

## CHAPTER 5.

# MARY FITTON

**T**HIS wayward daughter of Gawsworth, identified by many writers as the "Dark Lady" of Shakespeare's sonnets, was the daughter of Sir Edward Fitton. There is an interpolated entry in the parish registers that she was baptised on the 24th June 1578.

Her elder sister Anne, baptised at Gawsworth on the 6th October 1574, later married John Newdegate of Arbury Co. Warwick, at Stepney on 30th April 1587, when only 12 years of age. Mary, through her father's influence, became a maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth, travelling to court about the year 1595. She was placed in the care of Sir William Knollys, the Comptroller of the Queen's household. Sir William, who was then a middle aged man of 50, appears to have fallen violently in love with his young and beautiful ward, and although married, no doubt hoped his ailing wife would soon leave him free to marry again.

William Kemp, who is known to have been a clown in Shakespeare's company of players, dedicated his "Nine Daies Wonder" to Mistress Anne Fitton, (thought by some to be an error for Mary Fitton).

It seems to be well established by the contemporary evidence that about the year 1600 the lively but frail Mary Fitton became the mistress of William Herbert, later Earl of Pembroke.<sup>1</sup> The Shakespearean association, in view of the dedication to "W.H.", would suggest a friendship between the great dramatist and William Herbert, and possibly therefore with his mistress. In February 1601 Herbert was sent to the Fleet prison in connection with his illicit association with Mary Fitton, and the frail maid of honour was banished from Court. Mary's child by Herbert died soon after its birth, and the mother appears to have

<sup>1</sup> William Herbert was son of Mary Sydney, whose famous brother was Sir Philip Sydney, poet, sculptor and Christian gentleman, his father being the Earl of Pembroke, to which title William Herbert succeeded. Ben Johnson's famous epitaph, in which the highest tribute possible is paid to the memory of that charming and accomplished lady, reads as follows:

"Underneath this sable hearse  
Lies the subject of all verse,  
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother,  
Death, ere thou hast slain another  
Fair and wise and good as she  
Time shall throw a dart at thee."

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gone to her sister Anne Newdegate at Arbury. Dr. Ormerod mentions another scandal connected with Mary Fitton, and asserted that on the evidence of Sir Peter Leycester, she bore two illegitimate daughters by Sir Richard Leveson, the friend and correspondent of her sister Anne. Later, about the year 1606/7, Mary married as her first husband Captain William Polewhele of Perton Co. Staffs., by whom she had a son and daughter. Following the death of Polewhele in 1610 she married Captain John Lougher. Left a widow for the second time about the year 1635 Mary lived on until her 70th year. She died 1647 and in her will, dated 19 December 1640 and proved 1st. July 1647, she signs her name as "Mary Lougher."

The long cherished tradition that Mary Fitton was the "dark lady" of Shakespeare's Sonnets, rests on very slender and doubtful evidence, and the theory that William Herbert was the person to whom the sonnets were dedicated is equally speculative, though without it of course the whole possibility of Mary's association with Shakespeare fails. Mr. William Archer<sup>1</sup> found grounds for believing that Mary Fitton could be identified as the "dark lady" in the fact that Sir William Knollys was known to have been in love with her thus establishing three "Wills"



Church Corbel. The Mermaid.

<sup>1</sup> Fortnightly Review, December, 1897.

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among her admirers. On this reasoning there is a very obvious connection with the opening lines of Sonnet 135—

“Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy “Will”  
And “Will” to boot, and “Will” in overplus.”

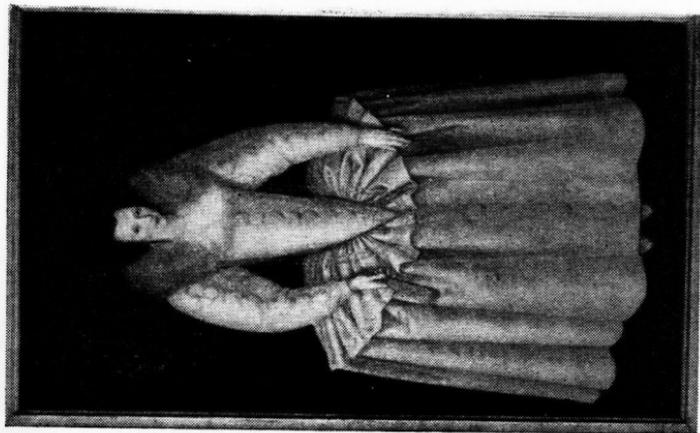
The late William E. A. Axon in his paper on Mary Fitton in *Bygone Cheshire* (1895) observes :

“The obscure dedication of the sonnets to Mr. W.H. as their “only begetter” has been supposed to point either to Southampton or Pembroke, and the researches of Mr. Thomas Tyler and the Rev. W. A. Harrison have brought to light a curious incident in the life of the latter which gives some confirmation to his claim.”<sup>1</sup>

The contemporary correspondence of the Fitton family, formerly preserved in the muniment room at Arbury and recently deposited on loan at the Warwickshire County Record Office, formed the basis of Lady Newdigate-Newdegate's delightful book “*Gossip from a Muniment Room*” published in 1898. I have explored the Fitton papers deposited at the County Record Office, Warwick, and the following history of the Fitton sisters is derived almost entirely from Lady Newdegate's book and the Fitzroy-Newdegate muniments. The Fitton portraits preserved at Arbury are unquestionably genuine, and complete answers have been provided to the doubts cast some years ago by Thomas Tyler upon the authenticity of the Arbury portraits.

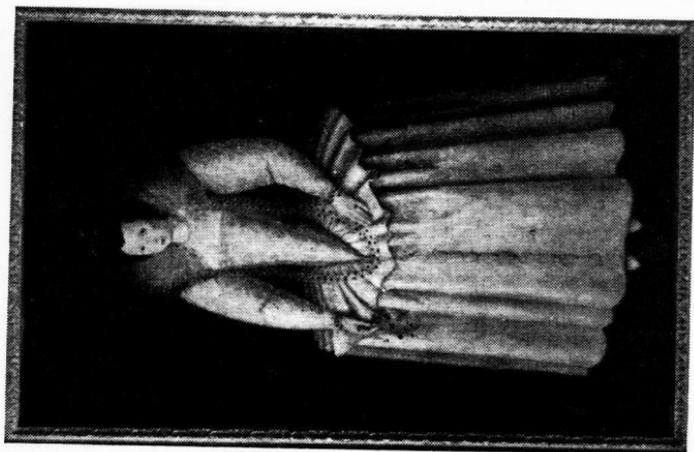
As already stated Anne Fitton, the elder of the two sisters, had a husband chosen for her by her parents whilst she was still a child, in accordance with the common practice of the age. When only 12½ years

<sup>1</sup> These suggestions depend upon the researches chiefly of Mr. Thomas Tyler and the Rev. W. A. Harrison. The following references may be useful, as some of the points here given briefly receive a more extended treatment:—The Academy, 8 March (T. Tyler), 22 March (T. Tyler), 19 April (T. Tyler), June 7 and 21 (report of Mr. Tyler's paper at the New Shakspeare Society), 5 July (Rev. W. A. Harrison), 12 July (Rev. W. A. Harrison), 19 July (T. Tyler), 26 July (W. E. A. Axon), 1884; 20 June, 1885 (T. Tyler), *Western Antiquary*, October 1886 (W. E. R. Axon); December 15, 1888 (Thomas Tyler: a reply to Gerald Massey), March 1, 1890 (Caroline Stopes), March 21, 1891 (F. J. Furnivall), March 28 (T. Tyler), April 4 (F. J. Furnivall), April 11 (T. Tyler), April 18 (F. J. Furnivall), April 25 (T. Tyler), January 9, 1892 (C. G. O. Bridgman), January 16 (T. Tyler), 1892, *Book Lore*, vol. 1, p. 186 (W. E. A. Axon). *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, the first quarto, 1609, a facsimile in photo-lithography (from the copy in the British Museum) by Charles Praetorius, photographer to the British Museum. With an introduction by Thomas Tyler, M.A., of the University of London. London: Praetorius, 1886. *The Songs, Poems, and Sonnets of William Shakespeare*. Edited, with a Critical Introduction, by William Sharp. London: Scott, 1885. See also *Athenæum*, 20 February, 1886, July 17, 1891, and *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. xix, p. 82-3, vol. xxvi., p. 228.



