did as he was told by his intimate friend. In November 1892 Farquhar told Lord Salisbury, Conservative Party leader and long-serving Prime Minister as huge tracts of Africa came under British control, that “five gold mining companies have now been capitalised in Mashonaland.” With such optimism in the air, Cecil Rhodes, the central figure in the BSAC, “formally offered the Government to extend the telegraph from Fort Salisbury[now Harare] to Uganda at his own expense.”²³

Farquhar later received a drubbing from the historian of the BSAC, Professor J.S.Galbraith, who regarded him as the worst of a parcel of rogues: “His sense of responsibility to the chartered company was even less than that of his colleagues. Rothschild’s offered him a directorship of the exploration company in the expectation that through him they would receive favourable treatment in mining claims. [Two other BASC directors declined a similar tempting offer.] But Farquhar unhesitatingly and apparently without embarrassment accepted. Farquhar’s business ethics belied his public reputation, and his presence on the board did not enhance its moral tone.”²⁴ He did at least resign from the board in 1896 over the Jameson Raid, the bungled operation designed to weaken the power of the Boers, in which a number of directors were implicated, almost certainly including him. He was with a shooting party at Castle Rising, his rented estate in Norfolk, when news of the Raid arrived. He “winked & gave everyone to understand he knew all about it.”²⁵ Publicly, however, he professed ignorance.

There were many shady figures like him; some were considerably worse. The City was awash with swindlers and fraudsters. Harry Marks, a man

notorious for promoting bogus companies, was Farquhar's fellow member for East Marylebone on the London County Council and, like Farquhar, went on to become an MP, surviving all attempts by those he had defrauded to get him expelled from the Commons. "Marks's scam was just one among hundreds of spurious company promotions of the mid- and late-Victorian period."²⁶ Prosecutions were very rare. Politicians were reluctant to order a crackdown. "Many parliamentarians became direct beneficiaries of speculative company promotions."²⁷ They had an interest in perpetuating the absence of effective regulation. At the end of the 19th century 44 per cent of MPs were company directors.

In his wonderful novel, *The Way We Live Now* (1875), Anthony Trollope showed how readily massive fraud could be organised. Augustus Melmotte, the villain at the centre of the story, exploited credulous investors who were glad to support a bogus plan to build a railway in Mexico, a part of the world where Farquhar also had his schemes; like Farquhar, he had a large house in Grosvenor Square where he entertained royalty (in Melmotte's case, the Emperor of China); like Farquhar too, he became an MP briefly (both made just one speech). Unlike Farquhar, the fictional Melmotte was exposed and committed suicide. Trollope hoped to rally public opinion against the bad men who were flourishing in the City of London where huge fortunes were to be made by dishonourable means. "Men and women", he warned, "will be taught to feel that dishonesty, if it can become splendid, and live in a gorgeous palace with pictures on all its walls and give Apician dinners, will cease to be abominable." But it was to no avail. Even the left wing of the Liberal Party, where the nonconformist conscience was so strong, showed no interest in cleaning things up. Mr Gladstone was unmoved by the evidence of moral failings in the City. Farquhar lived undisturbed in his Grosvenor Square palace with pictures on all the walls, giving Apician dinners to royalty and social grandees.

Naturally his lamentable "moral tone", displayed in South African affairs in the 1890s, did not improve. He even paraded it openly at King Edward VII's court to the horror of those who cared about its good reputation. In 1907 Lord Carrington (later Marquess of Lincolnshire), a former Liberal Lord Chamberlain of the 1890s, was appalled to hear that "a Siberian mining company formed by some Jew speculators" to search most implausibly for gold, had senior royal courtiers, including the King's private secretary, Lord Knollys, on its board. "The shares were rushed up to 16. They have fallen to 7, and it is supposed that Horace Farquhar has been at the bottom of it." Carrington was told that the court rogue had "netted £70,000." For some weeks a sense of alarm persisted "about the financial scandals at the Court, so many being

implicated in the 'Siberians' and other ticklish ventures. Horace Farquhar is ill and gone abroad"²⁸, which was a source of some comfort to Lord Carrington. But when Farquhar returned to court, it was not as a reformed character. (Carrington himself does not seem to have been beyond reproach; homosexual activity was recorded by the police.²⁹)

Farquhar was noted for skilfully buying shares when they were about to boom and selling them before they fell, or started to arouse serious suspicion. For years he profited greatly from heavy investments in the City Equitable Fire Insurance Company, run by a charming knave, Gerard Lee Beavan, whom he closely resembled. By the time that the knave's audacious frauds came to light after the First World War in one of the greatest of all City scandals, Farquhar had moved his money elsewhere. He ranged far afield. He was reported to have done well out of the land speculation that was rife around Santa Fe in New Mexico after its conquest in 1848 by the American government which set aside the ownership rights of much of the indigenous population.

Some denied that the shady, successful financier possessed great talent. One lifelong acquaintance called him "all bunkum and self-advertisement."³⁰ Others noted the jealousy of his City rivals. The fastidious Lord Carrington described him as "the most unpopular man in London."³¹ He was undaunted. Nothing could dent his massive self-confidence, which, allied to great financial acumen uninhibited by moral scruple and a late marriage to a wealthy widow, brought him the riches he craved.

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III A LIBERAL UNIONIST IN LOVE WITH HONOURS

The Farquhars were Tories through and through. They looked back with pride to the devotion with which Dr Sir Walter, the founder of the family's fortunes, had cared for the most illustrious of his patients, the Younger Pitt. That great man may not have described himself as a Tory, but his leadership and policies inspired a singularly able group of young admirers ("the friends of Mr Pitt"), who rebuilt the Tory Party and secured its predominance in early 19th century politics.¹

Both Horace Farquhar's grandfather and father had been Tory MPs, though without conspicuous distinction (like most MPs and peers), the disreputable character of the former contrasting sharply with the virtue of the latter. There were Farquhars from the family's main line in the membership lists of the Carlton Club throughout the 19th century. The last of the Townsend-Farquhar baronets, Horace's brother Sir Robert, though much preoccupied with music, painting, poetry and other interests, proclaimed proudly in his *Who's Who* entry that he was an "active supporter of the Conservative party in Westmoreland."

Horace Farquhar was to end up eventually in his brother's party, where the amazing finale of his scandalous career was played out. At the start of it, however, he defected to the Liberals, not in any ardent fashion but without ambiguity. His conversion may well have been encouraged by his cousin and friend, Edward Hamilton, Gladstone's private secretary, whose uncle, another Edward, was Liberal MP for Salisbury between 1865 and 1869 after making a fortune as a livestock owner on a vast scale in New South Wales. But undoubtedly Farquhar was influenced chiefly by his intimate friend Lord Fife, with whom he lived for much of the 1870s and 1880s. They were in agreement about everything else; politics would not divide them.

The two men's other mutual interests were more important to them: money-making, party-going, country sports, sex. There was a place for Fife in Gladstone's second government of 1880 as chief whip in the Lords, but he threw it up after a few months, and resisted offers of other posts, much to the disappointment of the prime minister, who always encouraged younger members of the aristocracy to play their part in politics. Fife retained "political

position and importance in Scotland”², occupying senior posts in the Scottish Liberal Association. In March 1884, Gladstone urged him to become the next Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This eminent position, highly esteemed throughout Scotland, was totally unsuited to a man of Fife’s dissolute character. Quite rightly he turned it down.

Farquhar left no discernible mark on politics at this point; it had not yet begun to interest him in any serious way. Everything changed in June 1886 when a significant section of the Liberal Party abandoned Gladstone, denouncing his Irish Home Rule Bill as a measure which, if passed, would lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom.³ Liberals from the right (under Lord Hartington) and left (under Joe Chamberlain), who were determined to stop that happening, formed their own Liberal Unionist Party, which remained in existence until 1912 when it merged formally with the Conservative Party after long years in association with it as part of a Unionist alliance.⁴

Too often the Liberal Unionists are thought of as the Conservatives’ poor relations, patronised and kept in their place by the larger Party. Lady Bracknell in Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) made the point in her memorable put-down: “Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate.”

In reality, the Liberal Unionist Party was far from being a tame Tory appendage. “It was the biggest defection from any political party (at its height, the Party boasted seventy-eight MPs who refused to obey the Gladstonian whip); it was the longest lived breakaway force in modern British political history, lasting for twenty -six years as an independent party, with its own [constituency] associations, leadership, whips, agents, funds and publications.”⁵ If its MPs had returned to the Liberal fold in the parliament of 1886-92, Salisbury would have lost his Commons majority. Even after 1895 with Unionism firmly in the ascendant, the Conservatives would only have had an overall majority of eleven without them. The Liberal Unionists demanded—and obtained—concessions on policy, notably social reform, from the Tories in return for their support.

In the Lords, Gladstone suffered severely as a result of Liberal Unionist defections: 120 of his 183 peers left him for the new Party. Fife was amongst them. He became, and remained, an implacable opponent of Home Rule. At the end of 1894, Edward Hamilton noted in his diary that Fife “appears to be willing to sacrifice everything to the maintenance of the Union, so strongly

does he feel about the disastrous consequences of Home Rule.”⁶ Farquhar, as usual, shared Fife’s view, though far less passionately. There is no record of any vehement declarations by him about the disasters that would occur if Ireland ceased to be part of the United Kingdom. Strong political convictions and principles eluded him throughout his life. His chief concern was to exploit the changed state of politics to advance his own interests and bring the titles and honours he coveted within his grasp. A determination to become Lord Farquhar was his obsession. The Home Rule split gave him his opportunity. He was encouraged by the knowledge that Salisbury “was more than willing to be generous in dispensing honours to Hartington’s and Chamberlain’s clients.”⁷ (The Tory leader was not always impressed by the merits of the Liberal Unionist nominees. “The difficulty”, he wrote about one, “is not so much his probity as his chastity.”⁸)

The Liberal Unionist Party needed funds, and plenty of them, as it created its nation-wide organisation and prepared for elections. Farquhar became one of its principal donors, alongside men of stupendous wealth like his mentor Lord Rothschild, the Duke of Westminster and, almost inevitably, his intimate friend, Fife. Lord James of Hereford recorded that “we had within our small party many very rich men who contributed to our funds very generously”⁹, listing Farquhar among them.

By 1890 he felt that his handsome donations should be rewarded with a peerage, as he repeatedly made clear to the Liberal Unionist leader, Lord Hartington, later (after 1891) 8th Duke of Devonshire, a man often regarded as an idle, reluctant politician whereas in fact “the constant love of his life was politics.”¹⁰ Farquhar was utterly brazen. “The earliest of a long series of letters to the Liberal Unionist leader, often very insinuating in their tone, is dated July 1890”¹¹, following a donation of £5,000. His persistent efforts were backed up by the Prince of Wales, his new friend made after the 1889 royal wedding, (see Chapter IV) and inevitably by his lifelong companion, Fife, who pestered Hartington on his behalf. The rogue himself dangled the prospect of further generosity in front of his party leader: “I would *of course* give what was asked for the next Elections”¹², he assured Hartington.

As the 1892 general election approached, his hopes were high. It had long been held that “the exchange of honours for money was of course scandalous and not to be officially countenanced.”¹³ But standards now fell. All the main Parties eventually succumbed.¹⁴ Rather surprisingly, that much-vaunted paragon of virtue, Mr Gladstone, led the way, permitting two peerages to be sold by the

Liberal whips in return for substantial contributions to their Party's funds in 1891.

