

The Lady of the Roman Catholic Church in Cambridge.

My Studio in Garden Alley is not very far from the Roman Catholic Church. When I used to pass it on my way from the town to my work, and when there was sun, and the sun was shining from the right direction, I could read fairly easily an inscription carved in stone over the windows of the nave. It is cut in such highly ornamented letters that even then they slightly confused my eyes. Now the stone has been blackened by the smoke of raids and the crevices have lost the sharpness of their cut so that it has become far more difficult to make out and I certainly could not read it if I did not know it. This is the inscription - "Pray for the good estate of Yolande Marie Louise Lyne-Stephens, foundress of this Church.

Long ago, when I was a girl, I drove down a country lane with Mr. Widnall. The road was near Lynford, a small village in Norfolk not far from the borders of Cambridgeshire. How I happened to be with him so far from Grantchester I do not know. My memory is often a blank before and after a conversation or event which is as clear in my mind as if it happened last week. The road, as I recall it, was shaded by trees and on one side the trees seemed to border a park and the park was separated from the road by iron railings. Mr. Widnall

drove very slowly and drew my attention to the railings. There was not much need for him to do so for I know that I was staring at them. A good many of the tops and standards were gilded and that attracted me for I thought they looked like the railings in the front of Buckingham Palace but not quite so fine. He said that he would tell me the story of the railings but he did not begin the story in the way I had expected for he only asked me if I had noticed the building of the new Roman Catholic Church that was being erected at Hyde Park Corner in Cambridge. Of course I had and then he seemed to forget the railings in order to tell me how an old wall used to run round the garden where the church was being built and how he and many other people would stand in Summer under the shade of the old poplar tree that grew in the pavement by the wall and listen to the nightingales singing in the garden. His voice was sad when he said that the nightingales would be heard no more. I felt this was wandering from the point and brought him back to the railings, partly to induce him to speak in his usual cheerful tones. I did not succeed. He nodded gloomily to the park. "In that park", he said, "behind those railings, in a fine mansion, lives the lady who is building the Roman Catholic Church. They call it a Cathedral but, thank Heaven! it will not be that!" He spoke with grim emphasis for he was a strong Protestant and very fearful of anything Roman. I said "She must be very rich", but I was thinking of the shining standards

quite as much as of the Church. "She is very rich, I expect she was getting a large income before she married Mr. Lyne-Stephens for she was a dancer on the Paris stage. She is a Frenchwoman and a ballet dancer ! ! ! Three marks of exclamation are necessary to give something of the emphasis of his voice. Now he went on with his story quickly for he was warmed up to it. "They say that she danced at the Opera and was a star dancer and might have married any French ~~nobleman~~ nobleman among the many who wanted her yet she chose an Englishman. He was'nt young, he was a Church of England man but he was very rich.

Here he made a pause. When he spoke again it was more cheerfully. "They say that he was a manufacturer of glass eyes. Not glass eyes for human beings only, - that would'nt make him very rich - but for stuffed animals, birds and above all for the eyes of wax dolls. Perhaps he invented those eyes and every little girl all over Europe was wild to have a doll with glass eyes. You longed for one, not so very many years ago and they were not then a new joy. Mr. Lyne-Stephens died more than twenty years ago and I am sure that his memory should be blessed by all little girls. Mrs. Stephens must have been still young but by his will he did not seem afraid that she would marry again. He was apparently afraid of something else. He was afraid that she might refuse to live in his big house here. She might sell it, let it, or shut it up and live in a small

way saving money in order to build churches. I think he saw her in his mind's eye in poor lodgings over some greengrocer's shop with a window looking over a site where she was building a church. Fearing this he tied his money up carefully so that she could not touch the capital, only the interest and not all of that. A certain sum must be spent on the estate and the sum was so large and the estate so well kept up that it became a puzzle to Mrs. Stephens how to spend it. So that is why she was driven to spend it on gilded railings."

I have no more memory of what Mr. Widnall said and for years after I only occasionally thought about the story he told me but when I went to Garden Alley I could hear the chimes and could see the spire of her church and my fancy began to play round the lady who built it. I wondered whether Yolande was happy in England and how she liked having to manage a big estate. Why did she build churches in a foreign country? Was it just for the art of it or from devotion? Did she think of what she hoped to do ~~while she was dancing~~ ^{while she was dancing}? During her airiest turns, applauded by admiring crowds, did she say to herself, "I do this because one day I may be able to prove how much I love our Lady?" Was she like the acrobat in the legend who wished to do something to show his love for the Holy Mother and therefore had himself locked into a cathedral at night and danced and tumbled in the moonlight before the image of the Virgin? He wished to give her the very best he could do. I could not help thinking

that some of the money that she herself had gained was in the church in Cambridge and that it was not all built from the money brought her by her husband. She must have been glad that so much of his income was gained by making things that gave pleasure to children.

