1

Before 1699

Roots: 'there is no Nobler descent'

Mary Pierrepont, the future Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, sprang from two families lavishly endowed with rank, wealth, and power, as well as with ability and achievement. (During her lifetime, a period of rapid economic change, the nation's 400 or so families of this rank did very well for themselves.) The title of this chapter is a claim which Lady Mary made, with relish, when relating her life as fiction.[1] Although her father held no title at the time of her birth, he was the brother of two earls (one dead, one living); her mother was the sister of another. Her family tree was an intricate web of earldoms, baronies, and dukedoms both English and Irish. Printed records of these multifarious bloodlines are all arranged so as to identify and highlight the patrilinear succession: in her case the Pierreponts, whose proud claim it was to have arrived with William the Conqueror.[2] Biologically, of course, the patrilinear element in anyone's heritage steadily diminishes as the line is traced back, from one-half and then one-quarter, to a genetically negligible one thirty-second, one sixty-fourth, and so on. But Norman blood in the paternal line is Norman blood in the best place.

During the thirteenth century the Pierreponts became great landowners in Nottinghamshire. Henry Pierrepont, who married a daughter of the famous Bess of Hardwick, had a mansion at Thoresby by 1589. From this base the men of the family continued to accumulate land, peerages, and honours, using marriage as the vital strategy in their programme of acquisition.[3] They commanded cavalry regiments, served as Lords Lieutenant of their county, and collected and carefully bequeathed books and manuscripts. So

[1] 'Autobiographical romance: fragment', *E&P* 77; Burnett 1969: 141.

[2] Family and genealogical information comes, unless otherwise specified, from GEC, *DNB*, Henning 1983, Sedgwick 1970, and Namier and Brooke 1964.

[3] Higginbottom 1987: 54; Brackenbury 1992: *passim*; Staves 1990: 200.

did the men of Mary Pierrepont's mother's family, the Feildings, and the men of other immediately ancestral families. However broadly or narrowly her family is defined, it is rich in privilege and in talents. In each successive generation, male Pierreponts made marriages which gobbled up the distinguished surnames borne by their brides, incorporating into their heritage the genes, possessions, and honours of those families.

Evelyn Pierrepont, Mary's father, became in turn a member of parliament, an earl, marquess, and duke. He was an Ll.D. of his old university (Cambridge), Knight of the Garter, a Privy Councillor, Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Lord Privy Seal, and one of the Regents of the kingdom during the monarch's absences. It was an impressive career, but not untypical of his family. In marrying Lady Mary Feilding, daughter of the third Earl of Denbigh, he made an alliance of connections and not without wealth. The Feildings had produced several remarkable individuals, though none yet to rank with the future novelists Henry and Sarah Fielding.[4] Evelyn Pierrepont may never have received the £6,000 dowry which his bride's brother was meant to supply (her father being dead); but in its place her stepmother, the Dowager Lady Denbigh, who had brought her up, produced £1,000 as a 'voluntary guift'.[5]

If Evelyn Pierrepont saw money as a marital priority, that was part of his inheritance. His father, Robert, had married (at the behest of 'Wise Parents' on both sides)[6] Elizabeth Evelyn, heiress of West Dean in Wiltshire; and *his* father, 'Wise' William Pierrepont of Thoresby, had married Elizabeth Harries, heiress of Tong Castle in Shropshire; and *his* father Robert Pierrepont, first Earl of Kingston, had married, at seventeen or eighteen, Gertrude Talbot, heiress of the seventh Earl of Shrewsbury.

Thus in four successive generations marriage settlements conveyed into the Pierrepont family the estates once owned by the fathers of heiresses, and multiplied blood-ties to other channels of rank and power. Each generation of Pierreponts, too, included some who did not marry: who, as uncles and aunts, left wills conveying their property back to the family's central stem. Mary Pierrepont's great-great-uncle Gervase Pierrepont, who died in 1679, earmarked in his will £10,000 with which his brothers were to get the family a dukedom.[7] Perhaps, however, 'Old Gervase' underestimated the price: it was not until 1715 that Mary's father was created Duke of Kingston, immediately after inheriting the estate of another childless Gervase, her great-uncle. The extant Pierrepont papers graphically illustrate the way a great

[4] Henry said he was the first of the family who could spell (*Westminster Review*, 1837: 27. 134).

