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On 20 April 1854 the three-masted Liverpool sailing ship *Bella* left Rio with a cargo of Brazilian rosewood bound for Kingston, Jamaica. Captain John Birkett and his crew of twelve were probably none too sober, while their one passenger was reported to be blind drunk. He had been carried on board by his manservant and the British Vice-consul, who had extracted him from his hotel room and smuggled him past the port authorities without the required exit visa, which he had never bothered to collect. The weather was good and there seemed no reason to suspect that the vessel on only its fifth voyage would not safely reach Kingston.

But it did not. After about four days at sea it disappeared, leaving only an upturned longboat marked with the name *Bella*, and some odd pieces of furniture. The two smaller lifeboats were never found and no survivors were definitely traced. Two years later, however, Captain Birkett's wife, who had remarried, was somewhat disconcerted to receive a letter purporting to come from her husband – who was apparently living in Bristol and was now enquiring about her health and that of their children. As for the *Bella*'s passenger, Roger Charles Tichborne, his extraordinary and uncertain fate was to lead to an extraordinary chain of events.

The Tichbornes could trace their ancestry back to pre-Conquest

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times, their name being derived from the River Itchen, which winds its way through their Hampshire estates. Renowned for little, unless it were their determined preservation of their Catholic faith through periods of ardent Protestantism, they were prevented from ever achieving high office of state. Nor did they show any artistic or literary merit, excepting the sad spontaneous elegy (see Appendix I) written by Chedioc Ticheborne on the eve of his execution for his involvement in the Babington plot against Elizabeth I.

An early legend tells of a cruel Crusader, Sir Roger de Tycheburne, who grudgingly acceded to his dying wife's request that she might be allowed to bequeath an annual dole of bread to the poor. He stipulated that the produce of a portion of land should be made available for this purpose, the portion to be determined by her ability to traverse it holding a lighted torch. As she had been bedridden for some years, it seemed unlikely that she would be able to move very far. However, the Lady Mabella was a very determined lady, and she had herself carried to the corner of the park and began to crawl. She covered twenty-three acres in this fashion, the rough equivalent of twelve football pitches. The area in question is still known today as *The Crawls*. The Dole is still distributed annually on Lady Day (25 March) and now amounts to a gallon of flour per adult.

Lady Mabella added a prediction to her bequest: should the Dole ever be stopped, seven sons would be born to the house, followed by seven daughters, after which the name would die out and the house fall into ruin. In 1794, owing to the large numbers of vagrants and gypsies taking advantage of the handout, the Dole was stopped. At the time, Henry Tichborne had seven sons, the first one dying in 1802 when the old house partly fell down. Three more of his sons died in the next few years, leaving the eldest, Henry Joseph, to father seven daughters, and to find their dowries from an impoverished estate.

Lady Mabella's predictions were not, however, to be completely fulfilled, as the two remaining sons did produce male heirs. Edward, the elder of the two, was the fortunate recipient of a bequest from a remote female relative, who had married a

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Doughty and who now left him the valuable Doughty estates, many of them in the more prosperous parts of London, on condition that he adopted the name Doughty Tichborne. Edward was not so fortunate with regard to his heir, and when his only son died at the age of six this was taken as a sign that the Dole should be revived. The house of Tichborne seemed to be teetering on the brink of extinction, with the younger brother, James, as the sole hope for the continuation of the line.

James was a typical Tichborne of that period: uncultured, with a violent temper, arrogantly convinced of his superior social status, and fiercely protective of the family name. With a small income and, at that time, little prospect of succeeding to the Tichborne baronetcy and estates, it is surprising that he was able to take for a wife Henriette Félicité, the attractive illegitimate daughter of Mlle Dailly-Brimont, a mistress of Prince Bourbon Conti. Henriette's father was Henry Seymour of Knoyle, and a member of the distinguished Seymour family.

James Tichborne was forty-three and Henriette twenty-four at the time of their marriage in 1827. The Contis were rich, and Henriette had little difficulty at first in persuading her husband to live in her luxurious Parisian apartment. It was here that Roger Tichborne was born on 5 January 1829. Ten years later they had a second son, Alfred Joseph, their two baby girls having died in infancy.

