



## **Anglo-American marital relations 1870 - 1945**

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On the 6th November 1895, the streets between 72nd Street and Fifth Avenue, New York City were lined with spectators. They had come to see the journey to St. Thomas' Church of the principals in the newest of the international marriages, that between the American railway heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt and the 9th Duke of Marlborough. The choir was sixty-strong, a symphony orchestra played the 'Wedding March', a bishop conducted the proceedings. It was, perhaps, unfortunate that the bride's face was puffy from crying at her fate.

Beginning about 1870, the union of American money and the British aristocracy was a continuing theme in the Anglo-American relationship. This was a development which had its basis in economics - in American economic growth and British sectoral economic decline. However, it was probably the social aspects which mesmerised American public opinion over five decades. Indeed, such marriages continued thereafter, although usually attracting much less publicity - with the overwhelming exception of that between the former King Edward VIII and Mrs Wallis Warfield Simpson in 1938. Yet there was something special about the earlier period: perhaps it was the number of such unions, or the amount of cash involved. Perhaps it was the sheer hard-headedness of many of the transactions. For whatever reasons, these fairy tales - or horror stories - provided the plot for many a newspaper article, novel and play.

But there was another tale, one less sprinkled with stardust and less immortalised in song and story. This was the saga of the war brides, the GI brides of World War II. The commanders of the American armed services, strongly supported by the British government, tried to prevent such marriages; American public opinion resented them. Frequently treated with contempt, prone to anxiety and despair, theirs is not the most admirable tale in Anglo-American relations.

From the end of the Civil War in 1865, the American economy surged. The completion of the transcontinental railways, and of the attendant north-south lines, meant that the entire country was now open to economic growth. One result of the spectacular growth in the economy over the next decades was the emergence of thousands of very wealthy men. Yet what very many of these men had in common were wives and daughters who burned to establish themselves socially in accordance with their newly-acquired wealth. They had become dissatisfied with local society, and so many of these families moved to nearby cities and made furious efforts to break into the best circles. A number of the more adventurous, or richer, determined to brave the strongest social fortress of all: New York City. However, the Tower of London in the time of the Normans would have been easier to storm. The nouveaux riche horrified the social elite: they were vulgar, flaunted their money, had no manners, no taste, no sense of the rightness of things. It was necessary to control access. Unsuitable people were kept out, those kept out were desperate to be in, and those who were in plumed themselves, making those kept out even more desperate and despairing.

But not everyone who was kept out was willing to leave it at that. If not New York, why not go beyond - to Paris, for instance? Some did. Leonard Jerome, a speculator on the New York Stock Exchange, was successful enough to build a huge mansion, with small private theatre attached, in Madison Square. It was

to be the setting for the storming of the citadel Mrs Clara Jerome and her three daughters Jennie, Clara and Leonie. She was unsuccessful. Unusually, she did not sit at home and mope: rather, in 1867 she informed her husband that she was unwell and wished to go to Paris. He arranged for an apartment on the Boulevard Malesherbes and then returned home with a permanent invitation to visit them and a permanent requirement to pay their bills. The court of the Second Empire welcomed lively, attractive, well-dressed young girls, and they were soon a success. But, just as serious marital possibilities presented themselves, the Prussians invaded, heralding two years of war. Jerome hastened over to Paris, collected his family, and re-installed them, this time in Brown's Hotel in London. He then again returned to New York - there was money to make and mistresses to entertain.

In London, they were a success, largely because their timing was good. The leader of society was Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, who was always keen on lively and beautiful girls, particularly American ones (he had visited the United States in 1860, when he was a slender and handsome nineteen-year-old, and had had a wonderful time). The nineteen-year-old Jennie Jerome made her debut in 1872, and spent the summer with her mother and sisters at Cowes, on the Isle of Wight. In August she attended a ball, where she met Lord Randolph Churchill, the fascinating but somewhat ill-disciplined second son of the seventh Duke of Marlborough. For both it was a bolt of lightning, and four days later they became engaged. They had, however, neglected to involve their parents in this momentous decision, and immediately faced furious opposition from both sides.

For the Jeromes, it was unthinkable that they had not been consulted before such a decision had been taken; besides, Lord Randolph was only a second son and would inherit very little and certainly not a title. For the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, the news was even more shocking: an unknown, an American, a vulgar, parvenu family. Even the reputed Jerome wealth did not make up for these drawbacks. Certainly once the Duke had had enquiries made in America, he was distinctly unimpressed. But the young lovers had a powerful ally, the Prince of Wales, who told the Marlboroughs that he knew about America and about the family, and not only was there nothing objectionable in the match, he positively endorsed it (Jennie Jerome was a favourite of his).

The engagement was finally accepted, but then came the financial negotiations. What dowry would she bring with her in exchange for marriage into a family of such lustre? The bridegroom had very little: as did most younger sons of the peerage and the gentry, he lived on an allowance from his father, which he was continually exceeding. Therefore, most of the financial support of the young couple would have to come from her side of the match.