[5] Marriage settlement 23 June 1687 (H MS 377; copy BL Eg. MS 3526. 6).

[6] Robert Pierrepont's memorial in West Dean church.

[7] BL Eg. MS 3517. 97–8.

family fed off its individual members, up to and including its head: how 'Heir urges heir, like wave impelling wave.'[8]

As an adult, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu professed high-minded unconcern with her family's vast estates and opulent possessions. She often took an acerbic tone about the codes of conduct subscribed to by noblemen: those of her father and those of his heir, her nephew.[9] But she took pride in other aspects of her heritage. Her forebears' intellectual gifts, for instance (and those of her husband's forebears, too), marked out her grandchildren to excel. In this context she cited the reputation of her great-grandfather William Pierrepont, who was nicknamed 'Wise',[10] and also the sharp and lively understanding of the grandmother who was hers by marriage, not by biology.

The family had produced other intellectuals as well. Wise William's brother the second Earl of Kingston delighted in hard study from his youth, qualified in both law and medicine, outraged the class feelings of his fellow peers by practising both professions even after he came into the title, and left to the College of Physicians a library valued at £4,000. Another great-great-uncle of Lady Mary, the second Earl of Denbigh, was credited by the historian Lord Clarendon with great abilities and political perception. (From Clarendon's viewpoint, but not from Lady Mary's, he exercised them on the wrong side.) Her grandfather Robert Pierrepont was (according to his memorial in West Dean church) 'LEARNED, much beyond the Gentlemen of This Age, in Languages and Arts, cheifly Mathamatical'. Her uncle the fourth Earl became patron before he was out of his teens to the satirist John Oldham.[11] Because great families married their offspring young, these preceding generations were not long gone.

For Lady Mary her forebears' politics were as inspiring as their abilities. In old age she boasted her education in the principles of 'old Whiggism', a creed which had schooled her to defend to the death a point of principle. This creed, she said, was already obsolete when she learned it, extinct in practice if not in theory among her father's Kit-Kat associates.[12] *His* Whiggism, she implies, was the decadence of *her* older, more heroic tradition. It was old Whiggism which had impelled men on both sides of her family to

[8] These transactions uncannily prefigure the uncles in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, 1748–9. Cf. Staves 1990; Pope, *Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace*, 1737: 253.

[9] *E&P* 77; *CL* ii. 65.

[10] The historian Lucy Hutchinson, William's contemporary, judged him one of parliament's 'wisest counsellors and most excellent speakers' (*CL* iii. 20, 27; Hutchinson, quoted in GEC).

[11] Clarendon 1888: viii. 245; Oldham 1987: xxxiv. For Robert Pierrepont's monument see p. 10–11, 12.

[12] *CL* iii. 277; CB MS fo. 8v. Her granddaughter Lady Louisa Stuart called her 'Whig to the teeth—Whigissima' (Stuart 1901: i. 86). Swift was a self-styled 'old Whig', but so was many an aristocratic radical.

oppose their king in the English civil war. Clarendon's Earl of Denbigh had fought against his own father at the battle of Edgehill. Wise William and his younger brother also sided with the parliament, against their elder brother. (Legend said their father, the first Earl of Kingston, vowed to remain unaligned, broke his vow in joining the royalists, and was struck down by God's vengeance in the form of a stray cannon-ball.)

Wise William was a lifelong moderate and mediator: a peace-party leader in 1642–3, an Anglican parliamentarian resisting the Scottish Presbyterian model, later a moderate Cromwellian. He withdrew from public life at the Restoration (which he had opposed) to exercise a behind-the-scenes conciliating influence, with only partial success. This stoic, under-rewarded greatness was just the thing to appeal to his great-granddaughter.

