

Prince Charles de Looz et Corswarem and Ponsonby Dalrymple

By Peter Jordaan

In 1894, a blue-eyed and fresh-complexioned youth named Ponsonby Dalrymple,¹ but styling himself ‘Charles Moreno’, appeared in a Westminster court charged with passing false cheques. Described as “faultlessly attired and wearing kid gloves and patent boots,” his solicitor averred that:

Mr. Dalrymple was highly connected, and a member of a well-known family. He was a young gentleman only recently of age, and, like many other young men, he had foolishly got involved with women, and incurred expenses which for the time he could not meet.

Ponsonby was the second last child, and third son in a middle-class family of ten children. His parents were Alexander and Fanny Hammond Dalrymple, whose money derived from Alexander’s father, a master mariner who’d owned a merchant ship. Most of the siblings had been born on the island of St Vincent in the West Indies.

When in 1896 Ponsonby contracted his first marriage, the press announcement stated that his father was “the late Alexander Dalrymple”. This was both a lie and a dreadful family secret – his father being still very much alive. Two years after Ponsonby’s birth, Alexander had been admitted to Brooke House in Hackney, London, a private lunatic asylum for the wealthy. He would remain insane for the rest of his life; however, as the expensive of his care drained the family’s financial resources, he was relocated to Scottish asylums, and then to publicly funded ones in London.

This instability was also manifesting in Ponsonby, and to a grand degree. He informed the Westminster court he was ‘equerry’ to Prince Charles de Looz et Corswarem.² This was not exactly truthful either: ‘accomplice’ would have been the better word.

While the Prince was the genuine article, he was the most *noir* of black sheep: the thirty-four-year-old heir of a Brabant noble family, he was described as “a young man of distinguished appearance, with a brown mustache; medium sized.” He’d been sentenced in Paris *in absentia* to five years imprisonment for his frauds of his own. As one report put it: “the prince is a master man, an astonishing seducer.” with “that exquisite air of good tone which impressed all who knew him” and “whose physiognomic knowledge is quite disconcerting. At a glance he judged his man.” His favoured means of extracting cash was to obtain loans on the strength of non-existent betrothals to heiresses.

In 1890, on the promise of a dowry of one million francs, he’d contracted a genuine marriage to a Portuguese noblewoman. When her father failed to stump up the cash, he had the marriage annulled a year later. However, the ethereal dowry enabled him to make many dupes.

He then announced his marriage to a succession of wealthy widows, again using the promise of massive dowries to have sums advanced to him. They included the London-based widow of a

¹ Ponsonby Dalrymple (1872–1947); married (1st) Helena Henrietta Hewlings, with whom he had a daughter and two sons who joined the Royal Flying Corps; divorced 1909; and (2nd) Louise A. Betts.

² H.S.H. Prince Charles Emmanuel Ernest Alexandre Arnould de Looz et Corswarem, later 7th Duke (1860–1946); married 1890, Maria Helene de Portugal de Faria (annulled 1891). [*Almanach de Gotha*, Justus Perthes, Gotha 1923, p167.]

Chicago newsprint magnate,³ and a Princess Demidoff.⁴

The Paris press even claimed that de Looz was one of the debtors of Father Olliver, a money lender whose garrotting was the basis of a sensational murder case – the so-called ‘Neuilly affair’ of 1891-92. Two of the accused, part of a gang of thieves who’d founded a bank in Neuilly to dispose of their takings, were sent to the guillotine. With the police on his tail, the Prince was forced to leave Paris, and took refuge in London.

How Dalrymple and De Loos met each other isn’t known, but it was a match made in their own hellish heaven. The police had tracked the ripe pair across the Continent, and ran them to ground at the Midland Hotel, where, as it was reported, “they found the Prince and his ‘equerry’ occupying the one room and the same bed.” With a warrant in hand only for Ponsonby, he was arrested and imprisoned for four months.

The Prince skipped back across the Channel, but was arrested in Paris, and taken to Brussels, where he was brought to trial in 1896. For this, the best defence team money could buy was marshalled to his side. They included the eminent psychiatrist, Professor Cesare Lombroso of Turin. His Serene Highness was pronounced as suffering from “hereditary psychical degeneracy,” which was manifesting as “ambitious monomania, which dominates and controls all his acts.” Despite protests by the Prince’s creditors who believed it to be ambitious acting, the Brussels Correctional Tribunal bought it all, deciding that Prince Charles not been responsible for his actions, and was consequently free to go. Seeking to explain these Continental antics to their readers, an English newspaper sniffed: “Their criminal law is almost a dead letter...It is carte blanche to the Anarchists.”