James and Henriette shared the Catholic religion and both spoke French and English fluently. They seem to have had little else in common. While always aware that she held the purse strings, he began to fret for his freedom in the English countryside, and whenever possible crossed the Channel to Tichborne House. His wife rarely accompanied him, as she soon became aware that she was barely acceptable to the other members of the Tichborne family. They objected to her French lineage and to her religious piety, which was seen as too extreme, a constant stream of priests calling at the Parisian apartment. Relations were better with her father's family, and she was given a warm welcome at Knoyle whenever she crossed to England.

Throughout his childhood in Paris, Roger was mollycoddled

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by his doting mother and reared in a grossly overprotective environment. He was dressed in white frocks trimmed with blue, because he had been devoted to the Order of the Blue, consecrated to the Holy Virgin whose colours these were. Such a costume was normally relinquished at the age of seven, but Roger was kept in the dresses until he was twelve. He was not allowed to play with other boys, and, apart from an unfortunate attempt to send him to school that terminated after two weeks, he was instructed by private tutors. He heard only French from his mother, and little English from his father. He seems to have learnt little in either language, as his later attempts at letter-writing clearly demonstrate.

The boy appears to have been of below-average intelligence and showed little inclination to learn. As the Abbé Sebastian Salis, who lodged in the house, described him:

‘He was idle and had a very slow intellect.’

The ability of the tutors was also in question. The first, Chatillon, who taught Roger from the age of six, seems to have had no qualifications apart from piety congenial to the mother. An excursion was made in 1839 with his father and Chatillon to Brittany, where Roger fell and hit his head on a rock, remaining unconscious for several days. Other trips, less eventful, took in the Pyrenees, Germany, and Jersey.

The second tutor, Jolival, was engaged when Roger was twelve years old. He was very different from Chatillon, and although Roger’s mother seems to have been convinced of his suitability, his father was not taken in, describing him in a letter to his wife as ‘that scoundrel Jolival’. Jolival took Roger around Paris to complete his ‘social education’. Unknown to the mother, these jaunts included night visits to a variety of establishments, restaurants, and clubs. Roger began to smoke, take snuff, and to drink. He also began to read – not, however, any prescribed texts, but rather the novels of Paul de Kock, which were regarded as instruction manuals in the art of seduction.

The relationship between his parents was very fraught. That Henriette may have been a difficult partner is suggested from

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the following letter written by James to his father-in-law, Henry Seymour:

I can no longer bear the cruel unkind treatment I experience from Harriet whose violence of temper seems to increase daily and she seems to have no other idea than making me as miserable as she possibly can . . . The grand object she seems to aim at is to alienate me from all my family and to make a Frenchman of Roger. This, believe me, I neither can nor ever will submit to.

James's primary purpose in writing this letter was to enlist support for the proposal that Roger should be further educated in England. Her father was the one person Henriette might listen to, as her perception of any such communication from the Tichborne family members would be to consider it part of a scheme to deprive her of any influence over her supposedly sensitive and delicate son. It was not until 1845 that James found the opportunity he was seeking.

The occasion was the death of his eldest brother, Henry, whose funeral served as a convenient pretext for Roger to be brought over to England. Henry's death meant that James's surviving brother, Edward, had succeeded to the title, but Edward was in poor health. The prospect of Roger's father, and ultimately Roger, taking over the baronetcy, had greatly increased. Once in England and out of his mother's clutches, plans could be put into place for Roger to be educated as an Englishman fit for his future role, and, on Henry Seymour's advice, his father arranged for him to enter Stonyhurst College in Lancashire.

His mother ranted and raved. She sent Jolivalt over to try to bring Roger back, but to no avail. Finally she capitulated and agreed to pay the bills.

The Jesuit system of education at Stonyhurst was based on classical lines originally intended to prepare pupils for public life in the Roman state. The earlier classes were called Grammar, Syntax, Poetry and Rhetoric, supposed to enable students to acquire a command of language. Then came the study of thought, with two years of Philosophy followed by four years of Theology. Young

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men of Roger's age who did not intend to go on to the priesthood were allowed to finish off their education in the Philosophy course. These students were known, in Roger's case most inappropriately, as the Philosophers. They had no very onerous routine: a minimum of previous knowledge was required, a minimum of attendance insisted upon, and a minimum of progress seems to have been expected.

