

TRUE STORY OF THE WONDERFUL WILSON FAMILY



Mrs. CORNELIUS VANDERBILT



Mrs. R. T. WILSON



LADY HERBERT



RICHARD T. WILSON, JR.

Southern People, Who Have Won Their Way to Northern Pre-eminence Through Kindly Tact and Social Attractiveness—Of Five Children, Three Girls and Two Boys, All Have Made Matrimonial Matches That Have Excited the Admiration and Envy of Society on Both Sides of the Atlantic.

PERHAPS in all history there has been no story of continued good fortune and success equal to that of the Wilson family in New York. It reads almost like a fairy tale, and what is known as the Wilson luck has become proverbial. But many of those who attribute all the bounties which fortune has bestowed on this Southern family may fail to see that not luck alone in this instance has brought success, and that it takes some other quality to rise to a prominent position, even though chance is in favor of and not against the person who makes the battle.

Early Family History.

Time and again statements have been made as to the position of the Richard T. Wilsons before they came to New York. It is more or less true that the head of the family is a self-made man. But his rise was not sudden and he was well known for many years in the South before he made New York his home.

Mrs. Wilson was Miss Melissa Johnston, of Georgia. Both she and Mr. Wilson passed their youth in small Southern towns. They lived in Kentucky and Tennessee for a while after they were married, and when they came to New York, in the early seventies, they were considered very well entrenched financially. Mr. Wilson had made several millions in cotton speculation. He already had a number of business friends and acquaintances and not a few of them were influential socially.

But New York society at the time was very narrow. It was before the Ward McAllister days. The Vanderbilts were an unknown quantity, except in the financial world. The old Commodore was still alive, living very quietly at the old mansion in Washington place. His grandsons were young men and his granddaughters were in boarding school. Society clustered around Bond street and Washington square and Fifth avenue up nearly to Central Park. The great Western social invasion was yet to occur, and such names as Mills, Bishop, Alexander, Crocker, Fair and others were not factors in the society of that day. Mrs. August Belmont was then the acknowledged leader of the small but very exclusive set which went to Newport and Saratoga in summer and occupied the proscenium boxes at the old Academy of Music on opera nights during the season.

Came With Millions.

When Mr. and Mrs. Richard Wilson first made New York their home, they were credited with being the possessors of an enormous fortune, for those days. In fact, until 1884, he was rated

at about \$20,000,000. After that time, it was understood that he had lost a great deal and to-day he is not supposed to be worth much more than \$5,000,000. But this fortune was a mere drop in the bucket to others in New York. So that the Wilsons could not have attained their present prominent position solely by money. Mr. Wilson has for years been interested in Southern railway stocks and some of the roads in which he has a controlling interest conflict with the vast Vanderbilt system. Indeed, in a business way, there never has been any love lost between the Vanderbilts and the Wilsons. This dates back to a period long preceding the days when Cornelius Vanderbilt wooed and won Miss Grace Wilson against the will of his father.

The Wilson Children.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard T. Wilson have had five children, three daughters and two sons. When they came to New York, the eldest daughter was about eighteen; the other children were at school. Mr. Wilson is rather medium sized, and has always worn a beard which these many years has been gray. He has quiet, chivalrous manners, being fond of music, and a shrewd observer and critic of the passing show. Mrs. Wilson strikes one as being almost timid. She is now a very prepossessing matron with white hair, which she wears very plainly, a charming manner and a great deal of magnetism. She is very small; in fact, all the Wilson women are short of stature, although Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt has a certain bearing and manner which convey the impression that she is very tall. This is noticeable at the opera, when she is seated in her box, or when she is driving in the park or on the avenue. It is somewhat significant that many early acquaintances of the Wilsons in New York have become intimates and have remained friends. They have not used people as rungs in the social ladder. Knowing well the benefit of good schools, the Wilson children were placed at the most exclusive fashionable academies and colleges. A very "smart" dancing class was picked out for the two elder ones—Miss Mary Wilson, who was just about to make her debut, and Marshall Orme Wilson, the eldest son and prospective heir. This class was attended by Miss Swan, now Mrs. Benjamin Welles, Miss Berryman, Miss Kitty Kernochan, Miss Johnson and other very fashionable girls then in their teens. Among them also was Miss Caroline Astor, youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Astor.

Bought Tweed Mansion.

Mr. Wilson purchased the Tweed residence, 511 Fifth avenue, several years ago. This brown stone house,

with a small lot at the corner of Forty-third street, he managed to obtain when Boss Tweed was eclipsed.