The Liberal Unionists were notable sinners as their pressing quest for funds continued. For the first time since the 17th century, a number of baronetcies were sold in 1892. They were awarded on the recommendation of the Liberal Unionist leadership explicitly in return for donations on a scale descending from £20,000 to £10,000.¹⁵ Sadly for Farquhar, no Liberal Unionist peerages were in the market. He settled for one of their "election baronetcies", becoming Sir Horace Farquhar of Castle Rising on 25 October 1892, including in his title the estate in Norfolk which he rented, but liked people to think he owned. Since he was already the heir to his bachelor brother Sir Robert's baronetcy, Sir Horace did not see his election purchase as a great gain. Wisely, he concealed his disappointment from Lord Salisbury, the Conservative Party leader, whose goodwill he would need for further advancement since the Liberal Unionist leadership had no direct access to the fount of honour. In a fawning yet pompous reply to Salisbury's letter offering him the baronetcy, he wrote: "I beg to return my humble thanks to Her Majesty for the 'Honor'[sic] she has so graciously authorised you to confer on me."¹⁶ But he yearned for more.

"The sale of honours gradually became a customary feature of political life"¹⁷, though the Conservative Party was not unduly tainted until after 1902, but then made up for lost time. This was the world that Farquhar would come to know well, and where he would feel very much at home in later years. To increase his claims to advancement in the 1890s, he poured money into London local elections as President of the London Municipal Society, formed in 1894 with offices near Parliament in Great George Street, to support candidates of the right, known as Moderates, the label adopted by the Tories and their allies on the London County Council (LCC), created by Lord Salisbury in 1889. He topped up his own contributions with useful large sums from the prodigiously wealthy and impressionable financier, Herbert Stern, whom he helped to become a peer as Lord Michelham in 1905.

His commitment went beyond the financial; he was a member of the LCC for twelve years from 1889 to 1901, representing East Marylebone, and came to be regarded as something of an expert on local government, the only political sphere in which he ever bothered to apply himself seriously. His efforts impressed Edward Hamilton who noted in his diary on 1 March 1895 that Farquhar "has taken immense interest in, and pains with, London municipal matters".¹⁸ The following day elections took place at which the Moderates made sweeping gains at the expense of their left-wing opponents,

the Progressives, leading to a hung Council. Farquhar was not slow to impress on the Liberal Unionist leadership the value and extent of his contribution to the work of local government in London when he stepped up his campaign for a peerage.

He also did all he could to win Lord Salisbury's goodwill by telling him too about the extent of this work in London. He kept offering to visit Hatfield to brief the great man, whom he treated as leader of the entire Unionist alliance as the combination of Conservatives and their allied Liberal Unionists was now increasingly known. In May 1894, he asked for "a few minutes to show you the proposed draft programme of the London Municipal Society & tell you of its objects".¹⁹ "I will gladly come and see you", he wrote in May 1895.²⁰ Two months earlier, on 26 March, he had expressed great sorrow at Salisbury's failure to mention his Society in a speech about Conservative successes in the local elections that had just taken place in various parts of the country. "I think it only right you should know what that Society has done", he wrote. "It practically provided at an immense cost, the whole of the literature, & at least half the candidates." On he went about the Society's work "in the most difficult and least hopeful constituencies", ending: "I hope you will forgive me for troubling you at this length."²¹ He was forgiven on this occasion. Three days later Farquhar wrote again thanking Salisbury "for having so kindly written to me"²² in appreciation of his London services. It was a rare break in Salisbury's normal habit of keeping Farquhar firmly at arm's length. Several more letters were sent to try and fix a date for Salisbury to dine with the Society's leading lights. It does not seem that these efforts succeeded. A surprising omission from this correspondence is any reference to Farquhar's money. Details of donations to political funds almost always featured in his remorseless quest for honours.

Farquhar never wanted a serious career as an MP. He thought of standing in 1891 in the hope that a brief stint in the Commons would bring him closer to a peerage. Hartington, with whom he discussed the matter, told him bluntly that he did not "think it would help the object you have in view [i.e. a peerage]. Once in Parliament as we agreed the other day, you would be pressed to remain there."²³ Nevertheless, a few years later he decided that a Commons seat would assist his progress to the Lords. He told Edward Hamilton about his plans in September 1894. "Horace Farquhar has talked to me several times about his going into Parliament. He has been offered Marylebone—a very safe seat—and has accepted the offer. It is strictly speaking a Conservative seat : but he stands as a Liberal Unionist. His return therefore for the seat will give the Duke of Devonshire an additional follower. Horace F. declares that this has been one

of the chief considerations which has induced him to enter the political fray.” But Hamilton was not deceived. He knew his cousin too well to have any doubt about his real motive. “I am sure”, his diary entry continues, “that the main consideration of all is the hope that actual Parliamentary service will qualify him for further elevation which is his great ambition. It will no doubt enhance his claims; but I expect he will tire of House of Commons life, before he has made much of a Parliamentary record.”²⁴

Hamilton knew his man. Farquhar regarded a Commons seat as no more than a very temporary perch to be cast aside as soon as he could get the seat on the red benches to which he thought himself entitled. Elected for Marylebone West with a majority of nearly 1,500 (hardly “a very safe seat”) at the general election of July 1895, he swiftly renewed his application for a coronet, writing with characteristic immodesty to the Duke of Devonshire on 22 September 1895: “May I first record what my services have been since 1892—I never like mentioning *l. s. d* -- but we all know very little politically can be done without it—I have collected since 91 for the Unionist cause £30,000 (£21,000 of that sum since the end of 1894), two-thirds of which I have given or guaranteed myself. The practical result has been the [creation of the] London Municipal Society, most of the victories at the LCC elections last March, and hence in a great measure the London Parliamentary ones in July...certainly Marylebone East & West which have fallen entirely on me.” He promised that after joining the Lords he would “always do the needful in E & W. Marylebone in the future” and keep the London Municipal Society afloat.²⁵

The campaign for a coronet became really intense at the end of October 1895. Devonshire was induced by Farquhar’s constant badgering to try to bring matters to a head at a meeting with Salisbury. To stiffen his champion’s resolve at that encounter, Farquhar sought to enlist the ardent support of his most important backer : the Prince of Wales. On 27 October 1895 he sent an 18-page letter to the Prince’s private secretary, Francis Knollys (“My dear Francis”), writing with such agitation that his normally clear handwriting deteriorated markedly. He had been waiting three years for his peerage. Devonshire must now be tasked “with getting me what he had asked [Salisbury] for in 1892” when in the end he had had to settle for a miserable baronetcy. “I never wished for that favor [sic] and took it at the especial wish of the Prince”, adding angrily “in fact it was giving me nothing.”

The letter ranged over his magnificent record of financial help to the Liberal Unionists and the work of his London Municipal Society in much the same

terms as they had already been described to Devonshire and Salisbury. The tone was alternately boastful and petulant. He claimed that his work for the March local elections in London had been hailed by Salisbury who had said: “I had been chiefly the cause of the deathblow to Rosebery’s Govt.” which had collapsed in June 1895. Now he was rushed off his feet and needed the peerage without delay even “by a year or two.” He had “more to do than I could go on with—Parliament, LCC, London Municipal Society & my business which now consisted principally of the [British South African] Chartered & Exploration Cos., Parrs Banking, & the management as you know of two large fortunes besides my own” [the two being Fife’s and his wife’s]. This was indeed an accurate summary of the interests that Farquhar had accumulated. The difficulty of coping with them all was turned into an additional argument for his peerage. It was another indication of his arrogance.

Devonshire had clearly been given an earful that autumn, and not for the first time. “I reminded him again of my reasons for wishing for my peerage—i.e that it was my ambition to deserve what my grandfather had been unable to accept & that my father’s services were also a great claim—all the contests he had fought in Hertfordshire from 1839 until he died in the House of C[ommons] in 1866 & his great services to Ld S’s family”. This was a quite shameless attempt to enlist the services of previous generations on his own behalf—and an unconvincing one too; peerages had not been in prospect for either of these two backbench MPs, the second of whom had never stood in the three-member Hertfordshire county constituency, as Farquhar alleged; his four contests were all for the Hertford borough seat. In a desperate postscript Farquhar added: “it is only fair to say that my wife kept & practically paid for the whole of the Bromley division of Kent for years”, a claim that arose out the influence in the area possessed by her first husband, the banker Sir Edward Scott.

This emotional appeal for the Prince’s help did Farquhar no good at all. Instead of drafting a measured letter of support for his master to sign, Francis Knollys sent on Farquhar’s screed to Salisbury’s private secretary, Schomberg McDonnell. He docketed it with the damning, if slightly unfair comment: “recapitulation at wearisome length of all his services (largely imaginary).” He urged the prime minister to “give the D. of Devonshire NO pledge about this until I have had a chance of speaking to you. A great deal depends on it.”²⁶ Salisbury probably needed little encouragement not to give Devonshire any good news for Farquhar at their meeting.

The impatient Farquhar was kept waiting for more than two years for the

peerage to which he thought himself so clearly entitled. He lined up his stepson, Sir Samuel Scott, Bart., to take over his seat, and in late 1897 Salisbury reluctantly agreed that he could have his coronet (still an astonishingly rapid ennoblement which caused much adverse comment). In his biography of Salisbury, Andrew Roberts writes that, having rewarded other substantial donors, the Tory leader was “against another large-scale contributor, Horace Farquhar, getting a peerage after only three years as a Liberal Unionist MP, but it went through, helped by the support of Devonshire and the Prince of Wales.”²⁷ This time the two backers he had lined up in 1895 did not fail him. Farquhar thanked Salisbury in a curiously restrained letter with an odd final sentence, written from Sandringham on 28 December 1897. “I have tried to do my best to serve the Unionist party in London, & shall feel it a duty to continue to do so...I wish to return my humble thanks to the Queen for conferring the honor[sic] at your recommendation. I have explained to you why it is an acceptable one to me.”²⁸ He was gazetted Baron Farquhar, of Saint Marylebone, in the County of London on 20 January 1898. The new peer boasted that he had paid more than the “accepted tariff”²⁹ for his title.

Naturally the bird of passage had made no effort to impress the Commons. He delivered just one speech as an MP, an amazing performance lasting for no more than five minutes on 13 February 1896, in which he ignored the convention that maiden speakers should be uncontroversial and hit out at the many critics of the controversial British South Africa Company in the House, provoking a number of angry interventions as he defended the very dubious organisation in which he was heavily involved. His successor in the Marylebone seat was a welcome contrast. Sir Samuel Scott, Bart., an honourable army officer and landowner, was to serve the 8,500 electors of Marylebone West for twenty years, and represent a new single Marylebone seat created in 1918 until 1921.

Farquhar’s tongue, little used in the Commons, was not readily loosened in the Lords either. A member for 25 years, he made just six speeches, all of them short, on legislation affecting London County Council, a subject on which he remained an expert. He sometimes took on the humdrum task of moving the adjournment of the House at the end of the day. There was no repetition of the ugly scenes he had provoked in the Commons.

The Liberal Unionist with a love of honours had made his way into the Lords by judicious use of his money and powerful connections. He had given his influential backers—and Lord Salisbury—no peace until he got his heart’s

desire. He was gripped by a powerful conviction, which no one (except perhaps his devoted Fife) shared, that he was entitled to a peerage. When he got it, he saw no reason to make a significant contribution to the work of the Lords.

Later, as a Conservative associate of Lloyd George in helping to sell peerages to other people, he would be advanced to a Viscounty on 21 June 1917 and to an Earldom on 20 November 1922 in Lloyd George's resignation honours list. He did not enjoy his highest honour for long, dying the following August when the title became extinct. No one else in modern times has risen so high while contributing so little to the public welfare or the good of the nation. 38 non-royal Earldoms were created between 1900 and 1984 (when Harold Macmillan received his belated honour), excluding those which were subsequently converted into Marquessates. All went to men of high distinction: prime ministers, very senior cabinet ministers, top military and naval commanders, Indian viceroys, the most important colonial governors and public servants. Farquhar is the only person in this period to have received an Earldom without possessing a substantial claim to it.