In spite of these lax requirements, Roger was at a considerable disadvantage when he entered the College. His English was minimal, he spoke with a French accent, he was unused to the company of his peers, he was maladroit, and he had played no games. A fellow student, who later became Father Thomas Meyrick, recalled that:

'Roger idled, fished and smoked, and did little else.'

However, he did appear on stage with the 'Gentlemen Philosophers'; on one occasion performing as Rapino in *The Castle of Andalusia*, his foreign accent probably suiting the part. His English began to improve, he succeeded in reading some Latin – the first book of Caesar's Commentaries – and he was said to have mastered the first book of Euclid. He even tried his hand at 'bandy', a Stonyhurst version of hockey.

During his three years at Stonyhurst, Roger received hundreds of letters from his mother enquiring about his health and comfort. On one occasion exasperation got the better of him:

You have always wanted to make me pass for being in delicate health, and you have said it so long and so often you have at last succeeded in making my Papa believe it . . .

Another thing I ought to state: I detested the life you made me lead in Paris and sighed to be delivered from it. The opportunity presented itself and you may well think that I availed myself of it with the greatest possible joy.

He generally wrote to his mother in a somewhat kinder vein, and occasionally in French. Although a fluent speaker, he was not literate in that language: one of his longer letters contains thirty-three mistakes. More frequent were his letters in English

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to his aunt, Lady Katherine Doughty Tichborne, wife of Sir Edward, now living at Tichborne. At this time Lady Doughty seems to have played the part of a sympathetic mother-figure, deeply religious, concerned for his moral welfare, but free from the constant harping on possible illnesses and accidents so typical of his own mother. To his father he wrote infrequently; only three letters over his years at the College.

Holidays were spent at Tichborne and at his Grandfather Seymour's house at Knoyle. Here he could take up the usual country pursuits at which he showed some aptitude: although his riding was poor, he could shoot well and he learnt to fly-fish. Another attraction at Tichborne was the presence of his cousin, Katherine, with whom a relationship was soon to be established, and who was to play an unforeseen and dramatic role in the distant future.

His years at Stonyhurst coming to a close, his father wrote to his mother in Paris:

What Roger now requires is to see a little of the world and be brought into good society, not to be under a glass case as you seem to prefer.

To this end, a career in the army offered a possible route, and it was arranged for Roger to take the entrance examination at Sandhurst. Despite some suspicion that a few strings had been pulled, he passed. Henriette was persuaded, again against her will, to come up with the money, and Roger was bought a commission in the 6th Dragoon Guards, known as the Carabineers, who were stationed in Ireland.

Whatever bullying he may have experienced at Stonyhurst must have been nothing in comparison to that which he now suffered. On his first appearance at the barracks, his pale fragile appearance led to the colonel mistaking him for the new cook. His fellow officers made his life a misery, pulling him from bed, dousing him with water, and mocking his physical appearance. His French accent led to the nicknames 'Frenchy' and 'Froggy', and his naive religiosity left him open to teasing. Report had it that on one occasion they succeeded in putting a

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donkey into his bed, and that Roger mistook the donkey for the Devil.

He turned out to be completely hopeless when put in command of a troop. Lieutenant Bickerstaff was detailed to teach him cavalry drill:

His whole time was taken up in trying to manage his horse, so that although he knew his drill, and could do it in theory on the table, the moment he got on a horse he was an inefficient, clumsy, useless officer.

On one occasion, his belt slipped down as he attempted to shout the command, 'Retire by threes from the right of troops.' The order came out back to front, his superior officer swore loudly at him, and all military training was forgotten as everyone collapsed into laughter; officers, men, and spectators.

When stationed in Dublin he was invited out for an evening at Howth Castle, some ten miles by road. Misled by his fellow officers into believing that Howth was an island and could only be reached by sea, he hired a boat for £5, and was then told by his oarsmen that there was no proper landing place. He was dropped at low tide on a muddy beach, and after struggling for half a mile knee-deep through the mud, reached the castle in a dishevelled state to be greeted by general derision.