The Prince’s ambitions didn’t end there. In 1899, a popular English periodical *Tit-Bits* featured an article of piquant interest – ‘Convicts who wear Coronets’. It alleged that across Europe thousands of prisoners of aristocratic lineage were languishing in penitentiaries. Amongst these, it added, was one Prince Charles de Looz et Corswarem.

Far from being behind bars, His Serene Highness was then happily fleeing in freedom – by 1903 alone, he’d accrued no less than eighty charges. However, reality was of little consequence to such a mentality, particularly one cossetted by wealth. In the Prince’s mind, the one-penny Limey rag *Tit-Bits* had grievously slandered his reputation, and wounded his noble pride. With impressive audacity he immediately sued for libel.

There then ensued, in June 1900, a remarkable and comical London court case. It opened with Q.C. Marshall Hall for the Prince denouncing *Tit-Bits*, and then promptly reseating himself. For *Tit-Bits* defence, its baronet publisher Sir George Newnes had availed himself of the services of the renowned barrister Charles Gill. The case enabled Gill to give full vent to a dry mirth. Rising from his chair, Gill:

put before the jury the reasons that had influenced the Prince de Looz in keeping out of the witness-box, and incidentally out of the country during the trial of the case. The Prince’s striking modesty, said Mr. Gill, was due to certain little episodes in his career, about which he (Mr. Gill) would have been glad to cross-examine him.

Gill then shared the Prince’s backstory with the court: of his passing of bogus cheques, and the

³ Clara Sophia Jessup Bloomfield-Moore (1824–1899), Anglo-American philanthropist and philosopher. Wife of Bloomfield Haines Moore of the Jessup & Moore Paper Company.

⁴ Princess Hélène Petrovna Demidoff, née Troubetzkoy (1853-1917); 2nd wife of Paul Pavlovitch Demidoff, 2nd Prince of San Donato.

extraction of money from victims using the claim of his marriage to the widowed Princess Demidoff – a fact the good lady, who had never met him, was unaware of. Despite this, in accordance with French law, de Looz had arranged the announcement of his forthcoming nuptial from the steps of Nice’s town hall, and gave notice to it in a registry office in London.

Also shared with the court was the Prince’s peregrinations across Europe with Ponsonby Dalrymple under a variety of aliases, which included them swapping names, Gill musing: “He supposed it was a peculiarity of Belgian princes that sometimes they used their mother’s name and sometimes their fathers. On off days [de Looz] was a count, but on good days he was a prince... At one place he went by the singular name of Crow. The important thing was to keep on moving:

“Paris was impossible,” said Mr Gill, “Brussels was dangerous, London was risky; but men of that calibre can do no work of this kind save in large cities, and, finally, in June 1894, they returned to London.”

On the witness stand, a superintendent from Scotland Yard confirmed that the Prince “had a bad reputation as a Continental swindler, and as a man guilty of abominable offences.” This was the standard euphemism for sexual crime of a particularly outré nature. Stretching the boundaries of acceptable drollery to the limit, Gill told the court that he would have liked to have asked the Prince and Ponsonby, “and perhaps one or two other equerries as to just what the duties of an equerry are – whether it is possible to take a man out of the street for that purpose...” As for the Prince’s defence of insanity, Gill said “It reminded him of the defence of ‘sunstroke in India’.

The Prince’s counsel rose to state that ill-health had made it impossible for him to be present to refute the evidence presented. As a symbol of the value of the Prince’s reputation that *Tit Bits* had so gravely compromised, the jury awarded him one farthing in damages.

As for Ponsonby Dalrymple: he had resided at the premium address of Jermyn, St Piccadilly, but followed the Prince to Belgium: the first of his two sons being born there in 1897. By 1901 he was back in London, living with his wife, Helena, their two sons, and two servants at 8a, Hyde Park Mansions, St Marylebone.

The censuses recorded Ponsonby’s changing professions – journalist (1891), advertising agent (1901), diarist (1911). In 1908 his first wife obtained a divorce, citing his “violent and ungovernable temper when under the influence of drink.” During their marriage he’d “frequently terrified her and the children with his violence.” Following the divorce, and possibly under financial pressure, he gave himself over to petty fraud. Although he was to marry again, he became a one-man crime wave, that continued before the courts until at least until 1939.



Prince Charles de Looz et Corswarem, later 7th Duke.
(*Le Matin*, 27 December 1903.)