CHAPTER III REFERENCES

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²*Diary of Edward Hamilton*, ed. Bahlman, Vol.II, p.495

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⁴For an account of the merger, see my article "The Formation of the Conservative and Unionist Party 100 Years Ago" in the *Conservative History Journal*, Vol. II (1), 2012

⁵Ian Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party: A History* (I. B. Tauris, 2012), p.1. Dr Cawood filled a long-standing gap in Victorian history with this impressive study

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¹⁶Farquhar to Salisbury, 20 August 1892, Hatfield House, 3M/E

¹⁷Hanham, "Sale of Honours", p.288

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²⁰Farquhar to Salisbury, 22 May 1895

²¹Farquhar to Salisbury, 26 March 1895

²²Farquhar to Salisbury, 29 March 1895

²³Hartington to Farquhar, 14 February 1891(copy), enclosed with Farquhar to Francis Knollys, 27 October 1895 (see note 26 below)

²⁴*Destruction of Lord Rosebery*, ed. Brooks, p. 169

²⁵Farquhar to Devonshire, 22 September 1895, Devonshire MSS, second series, 340.2648, quoted in Jenkins, "Funding of Liberal Unionist Party", *EHR*, Vol.105, p.924

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IV A ROYAL FAVOURITE

It was Farquhar's intimate friendship with Fife which first brought him the prospect of great wealth. It was also the route to another of the glittering prizes he sought: a prominent position among royalty. On 27 July 1889 his dear friend married Princess Louise, the eldest daughter of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, in the private chapel of Buckingham Palace. Farquhar naturally was his best man.

The marriage caused some surprise. As certain journalists pointed out, the groom had come to be widely regarded as a confirmed bachelor. He was eighteen years older than his unlovely bride; she and her two sisters were known unkindly as "the hags."¹ Her friends and relatives were very rude, calling her "noticeably idiotic" and "totally uneducated."² It was always a matter of some surprise if she managed to enter into conversation on social occasions. Her father had no misgivings about the marriage, despite Fife's colourful past. In her life of Edward VII, Professor Jane Ridley writes: "that the 22-year-old Louise, a shy plain girl who had led a secluded life was being married off to a dissipated man eighteen years her senior seemed not to weigh upon the prince's mind."³ Queen Victoria noted with approval that Fife was "immensely rich"⁴ and made him a duke, the last to be created from outside the Royal Family.

At the wedding the Queen noticed that "Louise was very pale & seemed very nervous", but "the music was good."⁵ The wedding cake was a memorable object, standing seven feet high and weighing 150 pounds. The newly-weds departed in "a splendid coach with gorgeous footmen in green and silver livery"⁶. Not much was heard about them thereafter. The middle-aged roué settled down to a quiet life, spent largely at Mar Lodge close to Balmoral, with his young wife who was clearly devoted to him (they had two daughters). For a time in the early 1890s Princess Louise would have become first in line to the throne if anything had happened to the future King George V. Everyone felt very relieved when his first son (who would become Edward VIII) was born in 1894.

There were no more than perfunctory references to the forty-five year-old best man in the extensive press reports of the wedding, though the *Pall Mall Gazette*

told its numerous readers that the Fife property had been “very well managed by Mr Horace Farquhar.” In February 1893 he was formally presented at court. With typical arrogance he asked Lord Salisbury, the Unionist leader, to do the presenting. Salisbury, who loathed court ritual, failed to turn up. Nevertheless, Farquhar “managed it all right”, telling Salisbury that the master of ceremonies was “most good natured about it”, and he was deemed to “have been duly presented by you.”⁷

He put it about the Queen had been very gracious to him. Recently, a historic Steinway grand piano appeared at a Chelsea Antiques and Fine Art Fair, said to have been “bought by Lord Farquhar in 1898 who assisted Queen Victoria with household purchases”⁸, though after her death he criticised her sharply for permitting so many “abuses”⁹ by members of her household which damaged the standing of the court (others disagreed, seeing in it “mystery and awe”¹⁰). Invitations to stay in great houses, like Knowsley in Lancashire (with Lord Derby) and at Wynyard in Co. Durham (with the Marquess of Londonderry), started to be showered on him. Farquhar’s chief objective in the aftermath of the Fife wedding, however, was to ingratiate himself with Fife’s new father-in-law.

He had for some time been known to the Prince of Wales and his staff. In 1884 a member of the entourage, General Martin Dillon, wrote to Farquhar, newly installed as a London banker, asking him to take on the humdrum post of treasurer of the Hyde Park Corner Improvement Fund. The offer was naturally accepted with alacrity. “Of course if His Royal Highness would really like me to do so I would accept the post with great pleasure & endeavour to perform the duties to the best of my power.”¹¹ The duties involved arranging payment for workmen moving memorials to the Duke of Wellington in order to ease traffic congestion.

Five years on, his sights were set much higher. He was a natural recruit for the louche Marlborough House set, over which the Prince of Wales presided, and within two years of the Fife wedding his friend Edward Hamilton was able to list him among the members.¹² As his wealth grew, so too did his value to his royal master. Farquhar became a prominent member of his circle of rich associates who helped finance his expensive life with no questions asked about their probity. He was one of ten close friends who were given a special bust in memory of Edward VII after his death to remind them of his gratitude to them.¹³ Some said that Farquhar, Lord Esher (a powerful figure behind the throne who kissed the King’s hand at every opportunity and who shared Farquhar’s interest in young men) and Sir Ernest Cassel, the fabulously rich

Jewish financier (and grandfather of Edwina Mountbatten), had between them raised enough to pay off all the debts which the monarch had accumulated during his life. As for the young men, Farquhar behaved with much greater discretion than Esher who became besotted with the future Edward VIII. “The boy is a darling”, he wrote, “backward but sweet.” He held endless conversations about the “most charming boy” with his mother, Queen Mary, endeavouring to persuade her that Edward would in the years to come prove himself “a worthy son.”¹⁴ She was unpersuaded (and rightly so).

In addition to large sums enabling him to indulge his expensive love of pomp and opulence, Edward VII also sought money from his friends and financial backers to assist philanthropic ventures designed to improve the social condition of his people, in which he was genuinely interested, as he proved by putting in a good deal of time as a member of a Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes in 1884. Some years later, he was persuaded of the importance of boosting the resources of voluntary hospitals in London and elsewhere at a time when demand for their services was increasing rapidly. An ambitious Hospital Fund was established under his patronage. Donations to it from pockets, large and small, throughout the country were secured by a fund-raising arm, the League of Mercy, operating under a Royal Charter granted in 1899. “Within a decade, 20,000 officers and workers were collecting money in London and the Home Counties. Each of them enlisted twenty subscribers of one shilling or more. Tradesmen and domestic servants came under particular pressure” to contribute.¹⁵ In the period up to the Second World War it raised some £850,000 for hospitals, a slightly disappointing sum perhaps in view of the great efforts that had been made.

A galaxy of titled grandees adorned the League’s central body and led its district organisations based on parliamentary constituencies, awarding the coveted medals of the Order of Mercy, instituted by the League, on a lavish scale to those who put money in its coffers. Edward VII took great pleasure in presenting the medals himself at receptions at Marlborough House. “The decorations delighted, and animated, the recipients.”¹⁶ As other organisations, most notably the Primrose League, discovered, such trinkets had wide popularity in late Victorian and Edwardian England.

Farquhar, much more used to taking than giving, now played the part of public benefactor and charitable campaigner for the first and last time in his life, conscious no doubt of the further approval he would win from his royal master and of the assistance that his very dubious business reputation would derive

from these unprecedented good deeds. His financial contributions would not have been paltry, particularly after he became joint President of the Order, along with Queen Victoria's son-in-law, the Duke of Argyll, in 1903. He seems to have taken his duties seriously, their tedium diminished by the royal personages and great ladies who served alongside him on its central council. He gained great credit with them when he persuaded the widow of a Jewish financier to donate £10,000 annually. He encouraged the misleading impression that the Order of Mercy occupied a high place in the country's honours system. "Has Order of Mercy", his entry in *Whitaker's Peerage 1906* proclaimed, as if it belonged by the side of the most eminent and historic decorations.

His name and his money were of great benefit to the League. As chairman of its meetings he did not excel. On 21 December 1915, Viscount Sandhurst, then the Liberal Lord Chamberlain in Asquith's coalition government (alongside Farquhar as Tory Lord Steward), "attended the annual meeting of the League of Mercy. Why I was asked I can't say, but so it was... Horace Farquhar, the Lord Steward, presided; never have I seen such a chairman for muddle... The agenda paper upside down, his glasses on the floor, his whispering to me—What the devil's his name?" as the recipient of an award came forward to collect it. It did not seem to matter. Criticism was silenced by the deference paid naturally to a lord at that time. At the end of the proceedings "he bowed his acknowledgements of the vote of thanks to the Lord Farquhar, G.C.V.O., for his able conduct in the chair."¹⁷

(Having been wound up in 1947, the League of Mercy was re-established in 1999 by Robert Balchin, now Lord Lingfield, to recognise and encourage those who undertake voluntary work with the sick, vulnerable and homeless. Many deserving people receive the League's medal each year. Recipients also include members of foreign royal houses toppled from power long ago, who reciprocate by bestowing their honours on Lord Lingfield. Horace Farquhar would have approved. He boasted of holding fourteen foreign orders, all of them first class, as well being a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour of France.)

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Under Edward VII the monarchy acquired a new magnificence. "Ceremonial he loves", Lord Esher noted in his journal on 6 February 1901, "not so much as a setting after the Napoleonic manner, but as an end in itself."¹⁸ Palaces were reorganised and redecorated to accentuate their imposing character and internal beauty. The ceremonial aspects of monarchy became more elaborate, and were

executed with almost faultless precision for the first time. Queen Victoria had not bothered about any of these things. The King himself inspired the necessary fundamental reforms, and oversaw every detail of their implementation. A small group of experts and courtiers assisted him, of whom Farquhar was a leading member. Leading office-holders were excluded. The Tory Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Clarendon, and his department had bungled the tasks they were given at the time of Queen Victoria's funeral. "They have been unhelpful and disloyal to the King and the Earl Marshal"¹⁹, wrote Esher sternly on 31 January 1901.

Magnificence in a monarchy requires efficient management, and that Farquhar introduced during the first five years of the reign as Master of the Royal Household, a post which goes back to the seventeenth century but had acquired its modern responsibilities for the staffing and administration of all the royal palaces under the Prince Consort. Esher thought him well- equipped for the role. "The King is going to appoint his old friend, Horace Farquhar, Master of the Household", he recorded in his journal on 1 April 1901. "An epicure, and a good man of business, with a deputy he will do well, as the servants will not be able to come between him and the King."²⁰

He clearly did some important work. One contemporary writer on royal affairs said: "the twentieth century courtier is shown in his most alert and assiduous aspect by the first Baron Farquhar."²¹ A later flattering profile summed up his achievement: "After Edward had ascended the throne, he looked for a man who should modernise the arrangements at court which, under the Queen, had become altogether too old-fashioned, and organise them on proper business lines. In Farquhar...he found the right person."²² The Duke of Portland, then Master of the Horse, agreed that "he brought the whole establishment into line with modern requirements", adding that "when I first knew him, he was nicknamed 'Kind Horace' "²³, presumably because less affluent courtiers benefited from his largesse.

He was certainly kind to those likely to exert influence on his behalf. Lord Rosebery was amongst them. His deep interest in Napoleon was borne carefully in mind by Farquhar. In an undated letter to "My dear Rosebery", he wrote: "I picked up this little statue of Napoleon, & remembering how much you appreciated & collected all connected with him—which I saw at Dalmeny, I bought this for you...It comes from Sèvres, but is I fear hard paste the soft being destroyed in the revolution as you know."²⁴ It was a gift the recipient was certain to cherish.

