Northumberland House and the Percys.

When Hotspur treads the stage with passionate grace, the spectator hardly dreams of the fact that the princely original lived, paid taxes, and was an active man of his parish, in Aldersgate Street. *There,* however, stood the first Northumberland House. By the ill-fortune of Percy it fell to the conquering side in the serious conflict in which Hotspur was engaged; and Henry the Fourth made a present of it to his queen, Jane. Thence it got the name of the Queen's Wardrobe. Subsequently it was converted into a printing office; and, in the course of time, the first Northumberland House disappeared altogether.

In Fenchurch Street, not now a place wherein to look for nobles, the great Earls of Northumberland were grandly housed in the time of Henry the Sixth; but vulgar citizenship elbowed the earls too closely, and they ultimately withdrew from the City. The deserted mansion and grounds were taken possession of by the roysterers. Dice were for ever rattling in the stately saloons. Winners shouted for joy, and blasphemy was considered a virtue by the losers. As for the once exquisite gardens, they were converted into bowling-greens, titanic billiards, at which sport the gayer City sparks breathed themselves for hours in the summer time. There was no place of entertainment so fashionably frequented as this second Northumberland House; but dice and bowls were at length to be enjoyed in more vulgar places, and "the old seat of the Percys was deserted by fashion." On the site of mansion and gardens, houses and cottages were erected, and the place knew its old glory no more. So ended the second Northumberland House.

While the above mansions or palaces were the pride of all Londoners and the envy of many, there stood on the strand of the Thames, at the bend of the river, near Charing Cross, a hospital and chapel, whose founder, William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, had dedicated it to St. Mary, and made it an appanage to the Priory of Roncesvalle, in Navarre. Hence the hospital on our river strand was known by the name of "St. Mary Rouncivall." The estate went the way of such property at the dissolution of the monasteries; and the first lay proprietor of the forfeited property was a Sir Thomas Cawarden. It was soon after acquired by Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, son of the first Earl of Surrey. Howard, early in the reign of James the First, erected on the site of St. Mary's Hospital a brick mansion which, under various names, has developed

into that third and present Northumberland House which is about to fall under pressure of circumstances, the great need of London, and the argument of half a million of money.

Thus the last nobleman who has clung to the Strand, which, on its south side, was once a line of palaces, is about to leave it for ever. The bishops were the first to reside on that river-bank outside the City walls. Nine episcopal palaces were once mirrored in the then clear waters of the Thames. The lay nobles followed, when they felt themselves as safe in that fresh and healthy air as the prelates. The chapel of the Savoy is still a royal chapel, and the memories of time-honoured Lancaster and of John, the honest King of France, still dignify the place. But the last nobleman who resided so far from the now recognised quarters of fashion is about to leave what has been the seat of the Howards and Percys for nearly three centuries, and the Strand will be able no longer to boast of a duke. It will still, however, possess an English earl; but *he* is only a modest lodger in Norfolk Street.

When the Duke of Northumberland goes from the Strand, there goes with him a shield with very nearly nine hundred quarterings; and among them are the arms of Henry the Seventh, of the sovereign houses of France, Castile, Leon, and Scotland, and of the ducal houses of Normandy and Brittany! *Nunquam minus solus quam cum solus*, might be a fitting motto for a nobleman who, when he stands before a glass, may see therein, not only the Duke, but also the Earl of Northumberland, Earl Percy, Earl of Beverley, Baron Lovaine of Alnwick, Sir Algernon Percy, Bart., two doctors (LL.D. and D.C.L.) a colonel, several presidents, and the patron of two-and-twenty livings.

As a man who deals with the merits of a book is little or nothing concerned with the binding thereof, with the water-marks, or with the printing, but is altogether concerned with the life that is within, that is, with the author, his thoughts, and his expression of them, so, in treating of Northumberland House, we care much less for notices of the building than of its inhabitants—less for the outward aspect than for what has been said or done beneath its roof. If we look with interest at a mere wall which screens from sight the stage of some glorious or some terrible act, it is not for the sake of the wall or its builders: our interest is in the drama and its actors. Who cares, in speaking of Shakespeare and Hamlet, to know the name of the stage carpenter at the Globe or the Blackfriars? Suffice it to say, that Lord Howard, who was an amateur architect of some merit, is supposed to have had a hand in designing the old house in the Strand, and that Gerard Christmas and Bernard Jansen are said to have been his "builders." Between that brick house and the present there is as much sameness as in the legendary knife which, after having had a new handle, subsequently received in addition a

new blade. The old house occupied three sides of a square. The fourth side, towards the river, was completed in the middle of the seventeenth century. The portal retains something of the old work, but so little as to be scarcely recognisable, except to professional eyes.