His life was a misery. It was reported that he was often seen in tears at his treatment by his colleagues. Worst of all, he appears to have had a physical abnormality. The condition seems to have been what is known as 'buried penis', in which the penis is hardly visible in its flaccid state. At Stonyhurst he had been in the habit of bathing with his trousers on in a vain attempt to prevent the other boys from observing his peculiarity. The nickname ('Small Cock') he received there was to follow him into the army, where there were even fewer opportunities for modesty.

His father visited him once or twice, visits that apparently concluded with violent quarrels over Roger's military weaknesses. His only consolation was the weekly letter to his aunt, Lady Doughty, to whom he poured out his woes. Visits to Tichborne

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Park were a regular routine whenever he had leave. The relationship with his cousin, Katherine, was now developing, and was encouraged by her mother, who presumably saw her daughter as the future wife of the next baronet. But as a mother she was alarmed over Roger's apparent lack of religious faith – he had been seen to read novels during the service at Tichborne – and his heavy drinking. Roger protested his forthcoming reformation:

I intend going to Confession and Communion as soon as I shall be able. That will be the beginning of the reformation which I intend to begin in my way of living and which I hope, with the help of God, to carry into execution.

His aunt remained cautious, pointing out that there was no proof of a change 'in the habits that have been the cause of endangering your life by bringing most serious illnesses' – she was referring here to his consumption of spirits. In fact he had suffered from no really serious illnesses, mostly stomach upsets, but his aunt had been influenced by his mother's view that he was delicate.

It would have been difficult for him, with the best of intentions, to escape from the ambience of the officers' mess, with its customary hard drinking, and while, as he was to claim, he may have abstained from spirits for a few weeks, the abstention did not extend to wine.

As he expressed it in letters to his aunt, his excuse for his indulgence in drink was to drown his sorrows:

With my disposition and manner it is quite impossible for me to think of marrying . . . I might be the cause of misery to the person whom I married . . . What shall I ever be worth? – Nothing! Suppose I were the head of a family, I could not fulfill the duties of that station as I should do.

In a letter of 24 April 1851, Lady Doughty did her best to cheer him up:

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Did you put a Withered leaf in your letter? Was it an emblem of yourself? If so, throw it aside, look to the bright green leaves now opening around us in spring, and say: 'I will not be the Withered leaf; but resist every inclination to drown care and shorten my days.'

At Christmas of that year Roger was on leave and staying at Tichborne. His uncle, who was not aware how close the relationship with his daughter had become, was surprised to see the couple walking and talking intimately. He was not well himself, which probably led to an increase in his tetchiness. Roger was summoned to the library and ordered to leave the house the next morning. Sir Edward made it quite clear that he could give up all idea of marrying Katherine, for, he is supposed to have added, 'I will never let my daughter marry the son of a bastard,' (conveniently forgetting that he himself had a bastard daughter living in Calais).

It was a mere month, however, before Sir Edward fell critically ill, and Katherine then had little difficulty in persuading her father to rescind the ban, and even to agree to her marriage to Roger after a three-year period. Her mother also agreed, with the proviso that, although Roger should consider himself tied, the engagement should not restrict her daughter's freedom to find a different partner if she so desired – and if, presumably, her mother also approved. Indeed, Lady Doughty wanted it to be quite clear that there was no official engagement; rumours to the contrary were being spread, with the result that no other possible suitors had come forward.

Roger was kept informed by letters from his friend and solicitor, Vincent Gosford, who was also steward of the Tichborne estates. Gosford wrote:

I have seen little of Lady D. since you left, but I am very much mistaken if she does not wish the whole affair of which you spoke to me at an end. I know not what advice to give you and, thrown here in the midst of all parties, it is most difficult and delicate to offer any at all.

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And a little later:

Lady D. and your cousin were in town last week for a day or two. I don't think there is anything particular going on just now. There is no knowing the plans of crafty old dowagers who have sons or daughters to marry.

The movement of Roger's regiment to Canterbury, the following year, meant that the couple could now meet again on a more regular basis. Whether they became sexually intimate during this summer of 1852 would become an important issue some twenty years later. As to when any such intimacy might have occurred, Roger was given leave from 15 until 23 June. He went to London for three days, during which time he succeeded in losing £1500 at cards, a debt which he had to ask his mother to pay. As he also had the address in his diary of Madame Guerin, the keeper of a well-known brothel, and said to be one of 'the wickedest women in London', his visit may have included a call on her as well.

