











**ELIZABETH**



**ELIZABETH'S**

**CAMPAIGN**

**BY**

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LADY ROSE'S DAUGHTER, MISSING, ETC.



**FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR BY**

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TO THE DEAR AND GALLANT  
MEMORY  
OF

T. S. A.

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## **FOREWORD**

This book was finished in April 1918, and represents the mood of a supremely critical moment in the war.

M. A. W.



## ELIZABETH'S CAMPAIGN

### CHAPTER I

'Remember, Slater, if I am detained, that I am expecting the two gentlemen from the War Agricultural Committee at six, and Captain Mills of the Red Cross is coming to dine and sleep. Ask Lady Chicksands to look after him in case I am late—and put those Tribunal papers in order for me, by the way. I really must go properly into that Quaker man's case—horrid nuisance! I hope to be back in a couple of hours, but I can't be sure. Hullo, Beryl! I thought you were out.'

The speaker, Sir Henry Chicksands, already mounted on his cob outside his own front door, turned from his secretary, to whom he had been giving these directions, to see his only daughter hurrying through the inner hall with the evident intention of catching her father before he rode off.

She ran down the steps, but instead of speaking at once she began to stroke and pat his horse's neck, as though doubtful how to put what she had to say.

'Well, Beryl, what's the matter?' said her father impatiently. The girl, who was slender and delicate in build, raised her face to his.

'Are you—are you really going to Mannering, father?'

'I am—worse luck!'

'You'll handle him gently, won't you?' There was anxiety in the girl's voice. 'But of course you will—I know you will.'

Chicksands shrugged his shoulders.

'I shall do my best. But you know as well as I do that he's a queer customer when it comes to anything connected with the war.'

The girl looked behind her to make sure that the old butler of the house had retired discreetly out of earshot.

'But he can't quarrel with *you*, father!'

'I hope not—for your sake.'

'Must you really tackle him?'

'Well, I thought I was the person to do it. It's quite certain nobody else could make anything of it.'

Privately Beryl disagreed, but she made no comment.

'Aubrey seems to be pretty worried,' she said, in a depressed tone, as she turned away.

'I don't wonder. He should have brought up his father better. Well, good-bye, dear. Don't bother too much.'

She waved her hand to him as he made off, and stood watching him from the steps—a gentle, attaching figure, her fair hair and the pale oval of her face standing out against the panelled hall behind her.

Her father went his way down a long winding hill beyond his own grounds, along a country road lined with magnificent oaks, through a village where his practised eye noted several bad cottages with disapproval, till presently he slackened his horse's pace, as he passed an ill-looking farm about half a mile beyond the village.

'Not a decent gate in the whole place!' he said to himself with disgust. 'And the farm buildings only fit for a bonfire. High time indeed that we made Mannering sit up!'

He paused also to look over the neighbouring hedge at some fields literally choked with weeds.

'And as for Gregson—lazy, drunken fellow! Why didn't he set some village women on? Just see what they've done on my place! Hullo, here he is! Now I'm in for it!' For he saw a slouching man coming rapidly towards him from the farmyard, with the evident intention of waylaying him. The man's shabby, untidy dress and blotched complexion did not escape Sir Henry's quick eye. 'Seems to have been making a night of it,' was his inward comment.

'Good-day, Sir Henry,' said the farmer, laying a hand on Chick-sands' bridle, 'I wanted a word with you, sir. I give you fair warning, you and your Committee, you'll not turn me out without a

fight! I was never given no proper notice—and there are plenty as 'll stand by me.'

The voice was thick and angry, and the hand shook. Sir Henry drew his horse away, and the man's hold dropped.

'Of course you had every notice,' said Sir Henry drily.

'I hadn't,' the man persisted. 'If the letters as they talk of were sent, I never saw 'em. And when the Committee came I was out—on business. Can't a man be out on his lawful business, Sir Henry, instead of dancin' attendance on men as know no better than he? The way this Government is doing things—you might as well live under the Czar of Russia as in this country. It's no country this for free men now, Sir Henry.'

'The Czar of Russia has come to grief, my man, for the same reason that you have,' said Sir Henry, gathering up the reins, 'for shirking his duty. All very well before the war, but now we can't afford this kind of thing.'

'And so you've told the Squire to turn me out?' said the man fiercely, his hands on his sides.

'You've had no notice from Mr. Mannering yet?'

'Not a word.'

'But you've heard from the Inspection Committee?'

The man nodded.

'But it's not they as can turn me out, if the Squire don't agree.'

There was a note of surly defiance in his voice.