From the date of its erection till 1614 it bore the name of Northampton House. In that year it passed by will from Henry Howard, Lord Northampton, to his nephew, Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, from whom it was called Suffolk House. In 1642, Elizabeth, daughter of Theophilus, second Earl of Suffolk, married Algernon Percy, tenth Earl of Northumberland, and the new master gave his name to the old mansion. The above-named Lord Northampton was the man who has been described as foolish when young, infamous when old, an encourager, at threescore years and ten, of his niece, the infamous Countess of Essex; and who, had he lived a few months longer, would probably have been hanged for his share, with that niece and others, in the mysterious murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. Thus, the founder of the house was noble only in name; his successor and nephew has not left a much more brilliant reputation. He was connected, with his wife, in frauds upon the King, and was fined heavily. The heiress of Northumberland, who married his son, came of a noble but ill-fated race, especially after the thirteenth Baron Percy was created Earl of Northumberland in 1377. Indeed, the latter title had been borne by eleven persons before it was given to a Percy, and by far the greater proportion of the whole of them came to grief. Of one of them it is stated that he (Alberic) was appointed Earl in 1080, but that, *proving unfit for the dignity*, he was displaced, and a Norman bishop named in his stead! The idea of turning out from high estate those who were unworthy or incapable is one that might suggest many reflections, if it were not *scandalum magnatum* to make them.

In the chapel at Alnwick Castle there is displayed a genealogical tree. At the root of the Percy branches is "Charlemagne"; and there is a sermon in the whole, much more likely to scourge pride than to stimulate it, if the thing be rightly considered. However this may be, the Percys find their root in Karloman, the Emperor, through Joscelin of Louvain, in this way: Agnes de Percy was, in the twelfth century, the sole heiress of her house. Immensely rich, she had many suitors. Among these was Joscelin, brother of Godfrey, sovereign Duke of Brabant, and of Adelicia, Queen Consort of Henry the First of England. Joscelin held that estate at Petworth which has not since gone out of the hands of his descendants. This princely suitor of the heiress Agnes was only accepted by her as husband on condition of his assuming the Percy name. Joscelin consented; but he added the arms of Brabant and Louvain to the Percy shield, in order that, if succession to those titles and possessions should ever be

stopped for want of an heir, his claim might be kept in remembrance. Now, this Joscelin was lineally descended from "Charlemagne," and, *therefore*, that greater name lies at the root of the Percy pedigree, which glitters in gold on the walls of the ducal chapel in the castle at Alnwick.

Very rarely indeed did the Percys, who were the earlier Earls of Northumberland, die in their beds. The first of them, Henry, was slain (1407) in the fight on Bramham Moor. The second, another Henry (whose father, Hotspur, was killed in the hot affair near Shrewsbury), lies within St. Alban's Abbey Church, having poured out his lifeblood in another Battle of the Roses, fought near that town named after the saint. The blood of the third Earl helped to colour the roses, which are said to have grown redder from the gore of the slain on Towton's hard-fought field. The forfeited title was transferred, in 1465, to Lord John Nevill Montagu, great Warwick's brother; but Montagu soon lay among the dead in the battle near Barnet. The title was restored to another Henry Percy, and that unhappy Earl was murdered, in 1489, at his house, Cocklodge, near Thirsk. In that fifteenth century there was not a single Earl of Northumberland who died a peaceful and natural death.

In the succeeding century the first line of Earls, consisting of six Henry Percys, came to an end in that childless noble whom Anne Boleyn called "the Thriftless Lord." He died childless in 1537. He had, indeed, two brothers, the elder of whom might have succeeded to the title and estates; but both brothers, Sir Thomas and Sir Ingram, had taken up arms in the "Pilgrimage of Grace." Attainder and forfeiture were the consequences; and in 1551 Northumberland was the title of the dukedom conferred on John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, who lost the dignity when his head was struck off at the block, two years later.