83in. x 49in.

MARY and ANNE FITTON by  
MARY Fitton portrayed in white satin dress,  
with white lace collar and pearl rope, wearing  
a jewelled crown.



83in. x 52in.

ANNE FITTON by  
Anne Fitton portrayed in white embroidered  
dress with white lace collar and pearl  
ornaments, holding the Fitton emblem of  
pansties in her hand.

Both portraits were exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum 1947, from the collections of Viscount Dillon and Francis Howard.

### *Mary Fitton*

old she was married in 1587 to John Newdegate or Newdigate aged sixteen, the eldest son of John Newdegate of Arbury in Warwickshire; the ceremony taking place at Stepney, London.

After the ceremony Sir Edward Fitton of Gawsworth seems to have held himself responsible for the young couple's expenses. Many years later Anne refers to her father having kept "her husband, herself, a mayde and two men for nine years," after her marriage, "of free will and without ever haveing paye allowed." She appears to have lived at home in her father's house at Gawsworth or in London during this period, whilst her young husband was probably continuing his education elsewhere.

In a letter from John Newdegate "to the Right Worshippfull Sir Edward ffytton Knight," dated November 1588, devoted entirely to money matters, he adds a postscript, "Good Sr, let me see my daughter, how I longe to see her." Anne was at this time just fourteen years old. The earliest portrait of the two sisters at Arbury was painted four years later. It is a double picture, three-quarter length, and painted on a panel. The respective ages of the sisters eighteen and fifteen are recorded on the picture. Anne, the elder, has dark hair and eyes and arched eyebrows. She has a gentle, serious expression, and is depicted full face, the shape of an oval contour, whilst her features are small and regular. She is dressed in hoop and ruff in accordance with the custom of the period.

Mary's girlish figure is less matured, her complexion fairer, and her face narrower, with a longer nose. Her lively eyes are alert and bright, indicating perhaps, already the wit and brilliancy which were among her prominent charms.

It was not until 1595 or 1596 that Anne Newdegate finally left her father's house at Gawsworth to begin her married life at Arbury. About the same time Mary Fitton received the appointment of Maid of Honour to Queen Elizabeth. Henceforth Anne's and Mary's paths in life took very different courses, but in joy and sorrow, through good and evil report, Anne clung to her sister Mary with faithful affection.

Mary Fitton was seventeen years old when she began her Court life in London. Sir Edward Fytton, in his natural anxiety for his young daughter's welfare in her new and trying position, made interest on her behalf with a personage of importance at the Court, who was now Comptroller of the Household, and later on Treasurer.

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This was an old friend of his own, Sir William Knollys, son of Sir Francis Knollys, and first cousin once removed to the Queen on her mother's side through the Careys. At this time Knollys was upwards of fifty years old, and married to Dorothy, daughter and co-heiress of Lord Bray, and widow of Edmund Brydges, Lord Chandos, who had been left her husband's sole executrix and the possessor of much wealth for her life. In his will Lord Chandos grants her this life interest "as his most faithful and loving wife, for her obedience truth and faithfull love towards him."

Though Dorothy was a valuable prize as regards her wealth, she must have been considerably older than her second husband, and there is reason to believe he chafed at the tie that prevented his marriage with a younger and fairer spouse.

Sir William's brother, Henry Knollys, had married the only daughter and heiress of Sir Ambrose Cave, a first cousin of John Newdegate's mother, Martha Cave. Sir Ambrose was the courtly knight who picked up Queen Elizabeth's garter at a Court Ball, but when he offered it to the Maiden Queen "she would have none of it," whereupon he bound it on his left arm and swore to wear it as long as he lived.

This Cave connection with both the Knollys and Newdegates is mentioned to show that Sir William, who was an old friend of Sir Edward Fitton's, had another claim to something more than a formal acquaintance with his daughter Anne through her husband's cousinship with his brother Henry's wife. Mary Fitton, being a young maiden, was probably more of a stranger to him.

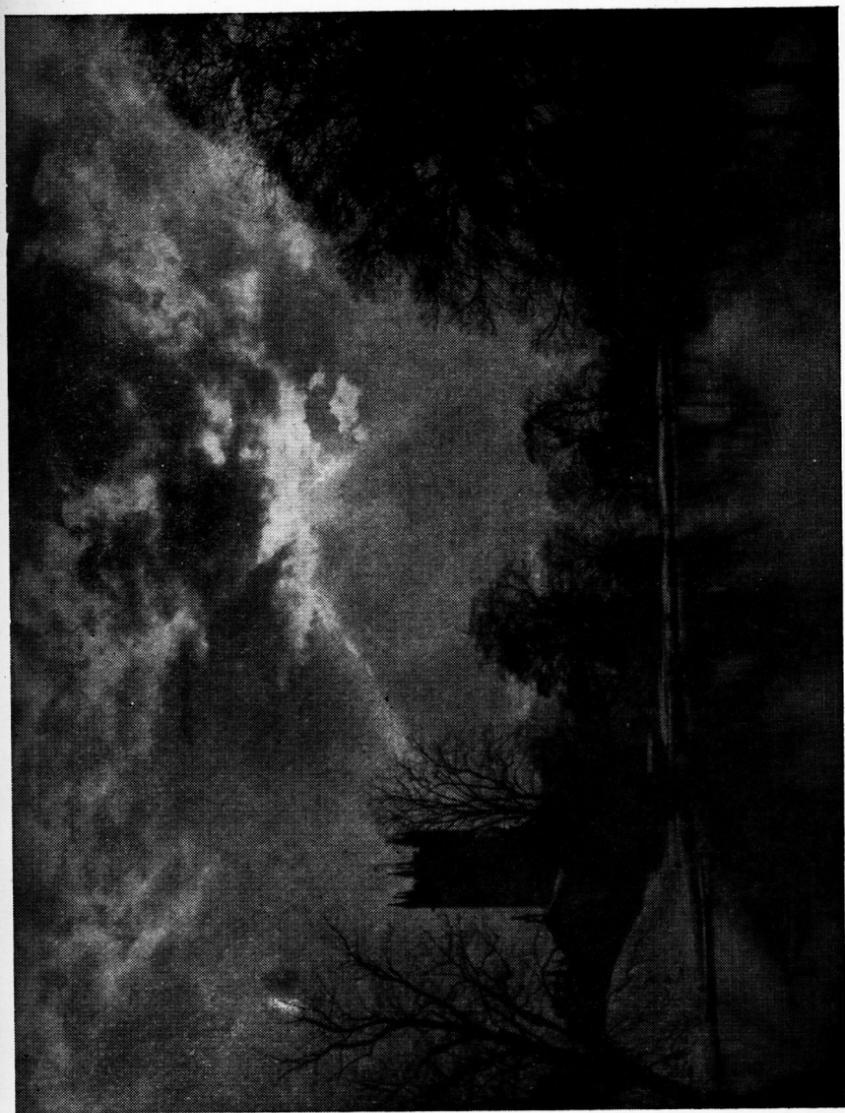
The earliest letter in the Arbury muniments from Sir William Knollys is addressed :

To my verve loyving frend Sr Edward Fytton, Knight.

Sr Edward, I am sorry your disease should so trouble you, as it deprives me of your company whilst you remain in London, but I will by no means that you trouble yourself with going abroad, but since you must undertake so great a journey, be careful to make yourself strong until you go. I wish I were at liberty to accompany you to Arbury & so to Drayton.<sup>1</sup>

I will not fail to fulfil your desire in playing the Good Shepherd & will to my power defend the innocent lamb from the wolfish cruelty & fox-like subtlety of the tame beasts of this place, which when they seem to take bread at a man's hand will bite before they bark; all

<sup>1</sup>His brother Henry Knollys' country place.



Gawsworth—Winter's Evening.