There were some tense negotiations, particularly when her father insisted on making Jennie a substantial allowance for her own use and under her control. Lord Randolph's lawyers were outraged, one writing to him that 'The Duke says that such a settlement cannot as far as you are personally concerned be considered any settlement at all, for...Miss Jerome would be made quite independent of you in a pecuniary point of view, which in my experience is most unusual. ...Although in America, a married woman's property may be absolutely and entirely her own, I would remark that upon marrying an Englishman, she loses her American nationality and becomes an Englishwoman so that I think that the settlement should be according to the law and custom here.' Jerome refused to be cowed: 'I can but think that your English custom of making the wife so entirely dependent upon the husband, is most unwise.' Again, at one point Churchill, backed by his father, told Jerome that unless all of the dowry capital came to him in the event of his future wife dying childless, 'all business between us was perfectly impossible and he could do what he liked with his beastly money.' In the end, agreement was reached.

On 15 April 1874 the couple were married at the British Embassy in Paris, although without his parents in attendance. After their honeymoon in France, they returned to England, where the new Lady Randolph Churchill assumed a prominent place in society. She also carried out, with commendable expedition, the duty of all wives of men of property: to produce an heir. Her eldest son Winston was born 30 November 1874. Indeed, she entirely lived up to expectations in this area and produced, in the phrase of a future

American Duchess of Marlborough, both an heir and a spare.

Although an early example, she was merely one of what would, just fifteen years later, be termed an invasion. Here is Oscar Wilde's description of them, written in 1887 for the *Court and Society Review*: '...on the whole, the American invasion has done English society a great deal of good. American women are bright, clever, and wonderfully cosmopolitan. ...They insist on being paid compliments and have almost succeeded in making Englishmen eloquent. For our aristocracy they have an ardent admiration; they adore titles and are a permanent blow to Republican principles. In the art of amusing men they are adepts, both by nature and by education, and can actually tell a story without forgetting the point - an accomplishment that is extremely rare among the women of other countries. It is true that they lack repose and that their voices are somewhat harsh and strident when they land first at Liverpool; but after a time one gets to love these pretty whirlwinds in petticoats that sweep so recklessly through society and are so agitating to all duchesses who have daughters. There is something fascinating in their funny, exaggerated gestures and their petulant way of tossing the head. Their eyes have no magic or mystery in them, but they challenge us for combat; and when we engage we are always worsted ...As for their voices, they soon get them into tune ...She can talk brilliantly upon any subject, provided that she knows nothing about it. Her sense of humour keeps her from the tragedy of a grande passion, and, as there is neither romance nor humility in her love, she makes an excellent wife.'

By 1914 sixty peers, and forty younger sons of peers, had married wealthy American women. It is fairly clear why there was such a supply: the quest for social acceptability and even superiority, the attraction of a more sophisticated social milieu, the search at the least for an alternative to Denver or Cleveland or Chicago - sometimes dismissed as rough, coarse, provincial - even, for the more daring, the simple attraction of the unknown. The question is, why was there such a demand from the British side? Naturally, some of the marriages were love matches: that was apparently the case with Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill. But many would-be bridegrooms were driven by economic need.

In 1873 four hundred peers and peeresses owned over 15% of England and Wales. The major change of the previous thirty years had been the repeal of the Corn Laws, i.e., the elimination of tariffs against imported grain. This had previously had relatively little effect, but the situation changed drastically from the 1870s. First of all, there was a run of bad harvests during the 1870s. In the past, farmers had simply raised their prices to compensate, but now the trend for prices was downwards. It was clear to contemporaries that the cause was foreign competition, but the belief was that this was a temporary phenomenon caused by the coincidence of poor harvests in Great Britain and good harvests in North America. But conditions had changed, and now foreign suppliers could permanently undercut British farmers irregardless of the weather; the obvious result of a drastic reduction in prices.

This continuing pressure on prices meant a growing call for reductions in rents. In the first years rents were maintained, but in the 1880s, and particularly the 1890s, landlords frequently had to choose between reducing rents and having a vacant farm. If, for example, rent at 28 shillings per acre = 100, rents fell from 101 in 1870-74 to 72 in 1900-4. Two farms in Steeple in Essex, together containing 638 acres, paid £760 in rent in 1873, £460 from 1883 to 1886, and but £1 a year from 1886 to 1891. The consequences for the landlord are obvious.

Not all great estates suffered and not all peers needs must marry for money. Large landowners were not a conspicuous element in the transatlantic marriage stakes. They might well have diversified sources of income - urban rents, mineral rights to coal on their lands, or investments abroad or in equities or government bonds - and have less need for inward investment from American heiresses. Only four peers with landed incomes in excess of £50,000 married Americans during this period. The middling ranks of landowning peers were more obvious in the lists: perhaps they were more at risk from changes in the economy and had less diversified income. However, in general the hard evidence for mass numbers of loveless but lucrative transatlantic marriages tends to be lacking. Yet, they did exist, and the huge amount of publicity they attracted helped to form the popular view.