Then the old title, Earl of Northumberland, was restored in 1557, to Thomas, son of that attainted Thomas who had joined the "Pilgrimage of Grace." Ill-luck still followed these Percys. Thomas was beheaded—the last of his house who fell by the hands of the executioner—in 1572. His brother and heir died in the Tower in 1585.

None of these Percys had yet come into the Strand. The brick house there, which was to be their own through marriage with an heiress, was built in the lifetime of the Earl, whose father, as just mentioned, died in the Tower in 1585. The son, too, was long a prisoner in that gloomy palace and prison. While Lord Northampton was laying the foundations of the future London house of the Percys in 1605, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, was being carried into durance. There was a Percy, kinsman to the Earl, who was mixed up in the Gunpowder Plot. For no other reason than relationship

with the conspiring Percy the Earl was shut up in the Tower for life, as his sentence ran, and he was condemned to pay a fine of thirty thousand pounds. The Earl ultimately got off with fifteen years' imprisonment and a fine of twenty thousand pounds. He was popularly known as the Wizard Earl, because he was a studious recluse, companying only with grave scholars (of whom there were three, known as "Percy's Magi"), and finding relaxation in writing rhymed satires against the Scots.

There was a stone walk in the Tower which, having been paved by the Earl, was known during many years as "My Lord of Northumberland's Walk." At one end was an iron shield of his arms; and holes in which he put a peg at every turn he made in his dreary exercise.

One would suppose that the Wizard Earl would have been very grateful to the man who restored him to liberty. Lord Hayes (Viscount Doncaster) was the man. He had married Northumberland's daughter, Lucy. The marriage had excited the Earl's anger, as a *low match*, and the proud captive could not "stomach" a benefit for which he was indebted to a son-in-law on whom he looked down. This proud Earl died in 1632. Just ten years after, his son, Algernon Percy, went a-wooing at Suffolk House, in the Strand. It was then inhabited by Elizabeth, the daughter and heiress of Theophilus, Earl of Suffolk, who had died two years previously, in 1640. Algernon Percy and Elizabeth Howard made a merry and magnificent wedding of it, and from the time they were joined together the house of the bride has been known by the bridegroom's territorial title of Northumberland.

The street close to the house of the Percys, which we now know as Northumberland Street, was then a road leading down to the Thames, and called Hartshorn Lane. Its earlier name was Christopher Alley. At the bottom of the lane the luckless Sir Edmundsbury Godfrey had a stately house, from which he walked many a time and oft to his great wood wharf on the river. But the glory of Hartshorn Lane was and is Ben Jonson. No one can say where rare Ben was born, save that the posthumous child first saw the light in Westminster. "Though," says Fuller, "I cannot, with all my industrious inquiry, find him in his cradle, I can fetch him from his long coats. When a little child he lived in Hartshorn Lane, Charing Cross, where his mother married a bricklayer for her second husband." Mr. Fowler was a master bricklayer, and did well with his clever stepson. We can in imagination see that sturdy boy crossing the Strand to go to his school within the old church of St. Martin (then still) in the Fields. It is as easy to picture him hastening of a morning early to Westminster, where Camden was second master, and had a keen sense of the stuff that was in the scholar from Hartshorn Lane. Of all the figures that flit about the locality, none attracts our sympathies so

warmly as that of the boy who developed into the second dramatic poet of England.

Of the countesses and duchesses of this family, the most singular was the widow of Algernon, the tenth Earl. In her widowhood she removed from the house in the Strand (where she had given a home not only to her husband, but to a brother) to one which occupied the site on which White's Club now stands. It was called Suffolk House, and the proud lady thereof maintained a semi-regal state beneath the roof and when she went abroad. On such an occasion as paying a visit, her footmen walked bareheaded on either side of her coach, which was followed by a second, in which her women were seated, like so many ladies in waiting! Her state solemnity went so far that she never allowed her son Joscelin's wife (daughter of an Earl) to be seated in her presence—at least till she had obtained permission to do so.