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their songs be Syren-life, and their kisses after Judas fashion, but from such beasts deliver me and my friends. I will with my counsel advise your fair daughter, with my true affection love her and with my sword defend her if need be. Her innocency will deserve it and her virtue will challenge it at my hands, and I will be as careful of her well doing as if I were her true father.

Touching yourself I will say only this, that your love to me is not requited & that whensoever any occasion shall be offered wherein I may stand you in stead. I will never fail to use my uttermost power. In the mean time with my best salutations to yourself and my Lady, wishing you both health & happiness

I remayne ever

Your assured lovyng ffrend.

W. KNOLLYS.

Thus Mary Fitton was launched on her Court life under powerful protection, but the "innocent lamb" soon turned out to be an arrant coquette, and Sir William's professions of fatherly affection rapidly grew warmer and blossomed into ardent love, which he confides in a series of letters to her sister Anne. Sometimes he veils his sentiments in the language of parable, but more often they are expressed in the frankest terms, apparently with no compunctions in regard to the existing Lady Knollys.

Anne's first child, a daughter, was born in 1598. The god-parents or "gossips" chosen for the baby were Lady Fitton, the grandmother; Anne's greatest friend, Elizabeth Lady Grey; and Sir William Knollys.

Immediately after this happy event Sir Edward Fitton writes as follows :

Good Nan, God in heaven bless thee and my daughter<sup>1</sup> and continue they health and life as my dearest friend and thereby comfort, next thy poor mother whose love and kindness to me and her children I fear will shorten her days, but she shall never want that comfort that I can afford her . . . God bless your little one and grant thee as much comfort as ever mother had of child, but I am sorry that yourself will needs nurse her . . . Thus longing sore to see thee . . . farewell this xvii of May 1598

Thy treuest friend

Ed ffytton.

<sup>1</sup> A common term for grand-daughter and god-daughter.

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And again in another letter dated the 3rd of July 1598 :

Nan Newdigate, I am to think myself much beholden to you as a father can be to a daughter. Your mother will needs send Frelan(?) and I send nobody but my own heart which ever shall be with you wheresoever my body is. I will see thee so soon as I can and that is soon as I can, and until then I will love thee, and ever remain more thine than my own.

Ed ffytton.

This latter date may have been that of the christening, for Lady Fitton writes on the same day :

My good Nan, I pray God bless you and my little daughter. I long to hear exceedingly how you both do. I had sent before this but that I hoped some other would have sent that do not . . . I have sent you a nurse's reward xll to buy you a kirtle for my daughter. I will provide somewhat when she is bigger to remember me by. I long to hear how all things about your new Charge goeth, for I persuade myself that my son Newdigate will not go back with his word. I pray God send you well to do with it. And we can do you any good let us know it and it shall be done. If you hear anything of your sister I pray let know, for I never heard from her since. God bless you and yours and send us all merry to meet. Gawsworth this third of July

Your lovyng

Mother A. ffytton.

Commend me kindly to your husband.

To my good daughter Mrs. Anne Newdygat at Erbery.

It will be observed that even so early as this year, 1598, Lady Fitton had cause for anxiety about her daughter Mary, who seems to have been on more confidential terms with her sister than with her own mother.

Anne appears to have been an especial favourite with other members of her family. Her eldest brother writes these few lines of warm affection, which indicate a tender regard—

Sweet sister, if I should paint my love in words it were very little to be respected, but I hope you know it without any ceremony, you shall see me before my going over, ever thus remaining

Absolutli yours

E. PHYTON.

Commend me to your husband.

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Francis Fitton, Anne's great-uncle, who had married the widowed Countess of Northumberland, was a constant correspondent of hers. In this year, 1598, he writes :

Mine own good niece, my earnest poor love unto you maketh me desirous to see you & especially in your own house, and your kind acceptance of my meaning is such as it bindeth me more to you for the same for which I can but rest thankful & so keep it in my breast. And as my desire to know of your abiding at home or not this winter was only that I meant to come to see you, if possibly I might . . . but if I possibly may I will see you this Christmas, if not it shall be much against my will.

Your father's house in London this xi day of November 1598.

Your owne uncle & affectionat frend to all my powere

FRANCIS FYTON.

I pray to be remembered to my cousin your husband and to my young mistress when she can understand my language

To myne especiall good neece Mrs. Newdigate at hir house at Arbery in Warwickshire.

There are portraits of Anne and Mary at Arbury painted about the year 1600. The elder sister, attired in hoop, farthingale, ruff and distended sleeves, has the gentle, serious expression of her earlier portrait. She has the same dark hair and eyes, arched eyebrows and pale complexion. By her side, on a table, stands her little daughter, encircled by the mother's arm.

Mary Fitton is in full Court dress, with high open ruff, large hoop and puffed sleeves, painted when she must have been at the height of her favour with her royal mistress. The portrait is only three-quarter length, but gives the impression of a tall slight figure. The expression, under the schooling of a Court life, is one of studied demureness, but Mary is fascinatingly beautiful, and it is easy to understand the sensation this lovely young woman created at Court.

Amongst Anne's numerous correspondents only one letter from her sister Mary is preserved with the Arbury muniments. This, written in a scrawling hand, is more than usually ill-spelt, and contains nothing of interest. It is given here because it shows the affectionate terms existing between the two sisters.

*Mary Fitton*

To my dearest syster Mrs An. Newdigate.

Since distance bares me from so great happiness as I can seldom hear from you, which when I do is so welcome as I esteem nothing more worthy, and for your love which I doubt not of shall be equalled in full measure, but lest my lines too tedious were, and time that limits all things bares me of words, which else could never cease to tell how dear you are, and with what zeal I desire your return, than can wish nothing than your heart's desire, and will ever continue

Your affectionat sister

MARY PHYTTON.

It was towards the end of the year 1601 that certain events took place at Elizabeth's Court which eventually brought about Mary's downfall and disgrace. Similarly at this period Sir William Knollys had other troubles to distract him in addition to his hapless love affair with the wayward maid of Gawsworth. He writes a hurried letter to Anne Newdegate when much disturbed by the disgrace of his nephew, the valiant but reckless Earl of Essex.<sup>1</sup>

Fair Gossip, I must crave pardon for my so long silence, not grown by a negligent forgetfulness of so good a friend, but forced by a distraction I have had concerning the Noble Earl of Essex, which hath made me careless to satisfy myself or my friends. I leave to you to imagine the discomforts I take hereof when your sister is fain to blame me for my melancholy & small respect of her, who when I am myself is the only comfort of my heart. She is now well & hath not been troubled with the mother<sup>2</sup> of a long time. I would God I might as lawfully make her a mother as you are. I would be near both at Arbury to shun the many griefs which this place affordeth & she should enjoy the company of the most loving & kind sister that ever I knew. My heart is so full of sorrow at this time for my lord of Essex being dangerously sick before his restraint, as I am scant myself. Receive therefore I pray you these ragged lines from a broken head as a remembrance of (a) most faithful friend who will ever be ready to do all good offices wherein I may stead you Thus leaving for this time abruptly with my best wishes of your best desires, I commend you to God & will ever remain

Your assured lovyng gossepp & ffrend

W. KNOLLYS.

God bless my fair daughter & kiss it I pray you kindly for me.

<sup>1</sup> Essex' mother was Lettice, daughter of Sir Francis Knollys.

<sup>2</sup> Hysterical passion; so called as being imagined peculiar to women.—(Johnson's Folio Dictionary, 1755).

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No wonder Sir William was thus disturbed about his nephew Essex. At a later date he was one of four members of the Privy Council sent to parley with him, when Essex, intoxicated by wild ambition, had assembled a crowd of his dependants with every sign of hostile intention at Essex House in the Strand. The other three were the Lord-Keeper Egerton, the Earl of Worcester, and Popham, Lord Chief Justice of England. After some parleying they retired with Essex into the house, when their graceless host bolted the doors upon them in the inner apartments, whilst he went off to see what support he might hope for from the City of London. "Thus were these four of the Privy Council confined and left in custody of a rabble, in peril of their lives." In the end they were released by Sir Ferdinando Gorges, and Essex expiated his succession of treasonable attempts with his life.