A number of well-rated social acquaintances had been made during the first two winters. When the time came for Miss Mary Wilson to make her debut it was decided to pass the Summer at New London. The Pequot House in those days was a very fashionable resort, and there one found the Lorillards, the De Forests, the Callenders, the Cannons and numerous other well known New York families who were in the Belmont set.

Miss Wilson was a very attractive girl, petite, a brunette, with an excellent figure, an exquisite complexion and splendid eyes. Unusual cleverness and a charming vivaciousness were also in the feminine inventory. But everything was not plain sailing in the beginning. This comparatively unknown Southern girl was looked upon somewhat furtively by the many New York belles. They all agreed that she was very pretty, and undeniably attractive. Her mother did not make the slightest effort to get into society. With infinite tact she bided her time.

Conquer Four Hundred.

The season had been very dull at Newport when one day Ogden Goelet, one of the heirs of old Peter Goelet, arrived at New London in his yacht. Although he as not looked upon as a wonderful catch, his was an excellent family, and he was a young man of mark and likelihood. He was inclined to be delicate and was not a very brilliant man. But he was a gentleman, first, last and all the time, in the opinion of Madame Grundy. The Wilsons were the only family which had a private parlor at the hotel and were entertaining considerably. So Miss Wilson was a topic of frequent conversation. Her beauty and her wealth were being discussed in italics.

So Ogden Goelet was presented. Shortly afterward he gave Miss Wilson an entertainment on his yacht. Then the entire colony took her up, and in a short time she was fairly lauded and before long was arriving. That Autumn her engagement to Ogden Goelet was announced, and the marriage occurred within the year.

The Wilson Luck.

It was now that the Wilson luck entered. Old Peter Goelet died and left his \$25,000,000 to be divided among his nephews and nieces. Ogden obtained a goodly share of them. As Mrs. Ogden Goelet, Miss Wilson had everything her own way, and immediately proceeded to arrange matters for her growing up brothers and sisters. The family affection is very deep, and this clanish trait has been one of the secrets of the rise of the Wilsons. Their house has never been divided.

Marshall Orme Wilson and Miss Carrie Astor had contracted a youth-

ful affection for one another at dancing school. But Mrs. Astor had other views and ideas of a son-in-law. It was rumored that Miss Astor after her debut was engaged to a wealthy member of a foremost Knickerbocker family—a noted cotton leader. Then she was taken abroad. But Orme Wilson, as he is known, persisted in his suit, and his sister, Mrs. Ogden Goelet, did everything in her power to bring about the match. After several denials of the engagement, it was announced at Newport in 1884, and that Autumn the wedding was celebrated at the William Astor town house—the present site of the Waldorf-Astoria. It was a very brilliant affair, and was the last ceremony performed in the house. Mr. Wilson gave his son \$500,000 and William Astor dowered his daughter with a similar amount. It has been an ideal marriage.

An Astor Alliance.

The Orme Wilsons have two young sons. With such a brilliant marriage the social fortunes of the Wilsons were assured. Mrs. William Astor had gradually become one of the leaders of New York society. Mrs. August Belmont was retiring on her laurels. The late Mrs. John Jacob Astor seldom entertained, and after her death Mrs. William Astor and Mrs. William Waldorf Astor had the famous discussion agent which should be recognized as the Mrs. Astor.

It was shortly after this wedding of Miss Caroline Astor to Orme Wilson that in the panic of '84 Richard T. Wilson is said to have lost a fortune. But this loss has never made any difference in the Wilson family's mode of living. While not entertaining a great deal, they have always had—since the first days of the Metropolitan opera—their box and keep their house in town and an establishment at Newport, and give a certain number of dinners during the season.

As Lady Herbert.

It was in 1886 that Miss Belle Wilson made her debut. She had an extremely pretty figure, dressed exquisitely, was well read and very clever, and although not as beautiful as her sister, was unusually attractive. She had a remarkable social career in the two years in which she was in New York society. With the cachet of the Astors and Goellets, and her own charms, she had many number of suitors. In the Spring of 1888 New York society was a bit disappointed to hear that she was to marry a young attaché of the British Embassy in Washington—the Honorable Michael Henry Herbert. Of course, no one could deny that he was descended from Henry Fitz Herbert, chamberlain to Henry L., and that among his ancestors was William Herbert, a staunch adherent of the House of York, who fell into the hands of the Lancastrians after the battle of Danesmoore and was beheaded. Of course, his brother was the Earl of Pembroke and his sister Lady De Grey.

But he was not rich in the American sense.