The depression was uneven in its impact. It was worst in the areas of heavy soils in southern England, which for centuries had been the traditional wheat-growing areas. In the middle of this block, sprawling in the country north of Oxford, was the estate of the Dukes of Marlborough, and it was the need of the ninth duke to marry a fortune which resulted in what was possibly the most notorious marriage merger of them all.

In 1893, on a cruise in the family yacht to India, Consuelo Vanderbilt fell in love with Winthrop Rutherford, a rich, extremely handsome, impeccably bred, New York lawyer. Her passion was reciprocated, and this was to prove a worrying barrier to the plans of her mother, Alva Vanderbilt, for Consuelo to make a stunning, and aristocratic, match. In 1894 the two ladies - or, rather, the lady and the girl, since Consuelo was only seventeen - arrived in London. They visited Mrs Minnie Paget, an American who had in 1878 married an Englishman, Col Arthur Paget, a close companion of the Prince of Wales; she was by then one of the Prince's favourite hostesses and a force in English society. Consuelo later remembered being looked over 'by a pair of hard green eyes...' 'If I am to bring her out,' she told my mother, "she must be able to compete as far as clothes are concerned with far better-looking girls". She would sponsor Consuelo and present her. She arranged a little dinner party, with the twenty-four-year-old Duke of Marlborough as the principal guest. Lady Paget placed the Duke on her right and Consuelo on his - an entirely obvious manoeuvre.

The young Duke needed to marry an heiress. Blenheim Palace, his ancestral home, needed repairs, maintenance and glorification. But the family fortune did not extend to this. Nevertheless, he could not marry just anyone. The Duke was a fastidious man - no loud voices for him - as well as a man with a high sense of what was due both to the estate and to the Marlborough name. He was stiff with family pride.

Nothing further transpired on this particular visit, other than a round of parties, and Consuelo and her mother returned to New York City for the winter season. Consuelo was very carefully chaperoned, because her mother was determined to keep her and Winthrop Rutherford apart. However, during a bicycling party in March 1895, the two managed to escape from the others. Winthrop proposed marriage and Consuelo accepted. Then her mother, peddling furiously,

caught up with them. The following day, Consuelo and her mother departed for Europe. Winthrop followed them, but her mother was ruthless: in Paris he was forbidden to see her, his letters were confiscated, and she was relentlessly chaperoned. The two ladies went to London in June, where they met the Duke again at a ball. He danced with Consuelo several times, a very promising sign, and invited Consuelo and her mother to Blenheim Palace, probably to see if she could match up to her surroundings.

Consuelo had been raised to fill a great position. She was tall and slender with a swanlike neck and a cloud of black hair. She had beautiful posture - her mother had ensured this by making her wear a back brace for much of her childhood - and beautiful manners. She knew all about butlers and formal dinners. She had been taught to speak French and German; she knew something about art, literature and history. The Duke drove her around the estate and guided her around the house. He seemed to find her acceptable, but nothing was said. When they left, however, Consuelo's mother invited the Duke to visit them at their house in Newport, Rhode Island, the resort town of New York society, and he accepted. Surely this could only mean one thing.

When Consuelo and her mother returned to the United States in the summer of 1895, preparations for the Duke's visit were put in hand. Meanwhile, the regular round of balls and other social events went on. Consuelo and Winthrop managed to snatch a dance at a ball; immediately afterwards there was a showdown between Consuelo and her mother. Consuelo later dramatically described it in her autobiography, *The Glitter and the Gold*. 'Thinking it best no longer to dissemble, I told her that I meant to marry X., adding that I considered that I had a right to choose my own husband. These words, the bravest that I had ever uttered, brought down a frightful storm of protest. I suffered every searing reproach, heard every possible invective hurled at the man I loved. I was informed of his numerous flirtations, of his well-

known love for a married woman, of his desire to marry an heiress. My mother even declared that he would have no children and that there was madness in his family’.

The following morning, the house was unnaturally quiet. No one came to Consuelo’s room, the telephone failed to ring, the servants would take any letter addressed to her to her mother and the porter would not let her out of the gate. Finally a close friend of her mother told Consuelo that her mother had had a heart attack, ‘brought about by my callous indifference to her feelings. She confirmed my mother’s intentions of never consenting to my plans for marriage, and her resolve to shoot X. should I decide to run away with him. I asked her if I could see my mother and whether in her opinion she would ever relent. I still remember the terrible answer, “Your mother will never relent and I warn you there will be a catastrophe if you persist. The doctor has said that another scene may easily bring on a heart attack and he will not be responsible for the result. You can ask the doctor yourself if you do not believe me!” This broke Consuelo, and she gave in.