In Knollys' next letter to Anne, Mary Fitton appears to be still encouraging her elderly lover with hopes that she would be willing to wait for him until he was free to marry her.

Fair gossip, your uncle's sudden departure and my coming—by chance coming—to London when he was ready to take his journey is cause you must look for no compliments at this time, only you shall know that true affection is as well expressed in few words as in many & I assure myself your wisdom doth not measure love by lines. So as having saluted you with my best commendations & assured you that I will be ever ready to perform toward you all the good offices of a true friend: the best news I can send you is that your sister is in good health & going to the Court within 2 or 3 days, though I think she could be better pleased to be with her best sister upon some conditions. Her greatest fear is that while the grass groweth the horse may starve & she thinketh a bird in the bush is word 2 in the hand. But both she and I must have patience & that will bring peace at the last. Thus in some haste with my best salutations to your self, and my kindest blessing to my daughter I wish you your heart's desire & will remain ever

Your ffaythfull ffriend & gossepp

W. KNOLLYS.

And again :

Fair Gossip, having so convenient a messenger though my warning be but short I may not suffer him to pass by you without some salutations which in regard of the humour I am put into though they can be but meloncholy yet to one to whom I have been so much

*Mary Fitton*

beholden as your fair self I will ever be thankful and just. Methinks it is pity that 2 bodies & one mind, so firmly united as your sister's and yours, should not endure such distance of place, but that you are both bound—the one by her Majesty's service, the other by a commanding husband—& yet I that am at the next door do think myself now farther from the place I most desire than in the beginning of my journey. Such is the variety of this world & the uncertainty of this time I must live in frost and snow subject to blasts and all ill winds and shall I fear never be so happy as to possess the fair flower of the summer's garden. I hope you dwell under a better climate where the sun sometimes comforteth though the soil be subject to fogs and mists. Make a virtue of necessity and since your lot fell not to dwell in the land of promise where all things were given that were desired, work your own contentment out of your own worthiness & be ever happier than your unfortunate gossip who will ever be ready to do you respectable service remaining ever

Your affectionate friend & gossepp

W. KNOLLYS.

Anne's "unfortunate gossepp" seems to have been, when at Court, not only figuratively but literally next door to the abode of the maids of honour.

Sir Nicholas L'Estrange relates the following anecdote :

"The Lord Knollys" (as he became at James I.'s coronation) "in Queen Elizabeth's time had his lodging at Court, where some of the Ladies and Maids of Honour used to frisk and hey about in the next room, to his extreme disquiet a nights, though he often warned them of it. At last he gets one to bolt their own back door when they were all in one night at their revels, strips off (to) his shirt, and so with a pair of spectacles on his nose and Aretine in his hand comes marching in at a postern door of his own chamber, reading very gravely, full upon the faces of them. Now let the reader judge what a sad spectacle and pitiful fright these poor creatures endured for he faced them and often traversed the room in this posture above an hour."

The following events in the Court life of Mary Fitton are largely derived from Thomas Tyler's work on Shakespeare's Sonnets, and his researches into the history of this Maid of Honour in order to make good his theory that she was the Dark Lady of the Sonnets.

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It may be as well to state that the late Lady Newdegate-Newdigate, who died in 1924, frankly disbelieved the theory that Mary Fitton was the Dark Lady of Shakespeare; no doubt because in the portraits at Arbury Mary is in no respect the brunette described by Shakespeare as follows :

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,  
Coral is more red than her lips are red:  
If snow be white why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head;  
I have seen roses damask'd red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks.

And again :

Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,  
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem  
At such, who not born fair, no beauty lack,  
Slandering Creation with a false esteeme.

Mary, on the contrary, was fair, not "dun"-complexioned, her hair was brown, not "black wires," and her eyes were grey, not "raven-black."



Morris Dancers in Church Lane.

## Mary Fitton

Certainly in the year 1600 William Kempe, the Clown in Shakespeare's company, dedicated his "Nine daies wonder" to "Mistris Anne Fitton, Mayde of Honour to most sacred Mayde Royal Queen Elizabeth." The name Anne is plainly a misnomer for Mary, and shows how slight was Kempe's knowledge of the "Mayde of Honour," though doubtless he selected her as his patroness not only on account of her natural gifts,<sup>1</sup> but in order to ingratiate himself with one so high in favour with Queen Elizabeth.

The book gives an account of a journey which Kempe had performed morris-dancing from London to Norwich.

In his dedication Kempe says :

To shew my duty to your honourable self, whose favours (among other bountiful friends) make me (despite this sad world) judge my heart Cork and my heels feathers, so that methinks I could fly to Rome (at least hop to Rome as the old Proverb is) with a Mortar on my head. But in a word, your poor servant offers the truth of his progress and profit to your honourable view; receive it I beseech you, such as it is, rude and plain; for I know your pure judgment looks as soon to see beauty in a Blackamoor, or hear smooth speech from a Stammerer, as to find any thing but blunt mirth in a Morris dancer, especially such a one as Will Kemp, that hath spent his life in mad Jigs and Merry jests.

To quote further from Thomas Tyler :

It was in June of this same year (1600) that there was a remarkable

<sup>1</sup> A writer in *Literature* of Nov. 4th, 1897, gives an interesting sonnet addressed to "Mistress Mary Fitten," by the author of a quaint and rare volume printed in 1599, and entitled: "A Woman's Woorth Defended against all the Men in the World, proving them to be more perfect, excellent, and absolute in all virtuous Actions than any Man of what qualitie soever. Written by one that hath heard much, seene much, but knows a great deal more." The lines are as follows:

This testimonie of my true hart's zeale,  
Faire and (for ever honord) vertuous maide;  
To your kind favor humbly dooth appeale  
That in construction nothing be mis-saide.  
Those fierie spirits of high tempered wit,  
That drink the dew of Heaven continually:  
They could have graced you with termes more fit,  
Then can my lowlie, poore, weake ingenie.  
Let not my love (yet) flightly passe respect,  
Devoted onely to your excellence:  
Winke woorthy Virgin at my lines defect,  
Let will extenuate what ere offence.  
It is no bountie that is given from store,  
Who gives his hart, what gifts can he give more?

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festivity at Blackfriars. William Herbert<sup>1</sup> was present, as was also a lady with whom we shall be still further concerned in the sequel. The occasion of this festivity was the marriage of Lord Herbert (Son of the Earl of Worcester) with a lady of the Court, Mrs. Anne Russell. The Queen herself was there; and having come to Blackfriars by water, she was carried from the water side in a lectica borne by six knights. The bride was conducted to church by the nobleman with whom we are now more particularly concerned, William Herbert (son of Lord Pembroke), and Lord Cobham. The Queen supped and passed the night at Lord Cobham's.

Rowland Whyte, in a letter to Sir Robert Sidney, dated 14th June 1600,<sup>2</sup> says :

There is to be a memorable masque of eight ladies.

They have a strange dance newly invented; their attire is this : each hath a skirt of cloth of silver, a rich waistcoat wrought with silks & gold & silver, a mantle of carnation taffeta cast under the arm, and their hair loose about their shoulders curiously knotted and interlaced. These are the Masquers : My Lady Dorothy (Hastings), Mrs Fitton, Mrs. Carey, Mrs Onslow, Mrs Southwell, Mrs Bess Russell, Mrs Darcy and my Lady Blanche Somerset. These eight dance to the music Apollo brings, & there is a fine speech that makes mention of a ninth, much to her Honor & Praise.

And again, in another letter written shortly afterwards,<sup>3</sup> he says :

After supper the masque came in as I writ in my last; and delicate it was to see 8 ladies so prettily and richly attired Mrs Fitton led, & after they had done all their own ceremonies, these 8 lady masquers chose 8 ladies more to dance the measures. Mrs Fitton went to the Queen & wooed her to dance; her Majesty asked what she was; "Affection," she said. "Affection!" said the Queen; "Affection is false." Yet her Majesty rose and danced; so did my Lady Marquess (of Winchester).