Joscelin's wife was, according to Pepys, "a beautiful lady indeed." They had but one child, the famous heiress, Elizabeth Percy, who at four years of age was left to the guardianship of her proud and wicked old grandmother. Joscelin was dead, and his widow married Ralph, afterwards Duke of Montague. The old Dowager Countess was a matchmaker, and she contracted her granddaughter, at the age of twelve, to Cavendish, Earl of Ogle. Before this couple were of age to live together Ogle died. In a year or two after, the old matchmaker engaged her victim to Mr. Thomas Thynne, of Longleat; but the young lady had no mind to him. In the Hatton collection of manuscripts there are three letters addressed by a lady of the Brunswick family to Lord and Lady Hatton. They are undated, but they contain a curious reference to part of the present subject, and are thus noticed in the first report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: "Mr. Thinn has proved his marriage with Lady Ogle, but she will not live with him, for fear of being 'rotten before she is ripe.' Lord Suffolk, since he lost his wife and daughter, lives with his sister, Northumberland. They have here strange ambassadors—one from the King of Fez, the other from Muscovett. All the town has seen the last; he goes to the play, and stinks so that the ladies are not able to take their muffs from their noses all the play-time. The lampoons that are made of most of the town ladies are so nasty, that no woman would read them, else she would have got them for her."

"Tom of Ten Thousand," as Thynne was called, was murdered (shot dead in his carriage) in Pall Mall (1682) by Königsmark and accomplices, two or three of whom suffered death on the scaffold. Immediately afterwards the maiden wife of two husbands *really* married Charles, the proud Duke of Somerset. In the same year Banks dedicated to her (*Illustrious Princess*, he calls her) his 'Anna

Bullen,' a tragedy. He says: "You have submitted to take a noble partner, as angels have delighted to converse with men;" and "there is so much of divinity and wisdom in your choice, that none but the Almighty ever did the like" (giving Eve to Adam) "with the world and Eden for a dower." Then, after more blasphemy, and very free allusions to her condition as a bride, and fulsomeness beyond conception, he scouts the idea of supposing that she ever should die. "You look," he says, "as if you had nothing mortal in you. Your guardian angel scarcely is more a deity than you;" and so on, in increase of bombast, crowned by the mock humility of "my muse still has no other ornament than truth."

The Duke and Duchess of Somerset lived in the house in the Strand, which continued to be called Northumberland House, as there had long been a *Somerset* House a little more to the east. Anthony Henley once annoyed the above duke and showed his own ill-manners by addressing a letter "to the Duke of Somerset, over against the trunk-shop at Charing Cross." The duchess was hardly more respectful when speaking of her suburban mansion, Sion House, Brentford. "It's a hobbledehoy place," she said; "neither town nor country." Of this union came a son, Algernon Seymour, who in 1748 succeeded his father as Duke of Somerset, and in 1749 was created Earl of Northumberland, for a particular reason. He had no sons. His daughter Elizabeth had encouraged the homage of a handsome young fellow of that day, named Smithson. She was told that Hugh Smithson had spoken in terms of admiration of her beauty, and she laughingly asked why he did not say as much to herself. Smithson was the son of "an apothecary," according to the envious, but, in truth, the father had been a physician, had earned a baronetcy, and was of the good old nobility, the landowners, with an estate, still possessed by the family, at Stanwick, in Yorkshire. Hugh Smithson married this Elizabeth Percy, and the earldom of Northumberland, conferred on her father, was to go to her husband, and afterwards to the eldest male heir of this marriage, failing which the dignity was to remain with Elizabeth and her heirs male by any other marriage.