But would the Duke ask her to marry him? Once he had arrived in Newport, Consuelo was allowed to take part in the social round, but day after day passed and nothing was said. A great ball was given in his honour, and still he said nothing. Rumours abounded, including one that he was interested in someone else. Finally, Consuelo later wrote, ‘it was in the comparative quiet of an evening at home [in September] that Marlborough proposed to me in the Gothic Room whose atmosphere was so propitious to sacrifice. There was no need for sentiment. I was content with his pious hope that he would make me a good husband and ran up to my mother with word of our engagement.’ The following day, when she broke the news to her brothers, her younger brother Harold observed that ‘He is only marrying you for your money’, and ‘with this last slap to my pride I burst into tears.’

Then came the financial negotiations. The Marlborough solicitor, Sir George Lewis, ‘crossed the seas with the declared intention of “profiting the illustrious family” he had been engaged to serve, [and] devoted a natural talent to that end.’ As a contemporary commentator was to write, ‘The Marlborough title was an expensive one....All told, the Marlborough dukedom had cost William K. Vanderbilt, it was said, fully \$10,000,000.’

The marriage seemed to embody much of what many Americans were beginning to dislike about these transatlantic marriages. In earlier years, some newspapers had expressed pleasure and even pride that sweet and pretty American girls had carried off all those aristocratic matrimonial prizes from under the noses of the English girls. At the same time, however, others pointed out that they were being married for their money. By the mid-1890s, the focus of opinion was the loss of capital. Newspapers printed lists of dowries being paid to English bridegrooms: May 1909 the Omaha World Herald published a table of foreign marriages entitled ‘Heiresses Who Have Taken Themselves and Their Millions out of America’, with a column for the amount of dollars ‘We Lost’. The charge remained the same as in earlier years: once they were there with their money, they were exploited, being required to pay for the estates and entertainments of lazy or effete peers and their families.

Linked with the idea that endless amounts of money were going to England to prop up and entertain impecunious peers - or to buy titles - was the growing argument that to marry a peer was to betray democratic principles. Why were these girls leaving the Republic to live in a monarchy? Even worse, it was the best stock, as demonstrated by the ability to make such fortunes, which were going. Instead of supporting equality of opportunity, they were propping up a system of hereditary privilege. ‘Certainly, by the turn of the century, marrying a foreign nobleman was denounced as unpatriotic.’ In short, by the time of the Vanderbilt/Marlborough marriage, transatlantic unions were attracting increasing amounts of criticism.

What about the reaction in Great Britain? It seems clear why the males courted and wed them. Granted that most of these wives were wealthy, they were also attractive to men, partly for the reasons listed by Oscar Wilde, but also because they tended to be more natural than English girls. The American girl was used to male friends, while the English was kept separate and chaperoned, was relatively uneducated, and

was taught to be shy and demure.

It was also not entirely the case that the girls all came to England to trawl for aristocratic husbands. Even more Englishmen went to America, some, admittedly, to try their luck, but many just to see the place. Both types sometimes met their fate there. Captain Ceedric Errol, youngest son of the Earl of Dorincourt, went to New York, accidentally met a lovely, sweet young woman, and married her. His father, who hated America and Americans, was appalled, and cut him off, forcing the young man to go out to work, for which he had not been educated. But he worked hard, the two of them loved each other, they lived in a small but pleasant house and they soon had a pretty young son. Then Capt. Errol died. But the story carried on. The Earl's other two sons both died without heirs, and the young son of Capt. Errol, aged seven, was suddenly the heir to the earldom. The Earl wanted him raised as an Englishman, not as a savage, and he summoned him and his mother to England to live with him. The Earl soon discovered that his grandson was a model in all ways, and he rapidly became extremely fond of the little Lord Fauntleroy.

The author of the novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Frances Hodgson Burnett, was an English-woman who emigrated to America with her family at the age of sixteen, lived for a portion of her life in each country, and died in America. She was only one of a number of authors who wrote about Anglo-American marriages. Indeed, another of her novels, *The Shuttle*, was the story of two such marriages, one of which went horribly wrong, while the other was wonderfully right. Her conceit was the weaving of the two countries together. The story is of two extremely wealthy American sisters, one of whom marries a baronet, Sir Nigel

Anstruther, a cad of the first order, who bullies and nearly destroys her in order to take

control of her money, and the other of whom marries a noble but impecunious earl. The baronet dies horribly of a stroke, and the earl and his American wife undoubtedly found a new race of superior persons.