In the next January William Herbert became Earl of Pembroke on the death of his father. The goings on at the Court at this time seem to have been notorious :

One Mrs Martin who dwelt at the Chopping Knife near Ludgate

The W.H. of the Sonnets?

<sup>2</sup> "Sidney Papers," ii. 201.

<sup>3</sup> "Sidney Papers," ii. 203.

*Mary Fitton*

told me that she had seen priests marry gentlewomen at the Court, in that time when that Mrs Fitton was in great favour, and one of her Majesty's maids of honour, and during the time that the Earl of Pembroke favoured her she would put off her head tire and tuck up her clothes and take a large white cloak and march as though she had been a man to meet the said Earl out of the Court.<sup>1</sup>

It must have been about this time that Sir William Knollys writes to Anne in evident distress about Mary's conduct :

Honorable gossip so much have I been ever beholder. to you in your true respectable good opinion of me as I should greatly blame myself & be thought unworthy if I should suffer your letters to return unanswered, not having other means to manifest how much I account myself indebted to you for many kindnesses, especially in your well wishing to me in a matter which most imported me, which I think will be clean extinguished, though I leave nothing on my part to be done for the continuance thereof. But since I know this discourse will nothing please you, let me assure you that no friend you have shall be more ready to do all the offices of a true friend than myself wishing the party I spoke of before so worthy & fair a mind as my gossip hath. But since wishes can not prevail I will hope the best & pray that God will rectify if anything be amiss, accounting myself the unfortunate man alike to find that which I had laid up in my heart to be my comfort should become my greatest discomfort. But why do I trouble you with these things, let me live in your good opinion & I will ever deserve it, & thus wishing you all contentment & your heart's desire I will ever remain

Your ffaythfull ffriend

W. KNOLLYS.

Mary Fitton seems to have been launched on a mad career that could only end in disgrace. In a letter of January 26th of this year (1601) from Sir John Stanhope to Sir G. Carew occurs this paragraph :

Of the persecution (which) is like to befall the poor maid's chamber in Court, and of Fitton's afflictions, and lastly her commitment to my Lady Hawkyne, of the discouragement thereby of the rest, though it be now out of your element to think of, yet I doubt not but that some

<sup>1</sup> "State Papers," Dom. Add. vol. xxxiv. of "Cal. State Papers," Dom. Add. 1580-1625, p. 411, where the name is erroneously given as "Lytton."

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friend doth more particularly advertise you.<sup>1</sup>

Next month, on February 5th, in the postscript of a letter written from the Court by Sir Robert Cecil to Sir George Carew it is recorded :

We have no news but that there is a misfortune befallen Mistress Fitton, for she is proved with child, and the Earl of Pembroke being examined confesseth a fact but utterly renounceth all marriage. I fear they will both dwell in the Tower awhile, for the Queen hath vowed to send them thither.<sup>2</sup>

Then we come to a letter (in the Record Office) from Tobie Matthew to Dudley Carleton on March 25th, which contains the following passage :

The Earl of Pembroke is committed to the Fleet; his cause is delivered of a boy who is dead.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Mary Fitton's short but brilliant career at Court came to an untimely end in dire disgrace. The Maid of Honour especially favoured by the Queen and adored by the Comptroller of the Household only seems to have escaped imprisonment in the Tower by "commitment to my Lady Hawkyngs" for her confinement.

It is not surprising that her parents were greatly distressed at this shameful catastrophe, though they still apparently hoped that Pembroke could be induced to marry their daughter.

Sir Edward Fitton writes to Anne from London soon afterwards :

Sweet Nan, I am very sorry that you are not well and so is your good Gossip also (Sir Wm. Knollys?) who hath him commended to you heartily. I pray you let hear from you as I do. I am in some hope of your Sister's enlargement shortly, but what will be the end with the Earl I cannot tell. So soon as (I) can you shall hear. I have delivered your letter to my Lady Derby<sup>4</sup> and so praying you if this bearer cannot otherwise do, that you help to hire him a horse to Lichfield to my host at the George: and so with my very hearty commendations I bid you farewell this xxiith of April 1601.

Yr loving father & friende

Ed FFYTTON.

<sup>1</sup> "Cal. Carew MSS.," 1601-1603, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> "Cal. State Papers," Dom. 1601-1603.

<sup>4</sup> Second wife of Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper.

*Mary Fitton*

Good Nan make sure that this bearer have a horse to Lichfield if not to Cheshire.

Lady Fitton adds a few lines on the same sheet :

My own good Nan this letter must serve for us both. Beware how you take physick. Let me hear how you do. When we hear any good news you shall hear from me. God bless you and yours.

Your lovyng carfull mother

A. FFYTTON.

There is a letter from Sir Edward Fitton to Sir R. Cecil in Lord Salisbury's collection on this matter. It is dated May 16, 1601, and shows that some pressure had been exercised to induce Lord Pembroke to consent to a marriage, but without effect :

I can say nothing of the Earl, but my daughter is confident in her chance before God and wisheth my Lord and she might but meet before in different scenes. But for myself I expect no good from him that in all this time hath not shewed any kindness. I count my daughter as good a gentlewoman as my Lord is though the dignity of honour (be greater only in him) which hath beguiled her I fear, except my lord's honesty be the greater "vertuoes."

This letter is written from Stanner, where Sir Edward was obliged to stop on his road to Cheshire, his daughter being with him, and too weak to travel farther. Thus he had obtained her "enlargement" from my Lady Hawkyns' keeping, and was carrying her homewards, but apparently in secrecy.

Francis Fitton writes to his great-niece, Anne Newdegate, eight days later, on the 24th May 1601 :

Mine own sweet niece, I thank you much for your last of the 14th of this instant (lately by me received) and so likewise for many other before, because I honor you and love you as any the dearest friends you have. I suppose your father by his stolen journey into Cheshire (unknown to me) hath acquainted you with something concerning your sister's estate. How true I know not for I find halting with me and their courses for her. God grant all be for the best but for ought I know & can see I see nothing better nor cause of better hope than before & I wish all things for her good so well as you desire which is all I can do, and so good niece farewell ten thousand times. ffrom my

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lodginge the signe of the Black Boye, a Chandler's house neare the weste end of the Savoye in the Strand this 24th of Maye 1601.

Your lovinge uncle & assured

Poor frind,

FRANCIS FYTTON.

I pray you remember me very kindly to your good husband and do long to see you both.

The next letter from Sir William Knollys must have been written after Mary had left the Court and gone to her faithful sister Anne. In spite of all that had occurred, the infatuated man seems still a victim to her charms :

Fair Gossip, sweet & pleasant was the blossom of my love, so comfortable & cordial to my heart as I had therein placed all my delight, I must confess the harvest was overlong expected yet had I left nothing undone in manuring the same but that it might have brought forth both wholesome & pleasing fruit. But the man of sin (Pembroke?) having in the night sowed tares amongst the good corn both the true husbandman was beguiled and the good ground abused. How much more unhappy am I who though with all the care & industry I can use to bring this soil to her former goodness, yet is it impossible for me to prevail & God knows I would refuse no penance to redeem what is lost. I write not this to grieve her whom I have so much love nor your good self, for there can be no greater punishment to me than to be a cause of either your sadness to whom I wish so well without comparison. I know your sister is apt to be melancholy & you can apprehend her grief more deeply than I wish. But you are not alone, neither of you be so often remembered with sad thoughts as I am for that which I can not remedy & yet can never cease to grieve at. Be you yet a comforter & I will not be wanting to add anything lying in my power to increase both your contentments, & if you were nearer that sometime I might play a part, I would not doubt but to pacify though not thoroughly to purge that humour of melancholy. Thus leaving you both to God's protection with my best salutations & blessing to my pretty daughter I remain  
ever

Your assured ffrend

W. KNOLLYS.

Let me be I pray you kindly remembered to Mr. Newdigate and the more if he will come dwell at Brackenbury.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>John Newdigate's property in Middlesex.