Many of these forefather tales must have been common family lore, passed on to the young Pierreponts after their mother's premature death by the women around them: their Pierrepont grandmother and aunt, and their old nurse from the Feilding family. The doings of foremothers were probably related too. Though they were ineligible to direct regiments or councils, they had not been behindhand in achievements or assertiveness. Though the wives among them owned no property, many wrote out their confidently phrased wills in their own flowing hands (unlike the men, who employed legal copyists). They also served as executrix for other family wills. They had strong political views. It was her Whiggism that made grandmother Elizabeth Pierrepont her father's sole heiress, for Sir John Evelyn (a Presbyterian till the Restoration, when he conformed to the established church) cut off his other daughter with 'Five Shillings for her Legacy' for marrying a Tory.[13]

Several of Lady Mary's female forebears sound like proto-feminists. Lady Elizabeth Pierrepont (not the grandmother but an unmarried great-great-aunt) wrote to a clergyman to question the unequal retirement ages for men and women (sixty and fifty respectively) from the duty of observing the fasts of the Church. (The answer she received made a polite show of reluctance to rehearse the 'Infirmities proper to that Sex', but stoutly asserted that to be past child-bearing was, for a woman, to enter old age.)[14] Mistress Anna Weamys dedicated her *Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, 1651, to Lady Anne and Lady Grace Pierrepont, daughters of the lawyer-doctor-earl: by their command, she said. Though she called herself simply 'a young Gentlewoman', the bouquet of prefatory verses to her book called her a

[13] BL Eg. MS 3517 (wills of Lady Elizabeth and Lady Grace Pierrepont).

[14] Edward Turner to Lady Elizabeth Pierrepont, 28 Feb. 1673 [1674?] (Bod. MS Tanner 461. 45).

virago, a brave Amazon, and an inspired Minerva. F. Vaughan declaimed, 'Lay by your Needles Ladies, take the Pen, | The onely difference 'twixt you and men | . . . Since all Souls equal are, let all be heard.' Presumably these sentiments were expected to appeal to the Pierrepont dedicatees.[15]

More convincing as Amazon or virago was Lady Mary's perhaps most famous ancestor of all: the redoubtable Bess of Hardwick, who was her great-great-great-great-grandmother. (Perhaps at this level of society it would be more uncommon *not* to have Bess as an ancestor.)[16] Lady Mary makes no mention of her (nor of Weamys's *Arcadia* sequel, which had a second edition the year after her birth), but she must have known of the relationship. The Pierrepont estates in Nottinghamshire lay close to the area of Bess's mansion- and empire-building, and the dynasties founded by Bess had supplied several advantageous later intermarriages.

Mary Pierrepont was born, in April or May 1689, to a fairly peripheral position in all this worldly splendour. Her father's eldest brother, the 3rd Earl, had died seven years before, at not much more than twenty-one.[17] His second brother, the 4th Earl, in his twenties and recently married, had just ambitiously extended and adorned the family seat at Thoresby, Notts., and looked set fair to retain the earldom for his still awaited progeny. Mary's father had no need to repine at being a youngest son. Christened with his mother's family name, he was designated by his grandfather Evelyn's will as heir to the Evelyn estates—if he proved 'an Obedient and Dutifull Son' to his widowed mother. He duly married at her behest, aged twenty, the orphaned Lady Mary Feilding.[18] Mary, their firstborn, must have disappointed them by not being a boy, though not so much as the two sisters who followed. She was born not at any family seat but in London, where she was christened at St Paul's church, Covent Garden, on 26 May 1689. It was a propitious moment for Whiggism: William and Mary had recently been crowned.[19]

Of the earliest influences on this child, very little can be known. Practices in childbirth and infant care were undergoing one of their frequent

[15] Weamys 1994: xxii–xxiii.

[16] See Durant 1977. All her children were Cavendishes, by the second of her four husbands. Her eldest daughter, Frances, married Henry Pierrepont; their son became 1st Earl of Kingston.