SOURCES

- a blue-eyed and fresh-complexioned:** Ponsonby Dalrymple, Metropolitan Police Register of Habitual Criminals 1881-1925, Record ID rhc87135; <https://www.digitalpanopticon.org>
- “faultlessly attired”:** A Prince And His Equerry On Their Travels, *The Globe*, 11 June 1894, p2.
- “Mr. Dalrymple was highly connected”:** A Prince And His Equerry On Their Travels, *The Globe*, 11 June 1894, p2.
- a master mariner who’d owned a merchant ship:** George H. Graham: <https://ghgraham.org/dalrymple.html>
- Most of the siblings:** George H. Graham: <https://ghgraham.org/dalrymple.html>
- “the late Alexander Dalrymple”:** Marriages, *The Morning Post*, 29 December 1896, p1.
- Two years after Ponsonby’s birth:** George H. Graham: <https://ghgraham.org/dalrymple.html>
- “a young man of distinguished appearance”:** Arrestation D’Un Prince Escroc, *Le XIX Siècle*, 30 April 1895, p1.
- He’d been sentenced in Paris:** Last Week’s Paris, *The Sketch*, 30 May 1894, p8.
- “the prince is a master man”:** Jeux De Prince, *Le Matin*, 10 January 1904, p1.
- In 1890, on the promise of a dowry:** Arrestation D’Un Prince, *La Lanterne* (Paris) 30 April 1895, p2; *Almanach de Gotha*, Justus Perthes, Gotha 1923, p167.
- However, the ethereal dowry enabled him:** Arrestation D’Un Prince, *La Lanterne* (Paris) 30 April 1895, p2.
- They included the London-based widow:** Arrestation D’Un Prince, *La Lanterne* (Paris) 30 April 1895, p2.]
- The Paris press even claimed:** Arrestation D’Un Prince, *La Lanterne* (Paris) 30 April 1895, p2.
- Two of the accused:** Instantanés, *Gil Blas*, 2 November 1891, p1; The Murder Of A Money Lender, *East Anglian Daily Times*, 8 June 1892, p3; Crime In France, *The Swindon Advertiser*, 18 June 1892, p2.
- With the police on his tail:** Arrestation D’Un Prince, *La Lanterne* (Paris) 30 April 1895, p2.
- “they found the Prince and his ‘equerry’:** Prince v. “Tit-Bits”, *Evening News*, 26 June 1900, p3.
- They included the eminent psychiatrist:** Prince v. “Tit-Bits”, *Evening News*, 26 June 1900, p3; Obituary, Professor Lomboso, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 20 October 1909, p5.]
- “hereditary physical degeneracy”:** Prince v. “Tit-Bits”, *Evening News*, 26 June 1900, p3.
- Despite protests by the Prince’s creditors:** Swindler Prince, *International Herald Tribune*, 15 February 1896.
- “Their criminal law is almost”:** Notes On Current Topics, *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 July 1900, p6.
- In 1899, a popular English periodical:** Convicts who wear Coronets, *Tit-Bits*, 8 July 1899.
- Far from being behind bars:** Prince Arrested, *St. James’s Gazette*, 26 December 1903, p8.
- With impressive audacity he immediately:** The Law Courts, *The (London Evening) Standard*, 27 June 1900, p3.
- put before the jury the reasons:** Prince v. “Tit-Bits”, *Evening News*, 26 June 1900, p3.
- Despite this, in accordance with:** A Prince’s Libel Suit, *Auckland Star*, 4 August 1900, p5.
- “He supposed it was a peculiarity”:** Queen’s Bench Division: A Belgian Prince’s Career, *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 1900, p5.
- “Paris was impossible”:** Prince v. “Tit-Bits”, *Evening News*, 26 June 1900, p3.
- “had a bad reputation as a Continental swindler”:** A Prince’s Action Against Tit Bits, *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 27 June 1900, p7.
- “and perhaps one or two other equerries”:** Prince v. “Tit-Bits”, *Evening News*, 26 June 1900, p3.
- “It reminded him of the defence”:** Prince v. “Tit-Bits”, *Evening News*, 26 June 1900, p3.
- As for Ponsonby Dalrymple:** Maximilian Ponsonby Dalrymple: 1901 Census.
- “violent and ungovernable temper”:** Helena Henrietta Dalrymple, File 8635: Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes (later, Supreme Court of Judicature).

he became a one-man crime wave: e.g: Crime In East Sussex: Tale Of A Cheque, Sussex Agricultural Express, 24 October 1908, p10; A Hove Cheque Cast, Brighton Gazette, 21 October 1908, p1; Apprehension, *Police Gazette*, 6 October 1916, p4; Malborough Sreet, *Illustrated Police News*, 22 March 1928, p7; A Nautical Old Man, *John Bull*, 28 December 1929, p10; Brighton Quarter Sessions, *West Sussex Gazette*, 10 April 1930, p14; Sent to Gaol For Larceny, *Worthing Gazette*, 20 February 1935, p10; Sussex Assizes, *Sussex And Surrey Courier*, 2 December 1939, p8.

ALCHEMIE

© 2022 Alchemie Books
alchemiebooks.com