Here again the circumstantial breeze filled the Wilson sails. Shortly before the date of the marriage, which took place in New York in November, 1888, Lord Sackville, then British Ambassador at Washington United States, wrote his famous California letter. He was recalled and Henry Edwards, son of Lord Kensington, next in office, was on his vacation. So young Herbert was virtually British Ambassador at Washington during a strenuous period and acquitted himself to the point of promotion. Since their marriage the Herberts have lived abroad until this year, as Sir Michael Herbert, the son-in-law of Richard T. Wilson, has returned to Washington as British Ambassador. Lady Herbert and her husband have been at various posts abroad and she has been a universal favorite everywhere. Their last post was at the French capital. Ogden Goelet died six years ago on his yacht, leaving a widow and two children, a boy and a girl. His fortune was very large and in his will he bequeathed a handsome sum to Lady Herbert.

Wilson-Vanderbilt Romance.

Miss May Goelet, the eldest granddaughter, made her debut some years ago and the Goellets took one of the handsomest houses in London for the year. Her hand has been sought in marriage by lord, duke and noble in vain. She and her mother are now at the Wilson town house in Fifth avenue for the winter, and until the recent illness of Cornelius Vanderbilt, entertained a great deal.

The story of the Wilson-Vanderbilt romance has been told frequently during the past few weeks, while young Cornelius Vanderbilt lay sick of the fever. Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt and Lady Herbert bear a striking resemblance to each other. Both are blondes.

Parental Barriers.

Miss Grace Wilson made her debut in the Four Hundred about twelve years ago. A little while after the death of his brother, William H. Vanderbilt, Cornelius, Jr., then the eldest surviving son of Cornelius Vanderbilt, went abroad. His health was not robust. He had already met Miss Wilson, but it is said that he fell in love with her during the season she was with her sister in Paris. On his return to New York he boldly announced his intention of marrying Miss Wilson. His father objected strenuously, and even insisted upon breaking off the match. Various reasons were given, one being that the young lady was the senior by several years, and the other that the conflicting business interests of the Vanderbilt and Wilson families were such that no alliance between them was to be considered.

All outward opposition was overcome, but Cornelius Vanderbilt never forgave his son for marrying against the paternal will. It was a midsum-

mer wedding, and none of the Vanderbilt family was present.

To-day young Cornelius Vanderbilt is one of the rising men of the generation.

His share in the fortune was woefully abbreviated because of his marriage. Since then the Cornelius Vanderbilts have entertained extensively. Mrs. Vanderbilt's capture of Prince Henry as her guest last winter was a social triumph of two hemispheres. Her subsequent bringing to Newport of an entire theatrical troupe and the closing for a night of a Broadway theater in consequence was another coup which immediately placed her beyond the reach of all save envy.

During this time she has never lost sight of the advancement of her husband, for whom she is said to be more ambitious than for herself. She attends his drills at the armory, takes a

deep interest in his inventions and is really a press agent par excellence.

Meanwhile the junior Richard T. Wilson has few social inclinations. He has been of late years devoted to the turf, and here the Wilson luck, if luck it be, has also been in the ascendant. He has the Southern love of sport, a keen judgment of a horse and excellent business capacity. Only last Spring he married Miss Marion Mason, of Boston. They live on their Southern plantation in Georgia the greater part of the year.

Such is the story of the Wilson fortune and luck. To those who ponder such matters it will be clearly seen that, although there may have been a certain element of luck, as there was in the Bonaparte destiny, there were certainly other attributes which have contributed to give them the position which they now maintain.

American to Own Abbotsford A Novelty in Church Fairs

Negotiations are said to be in progress for the sale of Abbotsford, with its interesting associations of Sir Walter Scott, to an American millionaire of Scottish extraction.

The succession of the great novelist's descendants has been a singularly broken one, and Abbotsford has come down through three generations of heirs female to its present owner, Mrs. Maxwell-Scott, who is married to a younger brother of Lord Herries.

Mrs. Maxwell-Scott has inherited the literary tastes of her great grandfather and has written well and gracefully on many episodes of Scottish history.

A novel method of raising money at a church bazaar was recently tried at Buckingham, England, when an autograph quilt realized the sum of \$100. The quilt contained 240 squares, on which, in pencil, the autographs of many distinguished personages were obtained. These were afterwards embroidered by two ladies, and the result of their labors was a substantial amount to the bazaar funds.

Generous to Pope Leo

The Pope's presents during his pontifical jubilee numbered upward of 20,000, and in value exceeded \$2,500,000. His Holiness will bequeath them to the Holy See, to the exclusion of his own relatives.