I found out Mrs. Lyne-Stephens maiden name. She was Mlle Duvernay and was, as Mr. Widnall had told me, a star dancer in the Opera house in Paris and it was said that she made a fortune there. She was charming and intellectual as well as being a "Premiere Danseuse". Surely, I thought, no church has ever been built on the proceeds of such joy given to others.

I never mentioned these wandering thoughts about the lady of the church until I was passing it with Eva, more than forty years after the church was opened. Eva said : " Find out more about her ".

I have four Roman Catholic friends so I went to them on purpose to find out more. They did not know as much as I knew. I applied to the Canon Rector. He knew little more that they did but was hunting up all the knowledge he could and promised to share it with me. Only the other day he sent me a magazine in which was an article by him on Mrs. Lyne-Stephens. However what he could give did not throw much light on her character or what she looked like but I was grateful for his facts and dates. She had built from the interest of her money a church at Lynford which she also endowed, she had paid for the erection

of several religious buildings and she had given large sums to hospitals before she commenced her greatest work - the church in Cambridge. She had been a widow for more than twenty years before she planned it.

That is how it came about that it was built here. There was in Cambridge only a very small Roman Catholic Chapel. The priest's name was Canon Scott. A site for a church had been given by the Duke of Norfolk but it seemed impossible to get the money to build one on it. I believe Canon Scott accidentally heard of Mrs. Lyne-Stephens and was told that she wished to give money for another church. He went at once to Lynford Hall and laid the claims of Cambridge before her. She listened and was convinced that Cambridge - a University Town - would be her best choice.

I was anxious to be able to picture her in my mind. Canon Marshall, the Rector, gave me a paper which contained a reproduction (very small) of an oil painting of her as an old lady, but that did not satisfy me and hearing that there was a sculptured head of her in the porch of the church I went to examine it. It was good. The head was also a representation of her as an old lady but she had a very interesting face. Certainly she did not erect churches as an expiation. The lids of those wide open, frank eyes were never lowered in sorrow for any serious sin. The cheeks were round and all the lines and little curves showed that she could laugh and her mouth was slightly

open and the corners turned up as if she were holding a cheerful conversation. When young she might have been described as a "moonfaced darling" but with such an expression of confident frankness she could always have been trusted to take care of herself no matter what career she took up. Her nose was straight and the nostrils open and raised as if she were often amused. The most noticeable feature in her face was a strong dimpled chin. Her hair was cut square across her forehead, hidden by a cap or shawl of lace.

Another light was thrown on my lady when I was told that Mrs. Stephens insisted on coming occasionally to Cambridge to see for herself how the building of the church was getting on. Up the ladder from scaffold to scaffold would she go and no royal visitor would cause more anxiety. Any accident to her would inevitably stop the whole work for she had no power to leave money. Architect, foreman and workmen must test ropes, ladders and platforms. The master builder, Mr. Kett, must have watched her progress with some misgivings especially when the wind caught her ample skirt and billowing mantle. Perhaps he remembered with relief that she had been a great dancer and so would certainly be sure footed.

I have a great wish to go to Lynford Hall and I would beg to be allowed to see the "French Garden" made by Mrs Lyne-Stephens. It covers five acres and is part of the garden which covers two hundred acres. What a change it must have been for

her after her life of excitement and triumph to be buried in a country house in East Anglia among a people without the warmth of manner of her compatriots. I am sure that she felt joy in making her own little homeland. She must have found it difficult to make a mimic France in Norfolk. In France the trees are so light, they look as if they lived on sand and sun and in Norfolk, more than in any other county, they look as if they lived on - say - beef and beer. I hear that Yolande's garden is still kept up as a French garden but now in this war time Lynford lies in the forbidden zone and I must wait before I go there.

The foundation stone of her church in Cambridge was laid in 1886 and it was opened in 1890. Her great hope was to live long enough to endow it but that was not to be. Death won the race. At her funeral Canon Scott in his sermon told a pretty story of the time when she first thought of building it. He told how Mrs. Stephens drove on Assumption day to the tiny Chapel which was all they had then and found him with some children. She asked him to lay the choice flowers she had brought on the altar and then turned and, as if their consent was necessary to her, she said to the children: "Will you allow me to build you a church?" Mrs. Stephens died on Assumption day four years after its opening.

Since I wrote this I have seen, not only the oil portrait of her as an old lady, but a print from a drawing made of her as a dancer at the Opera. It was a print from a delicate but

finished drawing of a lovely and charming girl. She is called on its inscription by what was evidently another of her numerous Cristian names - Pauline Duvernay.

I place her among "the people I have met". Although I have never actually seen her, yet I have thought very much of Mrs. Yolande Marie Louise Pauline Duvernay Lyne-Stephens.