It is at this point that the present line of Smithson-Percys begins. Of the couple who may be called its founders so many severe things have been said, that we may infer that their exalted fortunes and best qualities gave umbrage to persons of small minds or strong prejudices. Walpole's remark, that in the earl's lord-lieutenancy in Ireland "their vice-majesties scattered pearls and diamonds about the streets," is good testimony to their royal liberality. Their taste may not have been unexceptionable, but there was no touch of meanness in it. In 1758 they gave a supper at Northumberland House to Lady Yarmouth, George the Second's old mistress. The chief ornamental piece on the supper table represented a grand *chasse* at Herrenhausen, at which

there was a carriage drawn by six horses, in which was seated an august person wearing a blue ribbon, with a lady at his side. This was not unaptly called "the apotheosis of concubinage." Of the celebrated countess notices vary. Her delicacy, elegance, and refinement are vouched for by some; her coarseness and vulgarity are asserted by others. When Queen Charlotte came to England, Lady Northumberland was made one of the ladies of the queen's bedchamber. Lady Townshend justified it to people who felt or feigned surprise, by remarking, "Surely nothing could be more proper. The queen does not understand English, and can anything be more necessary than that she should learn the vulgar tongue?" One of the countess's familiar terms for conviviality was "junkitaceous," but ladies of equal rank had also little slang words of their own, called things by the very plainest names, and spelt *physician* with an "f."

There is ample testimony on record that the great countess never hesitated at a jest on the score of its coarseness. The earl was distinguished rather for his pomposity than vulgarity, though a vulgar sentiment marked some of both his sayings and doings. For example, when Lord March visited him at Alnwick Castle, the Earl of Northumberland received him at the gates with this queer sort of welcome: "I believe, my lord, this is the first time that ever a Douglas and a Percy met here in friendship." The censor who said, "Think of this from a Smithson to a true Douglas," had ample ground for the exclamation. George the Third raised the earl and countess to the rank of duke and duchess in 1766. All the earls of older creation were ruffled and angry at the advancement; but the honour had its drawback. The King would not allow the title to descend to an heir by any other wife but the one then alive, who was the true representative of the Percy line.

The old Northumberland House festivals were right royal things in their way. There was, on the other hand, many a snug, or unceremonious, or eccentric party given there. Perhaps the most splendid was that given in honour of the King of Denmark in 1768. His majesty was fairly bewildered with the splendour. There was in the court what was called "a pantheon," illuminated by 4000 lamps. The King, as he sat down to supper, at the table to which he had expressly invited twenty guests out of the hundreds assembled, said to the duke, "How did you contrive to light it all in time?" "I had two hundred lamplighters," replied the duke. "That was a stretch," wrote candid Mrs. Delany; "a dozen could have done the business;" which was true.

The duchess, who in early life was, in delicacy of form, like one of the Graces, became, in her more mature years, fatter than if the whole three had been rolled into one in her person. With obesity came "an exposition to sleep," as Bottom has it. At "drawing-rooms" she

no sooner sank on a sofa than she was deep in slumber; but while she was awake she would make jokes that were laughed at and censured the next day all over London. Her Grace would sit at a window in Covent Garden, and be *hail fellow well met* with every one of a mob of tipsy and not too cleanly-spoken electors. On these occasions it was said she "signalised herself with intrepidity." She could bend, too, with cleverness to the humours of more hostile mobs; and when the Wilkes rioters besieged the ducal mansion, she and the duke appeared at a window, did salutation to their masters, and performed homage to the demagogue by drinking his health in ale.

Horace Walpole affected to ridicule the ability of the Duchess as a verse writer. At Lady Miller's at Batheaston some rhyming words were given out to the company, and any one who could, was required to add lines to them so as to make sense with the rhymes furnished for the end of each line. This sort of dancing in fetters was called *bouts rimés*. "On my faith," cried Walpole, in 1775, "there are *bouts rimés* on a buttered muffin by her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland." It may be questioned whether anybody could have surmounted the difficulty more cleverly than her Grace. For example:

The pen which I now take and	brandish,
Has long lain useless in my	standish.
Know, every maid, from her own	patten
To her who shines in glossy	satin,
That could they now prepare an	oglio
From best receipt of book in	folio,
Ever so fine, for all their	puffing,
I should prefer a butter'd	muffin;
A muffin, Jove himself might	feast on,
If eaten with Miller, at	Batheaston.