[17] Her father, then aged 15, had written on his mother's behalf (she being still too grief-stricken to do so) to thank Dr Martin Lister of York for his unavailing care (18 July 1682, Bod. MS Lister 3. 204–5).

[18] The *DNB* and GEC call her about 19 at her marriage; the licence calls her about 22 (BL Eg. MS 3517. 62–3; fac. 27 June 1687; John Evelyn 1955: iv. 551).

[19] In old age MWM made a note about a classical author who 'reckons the first advantage being born in a celebrated City' (CB 9). Her parents must have been in lodgings or at some relative's house, of which there were several nearby. The coronation was 11 Apr.

revolutions, so the range of what *may* have happened to her is wide. As to childbirth, the old exclusively female occasion, managed by a midwife, was gradually giving way to something more professionalized, medicalized, and costly. Mothers-to-be had by tradition chosen half a dozen close friends and relations as gossips, or supporters with whom to shut themselves up. This they did literally: air and daylight were carefully excluded during the birth itself and the early stages of the month's lying-in. Household management devolved on someone else; husbands yielded authority to the occupying women; new mothers spent up to a fortnight in bed, and two more weeks confined indoors.[20]

Mothers seldom gave birth in bed, but sitting or kneeling, or even standing up. The midwife would at the Pierreponts' socio-economic level be a person of some standing; she might have received extensive practical training from an older midwife, who was often her mother. She would be skilled in recognizing the successive stages of labour, and entirely capable as long as the birth went normally. Occasionally, in cases of difficulty, she might call in a man whose professional title was surgeon; in real emergency he had little to offer except perhaps to save the mother by sacrificing the child.[21]

It was already fashionable to employ a male midwife, who (as supporters of the new way were never tired of reiterating) was the preferred choice of most mothers who could afford him. Men had studied anatomy both in Latin textbooks and in dissecting rooms; they alone were permitted to use the advanced technology of the forceps. For reasons of modesty they had to keep a sheet between themselves and their patients (making contact with hands but not with eyes). Because of the inevitable sheet as well as the possible forceps, they preferred women to lie prone while giving birth. The forceps undoubtedly saved some lives, of both mothers and babies, and undoubtedly killed others who might have been saved by patience and manual skill. Today the real advance represented by the new methods looks somewhat insecure. But Mary Pierrepont, born to upper-class parents in London, may well have been born new-style.[22]

New ideas were spreading, too, about how to treat the newborn infant. Till recently upper- and even middle-class babies had been starved *and* purged for several days before being handed over to a wet-nurse. Now 'godly' women of those classes were turning to the use of their own breasts. Pundits across a broad spectrum (John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canter-

[20] Wilson 1990*b*: 68, 71–3, 86; Wilson 1995: 25 ff. [21] Wilson 1995: 50–3.

[22] Hugh Chamberlain, of the famous midwife family, was now doing well in London—as was his son, also Hugh, when she bore her own children (Wilson 1995: 55–6).

bury, Samuel Clarke the 'advanced' churchman, John Locke the philosopher, and Richard Allestree the popular conduct-book writer) were at one in arguing just at this date that mothers ought to suckle their children, and that reluctance to do so could only spring from feminine vanity. Since nursing mothers were barred from sexual intercourse, however, their perceived maternal duty might conflict with marital duty, and their husbands might well prefer the old tradition of wet-nursing. This tradition meant frequent pregnancies, for breast-feeding usually though not invariably has a contraceptive effect. Since Lady Mary Pierrepont, née Feilding, had four babies in three years and five months, she is very unlikely to have been breast-feeding.