Word of Farquhar's striking success as a courtier reached the United States. On 1 August 1908, *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (of all unlikely publications) reported that "it is no exaggeration to assert that Lord Farquhar and Lord Esher [perhaps the most significant of all court reformers], by doing away with waste, perquisites, pilfering and with useless yet costly sinecures, were able to cut down the expenditure of the royal household by nearly one half, without in the slightest degree impairing the brilliancy or the splendour of King Edward's court, which, indeed, is vastly superior in that respect to that of his august mother." At the same time there were persistent rumours that he put substantial sums in his own pocket when selling off paintings and other property for which the decluttered palaces had no room. Horace Farquhar was always alert to ways of furthering his own interests.²⁵

He was a stickler for protocol, enforcing it rigidly and making himself look rather absurdly pompous in the process. On 4 October 1905 the senior Liberal politician, R. B. Haldane, was handed the following message: "The Master of the Household is commanded by The King to inform Mr Haldane that he has His Majesty's permission to leave Balmoral on Monday the 9th October."²⁶ Guests hardly needed such a chit in order to escape from royal hospitality. Haldane had come on secret political business. The King had been made aware that he, Asquith and others were plotting to turn their leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, into a purely figurehead prime minister sitting in the Lords when a Liberal government was formed, an event which was then drawing close. The monarch summoned Haldane to Balmoral to put a stop to the conspiracy and "smooth the rift in the Liberal party."²⁷ Edward VII believed that he should weigh into party politics when he felt he could make a helpful contribution.

Farquhar left no detail to chance in organising royal receptions, and appreciated the conscientiousness shown by those in the Household who worked with him. "My dear Sir Francis", he wrote in an undated letter to Francis Hopwood (later Lord Southborough), "I enclose a list of those invited, tho two as you see that have not accepted will probably do so. So far [of] those that have accepted, the Gentlemen have done so, &[will] bring their ladies. Perhaps you would kindly let any of the ladies know, whose protectors cannot come, that they are expected by themselves. I enclose a card of invitation for Lady Hopwood & yrself. If you have a daughter pray let me know that she may be included. Thank you so much for your kind assistance last night."²⁸

Farquhar raised the court's standards of hospitality to the highest level. Even the most demanding German guests were impressed. A banquet at Windsor Castle in November 1907 in honour of the visiting Kaiser was "said by the Germans to be finer than any spectacular display of the kind they had ever seen—finer than the Winter Palace Gala feasts." The host shone too. "Our King makes a better show than William II. He has more graciousness and dignity. William is ungraceful, nervous and plain", Lord Esher reflected with satisfaction.²⁹

The successful Master of the Household basked in the royal favour. After five years' service, the King proposed in 1906 to make him Lord Steward. Though it had ceased to carry important duties, the post had long been regarded as the most senior of the great Offices of State, the others being the Lord Chamberlain and the Master of the Horse. Those who held them were formally members of the government, appointed by the prime minister of the day, a practice which continued until the first Labour government of 1924. The King simply ignored long-standing constitutional practice in 1906 to try to get the senior of these offices for Farquhar, then a Liberal Unionist, during the premiership of the Liberal Campbell-Bannerman, to whom he had done a good turn two years earlier. The diary of Sir Almeric FitzRoy, Clerk of the Privy Council (who was married to the daughter of Horace's cousin, Sir Thomas Farquhar), contains details of what happened in an entry of 24 May 1907. "It appears that the King has used his influence to the utmost with Sir H Campbell Bannerman in order to obtain the Lord Stewardship for Horace Farquhar, to which end he was prepared to make him an Earl. Apart from the scandal of promotion of such a person to the highest place among the great Officers of State, the political character of the office can hardly have been forgotten... There has I understand been a good deal of friction over the matter and for the time [being] the office will be held in abeyance, Farquhar continuing to be described as Acting Lord Steward."³⁰

This extraordinary episode underlines both Farquhar's high standing as a royal favourite and the odium with which he was regarded by others ("the scandal of promotion of such a person to the highest place"). The exceptionally close bond between the King and Farquhar was widely observed and remembered. Sixteen years later in May 1923 shortly before Farquhar's death, Chips Channon encountered the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII, dining in a blue dinner jacket at Buck's Club in London "with his *eminence grise*, the irresistible Fruity Metcalfe. Will he be the Lord Farquhar of the next reign?"³¹ Channon wondered in his scandalous diary. Like Farquhar, Metcalfe was an adventurer who came from nowhere and won the confidence of a King. Gossips sometimes

wondered if Metcalfe was his master's lover. No one speculated along those lines where Edward VII and Farquhar were concerned.

Edward VII gave up the battle to promote his favourite in 1907. Campbell-Bannerman insisted that the disputed post of Lord Steward should go to Earl Beauchamp, a committed Liberal (and homosexual with a "persistent weakness for footmen"³² who would be forced to leave the country by George V in 1931 and later be immortalised as Lord Marchmain in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*). Farquhar was consoled with a Privy Counsellorship (regarded by Queen Victoria as a greater honour than a peerage and strictly rationed, unlike today when there are nearly 750 Privy Counsellors) and a special extra lordship-in-waiting, setting him apart from the other occupants of that normally lowly post.

Farquhar refused to defer to Beauchamp, and had the satisfaction of seeing his rival humiliated at the funeral of his royal master in 1910, following a dispute between them the previous year. Charles Hobhouse, a minister in Asquith's Cabinet, noted in his diary on 9 June 1910: "There has been a sharp contest between Lords Farquhar and Beauchamp over their respective duties and powers. It began when the King of Portugal came to Windsor in the autumn of 1909, and the then Queen [Alexandra] proposed that Winston Churchill should *not* be asked, as the other Ministers were – to Windsor. Lord Farquhar agreed to omit him, but Beauchamp insisted that he and the Lord Steward's Dept. regulated these things, and sent him an invitation. The dispute culminated over the King's funeral when Beauchamp was elbowed aside by the Earl Marshal [the Duke of Norfolk] and by the 1st Commissioner of Works [Lewis Harcourt, yet another homosexual]."³³

Churchill was the cause of this tiff between courtiers. The Royal Family was ill-disposed to him at this time. Esher recorded in his journal on 27 January 1908 that "Winston was not liked here. Of course, there is prejudice against him, and nothing is so difficult to remove. The King, whatever he may feel, never betrays that he dislikes a man. The Prince of Wales does."³⁴ On 23 April that year Esher wrote that the future George V "hates Winston",³⁵ who seems to have been considered guilty of undue "self-advertisement."³⁶ He left Churchill in no doubt about his antipathy at the banquet in November 1909 for the young King of Portugal (his father had been murdered the previous year), who was described by Esher as "a nice good looking boy, with perfect manners, simple and gay... Winston was coldly received, but the King was perfectly polite. The P of W was almost uncivil... He and the Queen 'chaffed' Winston about the suffragette who

attacked him.”³⁷ Farquhar would have done himself no harm in royal eyes by agreeing to exclude Churchill from the banquet, falling out with Beauchamp when his decision was overturned. The Portuguese King, exiled to Twickenham the following year when Portugal became a republic, retained his popularity at Windsor.

Courtiers thrive on quarrels amongst themselves. Farquhar instigated another one after he finally became Lord Steward (replacing Beauchamp) in 1915 as a Unionist in Asquith’s coalition government, remaining in the post under Lloyd George until the latter’s downfall in October 1922. It was widely held that since the Lord Chamberlain had so much more work to do (not least in licensing theatre productions) than the Lord Steward, who had lost most of his duties, the former should have precedence over the latter on ceremonial occasions. Farquhar would have none of it. “He took to turning up at Buckingham Palace and claiming precedence over the Lord Chamberlain, even at functions where his presence was neither commanded nor required. A week before the wedding of Princess Mary [George V’s only daughter] in 1922, the Duke of Atholl [a tough-minded former soldier and Liberal who was then Lord Chamberlain] wrote that he feared Farquhar might literally push him out of the way at the ceremony, as he had done before.”³⁸

When the day came, there was no pushing, but Farquhar made his displeasure very plain, as Sir Almeric FitzRoy recorded in his diary on 6 March 1922. “A state of war exists between the Lord Steward & the Lord Chamberlain upon the knotty point of precedence... [In Westminster Abbey] when [Farquhar] was called upon to sign the register of the Royal marriage; he had got so far as the middle of his name when he became suddenly alive to the fact that the hated name of ‘Atholl’ was just above his whereupon he threw down his pen & protested against the malignity to which he was asked to submit & [was] with the greatest difficulty prevailed upon not to insist upon his pretension there & then ... it was very bad taste to press the point at such a moment.”³⁹

Lord Curzon, Foreign Secretary and leader of the Lords, noted for his antiquarian interests, wrote “an immense memorandum”⁴⁰ in the middle of a diplomatic crisis on the vexed issue of precedence between these two great officers of state, putting it in historical context, but his document, for which to his great annoyance the King failed to thank him, did not resolve the dispute. George V, who treated Farquhar just as indulgently as his father, settled the matter by giving Farquhar *personal* precedence.

The pampered Lord Steward was unable to perform his ceremonial duties properly. In May 1919 a state banquet was held at Buckingham Palace for the President of Brazil. Viscount Sandhurst, the Lord Chamberlain at the time, recorded Farquhar's grave shortcomings in his diary. "The long walk backwards from the Bow Room where the King and Queen received to the Ball Room I managed all right, but Farquhar was awful. Had it been a race Farquhar would have been disqualified for bumping and was never in step. He bumped me, then recoiled and bumped again."⁴¹ The King, normally unforgiving when ceremonial duties were carried out badly, turned a blind eye to Farquhar's failings once again. Perhaps his age counted in his favour. He was 75 at the time.

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All his fellow courtiers rejoiced when Farquhar finally departed at the age of 78 on the fall of the Lloyd George coalition in October 1922. His intense loyalty to the Welsh wizard, whom he had helped to sell honours, meant that he was unacceptable as Lord Steward to the new Conservative premier, Bonar Law. It was the end of a twenty-one year career at court under the two Kings who befriended him. He was one of the very few to be on close terms with both of them. George V sent most of his father's cronies packing when he came to the throne in 1910. Farquhar's cousin, Edward Hamilton, noted in his diary as early as 1902 that the then heir "spoke strongly against the moneyed associates around the King", and predicted that his "might be a dull Court, but it will certainly be a respectable one."⁴² Yet the disreputable Farquhar managed to be prominent in it, though he was not quite such a dominant figure as in Edward VII's time. That he managed the transition so well was a tribute to the astuteness and charm with which he concealed his unscrupulousness.

He safeguarded his position at court by winning George V's friendship long before he came to the throne. Farquhar did this cleverly by cultivating him as a neighbouring Norfolk squire and shooting companion, the roles in which the second of his Kings thrived above all; he was one of the finest shots in the country, and Farquhar must have been pretty good to be worthy of his company. He got in plenty of practice in the Scottish Highlands thanks to Fife, that constant friend and supporter throughout his life. For years he had at his disposal a very attractive shooting box, Geldie Lodge, on Fife's 29,000-hectare estate, misnamed Mar Lodge; it was in fact a large country house with 2,435 stags' heads on its walls four miles from Braemar, rebuilt in the Elizabethan style in 1895 (and now a nature reserve). Very occasionally the game eluded both him and his two Kings. In October 1908 they went on a "deer drive" at Balmoral

on “a glorious day in the woods from Altnaguisach to Birkhall” but gaining “no spoils. The only stag was missed by Horace in the last drive.”⁴³ He took his gun far afield. “Lots of partridges and hares”⁴⁴ were successfully bagged by Farquhar and a shooting party, which included Winston Churchill and his cousin the Duke of Marlborough, at Eichhorn in Austria in September 1907.