*Mary Fitton*

There are only two more of Sir William's letter to be given. The next refers to the proposed marriage of his niece Letitia Knollys, the daughter and co-heiress of Henry Knollys and Margaret Cave, the latter being first cousin to John Newdegate's mother, Martha Cave :

Fair gossip, having occasion to send this bearer to Drayton I should fail in good manners & might justly be accounted ungrateful if with some few lines I did not yield you my best thanks for your many kindnesses which I will ever be ready to requite to the uttermost of my power. Whether yet you be delivered or not of your pretty burden I know not but in both I wish you as much joy & comfort as your self can desire. I pray you tell Mr. Newdigate that Her Majesty understanding of the match between Mr. Paget and my niece doth so well like thereof as she doth not only commend him but all those which wrought a deliverance of my Niece from her bondage & it were too long to write how exceedingly she alloweth of the match. But he shall not need to speak too much hereof until my Nephew Paget hath been here and is disposed to publish it. Whether your sister be with you or no I know not, but if she be, add something to your love of her for my sake who would desire nothing more of God than that she were as capable of my love as I have ever meant it, & what will become of it God only knoweth. Let it suffice that my first love shall ever bind me to love her, yourself and all that love her, & thus praying God to send you health & happiness I remain ever

Your trulye affectionate gossepp

W. KNOLLYS.

Burn my letters if you please.

Now follows Sir William Knollys' last letter, preserved within the Arbury muniments and it is given here, although the date is in advance of the period under review. It could not have been written until after July 1603, as it is addressed "To my very loyving ffriend & gossepp my La: Newdigate," and John Newdegate was not knighted until the above date :

Fair & worthy Gossip, your father being the messenger I may not but answer both your lines with this simple pen & your kindness with whatsoever a true honest heart may afford, desirous still to cherish

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all the branches of that root into the which my unchangeable love was so firmly engrafted. What it was your self & the world did know, but what is in my heart only is sensible of, yet may I boldly say no earthly creature is Mistress of my Love, nor is like to be, as not willing to trust a woman with that which was so truly given & so undeservedly rejected. Where to find it I know not, unless it be either hidden in myself or laid up by some who suffer it to rust in some out room of their careless thoughts. But were I not tied to a white staff in court & had liberty I would like a knight adventurer never rest until I found better entertainment for so good a guest. But what spirit guides my pen, or whither do I wander? You may guess at my meaning, she is not far from you that may decipher this riddle & I may boldly say that Mary did not choose the better part, yet let he I pray you know that no man can wish her more happiness & contentment than I do which I will be ready to manifest upon any offered occasion & though her commendations to me in your last letter were very ordinary let me be remembered to you both in the best manner I can as one who can not separate his thoughts from the remembrance of former bands. No more at this time, but wishing you & my godson<sup>1</sup> health & happiness I remain ever

Your ffaythffull ffrend & gossepp

W. KNOLLYS.

Excuse me I pray you for not writing to your unkind sister whose so long silence maketh me think she hath forgotten me & herself, I having deserved more than a few lines, but I am pleased since she will have it so.

In spite of this last touching appeal, Mary does not seem to have been inclined to respond to her old friend's protestations of affection.

Consequently, when, in 1605, Dorothy, Lady Knollys, died, and Lord Knollys (as he was created at the coronation of James I.) became released from the ties he had borne so impatiently, it was not Mary Fitton who succeeded to the vacant place.

Two months after Lady Knollys' decease her husband married Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of Thomas, Earl of Suffolk—she being nineteen and her bridegroom sixty-one.

It only remains to be told that in 1614 Lord Knollys was appointed Master of the Wards and created a Knight of the Garter. Two years

<sup>1</sup>Probably Anne's second son, Richard, born in 1602.

*Mary Fitton*

later, in 1616, he was created Viscount Wallingford, and in 1626 advanced to the Earldom of Banbury. He died in 1632 at the advanced age of 88.

Following briefly the course of Anne Newdegate's life at Arbury, she bore her husband five children, the youngest, Anne, being born in 1607. In 1603 her husband was knighted. A few years later Sir John Newdegate apparently had fallen into "a deep meloncholy," and on 28th March 1610 he died at his home, being buried at Harefield on the 12th day of the following month.

During Anne's widowhood Francis Beaumont of Bedworth, Near Coventry, wished to marry her. His many letters preserved at Arbury indicate that he was a scholar and gentleman. Despite Beaumont's pressure Anne resisted his suit. In a letter written to Lord Salisbury shortly after her husband's death she concluded :

"But since so many devils go in shapes of men that my judgment can not know the one for the other; God deliver me for ever being tied to any of them! For if I look for an honest man or a true friend, I must say as one of the Roman Emperors did, I must go to the graves for them, for they are all dead and buried."

It is pleasing to record that in spite of many advocates for a second marriage, Anne continued to "live maister of herself" and remained Anne Newdigate to the end.

Following Mary Fitton's disgrace and dismissal from Court, she appears to have spent a good deal of time with her sister Anne at Arbury. It seems probable that, so long as Sir Edward Fitton lived, Mary was outwardly decorous. He was evidently warmly attached to both his daughters, and Anne at any rate fully returned his affection. However, Sir Edward died early in 1616, a few months after the death of the old friend of the family Sir Richard Leveson, and it will be seen from two letters written by Lady Fitton later that same year and early in 1607, that her daughter Mary was again in deep disgrace.

The following letter from Alice Lady Fitton, written shortly after her husband's death, is the most tragic in the whole Arbury collection. It is addressed "to my best and dearest daughter the Ladie Newdygat at Erburie":

"My own sweet Nan, I pray God to bless you and all yours. I am sorry for the death of good Sir Fulke Greville, your good friend and

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mine; your loss is great as can be of a friend, he was a very old man, it was marvel he lived so long; no doubt but your husband and you shall find his son a very honourable gentleman, and one that will be glad of your friendships . . . Your brother doth enter into physic to-morrow for the pain in his nose. God send it well, Mr. Neithsmyth doth doubt but cure him afore Christmas, if please God. I take no joy to hear of your sister nor of that boy. If it had pleased God when I did bear her, that she and I had been buried it had saved me from a great deal of sorrow and grief, and her from shame and such shame as never had Cheshire woman, worse now than ever. Write no more to me of her. Thank my pretty Jack for his token. I will wear it for his sake, and send him another before it be long. Commend me to Moll, Dick and little pretty Letti. God Bless them all. Let me be kindly remembered to your husband. Praying God to send us all well to meet I end, and will ever remain to you A kynde mother

A. FFYTON.

I would wish you to send to your sister this enclosed to see. I have left them unsealed, you may read them and seal them. Good Nan fail not, It standeth much."

What must she not have suffered to write thus about her erring daughter! Stern as she is in the first part, her mother's heart relents in the postscript, whilst Anne, as ever, seems tender and charitable towards her sister's frailty.

Notice should be taken of "the boy" referred to in this letter in connection with Mary's disgrace. In the following year 1607, Mary married a certain William Polewhele, about whom there seems to have been different opinions in the family. She is known to have had a son by him, and possibly this was the boy born before her marriage. This son was living in September 1609, the date of William Polewhele's will, and a daughter was born subsequently who appears to have eventually married John Gatacre, of Gatacre in Shropshire.

Lady Fitton's next letter gives her opinion of her new son-in-law and must have been written in 1607, soon after the date of the marriage :

"My own sweet Nan I pray God to bless you and all yours. I writ to you the last week that Mr. Moer was a mean for the delivery of your husband's letter to my Lord Chancellor, who gave it to his Secretary and commanded him that Chamberlain should answer it,

*Mary Fitton*

which I did not well like. Your brother came hither upon Wednesday to see me, and was to go upon Friday back. I showed him your letter and caused him to go to Sir John Egerton, hoping he would have done him favour in this or any other. What Dick<sup>1</sup> hath written I know not, but this he told me was his answer, that Sir John Newdigate were best to come and answer it himself. It should seem some other had affirmed it; he would not do your brother that kindness as to send for the information given against your husband that he might see it, but fell into railing against you for speaking against the marriage of your sister to Polewhele; it was out of your humour and that he was worthy her. My Lady Frances<sup>2</sup> said she was the vilest woman under the sun. To conclude they did use Dick so unkindly as he hath no great heartburning to go there since Christmas. I had the kindest messages from them that could be and that they would come see me. But Polewhele is a very "kave" (knave?) and taketh the disgrace of his wife and all her friends to make the world think him worthy of her and that she deserved no better. It is long to write all I know, I would wish your husband to come hither. Give it out I have sent for him. Let him not doubt but to find as good friends as Chamberlain. I shall have lodging for him. He shall fare as I do. Thus praying God to defend us from our enemies and bless us I end, remaining ever

Your poure, kynde, greved

Mother A. ffytton.