To return to the house itself. There is no doubt that no mansion of such pretensions and containing such treasures has been so thoroughly kept from the vulgar eye. There is one exception, however, to this remark. The Duke (Algernon) who was alive at the period of the first Exhibition threw open the house in the Strand to the public without reserve. The public, without being ungrateful, thought it rather a gloomy residence. Shut in and darkened as it now is by surrounding buildings—canopied as it now is by clouds of London smoke—it is less cheerful and airy than the Tower, where the Wizard Earl studied in his prison room, or counted the turns he made when pacing his prison yard. The Duke last referred to was in his youth at Algiers under Exmouth, and in his later years a Lord of the Admiralty. As Lord Prudhoe, he was a traveller in far-away countries, and he had the faculty of seeing what he saw, for which many travellers, though they have eyes, are not qualified. At the

pleasant Smithsonian house at Stanwick, when he was a bachelor, his household was rather remarkable for the plainness of the female servants. Satirical people used to say the youngest of them was a grandmother. Others, more charitable or scandalous, asserted that Lord Prudhoe was looked upon as a father by many in the country round, who would have been puzzled where else to look for one. It was his elder brother Hugh (whom Lord Prudhoe succeeded) who represented England as Ambassador Extraordinary at the coronation of Charles the Tenth at Rheims. Paris was lost in admiration at the splendour of this embassy, and never since has the *hôtel* in the Rue de Bac possessed such a gathering of royal and noble personages as at the fêtes given there by the Duke of Northumberland. His sister, Lady Glenlyon, then resided in a portion of the fine house in the Rue de Bourbon, owned and in part occupied by the rough but cheery old warrior, the Comte de Lobau. When that lady was Lady Emily Percy, she was married to the eccentric Lord James Murray, afterwards Lord Glenlyon. The bridegroom was rather of an oblivious turn of mind, and it is said that when the wedding morn arrived, his servant had some difficulty in persuading him that it was the day on which he had to get up and be married.

There remains only to be remarked, that as the Percy line has been often represented only by an heiress, there have not been wanting individuals who boasted of male heirship.

Two years after the death of Joscelin Percy in 1670, who died the last male heir of the line, leaving an only child, a daughter, who married the Duke of Somerset, there appeared, supported by the Earl of Anglesea, a most impudent claimant (as next male heir) in the person of James Percy, an Irish trunkmaker. This individual professed to be a descendant of Sir Ingram Percy, who was in the Pilgrimage of Grace, and was brother of the sixth earl. The claim was proved to be unfounded; but it may have rested on an *illegitimate* foundation. As the pretender continued to call himself Earl of Northumberland, Elizabeth, daughter of Joscelin, "took the law" of him. Ultimately he was condemned to be taken into the four law courts in Westminster Hall, with a paper pinned to his breast, bearing these words: "The foolish and impudent pretender to the earldom of Northumberland."

In the succeeding century, the well-known Dr. Percy, Bishop of Dromore, believed himself to be the true male representative of the ancient line of Percy. He built no claims on such belief; but the belief was not only confirmed by genealogists, it was admitted by the second heiress Elizabeth, who married Hugh Smithson. Dr. Percy so far asserted his blood as to let it boil over in wrath against Pennant when the latter described Alnwick Castle in these disparaging words: "At Alnwick no remains of chivalry are perceptible; no respectable

train of attendants; the furniture and gardens inconsistent; and nothing, except the numbers of unindustrious poor at the castle gate, excited any one idea of its former circumstances."

"Duke and Duchess of Charing Cross," or "their majesties of Middlesex," were the mock titles which Horace Walpole flung at the ducal couple of his day who resided at Northumberland House, London, or at Sion House, Brentford. Walpole accepted and satirised the hospitality of the London house, and he almost hated the ducal host and hostess at Sion, because they seemed to overshadow his mimic feudal state at Strawberry! After all, neither early nor late circumstance connected with Northumberland House is confined to memories of the inmates. Ben Jonson comes out upon us from Hartshorn Lane with more majesty than any of the earls; and greatness has sprung from neighbouring shops, and has flourished as gloriously as any of which Percy can boast. Half a century ago, there was a long low house, a single storey high, the ground floor of which was a saddler's shop. It was on the west side of the old Golden Cross, and nearly opposite Northumberland House. The worthy saddler founded a noble line. Of four sons, three were distinguished as Sir David, Sir Frederick, and Sir George. Two of the workmen became Lord Mayors of London; and an attorney's clerk, who used to go in at night and chat with the men, married the granddaughter of a king and became Lord Chancellor.