In about 1890, just as he was breaking seriously into royal circles after the Fife wedding, Farquhar acquired a country house at Castle Rising, made famous by its 12th century fortress, just over two miles from Sandringham, on a long lease from its owners, a distinguished family of Howards, cousins of the Earls of Suffolk, who had owned it since the sixteenth century. The estate consisted of some 4,000 acres, well stocked with game. Farquhar retained it for the rest of his life, encouraging people to think that he owned it. When he bought a baronetcy in 1892, he included Castle Rising in his title as his territorial designation. He loved playing the part of a landed gentleman with royal neighbours who appreciated him. Other neighbours were less appreciative. A plaque was placed in the parish church recording local regard for his wife who died in 1922. There was no plaque for him.

Parties of important visitors and local worthies moved regularly between Sandringham and Castle Rising throughout the shooting season under both his monarchs. George V kept up the tradition as enthusiastically as his father, who was sometimes accompanied by Mrs Keppel. The destruction of some two thousand pheasants in a day was not uncommon. On 18 December 1910, the second of his Kings wrote to him from Buckingham Palace in a spidery, unregal hand: “Glad you had 3 such good days shooting at Castle Rising last week. If you are there on the 28th I hope you will come and shoot with me at Sandringham”. He ended characteristically, “Thank goodness the weather is a little better today”, signing himself “Yr. sincere friend George R. I.”⁴⁵

George plainly enjoyed his company. In a letter of 20 June 1905 he wrote from Windsor in terms that would have given Farquhar much satisfaction. “I can’t tell you how we miss you”, he said, after expressing concern that “the last fortnight when you had so much to do overtired you.” He wrote again the following month to thank Farquhar for his “kind letter & all your congratulations & good wishes on the birth of our 5th son”,⁴⁶ who was the unfortunate Prince John. Remarkably, no doubt ever seems to have crossed the royal mind about Farquhar’s honesty and integrity.

He was regarded as the ideal tenant for White Lodge, the imposing Palladian

mansion built for George II in Richmond Park and owned by the Crown, where Queen Mary had been brought up by her impoverished parents, the Duke and Duchess of Teck.⁴⁷ A visitor noted that “the plateau on which the house stands commands delightful views”, and that the gardens were “bright and attractive.”⁴⁸ It was transferred to Farquhar most willingly at his earnest request by Edward VII with his heir’s full support when its occupant, Eliza Hartmann, a wealthy widow and society hostess, went bankrupt in 1909. The cost of running the house was said to have contributed to her financial woes. Farquhar entertained in lavish style, bringing down parties of distinguished guests, royal family members prominent among them, for lunch or dinner from London.

On 22 July 1917, Sir Almeric FitzRoy and his wife “went down to White Lodge between six and seven, and stayed to dinner, Horace Farquhar sending us back with some others about eleven. Queen Alexandra and her daughters were present... The others at dinner were the Duchess of Abercorn and Lady Cynthia, Lady Sophie Scott, Lord Chaplin, Sir W. Garstin, and one or two young men”⁴⁹ (there were invariably young men at Farquhar’s parties). It was a typical Farquhar occasion with food and drink of the high standard for which he was famous. Even FitzRoy, a critic of Farquhar, was glad to accept his lavish hospitality (“most excellent food”⁵⁰, he noted of a lunch party in May 1920). In 1922 this grand individual, related to the Duke of Grafton, who had looked down on Farquhar, came a cropper: he was convicted of “wilfully interfering with and annoying persons using Hyde Park” (some said male persons) and although the conviction was quashed on appeal, he was sacked as Clerk of the Privy Council in May 1923.

When he decided to give up White Lodge after his wife’s death in 1922, Farquhar was delighted to pass it on to Prince Albert, Duke of York, later King George VI, on his engagement to the future Queen Elizabeth. On 23 January 1923 “the betrothed couple went with Lord Farquhar to inspect White Lodge.”⁵¹ It was the address which would appear on the birth certificate of the future Queen Elizabeth II in 1926. Farquhar would have been overjoyed. Later that year, however, the royal residents moved to London. They were replaced by the rich but neurotic Lord Lee of Fareham, who had given Chequers to the nation. He and his wife found serious fault with Farquhar’s stewardship. “There was practically no central heating and the rooms in winter were desperately cold; the electric light was inadequate and unsafely installed; the drains were of uncertain date.”⁵² The house which had added to Farquhar’s grandeur without anyone at the time noticing any problems is now the home of the Royal Ballet Junior School.

It was not just to impress his important guests that Farquhar took a great deal of trouble about food. He had a voracious appetite. A young army surgeon, Robert Willan, who had been seconded to the royal household, joined a shooting party at Castle Rising in October 1915. He wrote to his wife: "I shot badly. We had the usual enormous lunch in a tent. Lord F ate: soup, hashed venison (hot), chicken casserole (hot), tongue (cold), boiled apple pudding (hot), cheese, fruit, coffee, two glasses of whiskey and soda, one glass of port, brandy liqueur—not bad for a man of 71!!!"⁵³ Lord Hardinge of Penhurst, British ambassador in Paris, knew what was expected of him when Farquhar came to lunch in 1921. "In view of Horace's love of food, I gave the cook 'carte blanche' to do anything he liked, and we had a Gargantuan feast in consequence."⁵⁴

It was at 7 Grosvenor Square, a huge house made over to him by his wealthy wife which he enlarged still further, that Farquhar entertained most sumptuously of all on a scale that few could afford to match. He knew how to achieve perfection, and send his guests away singing his praises. They could rely on meeting royalty. In August 1909 Esher and his wife "dined with Horace Farquhar to meet the King. 37 people—and everything beautifully done."⁵⁵ Three months earlier Lord Winterton, an Irish peer and young Tory MP, had gone to "the Farquhars' dinner to the Queen" (Alexandra), his fellow guests including the future Queen Mary and a galaxy of peers and ambassadors. "A very pleasant as well as, of course, an admirably done dinner... Afterwards, went to the H. of C., with Charley Castlereagh, to vote in knee-breeches!! Created quite a sensation in the Lobby!! Returned, afterwards, to Grosvenor Square for the dance: H.M. there, looking radiant, and, of course, all London."⁵⁶

Such parties were spectacular and regular features of life in high society. In February 1920 Winterton went to another dance given "for H.M. & the Queen at Horace Farquhar's. Rather fun; most of one's friends and lashings of Royalty."⁵⁷ At yet another dance two months later the diarist Lord Sandhurst, a critic of Farquhar in other contexts, encountered "the King, Queen, Princess Mary, Prince Albert, Queen Alexandra, Princess Victoria, Princess Royal, Princess Arthur of Connaught. In an experience of 40 years and more I never saw a better or better class entertainment... It was a truly delightful evening."⁵⁸ In June that year Lord and Lady Strathmore brought their daughter Elizabeth to a ball attended by Prince Albert, the future King George VI. He asked his equerry, "Who was that lovely girl you were talking to? Introduce me to her."⁵⁹ That introduction in Farquhar's ballroom brought the future King and Queen together for the first time. They met in one of his houses (where the great inter-war hostess, Lady Cunard, was later to reign), and took over another on

their marriage. So great a royal favourite and so splendid a host could not be other than a fine, upstanding man, could he? The rogue was most effectively disguised.

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V ENRICHING – AND ROBBING – THE TORIES

Horace Farquhar was incapable of true loyalty to any political party (or to anything, or anyone, else). He gave money to the Liberal Unionist Party in its early years after 1886, demanding a peerage in return. He went into the Commons as a Liberal Unionist in 1895 solely to strengthen his claims to a title, expecting to be given it within weeks of his election amid promises of further financial support for his Party. It was not the only beneficiary of his activities in 1895. He helped to swell Conservative Party funds too, and went on doing so in the years that followed.

As the 1895 general election campaign approached following the resignation of Lord Rosebery's troubled Liberal cabinet, Farquhar wrote to Lord Salisbury's astute private secretary, Schomberg McDonnell (who was not his most ardent supporter : see p.31), asking for five minutes of the great man's time. What he had to say could only be made known to Salisbury himself. The letter referred conspiratorially to a large donation, which Farquhar now wanted belatedly to pass on to the Conservative leader. Mystery cloaked his words. "I have a confidential message to Ld. Salisbury. I have held it over since the late govt. resigned as I did not wish for many reasons to ask to see him. It relates to a considerable sum of money which has been placed in my hands for the elections from a foreigner residing here & I undertook to take this to Ld. Salisbury with the reasons etc & I feel I ought to carry out the giver's wishes."

Salisbury, who normally kept Farquhar safely at arm's length, did not turn him away on this occasion. "F.O. 5.30", he wrote on the letter.¹ And so in the splendour of the Foreign Office at 5.30 pm one day in early July 1895, Farquhar divulged the details of the mysterious foreigner's largesse, and no doubt explained what he wanted in return. In the way of these things nothing may have been put on paper. It was the kind of secret work that Farquhar plainly enjoyed, devoting much time to it in the years that followed. He stood at the gateway to a world of rich, but embarrassing scamps and title-seekers, who could not be allowed direct access to political leaders.

His efforts mattered hugely. No more than a few thousand pounds came from Party members to meet the costs of a growing central organisation and of

national election campaigns. Most committed Tory supporters did not belong to an official constituency association at this time. They preferred to work for their Party through the Primrose League, an organisation which attracted some two million ardent activists, sending them out to campaign for the cause all year round and brightening their leisure hours with a programme of entertainments, such as plays, dances and magic lantern shows.² Subscriptions to the League were low for working-class members; it was not unusual for them to be waived altogether. Then, as now, the Party organisers at Conservative Central Office in London relied on generous sums from a few wealthy people; then, as now, these big donors often expected honours in return. Farquhar became immensely skilled in handling these delicate matters.

Just a few scattered fragments survive, providing glimpses of his very secret work. On 16 December 1909 he wrote from his great London mansion, 7 Grosvenor Square, to Jack Sandars, the powerful (some said overbearing) private secretary to the then Tory leader, Arthur Balfour. “My dear Jack”, he said, “So very sorry not to see you at dinner tonight. What has been done re Marylebone [is] I hope all right. I enclose re S.J. Funnily enough he saw Natty today & told him he was going to subscribe, he also told Wernher he would send £5000 – I hope for more. This was all arranged a month ago by Cohn & I suggested the cheque being sent to Hood. When will you be up next week [?] We are here until the 26th. Yours ever Horace Farquhar.”³

Something which was left unspecified was clearly afoot in Marylebone, which had long been Farquhar’s own personal political stamping-ground. The letter then moves on to conversations about a £5000 donation to Tory funds between three men of stupendous wealth: Solly Joel (referred to as S.J), Natty Rothschild and Julius Wernher. Joel, a leading ‘Randlord’, and Wernher (remembered today for his magnificent art collection on permanent public exhibition) had both made fortunes from the gold and diamond mines of South Africa, which put them in much the same league as the Rothschilds. Natty, a Liberal Unionist like Farquhar and a peer since 1885, would shortly become a very generous Tory donor. Wernher had been given a baronetcy by the Tories in 1905. Joel remained a plain mister, though a handle to his name must have been his for the asking. It would have been surprising if Farquhar had not obtained more from him, as he hoped. Indeed, this ring of Jewish millionaires would have been cultivated carefully by Farquhar over the years. Sir Ernest Cassel, the great friend of Edward VII who left £7.3 million at his death in 1921, was also on Farquhar’s little list. “I shall see Cassel this week”, he told Sandars in November 1911, the month that Balfour resigned as Tory leader to be replaced

by Bonar Law. “You really must not lose touch with anything”, Farquhar told his fellow Tory conspirator. “Goodness knows what might happen without your experience & judgement... I want to see you very much this week.”⁴

