



Lady Percy

HENRY IV. PART I. ACT 2. SC. 3.

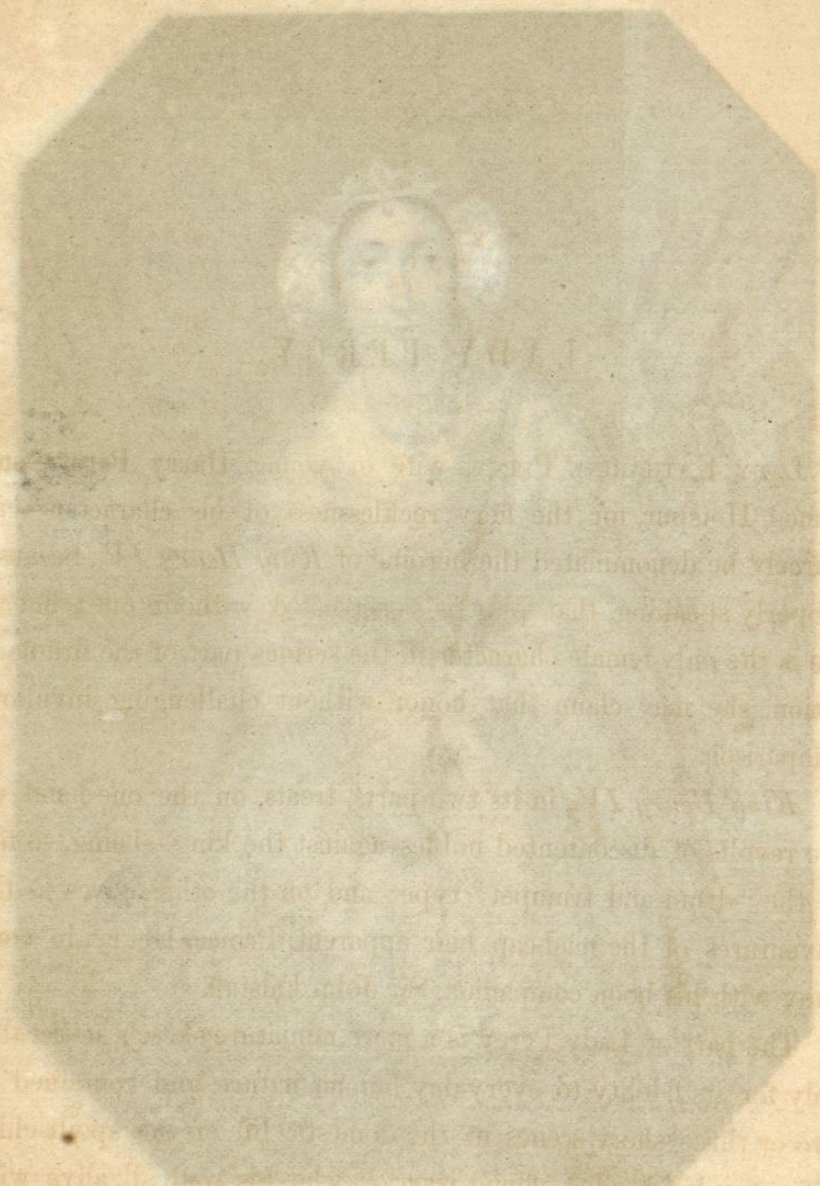
LADY PERCY

Lady Katherine Percy, wife of young Harry Percy—our named Hotspur, for the fiery recklessness of his character—can scarcely be denominated the heroine of *King Henry IV.* because, properly speaking, that play is constructed without one; but as she is the only female character in the serious part of the dramatic action, she may claim that honor without challenging any more comparison.

King Henry IV. in its two parts, treats, on the one hand, of the revolt of discontented nobles against the king—done in the "drum and trumpet" type; and on the other, shows us the adventures of the mad-cap heir apparent, Prince Henry, in company with his boon companion, Sir John Falstaff.

The part of Lady Percy is a mere miniature sketch, noteworthy only for its fidelity to every-day human nature, and contained in two or three short scenes in the domestic life of the spoiled child wife of a hot-headed young warrior, who, his soul all alive with the blaze and din of battle-fields, is accustomed to pet her with good-natured contempt.

She is young, fond and proud of her gallant Hotspur, modest and engaging; but she has no peculiar traits, mental or moral.



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King Henry IV., in its two parts, treats, on the one hand, of the revolts of discontented nobles against the king—being, so far, of the “drum and trumpet” type; and on the other, gives us the adventures of the mad-cap heir apparent, Prince Henry, in company with his boon companion, Sir John Falstaff.

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The nature of the conjugal relation between a pair so opposed, is best exemplified by the scene where Percy takes leave of his wife, before going to the wars :

Hot. * * * * *

How now, Kate? I must leave you within these two hours.

Lady P. O, my good lord, why are you thus alone?

For what offence have I, this fortnight, been

A banish'd woman from my Harry's bed?

Tell me, sweet lord, what is't that takes from thee

Thy stomach, pleasure, and thy golden sleep?

Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth,

And start so often when thou sitt'st alone?

Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks,

And given my treasures, and my rights of thee,

To thick-ey'd musing, and curs'd melancholy?

In thy faint slumbers I by thee have watch'd,

And heard thee murmur tales of iron wars,

Speak terms of manage to thy bounding steed,

Cry, *Courage!*—to the field! * * *

* * * * * O, what portents are these?

Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,

And I must know it, else he loves me not—

* * * * *

What is it carries you away?

Hot. My horse,

My love, my horse. * * *

Away, away, you trifler! Love? I love thee not—

I care not for thee, Kate. * * *

* * * * * Gods me, my horse!

What say'st thou, Kate? what would'st thou have with me?

Lady P. Do you not love me? do you not, indeed?

* * * * * Do you not love me?

Nay, tell me, if you speak in jest or no.

Hot. Come, wilt thou see me ride?

And when I am o' horseback I will swear

I love thee infinitely. But hark you, Kate—

I must not have you henceforth question me

Whither I go, nor reason whereabouts:

Whither I must, I must; and, to conclude,

This evening must I leave you, gentle Kate.

I know you wise—but yet no further wise

Than Harry Percy's wife; constant you are—

But yet a woman; and for secrecy,

No lady closer—for I well believe

Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know;

And so far will I trust thee, gentle Kate!

At the battle of Shrewsbury, the gallant Hotspur falls, mortally wounded by Prince Henry; and in the Second Part of *King Henry IV.*, we find, in dismal contrast to the playful, pouting, self-willed young wife, the subdued, grief-stricken widow. In her appeal to her Harry's father to "go not to these wars," she pronounces a beautiful eulogium on her dead soldier, replete with eloquent pathos:

O, yet, for God's sake, go not to these wars!

The time was, father, that you broke your word

When you were more endear'd to it than now—

When your own Percy, when my heart's dear Harry,

Threw many a northward look, to see his father

Bring up his powers; but he did long in vain.

Who then persuaded you to stay at home?

There were two honors lost—yours and your son's.

For yours—may heavenly glory brighten it!

For his, it stuck upon him, as the sun

In the gray vault of heaven; and by his light

Did all the chivalry of England move

To do brave acts; * * *

* * * * * So that, in speech, in gait,

In diet, in affections of delight,

In military rules, humors of blood,

He was the mark and glass, copy and book,

That fashion'd others. * * *

* * * * * —let them alone:

The marshal and the archbishop are strong;

Had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers,

To-day might I, hanging on Hotspur's neck,

Have talk'd of Monmouth's grave.