Probably, therefore, young Mary was wet-nursed, and so she missed out on colostrum, the rich and protective secretions which a woman's breasts produce immediately after giving birth. Her wet-nurse would have been well into lactation. Infants 'at nurse' were usually boarded, sometimes for years, in the home of artisan or cottager foster-parents, away from the unhealthy environment of London.[23] In that case any bond formed with the biological mother would be far from a primal one, and whatever primal bond was formed would be broken without leaving any conscious trace. It is quite probable that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's earliest, inaccessible layers of memory concerned some cottage either in the London suburbs or in the Wiltshire or Hampshire environs of West Dean. The mother whom she lost as a little girl may not have been at that time the most important person in her life; the loss may have been significant chiefly as a loss of future care and guidance.[24]

Lady Mary's father was a rake who begot numerous 'illegitimate progeny'. His own associates saw him much as she did: 'a very fine Gentleman, of good Sense, well bred, and a Lover of the Ladies.'[25] When she read Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, she found in the picture of Sir Charles's parents 'what I have heard of my Mother and seen of my Father'. This is a clue not only to her feelings about her father but also to the imagined mother in her mind. The novel presents a noblewoman who marries, for love, 'one of the handsomest men of his time', someone 'whom every-body admires'. His 'great notion of magnificence in living' soon exhausts his fortune and hers. When he has 'shew'd her every-where' he loses interest in his wife; she lives to feel that she was wrong to choose him. Her goodness is 'founded in principle': she is economical but also generous, obedient but never tame or servile. She loved her husband; she forgives him; but she implicitly judges

[23] See Fildes 1990: 81–5, 156–62 *passim*.
[24] This is how MWM's autobiography-as-romance sees it (*E&P* 77).
[25] Macky 1733 (written 1705): 75; *E&P* 10.

him. She does not subscribe to his 'riveted' notion, 'which is common to men of antient families, that daughters are but incumbrances, and that the son is to be everything'. She dies a heroic as well as a holy death: '*I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith.*'[26] Long before Richardson wrote, this was the kind of mother Lady Mary longed for. Whether or not as a three year old she was devastated by her loss, as a growing girl she felt it acutely.

This child avoided about a one-in-five chance of dying in her first year, and about a one-in-three chance of dying before she was five.[27] While her intimate life remains invisible, noteworthy events befell her family. When she was sixteen months old, on 17 September 1690, her remaining paternal uncle died.[28] Her parents became Earl and Countess of Kingston; she became Lady Mary; there was probably already a baby sister to become Lady Frances. The parents must have begun to spend much of their time at the Thoresby estate, with or without the children. Lady Evelyn, the third girl, was born on 6 September 1691, and William, Viscount Newark, the son and heir, on 21 October 1692. A month or so later the young mother died.[29] The children passed into the care of their grandmother Elizabeth Pierrepont, née Evelyn, of West Dean. She was seconded by her daughter, Gertrude, Lady Cheyne, who had a house in Chelsea near London, estates in Buckinghamshire, and no children of her own.[30]

Dean, as the family called it, was a spacious Jacobean manor house which had not been renovated and improved as Thoresby had. Lady Mary's life there between the ages of three and nine left no later trace, she said, on her memory. When she saw it again eleven years after leaving it, she did not think much of it. 'Here is nothing to be lik'd . . . every thing in [the] same Mode and fashion as [the] Days of King Arthur and the knights of the round table.' As a child, with her sisters and little brother, she would not care for mode or fashion, but would enjoy the elm grove, the Dutch gardens, parterres, terraces, straight-sided canals, and yew hedges.[31]

26 *CL* iii. 90, *Richardson* 1972: vol. ii, letter xi, 310–13, 315.

27 Porter 1982: 27.

28 Suddenly, it seems: till three weeks earlier he had been involved in the surveillance and arrest of local Catholics in connection with a threat of French invasion (BL Eg. MS 3516. 68, 70, 74).

29 PR 538, Diocesan Record Office, Notts. County Council. Narcissus Luttrell said on 8 Dec. that she was 'lately dead' (1857: ii. 636). The two youngest children were baptized at St Anne's, Soho, at two and three weeks old.

30 Her husband, William, Viscount Cheyne, was son and nephew respectively of the writers Lady Jane and Lady Elizabeth Cavendish.

31 *SL* 26;Olivier 1951: 254–5. In 1726 the 85 books there (some 'old Imperfect Ones', one printed in 1591) were valued at only £6 (Manvers MS 4883).