The Joel cheque of 1909 was destined for Hood, namely Sir Alexander Acland-Hood MP, then Tory Chief Whip whose responsibilities included the management of the Party funds. Its arrival in his hands would complete the plan made by a mysterious man called Cohn. He turns out to have been a rascal in Farquhar’s own image, indeed a young man after his own heart. Jefferson Davis Cohn (he claimed that the Confederate President was his godfather) was then a good-looking, 28- year-old, whose German father had settled in London and married a Miss Davis. He was open to any scheme that would bring him money. Like Farquhar, he acquired a fortune though his charms. He may have been the “C” who appeared in an another short, cryptic letter, written by Farquhar to Sandars on 23 December 1909. After mentioning that £500 had been sent to “Hughes”, the Party’s chief agent, Percival Hughes, he continued: “Met C at Apsley H & lunch with him Monday – wonderful how soon this has matured.”⁵ Cohn went to work for one of Farquhar’s regular sources of Tory cash, the much-exploited, rather dim-witted financier Herbert Stern, who became Lord Michelham in 1905 in return for his generosity. He was generous to Cohn too, as was the much younger Lady Michelham, who became his lover and mother of his child. Like Farquhar, he had other profitable secret side-lines, involving the unscrupulous art dealer, Joe Duveen (see p. 67 below). By the time of the First World War he was living in luxury in Paris. After it, he became known internationally as one of most successful horse breeders of his time. According to a keen student of his career, he went to Russia in 1926 with Solly Joel, whose 1909 donation he had arranged for Farquhar. They made a “£390,000 purchase of a huge hoard of diamonds from the Russian Bolshevik government.”⁶ Farquhar would have approved of these resourceful adventures conducted in the same profitable and carefree spirit as his own, unconstrained by moral considerations.

Farquhar did not allow the Michelhams to escape his clutches as Cohn made inroads into their wealth. In 1912 Farquhar “organised with Lady Michelham a party for the Conservative Party with a performance staged in the garden at Strawberry Hill [which the Michelhams owned] by Anna Pavlova[the great ballerina]. In one of the photographs illustrating the event for *Sketch* magazine, Lord Farquhar strikes a haughty pose, while the feature describes Lady Michelham as ‘small and smart and pretty...her pearls are worth a fortune, and she wears splendid emeralds which once belonged to the Empress of Russia.’”⁷

This was the kind of bejewelled display that Farquhar would have loved as he strutted around haughtily for the cameras.

There was ample cause for celebration at Strawberry Hill and elsewhere in 1912. It was the year in which Conservatives and Liberal Unionists finally came together, after many abortive negotiations, to form the Conservative and Unionist Party, the original plan to call it simply the Unionist Party having been abandoned at the last minute in the face of a revolt by Conservative members who refused to allow their historic name to disappear⁸ (though in practice they would be known as Unionists *tout court* for years ahead). Farquhar, having oscillated between the two parties in the 1890s, anticipated the creation of formal unity. In 1908 he became a member of the Carlton Club, the temple of Conservatism, joining its decision-making Committee, on which peers filled six of the ten seats, two years later.⁹ (Doubts had earlier been expressed about Farquhar's Tory convictions by Lord Salisbury, who suspected he might be in favour of the disestablishment of the Church of England. Farquhar, to whom the Christian faith and values meant nothing, wrote to reassure him that "he had no doubt on the question, & would never vote for disestablishment".¹⁰ Farquhar later feigned high regard for "the *statesman* Lord Salisbury" who "gave me his ideas"¹¹).

It fell to Farquhar to preside over the main part of the proceedings at the annual Conservative Party Conference in November 1912, the historic year which saw the merger with the Liberal Unionists. Their combined forces outside Parliament had been brought together as the clumsily named National Unionist Association of Conservative and Liberal Unionist Organizations. 5,000 constituency representatives, a higher total unsurprisingly than ever before, gathered in the Queen's Hall at Langham Place in London (later destroyed in 1941 during the Blitz). A man known for his wealth and opulence, Farquhar was expected to entertain Party members in style as President of the National Unionist Association. He did not disappoint them. On 13 November, he provided a lavish reception at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. The following day he arranged tables at various fashionable restaurants for hungry Conservatives to eat at his expense. Necessary, if unexciting party business was not neglected. On the third and final day of the conference, he presented challenge shields for the best organised county and borough constituencies.¹²

Farquhar faced his sternest test at a mass meeting in the Royal Albert Hall in the evening after the Conference had ended. At 8.15pm Lord Lansdowne, Party leader in the Lords, delighted the huge audience by announcing that the

pledge given by Balfour in 1910 to hold a referendum before introducing tariff reform had been scrapped. The hugely contentious commitment to put duties on imports would be implemented after election victory without a subsequent special appeal to the people. That was what most Party members wanted. “Farquhar then struggled to introduce Bonar Law. The audience cheered themselves hoarse at the mere mention of his name, and it was some minutes before he could make himself heard.” A year after becoming leader, Bonar Law had won a devoted following as a result of his aggressive tactics in Parliament against Asquith’s Liberal government. Wild cheering during his speech brought “demands from the Chairman for ‘Order! Order!’”¹³ A report produced for the next annual Conference held at Norwich in 1913 noted contentedly that “the meeting was remarkable for its enthusiasm.” The motions passed at the 1913 Conference included one on Parliament’s upper house: “The House of Lords should be reconstructed so as to truly represent all great and permanent national interests”.¹⁴

Kind words were said about Farquhar at the 1913 Conference which brought his term of office as National Unionist Association President to an end. On 12 July that year he had given a garden party for Party members at White Lodge, his much-admired house in Richmond Park, following the Party’s annual banquet at the Hotel Cecil in London, at which he presided. There was sincere praise in Norwich for “the social entertainment they had been able to enjoy, thanks to his kind invitation (Hear,hear.) They knew Lord Farquhar in London as a thorough hard worker in their cause—(hear, hear)—he was a member of the London committee which held meetings nearly every week, and he was always present at those meetings.” Farquhar spoke very briefly in reply, pleading his lack of skill as a speech-maker. “During the last thirty years he had been actively connected with politics, mostly in London, and he was proud to have had the privilege of serving their great party.”¹⁵ So ended his year in the public eye as an apparently respectable figure at the forefront of the Conservative Party with a long record of honourable drudgery on its behalf. This incomplete and misleading image was not to be recreated. He was never seen again in a prominent position on a Tory political platform. There was no lack of work for him behind the scenes where his particular talents belonged.

There were some who said that old malpractices should be discarded after the merger of 1912. The high-minded Lord Selborne, a former cabinet minister, wrote to the Party leaders in both Houses demanding an “onslaught on the system of the sale of honours... [No one] should receive an honour because, and only because, he has engaged to pay cash for it. But this practice is becoming

common and is even assuming new developments. To my certain knowledge honours have recently been hawked about by agents... If one party cuts itself free from these evil practices, and it becomes gradually known it has abjured them, the other will have to do the same... My ambition is that it shall be the Unionist leaders who will take up this position on principle... I do wish to help to free the party from all complicity in the special evil."¹⁶

As part of a major reform of Central Office the previous year (which had put it under the control of a Party Chairman for the first time), a new post of Party Treasurer had been created to free the Commons Chief Whip from burdensome responsibilities for Tory funds. Here was an opportunity for the kind of fresh start that Selborne wanted. But, in a surprise development, Farquhar was appointed as the Party's first Treasurer. "The press had announced that Hood, the retired Chief Whip, was to have the post, when suddenly [Walter] Long [a leader of the Tory right] launched an intrigue on behalf of Lord Farquhar... a man of every possible sinister quality"¹⁷ There would be no reign of purity while he was in charge of the Party's funds. Indeed things would get very much worse when, after 1916, Lloyd George was at the helm of a coalition government, dominated by Conservatives. He and Farquhar were two of a kind. Farquhar, who remained Tory Treasurer until 1923, would help the Welsh wizard expand the sale of honours massively, though it is unclear whether he co-ordinated his work with Maundy Gregory and other honours brokers.

Nothing embarrassing happened in the first few years. The Treasurer was widely praised. He launched "a hugely successful fund-raising campaign"¹⁸ which brought in "about £30,000 a year more, mostly in a few big subscriptions" followed by "systematic collections from (1) Peers (2) the City"¹⁹ where Farquhar's old friend and mentor Natty Rothschild opened new doors. The bank balance swelled impressively. By 1914 "the invested funds amounted to £671,000—twice the sum in 1911 and worth four years' expenditure—and there was a special cash deposit of £120,000 for the coming election"²⁰, which was postponed by the outbreak of war. That should have been more than enough since "an election costs from £80,000 to £120,000", Bonar Law was told. He was also assured that Farquhar's success had been obtained "to a large extent, but not wholly, irrespective of future honours."²¹ In other words, some donations had been given as down payments for titles to be conferred when the Tories were back in office, but leaving others entirely unmortgaged.

The Tories had not been so rich for years. They got richer still during the years of the Lloyd George coalition between 1916 and 1922 when more honours than

ever before were sold. It was through Farquhar that “negotiations with would-be honorands were conducted on the Tory side”.²² (He did not allow this, or any other, aspect of his dubious activities or his personal comfort to suffer during the war. “I hear Farquhar’s valet has total exemption”, Lord Sandhurst noted in his diary. “He says he is necessary and indispensable as he keeps him alive—indeed a service of national benefit!”²³). There was plenty of speculation about his intrigues with Lloyd George, but no outright accusations in his lifetime. Critics “refrained from exposing him because his connections were so exalted.”²⁴ After his death, the silence was broken. On 27 August 1927, the *Daily Mail* revealed that Farquhar had “often in his indiscreet old age...recounted to his friends the names of individuals for whom he had procured titles, with the exact sums paid.”²⁵

There is only one letter of any substance from Farquhar among the Lloyd George Papers, now housed in the Parliamentary Archives. It was written in September 1918 after Lloyd George had caught the Spanish flu which was sweeping Europe. He recovered, but some 228,000 died in Britain. Though honours are not mentioned, the rather touching and solicitous letter makes clear how diligently Farquhar assisted Lloyd George’s interests, rallying his wealthy “friends” in preparation for an election campaign. “My dear Prime Minister”, he wrote from Buckingham Palace, “I was so glad to hear such a good account of you at Downing Street this afternoon. I have been there most days during your illness but write today because I hear you are all right & I am thankful to feel it is so. Preparation has been generally made [in] the last three weeks for an election this year whether it comes or not, & I have seen some of my friends accordingly. I cannot say they all favor [sic] it. Still they all keep their word should it take place which means no change [in their contributions to election funds]. My kindest regards to Mrs Lloyd George and yourself.”²⁶ They obviously had a close personal rapport.