On 19 June he travelled with Lady Doughty and Katherine down to Tichborne, which he left on 22 June for several months. There were thus only two to three days when the cousins might have had intercourse. It was nonetheless later claimed that Katherine met him in the autumn and expressed the fear that she might be pregnant, a fear she had communicated to her mother. Roger did not believe it likely, although shortly afterwards he did write to Gosford to ask him confidentially if the expected crisis had taken place and if he had noticed any change in his cousin. It is also the case that the family doctor, Dr Lipscomb, prescribed for her in late August; the exact reasons were never made known.

What is more certain is that Roger deposited a sealed packet with Gosford, and gave what was claimed to be a copy to Katherine. The original was later destroyed; the 'copy' read as follows:

Tichborne Park, June 22, 1852

I make on this day a promise that if I marry my cousin,

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Catherine Doughty, this year, before three years are over at the latest to build a church or chapel at Tichborne to the Holy Virgin, in thanksgiving for the protection which she has thrown over us, and in praying God that our wishes may be fulfilled.

(Signed) R.C. Tichborne

Katherine was later vehement in her denials that Roger had seduced her, but that was only to be expected of the by-then-respectable Lady Radcliffe. The intervention by the doctor two months later might have been to bring on missed periods or even to induce a miscarriage, and Roger's proposed building plans might have been the gesture of a guilty or reassuring lover. It is rather an odd promise, as it seems to depend on their marrying within a year, but it can be read in various ways and might well reflect Roger's view that the Holy Virgin had seen to it that they did not have full intercourse on this occasion.

Roger was now beginning to find army life more congenial, with a greater acceptance from his fellows on account of his more confident and easy manner, and his improved riding and shooting skills. But the boredom and drill of the cavalry barracks at Canterbury did not appeal, and a future in uniform seemed only acceptable if the long-standing rumour were true that the regiment was to leave for India. The rumour turned out to be unfounded, and Roger, impulsive and unwilling to withstand any frustration, immediately resigned. He was granted leave until January 1853, when the resignation was to take effect.

The Doughtys offered him the use of their earlier home, Upton House, at Poole, perhaps to avoid his expected presence at Tichborne. His aunt made it plain that Katherine's mind was far from being made up, and, although it was painful not to see him:

Our duty must supercede inclination, and we could not be justified, after what so recently passed, to run the risk of any renewal.

Katherine's parents forbade her to write to Roger, and Roger himself seems to have cooled off. He wrote to Gosford:

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If her Ladyship still thinks she can make a fool of me, as in former days, she is, I must say, greatly mistaken.

He told Gosford he had no intention of coming to Tichborne; indeed, he was planning to go to South America for a few years. Gosford advised him to make his will, and this he did in secret without telling either parent. Under this will, all the Tichborne and Doughty properties were to be left to his younger brother, Alfred. If Alfred died without a son, the estates were to go to any sons of Katherine. Gosford himself was to profit from Roger's demise by continuing as steward of the estates and living rent-free at Upton until Alfred came of age.

In February Roger went to Paris to say goodbye to his mother, whom he had rarely seen since entering Stonyhurst, and during this visit he gave her a lock of his hair. With a manservant, John Moore, who was the son of the butler at Upton House, Roger then sailed from Le Havre on 4 March in the French ship *La Pauline*, touching in at Falmouth on 12 March, and arriving at Valparaiso on 18 June, having sailed around the Horn to the Pacific coast of Chile.

A fellow passenger, a Mr Watson, did not think highly of Roger:

The object of his existence appeared to be the satisfaction of a desire for excitement, obtained at no matter what cost, either in health, comfort, or money.

Well, there was certainly more excitement to be had in South America than in the barracks at Canterbury.

Roger stayed a few days at Valparaiso, where he got the news that his uncle had died, and his parents had taken over Tichborne House. He wrote at once commiserating with his aunt, but also saying he was glad not to have been there during his uncle's final days as he could not have kept his temper. He goes on to say that he found his parents impossible, and then gives an account of his voyage and his travel plans. An envelope marked 'Private and Confidential' was enclosed in the letter. In it he declares his

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intention of staying away for some years. Then he comments on his relationship with his cousin:

You may rest assured my Dear Aunt, that what has passed between me and my cousin, though I feel as much attached to her as ever I was, has nev [*sic*] been told by me to anybody, and moreover will never be spoken by me to any living soul and that I shall always be happy to do anything in the world for her.