'I don't know about that,' said Sir Henry, whose horse was getting restive. 'My advice to you, Gregson, is to take it quietly, pull yourself together, and get some other work. There's plenty going nowadays.'

'Thank you for nothing, Sir Henry. I've got plenty to advise me—people as I set more store by. I've got a wife and children, sir, and I shan't give in without a fuss—you may be sure of that. Good-day to you.'

Sir Henry nodded to him and rode off.

'He'll go, of course,' reflected the rider. 'Our powers are quite enough. But if I can't get Mannering to send the notice, it'll be a deal more trouble. Hullo, here's some one else! This is another pair of boots!'

He had scarcely turned the corner beyond the farm when another man came running down the sloping field, calling to him. Sir Henry pulled up his horse again. But his aspect had changed, and his voice took another note.

'Did you want to speak to me, Adam? A nice day, isn't it?'

'I saw you, Sir Henry, from the top of the field, talking to Gregson in the road, and I thought perhaps you'd let me have a few words with you. You know, sir, this is awfully hard lines.'

Sir Henry looked impatient, but the man who had spoken to him was a fine specimen of young manhood—broad-shouldered, clear-eyed, with a natural dignity of manner, not at all a person to be brushed aside.

'I'm sure you can't defend Gregson, Adam,' said Sir Henry, 'you—one of the best farmers in the district! I wish they had put you on the Inspection Committee.'

'Well, they didn't,' said the other, perhaps with a slight emphasis. 'And there's many of us feel, I can assure you, as I do. Gregson's a poor creature, but he hasn't had quite fair play, Sir Henry—that's what we feel. And he's been fifteen years on his place.' The man spoke hesitatingly, but strongly. There was a queer, suppressed hostility in his pleasant blue eyes.

'Fifteen years too long,' interrupted Sir Henry. 'I tell you, Adam, we can't afford now to let men like Gregson spoil good land while the country's likely to go hungry! The old happy-go-lucky days are done with. I wonder whether even you recognize that we're fighting for our lives?'

'I know we are, Sir Henry. But if the war makes slaves of us what good will it do if we do win it?'

Sir Henry laughed. 'Well, Adam, you were always a Radical and I was always a Conservative. And I don't like being managed any more than you do. But look at the way I'm managed in my busi-

ness!—harried up and down by a parcel of young fellows from the Ministry that often seem to me fools! But we've all got to come in. And this country's worth it!

'You know I'm with you there, sir. But why don't you get at the Squire himself? What good have he or his agent ever been to anybody? You're a landlord worth living under; but—'

'Ah! don't be in too great a hurry, Adam, and you'll see what you will see!' And with a pleasant salute, his handsome face twitching between frowns and smiles, Sir Henry rode on. 'What trade unionists we all are—high and low! That man's as good a farmer as Gregson's a vile one. But he stands by his like, as I stand by mine.'

Then his thoughts took a different turn. He was entering a park, evidently of wide extent, and finely wooded. The road through it had long fallen out of repair, and was largely grass-grown. A few sheep were pasturing on it, and a few estate cottages showed here and there. Sir Henry looked about him with quick eyes. He understood that the Inspection Sub-Committee, constituted under the Corn Production Act, and on the look-out for grass-land to put under the plough, had recommended the ploughing up of all this further end of Mannering Park. It carried very few sheep under its present management; and the herd of Jersey cattle that used to graze it had long since died out. As for the game, it had almost gone—before the war. No use, either for business or play!

Then—on this early autumn day of 1917—Sir Henry fell to musing on the vast changes coming over England in consequence of the war. 'Who would ever have believed that we—*we* should put ourselves to school as we have done? Military service, rations, food-prices, all our businesses "controlled," and now our land looked after! How much of it has come to stay? Well, it won't affect me much! Ah! is that the Rector?'

For a hundred yards ahead of him he perceived a clerical figure, spare and tall, in a wideawake hat, swinging towards him. The September sun was westering, and behind the approaching man lay broad stretches of wood, just showing here and there the first bronze and purple signs of autumn.

The Rector, recognizing the solitary rider, waved his hand in welcome, and Sir Henry pulled up. The two men, who were evidently personal friends, exchanged greetings.

'You're going to the Hall, Sir Henry?' said the Rector.

Sir Henry described his business.

The Rector shook his head reflectively.

'You haven't announced yourself, I hope?'

'No, I took that simple precaution. I suppose he's already pretty savage?'

'With whom? The Committee? Yes, you won't find him easy to deal with. But just at present there's a distraction. His new secretary arrived some weeks ago, and he now spends his whole time, from morning till night, dictating to her and showing her his things.'

