

Parson's Daughter

"*THERE'S ROSEMARY . . . THERE'S RUE. . .*" By Winifred Fortescue. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1941 428 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by R. ELLIS ROBERTS

WINIFRED BEECH was the eldest daughter of a country parson in Suffolk, England. Her life, told here with charm, modesty, humor, and dignity, is a curious illustration of the part played by chance in human affairs. She was one of a large family: had beauty, a certain talent for writing, and gave pleasure by her very bad recitations to village rustics. Her father had an old Oxford friend who was vicar of Woodstock, near Oxford, and chaplain to the Duke of Marlborough. He was ill, asked Beech to take his place, and so Mr. and Mrs. Beech, who had a son at Oxford, went to Woodstock with Winifred, who was then seventeen years old. There Winifred made friends with the Duchess, nee Consuelo Vanderbilt, and knowing her father's financial worries, consulted her about a career—and Consuelo advised the stage and helped her young friend to get a start.

The charm of Winifred Beech was evidently great; even the formidable Mrs. Pat Campbell fell before it; and while she was never a star, Winifred was leading lady on tour. Then, when she was twenty-five, she met John Fortescue, Librarian of Windsor Castle, author of the great official history of the British Army. Fortescue was over fifty, a confirmed bachelor, and a man of maddeningly regular habits which included leaping out of bed every morning at 6:30. He loved Winifred, was gallant, silent, and after three years of friendship, told her they had better part. She, who had loved him from the day of their first meeting, did not hide her bitter disappointment; the strangely matched pair married and had a wedded life of exceptional bliss, in spite of poverty, ill-health, and a good deal of incompatibility. These are the bones of this fascinating and beautiful record of a devoted life. Lady Fortescue has a rare gift for intimate writing; she never says too much, and she establishes a friendship with her readers which justifies her invitation to them to share her happiness and her sorrow.

The book is full of stories of the great and the well-known. Here the curious reader can learn how Queen Mary took the part of a grasshopper in a charade portraying the entrance to Noah's Ark; how round the bracket of the alabaster Venus in Thomas

Hardy's house hung a card saying "When dusting, please *blow* but do not touch"; how a dipsomaniac monkey, belonging to a niece of the Governor of Gibraltar, was found in the Governor's hammock "lying between the sheets . . . by its side an empty whiskey bottle and clutched in a small paw—believe me or not, this is the truth—an empty bottle of Aspirin tablets". . . . "This extremely human behavior of the monkey's undoubtedly saved its life. Instead of being shot at dawn, it was presented to a ship, and the last news of it was that every night in the Officers' Mess it drank them under the table."

But I think my favorite story concerns a time when Lady Fortescue was ill and in a high delirium. It was before her marriage, and she was at home with her mother.

Mummie told me afterwards that I puzzled her by repeating over and over again: "Is this h'all, H'Albert? Gawd's truth! This here's a bloody feeasco," which was the sergeant's version of Queen Victoria's remark when she was taken on board the wrong ship to review the remnant of troops which has been engaged in the battle of Balaclava, and, by mistake, was shown only four soldiers of another regiment.