His subsequent travels are well documented, as he kept a journal from which he copied extracts in letters to his mother; he also wrote to his aunt, and to Gosford. In one of his earlier letters to his mother from Lima (dated 25 August 1853) he describes his first journey inland from Valparaiso to Santiago. There were two possible routes between the two towns, and, as on this occasion he was in an old cabriolet with three horses, it seems likely that he took the less hilly route, which passed through the village of Melipilla. As the towns are 75 miles apart, it was usual to break one's journey halfway, and this he did, possibly in Melipilla.

No sooner had Roger arrived at Santiago than his servant John Moore became seriously ill and was forced to remain there. Roger returned immediately to Valparaiso in order to reboard the ship, but found there was a delay of three weeks before her departure. It was later to be claimed that during this period he could have returned to Melipilla and become friendly with a Tomás Castro, but there is no mention of this in his letters. That name, Tomás Castro, was to emerge as one of the enigmas in the subsequent identity mystery.

Back at Valparaiso again, Roger needed another servant and found one in Pierre Feron, a member of the crew of *La Pauline*, which he was now able to rejoin for the voyage up the coast to Lima. From Lima he sailed to Guayaquil and went by canoe up the river on a shooting trip. Back at Lima he was forced to find yet another servant when Pierre Feron himself appeared to fall ill. It subsequently emerged that he had shammed the illness to escape from Roger, who was, he claimed, living a 'wild life': drinking spirits and mixing in low company. He said Roger

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was even taking arsenic for spasms of the heart, on one occasion taking so much that Feron found him raving and foaming at the mouth.

A third servant was now found, another Frenchman, Jules Barraut, who sailed with Roger back to Valparaiso, and who was to stay with him for his remaining five months in South America. While at Lima Roger wrote to Gosford (20 February 1854), sending him some skins of beautiful birds he had shot, some pictures and various curios. His letter includes the comment that his main reason for staying abroad was to escape the situation at Tichborne now that his father and mother had taken up residence, and he goes on:

I am very sorry my mother's character is so disagreeable, because it must make Tichborne a kind of hell for my father and everybody in the house.

Back at Valparaiso Roger met up again with John Moore, with whom, as he tells Gosford, he was now disenchanted on account of the extraordinary rumours Moore had been spreading about his behaviour. Again he visited Santiago, riding (he claimed) the 75 miles in one night. There he had two portraits taken by the early photographic process of daguerreotyping, one for his parents and one for his aunt. He then left on horseback with his baggage on mules to cross the Andes to reach Mendoza. Finding nothing to detain him there, he left on 27 January 1854 and, galloping ahead of Barraut and his luggage, covered the 1200 miles to Buenos Aires by 13 February. They both then sailed north to Rio, where they stayed awaiting a suitable ship for Roger to continue his travels to Jamaica and Mexico.

A letter from his father was dated 6 April 1854:

I must beg and entreat you to return to me as soon as possible. Your mother is unhappy and dislikes Tichborne Park more and more, and is forever entreating me to return to Paris or to Rome. When I am dead, she will try to make you marry a French or Italian girl and live in Paris or Rome. You may be assured that

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if you marry a foreigner, you will be miserable for the rest of your life.

But it never reached Roger. At the last minute he had arranged a passage for himself to Kingston. His servant, Barraut, remained in Rio and thus escaped whatever was the fate of the passenger and crew of the *Bella*. After her longboat was found a search was made, but as no further trace was discovered it was presumed that the ship had capsized in a squall with the loss of all on board. The news reached Tichborne in May; the family waited months before giving up hope of any survivors, and it was not until the following year that Roger's will was proved and his younger brother, Alfred, became heir apparent.

Meanwhile, and even before the news of the loss of the *Bella*, Katherine Doughty had become engaged to Percival Radcliffe, the heir to a Yorkshire baronetcy. Their marriage was arranged for November.