'Secretary? A woman? Good heavens! Who is she?'

'A great swell, I understand. Oxford First Class in Mods, Second in Greats. I've only just seen her. A striking-looking person.'

'Why isn't she in France, or doing munition work?' growled Sir Henry.

'I don't know. I suppose she has her reasons. She seems patriotic enough. But I've only exchanged a few words with her, at a very hurried luncheon, at which, by the way, there was a great deal too much to eat. She and Pamela disappeared directly afterwards.'

'Oh, so Pamela's at home? What's the name of the new woman? I suppose she's to chaperon Pamela?'

'I shouldn't wonder. Her name is Miss Bremerton.'

'Beryl declares that Pamela is going to be a beauty—and clever besides. She used to be a jolly child. But then they go to school and grow up quite different. I've hardly seen her for a year and a half.'

'Well, you'll judge for yourself. Good luck to you! I don't envy you your job.'

'Good Lord, no! But you see I'm Chairman of this blessed show, and they all fixed on me to bell the cat. We want a hundred acres of the Park, a new agent, notices for three farmers, etcetera!'

The Rector whistled. 'I shall wait, on tiptoe, to see what happens! What are your powers?'

'Oh, tremendous!'

'So you have him? Well, good-day.'

And the Rector was passing on. But Sir Henry stooped over his horse's neck—'As you know, perhaps, it would be very inconvenient to my poor little Beryl if Mannering were to make a quarrel of it with me.'

'Ah, I gathered that she and Aubrey were engaged,' said the Rector cordially. 'Best congratulations! Has the Squire behaved well?'

'Moderately. He declares he has no money to give them.'

'And yet he spent eighteen hundred pounds last week at that Christie sale!' said the Rector with a laugh. 'And now I suppose the new secretary will add fuel to the flame. I saw Pamela for a minute alone, and she said Miss Bremerton was "just as much gone on Greek things as father," and they were like a pair of lunatics when the new vases came down.'

'Oh, blow the secretary!' said Sir Henry with exasperation. 'And meanwhile his daughters can't get a penny out of him for any war purpose whatever! Well, I must go on.'

They parted, and Sir Henry put his cob into a sharp trot which soon brought him in sight of a distant building—low and irregular—surrounded by trees, and by the wide undulating slopes of the park.

'Dreadfully ugly place,' he said to himself, as the house grew plainer; 'rebuilt at the worst time, by a man with no more taste than a broomstick. Still, he was the sixteenth owner, from father to son. That's something.'

And he fell to thinking, with that half-ironic depreciation which he allowed to himself, and would have stood from no one else, of his own brand-new Georgian house, built from the plans of a famous American architect, ten years before the war, out of the profits of an abnormally successful year, and furnished in what he believed to be faultless taste by the best professional decorator he could find.

'Yet compared to a Mannering, what do I mean to the people here? You scarcely begin to take root in this blessed country under half a century. Mannering is exceedingly unpopular; the people think him a selfish idler; but if he chose he could whistle them back with a hundredth part of the trouble it would take me! And if Aubrey wanted to go into Parliament, he'd probably have his pick of the county divisions. Curious fellow, Aubrey! I wonder exactly what Beryl sees in him?'

His daughter's prospects were not indeed very clear to a mind that liked everything cut and dried. Aubrey Mannering was the Squire's eldest son; but the Squire was not rich, and had been for years past wasting his money on Greek antiquities, which seemed to his neighbours, including Sir Henry Chicksands, a very dubious investment. If Aubrey should want to sell, who was going to buy such things at high prices after the war? No doubt prices at Christie's—for good stuff—had been keeping up very well. That was because of war profits. People were throwing money about now. But when the war industries came to an end? and the national bills had to be paid?

'The only thing that can't go down is land,' thought Sir Henry, with the cheerful consciousness of a man who had steadily year by year increased what had originally been a very modest property to something like a large estate.

Mannering had plenty of that commodity. But how far had he dipped the estate? It must be heavily mortgaged. By decent management anybody, no doubt, might still bring it round. 'But Aubrey's not the man. And since he joined up at the beginning of the war the Squire won't let him have a voice in anything. And now Desmond—by George, the twins are nineteen this month!—Desmond'll be off directly. And then his father will be madder than ever.'

By this time the ugly house was near at hand, and the thick woods which surrounded it had closed about the horse and rider.

'Splendid timber,' thought Sir Henry, as he rode through it, measuring it with a commercial eye, 'but all past its prime, and abominably neglected.... Hullo! that looks like Pamela, and the new woman—the secretary!'