If Burnett was positive about such relationships, other authors such as Henry James were more ambivalent. Or consider Edith Wharton, herself a somewhat renegade member of the best New York society. Her last, but unfinished, book, *The Buccaneers*, is the story of four American girls who, baulked of entry into New York society, travel to England. There they pick up between them a duke, an earl, a younger son of a marquess, a baronet and a rising MP, but only two of them experience real happiness. Added interest is provided by the fact that at

least two of the characters are apparently based on real people. Nan St George, who married the duke and then in despair fled him for divorce and another man (the baronet), was not unlike Consuelo Vanderbilt, who, after providing her husband with his heir and spare, left him eleven years after their marriage, and moved into the fifteenth-century Crowhurst Place in Surrey. (She also had the use of Sunderland House in London, newly-built substantially with Vanderbilt money.) She then spent some years engaged in social work and local politics, becoming a London County Councillor in 1917. In 1921 their divorce became final, and six years later she gained an annulment of her first marriage (on the basis that she had been coerced into it) so that she could marry the French flier, Jacques Balsan, in the Catholic Church. She then lived happily ever after. Another character, Lizzie Elmsworth, who married the rising MP Hector Robinson, was based on Jennie Jerome, Lady Randolph Churchill, whose husband would rise to be Chancellor of the Exchequer before throwing his career away. It is Robinson, appalled at the planning which is being devoted to catching the same duke for a newly-arrived sister, who breathes to his wife, 'What a gang of buccaneers you are!' 'Buccaneers,' Lizzie reminded him gently, 'were not notorious for paying fortunes for what they took'.

The husband, however, was expressing a view which was common amongst a wide range of people, although it was by no means a blanket reaction. The very fact of the existence of so many American wives in society upset so many, and especially other women, because they exemplified changes in society itself while seeming to threaten further the composition and indeed the continuing existence of the aristocracy.

The British peerage was different from those of the Continent in various ways. First of all, because there was only one peer per family, rather than the others also having titles, it meant more. Furthermore, it was very much more established and stable: a younger son of an eminent British aristocratic family was often a

more attractive proposition than a down-at-heels French count. Importantly, it was more fluid, and therefore it was considerably easier to move up and down the scale than it was, say, in France. New forms of money could eventually join. Merchant bankers were amongst the first - Barings, Rothschilds - but increasingly over the nineteenth century, industrialists were enobled. As the agricultural depression ate away at the economic basis of the peerage, this newer form of wealth - and wealth was needed to support the way of life of a peer - gained its reward. From 1874 to 1885, twelve per cent of new peers were industrialists, while from 1905 to 1911 forty per cent of new peers were industrialists. A major consequence was the loosening up of Society, the lowering of social barriers, and this made it easier for American girls, wives and widows to be accepted. These wealthy American wives, however, upped the ante. They could afford endless new dresses from Worth and hats from Viot, elaborate balls and other entertainments, jewels, huge estates, houses in London. The reaction of members of society who disapproved was that the Americans were commercialising society. However, the Americans were supported by the Prince of Wales, who liked expensive entertainments and loved to go to house parties where he received the best of everything. This required money on the part of the host, and this sometimes came from the wealth of the wife. At the same time this seemingly lowered the social barriers even more, with mere wealth becoming as, if not more, important than birth and breeding. For many of the old aristocracy, this was distasteful, and even hateful.

Of more importance to the individual family was the fact that the Americans and their money were taking husbands away from English girls. As the economic position of many peers worsened, they had to marry wealth. At the same time, it meant that the allowances given to younger sons were often less than that required to support a wife in reasonable comfort; it also meant that daughters' portions were smaller. But why should the girl not marry a businessman? After all, peers had, not infrequently, married the daughters of bankers, nabobs, industrialists. But for a woman, it was different: her social status followed that of her husband. Should she marry a businessman, she would go down in the world. With a decent allowance, the daughter of a peer might find the single life preferable to being married to someone so far beneath her. By the turn of the century, fully one-third of the daughters of peers were spinsters.

Not only did the Americans take husbands away from English girls: they were a positive threat to the existence of the peerage itself, because they were failing to reproduce themselves. There were already difficulties amongst the British themselves, as an article in the periodical *The Nineteenth Century and After* tried to make clear: 'our stable upper classes during the past fifty years have reduced their birth-rate by more than one-half, and have passed well below the point at which the number of births compensates for the number of deaths. Their extinction on these lines is clearly only a matter of a few generations.' The dark suspicion was that the cause was birth control, the use of which went beyond the peerage to embrace the gentry and middle classes as well. As the eminent gynaecologist John W. Taylor wrote in the same periodical in 1906, 'I have no hesitation tracing the decline of the birth rate to the use of artificial checks or preventatives,' which he called 'vicious and unnatural'.