The house is gone now, except for its stable block. It stood between its park, parish church, and the village which bestrides the Wilts.–Hants border. The whole lies on the track of a Roman road, in a muddy east-west valley. Dean Hill to the south, and other surrounding hills, are outposts of the great chalk sweep of Wiltshire.

Lady Mary later emblematized the view from these hills. About a year after her return to Dean as a young adult she recalled how, 'when I took the air upon the Downs at 4 year old', she imagined that 'Salisbury Steeple', a few miles off, was running away from her efforts to reach it. It is surely the same experience which in 1757 became 'the childish desire of catching the setting Sun, which I can remember running very hard to do: a fine Thing truly if it could be caught, but experience soon shews it to be impossible'. The childhood reminiscences in her writings are all moralized in this manner, charged with a Lockean sense that the child is mother to all that is universally human in the woman. At twelve, she says, she despised tarts and cheese cakes 'as being too childish for one capable of more solid Pleasures'; at twenty she felt the same way about reading novels.[32]

There are, however, not many even of these generalized reminiscences. The question 'Was she happy at West Dean?' can be approached only with somewhat flimsy speculation. Washing (either of the children or their clothes) was probably minimal, though only a generation later a French traveller was to report in tones of surprise, 'English women and men are very clean; not a day passes by without their washing their hands, arms, faces, necks and throats in cold water, and that in winter as well as in summer.'[33] The children's clothes were tight, formal, and easy to spoil. Discipline would have been strict. Their play was probably gender specific, as Lady Mary later imagined that of her own grandchildren to be: the girls busy with 'babies' (dolls), their brother riding the poker as if it were a horse. If Bernard Mandeville can be believed, Lady Mary was probably introduced very early to female propriety: daily nagged at 'scarce three Years old . . . to hide her Leg' on pain of serious rebuke; fully conscious by six that to let it be seen was shameful.[34]

The children's 'Governess' had been their mother's 'Nurse'. She was probably therefore the Mrs Dupont to whom grandmother Pierrepont left £20 as a legacy for looking after them. Two under-nurses helped her; Mrs Pierrepont supervised them all.[35] Lady Mary generally depicts nurses as

[32] *CL* i. 112; iii. 132; ii. 484.

[33] Porter 1982: 33, 239 (quoting Cesar de Saussure).

[34] *CL* iii. 134; Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 1714, Remark C, ed. John Phillip Harth, 1970, 105, 103.

[35] The will gave the under-nurses £5 each: half the other servants' legacy. For today's pounds, multiply by at least 60 (Burney 1988: 951–2).

foolish and benighted, notably the tattling peasant nurse in her satirical tale 'Princess Docile'. This also presents a deplorable governess: 'Prudish, sanctimonious, and stupid beyond belief'. As a young adult Lady Mary sounded quite tolerant of her own governess: 'thô perfectly good and pious', she lacked 'a capacity for so great a Trust'. Later her opinion hardened: though she thought the governess was what a didactic novelist would call exemplary, she judged her influence to have been entirely baneful. It included taking 'so much pains from my Infancy to fill my Head with superstitious Tales and false notions, it was none of her Fault I am not at this day afraid of Witches and Hobgoblins, or turn'd Methodist'. Lady Mary also wrote angrily of 'the silly Prejudices of my Education [that] taught me to beleive I was to treat no body as an Inferior, and that poverty was a degree of Merit'.[36]