By 1922, the year of Lloyd George’s downfall²⁷, Farquhar, now seventy-eight but still to be seen in shooting parties on country estates, had accumulated over a million pounds for political expenditure, or so he said; he alone knew because no one else had access to the money, which was held in his own personal bank accounts²⁸ or in trusts, with a couple of ineffectual fellow trustees who left everything in his hands. No record could be kept at Conservative Central Office. Farquhar, the professional banker, knew how to make things very complicated indeed. A snap election took place in November 1922, a month after Lloyd George’s resignation, which gave the Conservatives under Bonar Law a decisive majority. Farquhar would not allow the Party’s funds in his

possession to be touched. He refused to sign a cheque for £ 20,000 in January 1923 to meet a number of election bills, which the then Party Chairman, Sir George Younger (Viscount Younger of Leckie after February 1923), asked him to pay.²⁹ He reacted furiously to the request, putting out statements to journalists who followed the ensuing ructions with avidity. For the first and last time in his life, Farquhar was reported prominently in both the national and provincial press. Younger was denounced for his impertinence: “He is not even an MP and instead of making demands for political party control he ought to retire to Scotland. I am opposed to any individual dictatorship in the Conservative Party”, Farquhar told London’s *Evening Standard* on 18 January 1923.³⁰

Farquhar’s line was that much of the money in his possession had been subscribed specifically to assist Lloyd George’s coalition government, and should not be spent for the benefit of the Conservatives after they had brought down that great government, of which Farquhar as Lord Steward had been a member, and whose resignation he plainly deplored. That was why he had “refused his consent to the use [of the funds] by the party now in office.”³¹ A few days later the press got wind of a substantial payment from Farquhar to the notorious Lloyd George Fund, the former prime minister’s personal property, from which a few Liberals who continued to support him received financial help; most of the money, however, was used for Lloyd George’s own benefit. On 22 January the *Daily Record* reported that “Lord Farquhar, the trustee of the general funds of the Conservatives, paid over £100,000 to the Coalition Liberals. Trouble has now arisen owing to the proposal put forward by Sir G Younger that the Conservatives should now ask for the return of this money. Lord Farquhar resolutely opposes any step of the nature.”³² Relations between Party Chairman and Treasurer deteriorated further.

The Party leaders had little doubt that the funds on which they could not get their hands had been seriously depleted. Bonar Law wrote of his “strong suspicion that [Farquhar] has handed sums—perhaps large sums—to L.G. for his party, while acting as our Treasurer.”³³ Lord Beaverbrook, a close friend of Bonar Law who had access to some important private papers, wrote later that “large sums of Tory money contributed by their supporters had been diverted by Lord Farquhar to Lloyd George’s Fund.”³⁴ Sir John Ellerman, a shipowner reputed to be the richest man in Britain, was outraged to discover that his donation of a comparatively modest £5,000 to the Tories (he was worth over £20 million) had been passed on to Lloyd George by Farquhar.³⁵

Explanations were demanded urgently from the errant Treasurer. On 22 January 1923, Bonar Law asked Farquhar to send him “the promised statement” on the party’s financial position “at once.”³⁶ He does not seem to have got it. After talking to “poor old Farquhar” twice, the Tory leader put all the problems that had arisen down to senility. “He is so ‘gaga’ that one does not know what to make of him.”³⁷ Could it have been an act on the old rogue’s part to disarm his accusers? Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary, found him perfectly lucid when they talked at Buckingham Palace in October 1922.³⁸ In his interviews with journalists about the great Tory funding controversy, he was perfectly coherent, though his statements attacking Younger and criticising Bonar Law became increasingly fierce.

In Tory circles, the suspicions increased. It emerged that Lord Astor, father-in-law of Nancy Astor, who had been created a peer in 1916 and gained a Viscounty in 1917 (dying two years later), had given Farquhar £ 200,000 “to do exactly what he liked with”, as the former Conservative Chief Whip, Lord Edmund Talbot, now Viscount Fitzalan, told Bonar Law in the course of a long letter from Cannes.³⁹ Farquhar had informed Fitzalan that he had donated £40,000 from Astor’s generous gift to a charity favoured by King George V, and divided the rest between Lloyd George and Conservative Party funds, insisting that he had personally given a cheque for £80,000 to Fitzalan, but the latter was clear that “no money was handed to me.” Where had it gone? Farquhar unsurprisingly prevaricated. Fitzalan told Bonar Law that “I tried to speak to him seriously, but he would not listen and was quite hopeless.” The exasperated Fitzalan concluded: “He certainly cannot be relied upon”⁴⁰—which would have been a considerable understatement at any stage of Farquhar’s dishonourable career.

According to Beaverbrook, Farquhar could not have provided any money from the Party’s funds because nothing remained in them. “Horace had spent the lot.”⁴¹ Yet it was not until 15 March 1923, two months after the trouble began with Farquhar refusing to pay election bills, that Bonar Law finally sacked him as Party Treasurer.⁴² He refused to go. Two days later, the *Daily Mail* reported: “An announcement was made on Wednesday that Lord Farquhar had resigned. At that time it was understood that he was willing to do so, but subsequently it became known to him that Lord Younger was to be his successor and, according to the party organisers, he then withdrew his resignation.” He could not abide the thought that the detested Younger would succeed him. Farce followed. The *Mail* report continued: “there have been successive announcements of his resignation and of the appointment of Lord Younger, and repeated denials

by Lord Farquhar himself.” He remained defiant: “I have not spoken to Lord Younger for a considerable time... I decline either to resign or to put my signature on anything.”⁴³ He repeated his original reason for refusing to hand over any money: “His position has always been one of difficulty and delicacy, inasmuch as he personally collected large sums, much of which was subscribed, and was expressed to be subscribed, for coalition purposes.”⁴⁴ Much of the money had not of course come from subscriptions all. But although the press got hold of the Astor story, its full scandalous implications never emerged publicly.

Journalists speculated joyfully that the Party might sue Farquhar to recover its money.⁴⁵ The potential damage to its reputation ruled out any such action. The press soon lost interest in the story. While Farquhar continued to fume, Younger put in place an orderly system, based in Central Office, which ensured that there could be no repetition of what had occurred. “He arranged that party funds should be safeguarded in a complicated system of trusts”⁴⁶ which made it impossible for any single individual to gain control of them. But the complete repudiation of honours sales, for which the virtuous Lord Selborne had yearned, did not occur. As for the 1922 election bills, a Tory minister, Robert Sanders, noted in his diary that “Farquhar stopped our drawing on our party fund... [but] luckily [Sir Malcolm] Fraser [the Party’s chief agent] had collected and banked a considerable sum in his own name.”⁴⁷ Later, Younger claimed that he had paid the bills, which amounted to £120,000, by using £80,000 left over from the 1918 election, topped up by money which he raised himself.⁴⁸

Farquhar died five months after the end of this extraordinary episode, in which he used his (perfectly genuine) support for Lloyd George and the coalition he had headed to try to conceal the disappearance of the Conservative Party’s funds, of which he had virtually unfettered control. Some had gone to Lloyd George; the rest he had obviously used himself. Bonar Law found himself embroiled in an unseemly public row with the Party’s venerable, long-serving Treasurer, which the press naturally loved. His argument that some of the funds had been given specifically to help the coalition that had now been dissolved usefully confused the issue, to his advantage. There was nothing much the Party could do to bring him to book. Yet again Farquhar’s public reputation survived without serious damage.

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VI THE FORTUNE THAT VANISHED

Like many others in their last years, the elderly Farquhar derived much pleasure from telling people what he had left them in his will. As befitted so rich and pretentious a man, the will was long and grandiose. The Royal Family naturally dominated it with an array of bequests. King George V, whose friendship he had cultivated so assiduously for over thirty years, was assigned two Louis XVI commodes, together with anything he cared to choose from the contents of Castle Rising (much of which, as a tenant, Farquhar did not actually own). Queen Mary could look forward to receiving the entire contents of his second rented home, White Lodge in Richmond Park, where she had spent her youth. For the widowed Queen Alexandra there was a *sang de boeuf* vase, and for her sharp-tongued, unmarried daughter, Princess Victoria, two Dresden quails (probably the least valuable items in his collection; he cannot have thought much of her).

The two daughters of Princess Louise, the Princess Royal, and his intimate friend, the Duke of Fife (who had died in 1912), were treated with particular generosity. That was entirely right in view of the way Fife had backed and supported Farquhar at every turn as he worked his way to riches and honours. Princess Maud, the younger of the two, was to receive a diamond necklace and £50,000 in cash, a fantastic sum at that time, if she was still unmarried when the will took effect; if she had a husband, he would get the money (an arrangement which, though calculated to enrage champions of women's rights, was intended to clinch her marriage to a reluctant suitor, which indeed it did).

The other daughter, Alexandra, was already married; her legacy was not to be diverted to her husband, Prince Arthur, the son and heir of the Duke of Connaught. She would have a diamond necklace, the contents of Farquhar's grand house in Grosvenor Square, and the residue of all his property after the various individual legacies had been settled. There was provision too for 48 high-ranking personages, their names a roll-call of the aristocracy, who were each to receive a sum of money with which to buy a memento. There were also bequests to Farquhar kinsmen and generous sums for his servants. Everything was set out in meticulous detail.

Senior members of the Royal Family were extremely attentive during Farquhar's final illness in August 1923, a month when as a rule they and everyone of importance would have been out of London. George V and Queen Mary visited him a fortnight before he died. Queen Alexandra was at his bedside the following week. Their solicitude, however, went unrewarded. All were denied their legacies after having at first received reassuring news, following Farquhar's death on 30 August 1923.

The Farquhar estate was provisionally valued at £400,000. But "the fortune made by banking and on the Stock Exchange; those lavishly bequeathed riches, those splendidly furnished houses: all were engulfed by huge and unsuspected debts."¹ The former Conservative cabinet minister, the Earl of Crawford, who had always harboured deep suspicions about Farquhar's character, commented in his trenchant diary on the "handsome bequests to sundry minor lights of the Royal Family (he was always a perfect snob)", none of which could be paid: "when the estates were valued, it transpired there was nothing to divide."² Farquhar's old, but never very loving, friend, Lord Huntly, emphasised the extent of the humiliation: "Even the small presents in kind—china, ornaments, and bijouterie—he had made in his will had to be returned, and everything was sold to meet the liabilities upon the estate."³

The lawyers of course had a field day. A glimpse of their activities emerges in a couple of isolated letters which survive in the papers of Jack Sandars, who had learned a good deal about Farquhar's shady activities as a fund-raiser when he worked as Arthur Balfour's devoted private secretary between 1892 and 1911. In March 1925 Sandars received a letter from Coward, Chance & Co (one of the two firms which would later merge as Clifford Chance) who announced that "we act for the executors of the late Lord Farquhar, whose estate is being administered by the Chancery Division." They told him that "amongst the persons claiming to be creditors of the estate are the executors of the late Lord Michelham, who allege that in 1906 Lord Michelham lent to Lord Farquhar certain securities of the value of £29,400... We have reason to think that this transaction was in some way connected with contributions made by Lord Michelham to the Conservative Party Funds, and there is an entry in the late Lord Farquhar's diary for 1905 in which your name occurs. We should like to have an opportunity of discussing this matter with you."⁴ The matter was all too plausible; Michelham, a weak-willed member of the fabulously wealthy Stern banking dynasty who yearned for social acceptance, had been of great assistance to Farquhar, particularly in 1905, the year in which he received first a baronetcy and then a peerage, honours that were widely condemned as having been quite

flagrantly bought.

The wily solicitors at Coward, Chance & Co successfully contested this particular claim. A second letter to Sandars in April 1925 informed him that “subject to the sanction of the court, we have, within the last day or two, arranged terms which will dispose of the claim upon payment of what is comparatively a very small sum of money.”⁵ Lord Fitzalan, a former Tory Chief Whip, who knew how much embarrassment Farquhar’s will could cause the Party if anything about it became public, greeted the “most satisfactory” second Coward, Chance letter with relief, assuring Sandars that “the solicitors evidently think the Court will sanction the arrangement.”⁶ There must have been many more letters as creditors sought to get their money back from the Farquhar estate, but no others have come to light. Nor has the Farquhar diary. A search for the relevant records of the Chancery Division proved unavailing.⁷

Word naturally got around about the astonishing turn of events after Farquhar’s death and the revelations about his debts. His reputation, more or less unscathed in life, was now seriously tarnished in the upper-class circles where he had been prominent. King, Queens and Princesses were all deprived of their legacies. Of that there is no doubt. But the stories of total disaster, so widely circulated at the time and later included in royal biographies, may not have been entirely accurate. The Michelham claim may not have been the only one that was successfully resisted. A few years later, the King’s Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham, talking to Crawford at dinner, “surprised me by saying that he actually received the legacy left him by Horace Farquhar. I always thought that the old boy’s bequests proved chimerical; in other words that the estate he so lavishly distributed was swallowed up by debts. Not so. If Stamfordham got his hundred guineas, the others presumably received their share.” So payments were apparently made to most, if not all, his grand 48 legatees.