Anglo-American marriages occupied an ambiguous place in this argument. On the one hand, they brought in new blood: as the popular novelist Marie Corelli wrote, 'one should look upon the frequent marriages of American heiresses with effete British nobles as the carrying out of a wise and timely dispensation of Providence. New blood - fresh sap, is sorely needed to invigorate the grand old tree of the British aristocracy, which has of late been looking sadly as though dry rot were setting in'. On the other hand, many accused them specifically of driving down the rate of reproduction of the upper classes, thereby depriving Great Britain of the best of the population and leaving the lower orders to breed irresponsibly. The basis of this charge was the observation that many of these Anglo-American marriages were childless, and it is the case that from 1870 to the turn of the century, approximately one in every two transatlantic marriages was either childless or produced only one child. It was the conviction held by members of the British medical profession, as well as by many intellectuals, that the Americans were practicing birth control, known by many of the more moralistic amongst them as the 'American sin'.

There was another possibility, even worse than the first, and this was that American women were genetically inferior and becoming increasingly sterile, which would account for the high number of childless marriages (the possibility of any sterility arising from the male side was seldom considered). A subordinate

charge was that if they did manage to produce offspring, they neglected them, with the result that 'there was not a single distinguished peer's son with an American mother'.

For some years concerns about the baleful effect of American brides on the nature and even the existence of the peerage continued to be expressed. The fears of their likely effect on the British gene pool exercised the many believers in the science of eugenics, although this died down as interest and belief in eugenics became less widespread. Perhaps closer to home, members of society continued to bewail the deleterious effects of the Americans both on the tone of society and on the marriage prospects of their daughters. Even the former Prince of Wales, now King Edward VII, complained that he had met too many Americans and he did not want to meet any more. Upon his death in 1910, George V and Queen Mary made it clear that Edward VII's way of life was not one which they were disposed to follow, with the consequence that American women no longer had such access to court. In America itself, such marriages had for some years been viewed rather sceptically, particularly since a number of them had ended in separation and even divorce. With the coming of the First World War, the phenomenon appeared to die away, not least because a substantial number of those eligible for such marriages died on the battlefields of France.

After the war, however, and once transatlantic steamers resumed their regular and frequent crossings, the rate of Anglo-American upper class marriages reached and even surpassed that of 1870 to 1914. During this period, however, they were not much of an issue, either in the US or in Great Britain. In the US, perhaps, the Roaring Twenties provided enough excitement and social possibilities at home. Now the focus for many Americans abroad was not London, but Paris, where exciting artistic things were happening and where the dollar went far. In Britain the focus of the prurient interest of the general public and the newspapers were the Bright Young Things, not American girls. Yet there was an American set, and in an unnerving repeat of history it circled around the Prince of Wales.

In the same way that Edward VII had rebelled against the strict upbringing of his parents, the future Edward VIII did against the cold and frequently harsh rule of his father George V. Born in 1894, the Prince of Wales was almost beautiful, with his blond hair, blue eyes and melancholy smile. He was also possessed of an extraordinary charm, united, in his days of youth and young manhood, with a strong desire to please but a short attention span. His father kept him on a very short rein, and therefore his post-war official visit to Canada and North America in 1919 was something of a turning point - as it had been for Edward VII in 1860. He felt an immediate

affinity with the United States, possibly encouraged by his knowledge that the King was distinctly anti-American. He discovered that he could turn crowds into adoring mobs, and he also discovered the immense pleasure of living his life more as he liked to do. What he especially liked were pretty girls, dancing, drinking, late hours, golf, and general hedonism. He was particularly attracted to bright, lively and fun-loving American girls. For a young man of twenty-five who was never really to grow up, this was all perfectly natural.

It is fair to say that for the next several years, he endeavoured to carry out the tasks required of him by his father. Yet, over the next decade and a half, he increasingly adopted a particularly irresponsible lifestyle. What the Prince of Wales increasingly devoted his time to was the interwar equivalent of clubbing, as well as to the pursuit of women with 'hectic abandon'. In this, of course, he was following the same road as all of the other aristocratic Bright Young Things. But even in the general freneticism, it was noticeable that his set was particularly

heedless, fun-loving and superficial. No one was more so than Thelma, Lady Furness, his American mistress for several years. Her place in history rests on the fact that she effectively turned the Prince over to her closest friend, the American Mrs Wallace Warfield Simpson.

Mrs Simpson and the Prince first met in January 1931, and the friendship gradually ripened over the following three years. In January 1934, Lady Furness left for an extended visit to the United States. In her memoirs she describes how she asked Mrs Simpson to 'look after him while I'm away. See that he doesn't

get into any mischief.' Being such a good friend, Mrs Simpson did just that. Within a few months she had established her ascendancy: the Prince was wholly, abjectly, besotted with her, and remained so for the rest of his life. 'He was frightened by Wallis Simpson, enjoyed being frightened by her, and accepted her lightest word as law.' She needed to master and he needed to be mastered - the perfect couple.

The relationship was known amongst the elite but 'the affair was still far from a public scandal. Only a handful of people in the British Isles had even heard of Mrs Simpson' by the time King George V died in January 1936. Some politicians, however, were becoming worried. Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister, told Duff Cooper, the Defence Secretary, that "if she were what I call a respectable whore, I wouldn't mind,"...a description which Cooper took to mean "somebody whom the King occasionally saw in secret but didn't spend his whole time with". But increasingly they appeared together in public.