Elizabeth Pierrepont made her will on 2 August 1698. She left legacies to her other grandchildren but none to the nine-year-old Mary. This omission, however, may reflect not displeasure but some grand family plan. The youngest girl, christened Evelyn like her father, was marked out in the will as the Evelyn family heiress, receiving a handsome £12,000 and destined (in the event of her grandmother's death) to pass into the care of her aunt Lady Cheyne, not her father. The will decreed that aunt Cheyne should keep Evelyn with her; if Evelyn died she was left free whether or not to replace her with either Mary or Frances. Mrs Pierrepont left Frances £1,000, 'desiring her Father . . . not to give her the Less'.[37] If Evelyn died unmarried, however, *her* opulent share was to be divided equally between her sisters, and Frances's extra portion withdrawn. Money for each girl would only be forthcoming if she married with proper consent. Mrs Pierrepont left 'all my Jewells to whoever is Heir to the Family', never to be 'sold or parted with to any but the Heir'. This sounds like a context for rigid propriety rather than for vindictive favouritism. Frances may have been felt to need an equivalent for Mary's 'expectations' from her bachelor great-uncle Gervase, Lord Pierrepont of Ardglass and later of Hanslope: expectations that were to outlast Mary's undutiful elopement, but not her uncle's death in 1715.[38]

Even if not a disinheritor, Elizabeth Pierrepont remains a shadowy, intriguing figure. If she herself composed or helped compose the lengthy inscription on her husband's tomb, then she possessed not only prudence

[36] *RW* 108; *CL* iii. 25–6, 36; BL Eg. MS 3517; *E&P* 77.

[37] It was the same amount as their dead mother's gift from *her* grandmother, but that had supplied a missing dowry.

[38] BL Eg. MS 3517. 116–29, 153–65; see p. 74, 95; Halsband 1956: 3.

and a 'prodigious memory',[39] but also real literary aptitude and strong ambition. This monumental elegy is eccentric in style (in both verse and prose) but strong and rich in the metaphysical manner. Robert Pierrepont's early death, it seems, as good as robbed him of the two earldoms awaiting him. He inherited 'Bullion VERTUES', but no opportunity to coin them into great exploits like his ancestors'. His body passed 'Un-mutilated, Un Diseas'd' through the perils of European travel, only to suffer, with 'Passive Valor', the amputation of a leg at home. Since it was peacetime, this suggests he died by accident.[40]

His wife, now his widow, receives considerable attention in this elegy. She is 'a LADYE—(Of Whom | Though All Good might, Nothing must Here be said, | Since—VAULTS Speake not the Living but the DEAD . . .)' A Latin sentence declares that Robert Pierrepont's 'sorrowing relict desired him to be mourned in no mean fashion'.[41]

It cannot have been bad for Lady Mary to have a grandmother who may have been a poet; it might not have been bad to have a grandmother with no mean idea of her own importance. Yet doubts remain about West Dean. Something of her own childhood certainly went into Montagu's 'Princess Docile', a work of her old age. Since Docile's governess is akin to Lady Mary's, her appalling royal mother *may* carry some hint of grandmother Pierrepont. It is not hard to imagine this passionate, imaginative, idealistic child committing herself to some religious vow which she later re-created, with protective irony, as the vow Docile takes 'to remain for seven years sitting cross-legged in honour of the Goddess Vishnu'. This vow, which outrages the codes of her upbringing, springs from Docile's emotional isolation: 'she would rather belong to Vishnu, than to nobody.'

Docile's idealism has two phases: a brief religious one and the Enlightenment one which replaces it, which she never outgrows. She is eleven when she makes the vow; and reaction to the vow provokes her passage from religion to philosophy. Lady Mary is almost never precise about the dates of her own life, and no exact parallel should be sought for. But her tone about grandmother Pierrepont and Aunt Cheyne is never warm. When she cites a pattern for her own grandparental role, it is not the grandmother she lived

[39] Noted in her youth by her cousin John Evelyn the diarist, who at her death called her 'a most excellent, & prudent lady' (1955: i. 557; v. 310).

[40] Body and soul are described as striving together; since the body is 'it' and the soul 'she', the dead man *appears* to be called 'she' throughout.

[41] The church, where Gilbert White was to be briefly curate, has vanished, but its south aisle or Borbach Chantry is preserved by the Redundant Churches Fund, which issues a leaflet on it. Thanks to Rosemary Nielsen for translating. The monument cost £500 (BL Eg. MS 3526. 10).

with but her grandmother-by-marriage, Lady Denbigh.[42] Later, when she felt warmly towards her mother's brother, William Feilding, and chillily towards her father's sister, Lady Cheyne, she was clearly responding to their differing reactions to her elopement.[43] But some feelings from her childhood may have lingered too.