Pray your husband think no unkindness I did not write to him.

If there had not been some previous scandal between Mary Fitton and Polewhele, why should her mother thus rail against the marriage? Anne too seems to have disapproved of her new brother-in-law. Probably it was not an alliance worthy of a Fitton, but under the circumstances one would imagine it ought to have been welcomed, though in silence. Be that as it may, when once Mary Fitton became Mary Polewhele, her family seem to have accepted the situation, whilst her great-uncle, Francis Fitton, even goes so far as to express his approval of her husband as a relative. In his will, dated 31st March 1608, he makes a special bequest of his "usual ridinge sword beinge damasked comonlie called a fawshion" to his "nephewe Mr. William Pollwheele whoe married with

<sup>1</sup> Anne's second brother, Richard Fitton.

<sup>2</sup> Lady Frances Stanley, daughter of Ferdinando, Earl of Derby, and wife of Sir John Egerton, afterwards Earl of Bridgewater.

### *The Manor of Gawsworth*

my neice Mistress Marie Fitton," and also bequeathed to him "the best horse etc. etc. as a remembrance and token of my love to him and to my said cozen, his now wife etc."

Mary Fitton's marriage to William Polewhele only lasted until 1610 when she was left a widow with one son and one daughter.

In William Polewhele's will, dated 19th September 1609, and proved 23rd June 1610, he is described as "of Perton, co. Stafford." His executors are his wife, Mary Polewhele, Sir Walter Leveson, Kt., of Ashmores, and Sir Richard Titchborne, Kt., of Titchborne. The contents of the will are a devise of lands to his wife Mary until their son attains the age of twenty-one; then to his son William Polewhele; a devise of the parsonage of Brownsover als Rugby, co. Warwick, one third to his wife, one third to his son William, and one third "to such child as my wife is now with child of", or failing such child to his son William. The residuary legatee is his wife Mary.

The child expected at the date of this will was a daughter, Mary, who afterwards married John Gatacre of Gatacre. Thus Mary Polewhele found herself again independent, though as a widow with two children.

Turning now to the closing years of the lovely Fitton sisters, Anne Lady Newdegate died in 1618 in the prime of life, being only forty-three years of age, leaving five children to lament the loss of a mother at a critical period of their young lives, the eldest being just twenty and the youngest only eleven years old.

In accordance with the directions in her will, she was taken to Harefield to be buried. If she had died at Gawsworth, her desire was to have been laid at rest in the home of her youth; but as she passed away at Arbury, her remains were laid to rest beside her husband in the old family burial place of Harefield, Middlesex.

Anne's effigy<sup>1</sup> on the sculptured monument to her husband's memory erected in her lifetime is not a flattering representation of her, and bears little resemblance to her portraits at Arbury, of which there are four. The latest of these must have been executed about four years before her death. It is a full-length portrait, where she is depicted standing by a table with a fan in her hand. In spite of her large hoop, she looks slight in figure, and her countenance is pale and wan. Her gown is of black velvet with a ruff closed at the throat, and the red embroidery of

<sup>1</sup> This memorial, and the other interesting monuments of the Newdegate family, have recently been restored. (1955).

*Mary Fitton*

her high-heeled shoes gives the only touch of colour to her dress.

Anne Newdegate's will, a copy of which, entirely in her own handwriting, is at Arbury, is dated in 1610, the year of her widowhood. Much of the first part is copied from her husband's will, to which she was left sole executrix.

She begins, as was customary at that time, with a profession of her faith :

In the name of the father and of the son and of the holy ghost Amen. I dame Anne Newdigate, late wife of Sir John Newdigate, Knight, being in health of body and in perfect and good memory thanks be to my merciful God for the same, at the making of this my last Will and Testament which I ordain, etc. etc.

First I bequeath my soul into the hand of God my maker & creator and to Jesus Christ my blessed Saviour and Redeemer, and to the Holy Ghost my blessed sanctifier . . .

And I bequeath my body to the earth from whence it came, desiring either to be buried in Harefield church by my husband, Sir John Newdigate or in Gawsorth Church by my dear father Sir Edward Fitton without any extraordinary cost, but in a comely manner as is fit, with some small memory of me, as my name, and my husband's and father's Arms together in some window set. I desire to be buried at Harefield, unless it should please God I shall die at Gawsorth since it is God's will that I should outlive my husband Sir John Newdigate, and he making me his executrix, leaving me in trust with his Children, and all that ever he had in the world, I hereby charge my Executors, as they answer before God at the general day of Judgement, that whatsoever shall be left unperformed of his my husband's Will at my death, that it be truly and faithfully performed.

Item, I give to my son John Newdigate all chattells, goods, plate, household stuff, stocks of cattle, quick or dead, that I shall have at the time of my death remaining unbequeathed, my Will being first performed, the remainder to my son John :

Lady Newdegate then wills certain portions to her daughters and to her second son, who inherits some land as well, and continues :

And whereas out of my dear love to my eldest son, and for the better upbuilding of his house, I have hereby wholly given and disposed the profit of his wardship and marriage to those uses the sooner to free

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his lands in Middlesex etc. . . yet he shall pay each of his sisters Thirty Pounds apiece yearly until they are married or their portions are paid to them . . . And I earnestly desire and charge William Whitall as he was left in trust by his Master, my husband Sir John Newdigate and now by me that my boys may be brought up in good learning and both they and my daughters to be bred up in virtuous and godly life in our Catholick and Protestant Religion, to the understanding of God's holy Will and ways revealed in his great compassion and mercy unto us by his divine Gospel, and in the true faith of Jesus Christ our only Saviour, Redeemer and Mediator, whom I beseech in his abundant mercy make them all five of his chosen elect. And when my boys are of fitting learning and years that they may go to the Universities and Inns of Court. And I charge William Whitall that my eldest son be not married before he be Sixteen years old at the least, and not then nor ever against his own Will and good liking by any interest challenged over him by my right . . .

Ann then divides her "gowns, petticoats, jewells" and other valuables among her five children. She bequeaths to Richard the bedstead "with the yellow velvet canopy and taffeta quilt which my uncle Francis Fitton gave me."

To her daughter "Marie" she leaves "my Lady Graye's picture", and to Lettice "my tablet with my sister picture in it."