The Prince always claimed that she had not been his mistress, but she certainly was not his wife. He later told a friend that from 1934, he had been determined to marry her, but of course there was an inconvenient husband in the way. On 20 January 1936 George V died and the Prince became King Edward VIII. In early February Simpson 'directly challenged the King and asked him what his intentions were. The King rose from his chair and answered: "Do you really think that I would be crowned without Wallis at my side?"' In July Simpson moved out and left the field clear for the King. The question now was divorce. Would Simpson

agree to it? He would have to provide evidence of his adultery - not a problem - but there was also the very great danger of a public scandal engulfing the King. The divorce was heard in late October, and a decree nisi, or provisional divorce, was granted. Nearly a century later, one of the most surprising elements of the whole situation is the self-denying ordinance observed by the British press. The Canadian press followed suit, but one national press did not. The American newspapers covered the divorce in lurid detail, and the New York American announced on 26 October that the two would marry eight months later. In most of the newspapers the comment was friendly towards the King.

The King for some time continued to believe that Mrs Simpson could be Queen. He finally accepted that this was impossible, and the possibility of amorganatic marriage then arose. (Amorganatic marriage is one between two people of unequal rank. In this case, any children would be legitimate but not royal, and nor would Mrs Simpson be.) Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Prime Minister, sounded out the leaders of the Labour Party. On the one hand, many socialists were attached to the King, because whilst he was Prince he had expressed strong support for helping the poor and unemployed. The Party leadership, however, would have none of it. Baldwin then raised the issue in Cabinet, but amorganatic marriage had no support at all. Nor was there any support from the Dominions. If there could not be amorganatic marriage, and if the King refused to lay aside the idea of marrying Mrs Simpson, there was only one outcome: he would have to follow the advice of his ministers and abdicate the throne. The choice was the King's.

As far as he was concerned, there was no choice to be made. Without her at his side, he would not be crowned. And so he was not. On 14 December 1936 he broadcast to the nation, and indeed to the world, the reason why he was giving up the throne: 'You must believe me when I tell you that I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duty as King as I would wish to do, without the help and support of the woman I love.'

The travails of the King, and the accompanying political crisis, were soon over- shadowed by a far greater threat, that of the rise of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and militarist Japan. For Great Britain, war came on 3 September 1939 and for the United States on 7 December 1941. And with the unfolding war came another phenomenon of Anglo-American relations - the war brides. Beginning in January 1942 with 4,068 men, the numbers of American servicemen occupying Great Britain in May 1944 came to 1,526,965, before the numbers declined to 62,000 at the end of November 1945. The possibilities for sex, and even marriage, were endless.

The possibilities for misunderstandings were also endless, arising from the very different dating mores that existed in the two countries. As explained by one American serviceman, 'American adolescents were expected to make a pass on a date; the test for the girl was her adroitness in saying no. In Britain...girls expected the man to show restraint. A man's kiss was therefore regarded as a much more serious token of affection than the American might have intended.' The problem was that incidents of this kind gave rise to the oversexed element of the gibe that the Americans were 'overpaid, overfed, oversexed and over here'. Conversely, because they kissed, many local girls seemed cheap and forward to the GIs (government issue). One GI, in a letter home, referred to Britain as 'a nation of prostitutes'.

On the assumption, then, that misunderstandings were sorted out, and a couple became engaged, they then ran up against a huge, and sometimes insuperable, barrier: the attempts by both countries, but especially by the US, to prevent such marriages. A moment's thought makes it clear that while access to sex could be considered highly desirable and even a necessity - comfort girls for the Japanese army, brothels for the French - marriage interfered with the ability and even the willingness of the soldier to fight. For one thing, wives living near bases could distract soldiers' attention; for another, it was unfair: soldiers were not allowed to bring their families with them from the States, so why should others enjoy the comforts provided by 'local' marriages? Furthermore, American soldiers were better off than most Britons. They had higher rates of pay, access to food of which the British could only dream, and much higher allowances for dependants. In short, it was claimed by the US Army that 'gullible men are readily seduced by British girls, whose ulterior motive may be that of extra remuneration on the part of our Government as well as that of the soldier.'

One major concern of the British Government was to prevent American soldiers' taking advantage of British girls by engaging in bigamous unions, which could then be disclaimed at the end of the war. But even more important, apparently, was to prevent girls latching on to Americans as their passport to the American dream. In this they were at one with the American government, although for foreign policy reasons rather than out of deep concern for the girls involved: Anglo-American relations must be as smooth as possible.