West Dean was moth-eaten and old-fashioned, and *may* have been emotionally bleak. But the park and the downs offered scope to run. The adults around Mary presented belief-systems that would later have to be rejected. In the church the Evelyn monuments were overshadowed by Robert Pierrepont's life-size, kneeling figure: a young grandfather with naked, hefty torso and helpful, hovering angel. His surround of text, cherubs, urns, and heavy architectural detail dominates the east wall. What would an impressionable child have made of this Baroque bravura?[44] No wonder she grew up with a strong infusion of family pride; no wonder also if that pride were mixed with aspirations after 'exploits' and after the intoxicating power of language.

Elizabeth Pierrepont's death, on New Year's Day 1699, divided the family.[45] Mary, Frances, and William passed into their father's care, and moved to Thoresby without Evelyn. The different relationships that developed between the sisters can be guessed from the notes Lady Mary kept of letters despatched to England from Adrianople on 1 April 1717. To Frances, now Sister Mar, went a letter packed with exotic detail: 'Hope she'l be glad to hear I am wel. French Ambassadresse and Ambassador pomp. Cavalcade thro the Town. Court to me. Description of Dress. Jew Ladys.' To Evelyn, now Sister Gower, went something that sounds like a quintessential duty letter: 'Hope she will glad to hear we all well. Compliments.'[46]

Lady Mary's epoch-making visit to the Kit-Cat Club must have predated her grandmother's death, since she was eight years old at the time. It would then have been at Lord Cheyne's in Chelsea that the child was staying when the message arrived from her father that she was to be sent forthwith to the tavern where the club met. He had proposed her as a toast (an honour reserved for reigning beauties), but they would not accept her name until they had seen her. Lady Mary later presented the experience as one of intoxicating delight: to be dressed in her best, admired and made much of, to go 'from the lap of one poet, or patriot, or statesman, to the arms of another', to have 'her health drank by every one present, and her name engraved in due form upon the glasses'. It was a taste of applause calculated to make applause

[42] *RW* 109, 114; *CL* iii. 27. [43] *CL* i. 172, 216, 353; ii. 31, 63, 77–8.

[44] The sculptor was John Bushnell.

[45] She was buried at Dean on 4 Jan. (Evelyn 1955: v. 310; Wh MS M 439/59).

[46] *CL* i. 325–6 n. 3, 344.

an addiction; and years later she confessed she was a flattery addict, eagerly gulping down what she felt to be doing her harm. Meanwhile she was not *only* honoured by this Whig centre of power as if she were a grown-up woman;[47] unlike any woman, she had entered it. Such delight could never happen again.

Her story presents her father as a figure of power and glamour, but it suggests (as her granddaughter Lady Louisa Stuart astutely noted) that he thought of her as something rather like a social asset, a luxury plaything. It evokes the attraction he exerted for her, but is very far from contradicting her other representation of him as 'thô naturally an honest Man . . . abandonn'd to his pleasures, and (like most of those of his Quality) did not think himselfe oblig'd to be very attentive to his children's Education'.[48] To pass into his care was to enter a sphere where she would strive for attention but not receive it, where the unattainable would be always within sight.

[47] *E&P* 8; Hunter 1831: ii. 322; Treglown and Mortimer 1981; *CL* iii. 141. Lady Mary was probably older than 8 when the club got its famous name, but not when it began. The story went that her father 'carried on the frolic . . . by having her picture painted for the club-room' (*E&P* 9); but no known portrait of her is so early. His own was done for the club in 1709. She is listed as a toast in 1712 (as Pierrepont) and 1714 (Tonson MSS, National Portrait Gallery).

[48] *E&P* 77. In his accounts, sums given to charity are smaller than those for wine, brandy, and racehorses (1711–12, Manvers MS 4265).