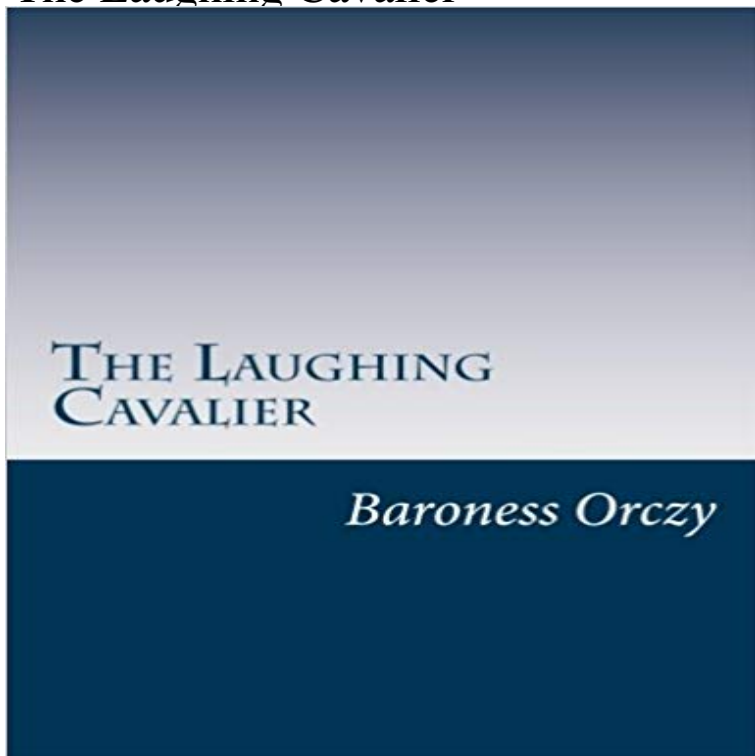


The Laughing Cavalier



Does it need one? If so it must also come from those members of the Blakeney family in whose veins runs the blood of that Sir Percy Blakeney who is known to history as the Scarlet Pimpernel for they in a manner are responsible for the telling of this veracious chronicle. For the past eight years now ever since the true story of The Scarlet Pimpernel was put on record by the present author these gentle, kind, inquisitive friends have asked me to trace their descent back to an ancestor more remote than was Sir Percy, to one in fact who by his life and by his deeds stands forth from out the distant past as a conclusive proof that the laws which govern the principles of heredity are as unalterable as those that rule the destinies of the universe. They have pointed out to me that since Sir Percy Blakeney was an exceptional personality, possessing exceptional characteristics which his friends pronounced sublime and his detractors arrogant he must have had an ancestor in the dim long ago who was, like him, exceptional, like him possessed of qualities which call forth the devotion of friends and the rancour of enemies. Nay, more! there must have existed at one time or another a man who possessed that same sunny disposition, that same irresistible laughter, that same careless insouciance and adventurous spirit which were subsequently transmitted to his descendants, of whom the Scarlet Pimpernel himself was the most distinguished individual. All these were unanswerable arguments, and with the request that accompanied them I had long intended to comply. Time has been my only enemy in thwarting my intentions until nowtime and the multiplicity of material and documents to be gone through ere vague knowledge could be turned into certitude. Now at last I am in a position to present not only to the Blakeney themselves, but to all those who look on the Scarlet Pimpernel as their hero and

their friend the true history of one of his most noted forebears. Strangely enough his history has never been written before. And yet countless millions must during the past three centuries have stood before his picture; we of the present generation, who are the proud possessors of that picture now, have looked on him many a time, always with sheer, pure joy in our hearts, our lips smiling, our eyes sparkling in response to his; almost forgetting the genius of the artist who portrayed him in the very realism of the personality which literally seems to breathe and palpitate and certainly to laugh to us out of the canvas.

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