In his diary Crawford added some further telling comments about Stamfordham’s legacy which bring out ugly aspects of Farquhar’s character. The amount “was to have been five hundred [guineas] but Horace was furious with Stamfordham who he alleged had dissuaded the King from giving Horace the G.C.B [Knight Grand Cross of the Bath]. Stamfordham certainly discouraged such an idea and quite rightly as such a decoration should be confined to those who have given signal service to the state. But I fancy Farquhar got it after all. He claimed audience after audience, and wore down all resistance by his obstinacy and cheek.”⁸ Farquhar was indeed remorseless, and in the end successful. The coveted, long sought honour was awarded to him in 1922,

joining a constellation of other stars on his breast. His Earldom, the final honour, followed later that year on the recommendation of Lloyd George, to whom he had given much assistance with the sale of titles. Again, there was displeasure among courtiers at the Palace.

Because the biggest, most well-known legacies could not be paid, the sense of shock arising from Farquhar's will remained vivid in upper-class circles for some time. People cast around for explanations. The ever suspicious Huntly acquitted Farquhar of making arrangements for the distribution of a fortune which he knew did not exist. "My opinion is that he did not for a moment realise the position into which he had drifted. He had such unbounded confidence in his judgment and foresight that the idea of his investments being failures never occurred to him, or, if it did, it was instantly dismissed from his mind."⁹

Huntly identified just one possible source of misfortune. "It is said that he was in a syndicate which guaranteed large advances made to theatres and places of entertainment both in London and in Paris, and that his death brought about demands from the holders of the securities for payment. This class of property had lately been in a most depressed condition, and, if the rumour is right, it would account for the drain on Farquhar's estate."¹⁰ That could indeed have been the case. In earlier generations the Farquhar family had given theatres generous financial assistance. The stage continued to be a source of attraction. Horace Farquhar's younger brother was an actor of some note. It is, however, hard to believe that all his assets could have been swallowed up by his theatrical ventures.

The turf might also have contributed to the difficulties. He had registered his racing colours on his arrival in the highest social ranks thirty years earlier. Newmarket was a regular haunt. In the 1890s he had a picture of his successful chestnut colt, named aptly 'Nouveau Riche', painted in the winner's enclosure. Memories of the time he had spent with Fife in Richmond led him to call another horse 'East Sheen'; it won races at Newmarket in 1896, beaten eventually by a horse that had been doped (which only emerged later). His initial good luck may well have given way to expensive failures by the 1920s.

There are of course many other possibilities: a sudden burst of calamitous stock market speculations by this hitherto successful shady financier, successful claims for the return of money intended for party funds which he stole, the cost of his never ending round of glittering parties and entertainments graced by members of the Royal Family, the upkeep of three big houses (the Grosvenor Square mansion, which he enlarged by adding extra bedrooms and a conservatory, was

particularly costly), the effects of high post-war taxation, the prolonged blackmail of a prominent man with gay interests, assuming that he continued to pursue them throughout his life.

There is also the intriguing possibility that, despite Huntly's generous assessment, he was not as rich as he wanted people to believe. Small, tantalising pieces of evidence point to that conclusion. Crawford was told that "some of the fine works of art in his house were hired."¹¹ There is little doubt that he had been in league for years with Joe (later Lord) Duveen, the most successful and least scrupulous art dealer of the age (perhaps of all time), a man notorious on both sides of the Atlantic : and that, in return for being told of impoverished aristocrats who would be willing to sell Old Masters and ancestral portraits cheaply, Duveen, who kept his money in Farquhar's bank, furnished the banker's houses without charge (apparently sending removal vans to get his valuable items back after Farquhar's death)¹². Farquhar was on hand when Duveen visited Buckingham Palace in 1919. He was given a tour which the King joined. They stopped in front of an undistinguished bronze of a river god, which Duveen valued at £10,000. "Take it—I'm tired of it", said the monarch, "send the cheque to Farquhar when it's convenient." It is now in the Norton Simon Collection in Los Angeles with an inscription: "ex coll: King George V, the Right Hon. The Earl Farquhar."¹³ Did the Earl pay the cheque into his own account?

It is likely that Farquhar was "in the pay"¹⁴ of the corrupt Duveen for years in return for a range of helpful services, all of them disreputable. Would a securely rich man in possession of a fortune made from banking and the Stock Exchange, reinforced by his wife's wealth, have needed to stoop to the squalid deeds which Farquhar carried out? When the Howard family moved back into their house at Castle Rising, which Farquhar had rented for many years, "they noticed that [several pictures] had been rehung, somewhat higher than before. It was not until several years later, when they were taken down for cleaning, that they were found to be modern copies." The whereabouts of one, "The Edge of the Common", by John Crome, a founder of the important Norwich School of painters, came to light in due course. It was in the Huntingdon Museum at Pasadena, to which it had been sold, unsurprisingly, by Joe Duveen who said it came from the collection of one P. M. Turner ¹⁵. There was more. By chance the Howards found out about another of Farquhar's little misdemeanours. Their family jewellers were also used by Farquhar to get his wife's valuable pearls restrung with some regularity. Whenever this happened, two pearls were removed and given to Farquhar. Imitation pearls took their place ¹⁶. He even robbed his own wife.

Then there were the straightforward thefts of money. He must have taken many thousands from the Conservative Party during the twelve years when he was its official treasurer, keeping its funds in his own private bank account out of the reach of all other senior Party officials. The total loss obviously could not be accurately established by the Party (though it seems to have had a good try: the leading academic expert on the Party in these years states that most of what Farquhar took was “eventually recovered”¹⁷, presumably as the result of a successful, unpublicised claim on his estate). A figure could, however, be put on perhaps the most shocking of all his thefts. After his death £80,000 was found to be missing from the trust placed under his control by his dear friend, the Duke of Fife, to provide for his wife, the plain Princess Louise (at whose wedding he had been the best man) and their children—the very people to whom he had promised riches in his will. The unfortunate, betrayed Princess was described as being “open-mouthed in consequence”¹⁸, silenced by the enormity of what had come to light. A number of prized family heirlooms had to be sold to replenish the depleted trust. 45 paintings went to Christie’s in 1924, including portraits by Reynolds and Raeburn, and religious scenes by Jan Mabuse and Quentin Matsys, owned by the Fifes since the 17th century. The family of his intimate friend who had done so much for him became his final victim.

Large sums were stolen to help sustain him, and the Duveen connection provided a profitable little side-line for the swaggering banker and financier—and still he left a mountain of debt. It was, by any standard, a spectacular crash. Excited and inconclusive chatter about it in upper-class circles died away after a while. The reputation of the Royal Family, whose members had been at the centre of his life, would have been severely compromised if word of his misdeeds had spread too far. Silence fell. It is hard to believe that no word of the scandal reached the gentlemen of the press, but in that deferential age it would have been suppressed to spare the monarchy embarrassment.

The childless Horace Farquhar, whose devoted wife predeceased him, was soon forgotten. No one mourned him. Lord Huntly, who knew him from the start of his career, was struck by his inability to attract firm friends. “With all his honours and titles, it cannot be said that he was popular with his fellows... His manner, which was obtrusive, told against him... His extraordinary success created enemies, and, though he tried to ingratiate himself, he failed in the attempt.”¹⁹ It seems appropriate that he lies buried in an obscure corner of the London Road cemetery in Bromley, the kind of place he would have despised in life, where his gravestone is today forlorn and decayed.

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Horace Farquhar took many secrets with him to his obscure grave. Who were the lovers who succumbed to his charms, and assisted his rise to wealth and great position (a role which the Duke of Fife so conspicuously filled, inviting speculation about the extent of their relationship)? What impelled him to lay on endless glittering parties and dinners adorned by members of the Royal Family? Why did corrupt activity appeal to him so strongly? Above all, how many millions passed through his amoral hands during his life, and what were the disasters that destroyed his fortune by the time of his death a century ago? Perhaps in the years to come someone else will continue the quest for the full truth about this scandalous man. I hope so.

REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER VI

¹Kenneth Rose, *King George V* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p.279

²*The Crawford Papers: The journals of David Lindsay twenty-seventh Earl of Crawford and tenth Earl of Balcarres 1871-1940 during the years 1892 to 1940*, ed. John Vincent (Manchester University Press, 1984), pp 502-3

³Marquis of Huntly, *Milestones* (Hutchinson, 1926), p.169

⁴Coward, Chance & Co to Sandars, 12 March 1925, J.S.Sandars Papers, Eng. hist. MS c. 770 f.62, Bodleian Library, Oxford

⁵Ibid., 22 April 1925, MS c. 770 f.63

⁶Edmund [Fitzalan] to Sandars, 24 April 1925, Sandars Papers, MS c.770 f.64

⁷The surviving records of the Chancery Division are in the National Archives. An official told me that “we may have records relating to your enquiry” (30 December 2022). He went on to indicate that “a considerable amount of research” would be needed in their electronic catalogues. A search, conducted on my behalf by a computer expert, failed to locate any relevant material

⁸*The Crawford Papers*, p.510

⁹Huntly, *Milestones*, p.169

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹*The Crawford Papers*, p.502

¹²Colin Simpson, *The Partnership: The Secret Association of Bernard Berenson and Joseph Duveen* (Bodley Head, 1987), pp 24,164-7. Drawing on the Duveen archives in New York, this book lays bare Duveen’s corrupt relations with various figures, including Farquhar who is described as “probably the greatest scallywag of the many who surrounded Edward VII”

¹³Ibid., p.167

¹⁴*Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. II (1992), pp341-2

¹⁵Simpson, *The Partnership*, p.166

¹⁶Information from Lord Howard of Rising

¹⁷Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p.305

¹⁸Rose, *King George V*, p.279

¹⁹Huntly, *Milestones*, pp 168-9

APPENDIX: A NOTE ON PRIMARY SOURCES

The following collections of unpublished material were consulted either personally, or through the good offices of archivists and colleagues, to whom I am greatly indebted: Bonar Law Papers in the Parliamentary Archives; Conservative Party Archive in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; Devonshire Papers at Chatsworth House; Esher Papers in the Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge; Sir Almeric FitzRoy Papers in the British Library; R.B. Haldane Papers in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; Lincolnshire Papers in the Bodleian Library; Lloyd George Papers in the Parliamentary Archives; Rosebery Papers in the National Library of Scotland; Salisbury Papers at Hatfield House; J.S. Sandars Papers in the Bodleian Library; Southborough Papers in the Bodleian Library; Winterton Papers in the Bodleian Library.

Most of these archives possess only very limited material from or about Farquhar. He seldom wrote long letters, except when seeking honours for himself. Very little correspondence from him has come to light relating to his many disreputable activities in and beyond politics. He probably sent short, terse notes to his accomplices involved in his various rackets and money-raising ventures, particularly those connected with political parties—just the kind of communications likely to be discarded by recipients. What does survive in this area rather bears that out.

I did not seek access to the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle, where those whose writing is not for general, commercial publication are rarely admitted. In any case, Farquhar's life as a courtier is the aspect of his life which is most readily described from other sources for the purposes of a short study like this.

I would be very interested to hear about any material relating to Farquhar that I did not locate. My address is House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW (email: lexdena@parliament.uk).