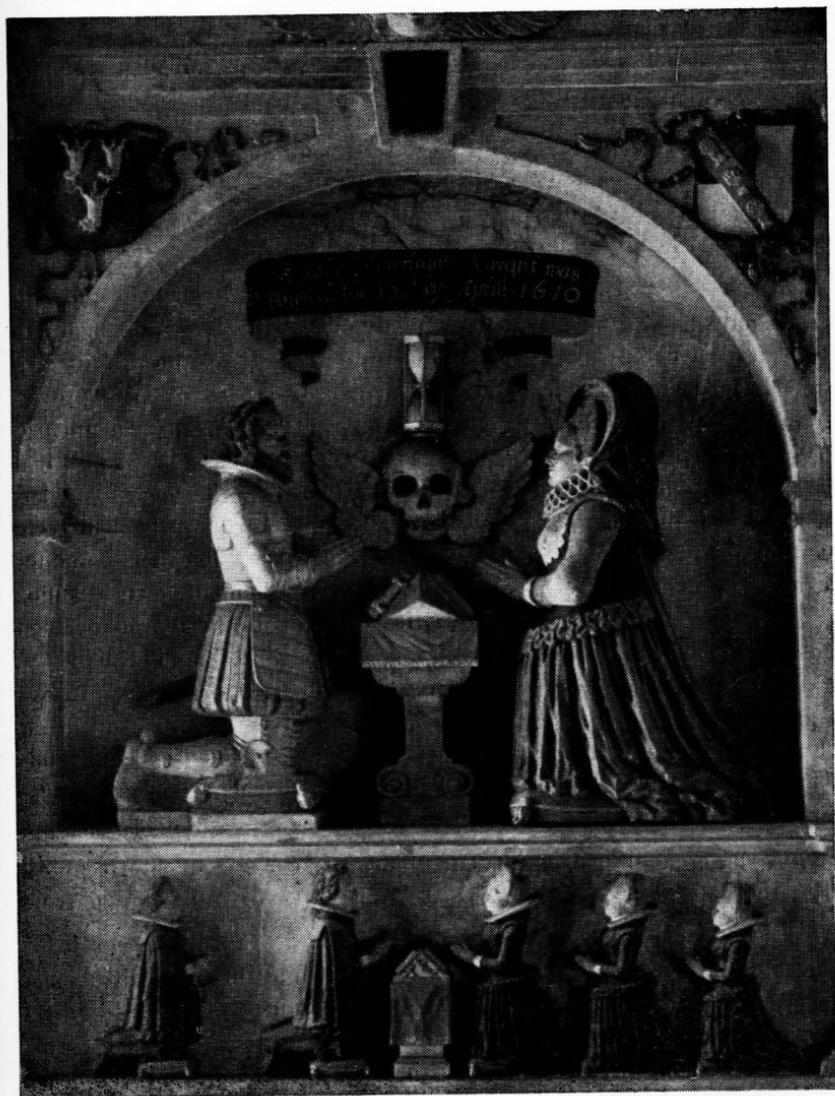
Item I give unto my dear Mother the Lady Fitton my scollop shell Ring with the diamond in, which my father gave me.

Item my will and desire is to have a few plain gold Rings made of ten or twelve shillings price with a pansy being my father's Crest, engraven on the outside and two letters for my name enamelled with black on either side the pansy and an inscription within to be in latin, these words following: Death is the begininge of life; and to be delivered unto so many of my friends as a memory of my love as I here nominate.

Amongst those here mentioned is Anne's sister, Mary Polewhele, the date of this portion of her will being shortly after William Polewhele's death and before her marriage to John Lougher or "Captain" Lougher as Sir Peter Leicester calls him.

The last part was added in 1615, when she goes on :

I now make and ordain my honorable kinsman Sir Francis Englefield Knight Baronet, William Whitall and William Henshawe my two



Memorial to Anne Fitton (1574/1618) in the Arbury Chapel, Harefield Church, Middlesex. She married Sir John Newdegate of Arbury Hall, Warwickshire (1571/1610).

### *The Manor of Gawsworth*

servants, my three Executors. I did (not) nominate Sir Francis till I had spoken with him, who hath promised me to take care of my Children . . .

In witness that this is my Will and Deed I set my hand the four and twentieth of October in the year of Our Lord 1615.

ANNE NEWDIGATE.

Nothing more is known of the last days of Anne, Lady Newdegate. Her mother and her sister may have been with her at the end, for they both survived her by many years.

As regards Mary, following the death of William Polewhele in 1610, her second husband was Captain John Lougher. Left a widow again in 1636, she took out letters of administration to her second husband's estate. Mary Fitton's will is dated December 19, 1640, and was proved in the Prerogative Court of the Archbishop of Canterbury on July 5, 1647: it was proved a second time, before the Probate Court established by Cromwell, on September 22, 1653. She signs her will Mary Lougher, the widow of John Lougher. The executors appointed by the will were her son by her first marriage, William Polewhele, and her daughter Elizabeth Lougher, but probate was granted to William Polewhele alone, as "surviving executor." She bequeaths the lease of Perton to her son William Polewhele; the lease of Rinkeston or Rinteston and Kilkelly, in Pembrokeshire, to her daughter Elizabeth Lougher. She makes bequests to her "little grandchild Ann Gattachree" to her son-in-law John Gattachree, his wife and three children. She mentions her son-in-law, Robert Chernnock, and gives directions for her burial at Gouls-worth (Gawsworth), co. Chester.

Thus she apparently continued to flourish like a green bay-tree until 1647, the date of her death, when she must have been sixty-nine years old.

In bidding farewell to Mary Fitton, with all the difficulties that obscure her career, we cannot but hope and believe that the beautiful maid of honour, frail though she undoubtedly was, had qualities of heart and soul to enable her to benefit by the love and example of her faithful sister. Although there is no record of her death in the Gawsworth Registers, the directions contained in her will suggest Mary was interred in her native village church.

The story of Anne and Mary has been most lovingly told by Lady Anne Emily Newdigate-Newdegate, widow of Lieutenant General Sir

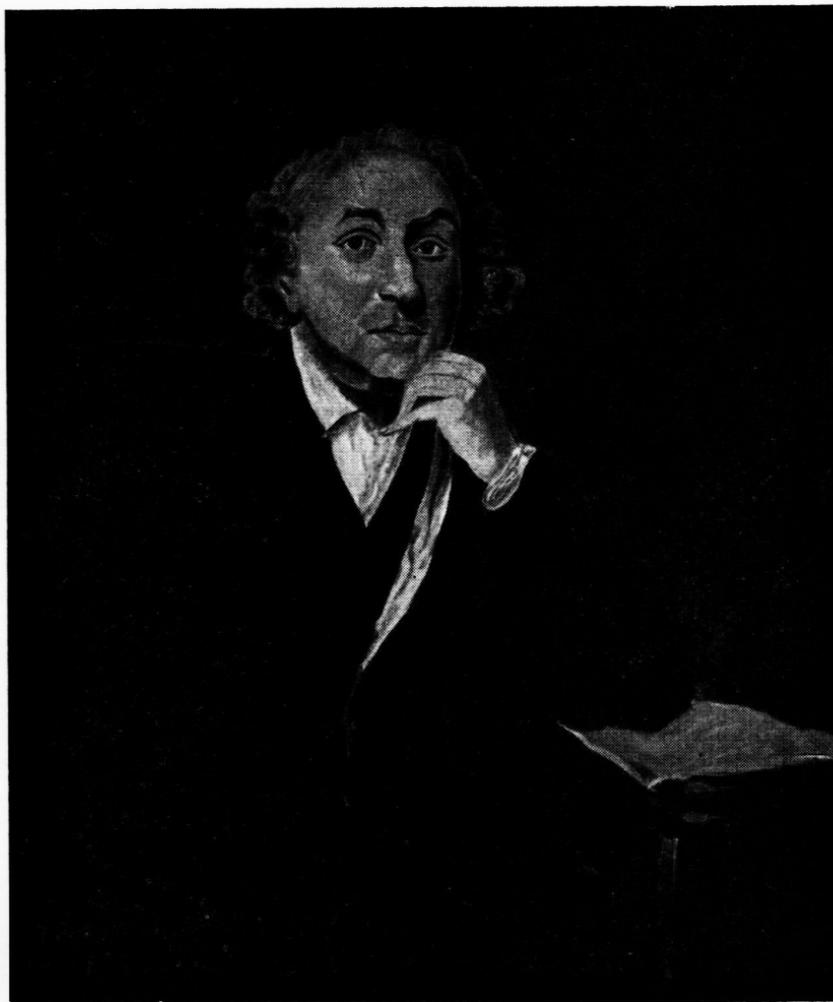
### *Mary Fitton*

Edward Newdigate-Newdegate, K.C.B, who was formerly Governor of Bermuda and died in 1902. Lady Newdigate was born in May 14, 1837, and died, December 1924 leaving no issue. She lies buried with her husband at Astley church, near Nuneaton.

The books, papers and articles published about Mary Fitton are legion. Some are reliable, others without any documentary authority whatsoever. A recent publication, "The First Night of Twelfth Night" by Leslie Hotson, presents Mary Fitton, in a new light, and is a welcome addition to the Dark Lady of the sonnets saga.



The Avenue, 1890.



Samual Johnson, b. 1691, d. 1773, known as "Maggoty" Johnson and "Lord Flame."  
From the self portrait in the possession of the author.