American military officials could be quite brutal in their attempts to discourage these marriages. It was stipulated that officers and men could only marry with their commanding officer's permission and after written notice of three months; violation of this order would be a court-martial offence under the 96th Article of War - 'conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the military service.' Not surprisingly, this provoked anger within the army, and three months later, the provisions were less harsh. Yet, commanding officers could impose stringent requirements if they wished to do so. For example, one such officer arbitrarily denied all requests except in the case of pregnancy. By the spring of 1943, senior officers were concerned, fearing that this policy threatened to encourage immorality, given that it was clear that some couples deliberately put themselves in this situation in order to force the commanding officer to give permission to marry.

Until 1944, the number of war brides was small - by mid-February 1944 there were 4,093. But with the drive to real combat, the numbers went up rapidly, with surges in the spring of both 1944 and 1945. The former was linked to D-Day, with 1,650,000 American soldiers in the UK by June. Everyone knew that an invasion of Europe was about to happen, and everyone also knew that many of these soldiers would not be coming back. As a Canadian soldier later remembered, 'My God, but it was easy to fall in love in those two months before D-Day...There was a feeling that these were the last nights men and women would make love, and there was never any of the by-play or persuading that usually went on. People were for love, so to speak. It was so easy to fall in love....I won't describe the scenes or sounds of Hyde Park or Green Park at dusk and after dark. They just can't be described. You can just imagine a vast battlefield of sex.' The second, and larger, surge came with the defeat of Germany, when obstacles put in place by the U.S. Army weakened.

But with the end of the war, what was to be done with all of these GI brides, which have been estimated as numbering between 40,000 and 45,000? By law they were entitled to passage to the US, but the priority for the American servicemen and the American public, and therefore for the American government, was to bring the boys home as rapidly as possible. In response to pressure from soldiers in the UK, as well as

from the American Embassy, it was announced by U.S. Army Headquarters on 14 June 1945 that 'British girls who have married American soldiers are unlikely to get free shipping passages to the United States for 10 months to a year.' The GI brides were becoming increasingly anxious, and as a result of the announcement, the U.S. Embassy was 'mobbed by desperate wives'. The Foreign Office became increasingly concerned about the diplomatic implications of the problem. It all became too much for many of the women, and on 11 October 1945 about a thousand brides held a protest meeting at Caxton Hall in Westminster, before marching on the U.S. embassy with cries of 'we want our husbands'. The London papers gave it extensive coverage, and this stimulated an acceleration of their travel to the US.

The whole episode a nightmare for many of the women. 'Many of the brides recalled Tidsworth station in bleak mid-winter, struggling with bags and screaming children. At the barracks some GIs could not conceal their resentment at this unwelcome duty, which was delaying their return home. [One woman] never forgot the opening of a "welcome" speech from one officer: "You may not like conditions here, but remember no one asked

you to come." At first there were no cribs for the babies, until one inventive officer obtained file drawers and footlockers that he lined with pillows and rubber mattresses. Washing facilities were rudimentary, food often abysmal, and the obligatory physical exam proved a public humiliation. Women stood naked on the stage of the camp theatre while a doctor shone a flashlight between their legs to check for VD, watched from the back by a crowd of American officers.' After strong protests from both the wives and their husbands already in America, conditions improved, and on 26 January 1946, the first ships devoted to the transport of war brides left Southampton for New York.

For many of the war brides, arrival in the US and the long-awaited reunions with their husbands, were the beginning of months or years of unhappiness. Many men had exaggerated their economic and social positions; many now resented the responsibilities which a wife and family entailed. As one unfortunate woman later described it, 'It was getting dark when I got off the train [in a grimy town in Pennsylvania]. He was wearing one of those long overcoats like I'd seen people wearing in the old movies. He looked like Himmler. I stared at him and thought, "Lord! What have you married?"... I looked at him and said, "Am I really in America?" I woke up next morning and I told him, "I'm going home. I don't like it here." He said to me, "You're not getting away. You're mine, you belong to me!" - and he meant it.' It was twenty-five years before she was able to get a divorce.

But of course, there were also stories with happier endings. One English wife of an American sergeant had married against her parents' wishes, since, according to her husband, he was only a fisherman. She was prepared to go out to work herself, not as ordinary a decision as it was later to become. When she arrived in Redondo Beach, California, she found that her husband was indeed a fisherman: he had just neglected to tell her that he owned a fleet of five boats. Presumably he had wanted to assure himself that she had wanted to marry him, not the good life. And she did.

By and large, the stories of these wartime Anglo-American marriages, emphatically not unions of heiresses and the peerage, were probably much the same emotionally as those of their elders and - in late nineteenth and early twentieth century terms - betters. Some survived, some did not. A major difference was that obtaining a divorce now made a woman less of an outcast than had earlier been the case in England. On the other hand, there was less money all round, and this lack could make rocky marriages even rockier. Furthermore, lack of money meant that the homesick, the unhappy, the deserted war bride found it very difficult if not impossible to return to Britain. Much happiness was matched by much despair. In this sense, all Anglo-American marriages, for richer or poorer, were the same.