

The Poison Tongue Plot Against Caroline

Morals Are Under Fire at Trial

The lively little Princess Caroline of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel arrived at the court of King George III. of England in the spring of 1795 to marry Prince George of Wales. But she found a drunken, furious bridegroom who had only promised to marry her so that parliament would pay his debts. After the birth of their daughter a year later Caroline was thrust out of Carlton house and forced to take up residence at Blackheath. Here we find her in 1806 as this instalment opens, about to be tried for high treason committed in the crime of adultery. She is accused of having had an illegitimate son four years before and of shocking relations with numerous guests at Montague house. After ten years of crafty spying Prince George feels that he has at last succeeded in amassing a sufficient volume of evidence against his discarded wife to ruin her for all time.

SECOND ARTICLE

By LOUISE BARGELT

THE "delicate and secret investigation" into the life and morals of Princess Caroline, wife of Prince George, later King George IV. of England, started on a warm, sunny morning, June 6, 1806.

It proved to be neither delicate nor secret, for the charges against the princess were scandalous, and full news of the affair speedily leaked out.

Up to a few nights before the trial opened Caroline had held her head up, kept on top of her fears, and insisted passionately to everyone who would listen that she "couldn't be convicted of those ghastly charges because she wasn't guilty of them." Then one afternoon her lady in waiting, Charlotte Sanders, came to her with an unbelievable piece of news.

"They do say," whispered Charlotte, "that it was King George himself who started this whole thing."

At first Caroline couldn't believe her ears. The king was her friend! From the night her husband turned her out of Carlton house King George had maintained her at Blackheath. He had seen to it that she had money to live on and that her bills were paid.

"Why would he do that to me?" she gasped. "Order my carriage, Charlotte. I am going straight to the king."

Caroline never minced matters when she was aroused, and in a few minutes the two women were driving fast toward the king's palace. She flung herself impudently past the guards and burst into his private study, heedlessly indifferent to decorum.

The king was lying listlessly on his couch, the light from a single tall candle on his white, strained face. He had been ill for days, and he looked as if the old fear of madness were creeping over him again.

"Caroline! What are you doing here?" he cried sharply.

"I came to see you to find out if it's true you started this investigation," she stormed, her cheeks flushed and hot with anger.

"I authorized the proceedings," he said quietly.

"Why did you do it? I thought you were my friend! Do you believe George's horrid charges? Do you put any faith in those stories which Lady Douglas tells? She's a scandalmonger. Don't forget I put her out of my house three years ago and she's after sweet revenge."

The king glanced nervously around. "You shouldn't have come here," he repeated. Then in a lower voice: "I had to do it, Caroline. I couldn't help myself."

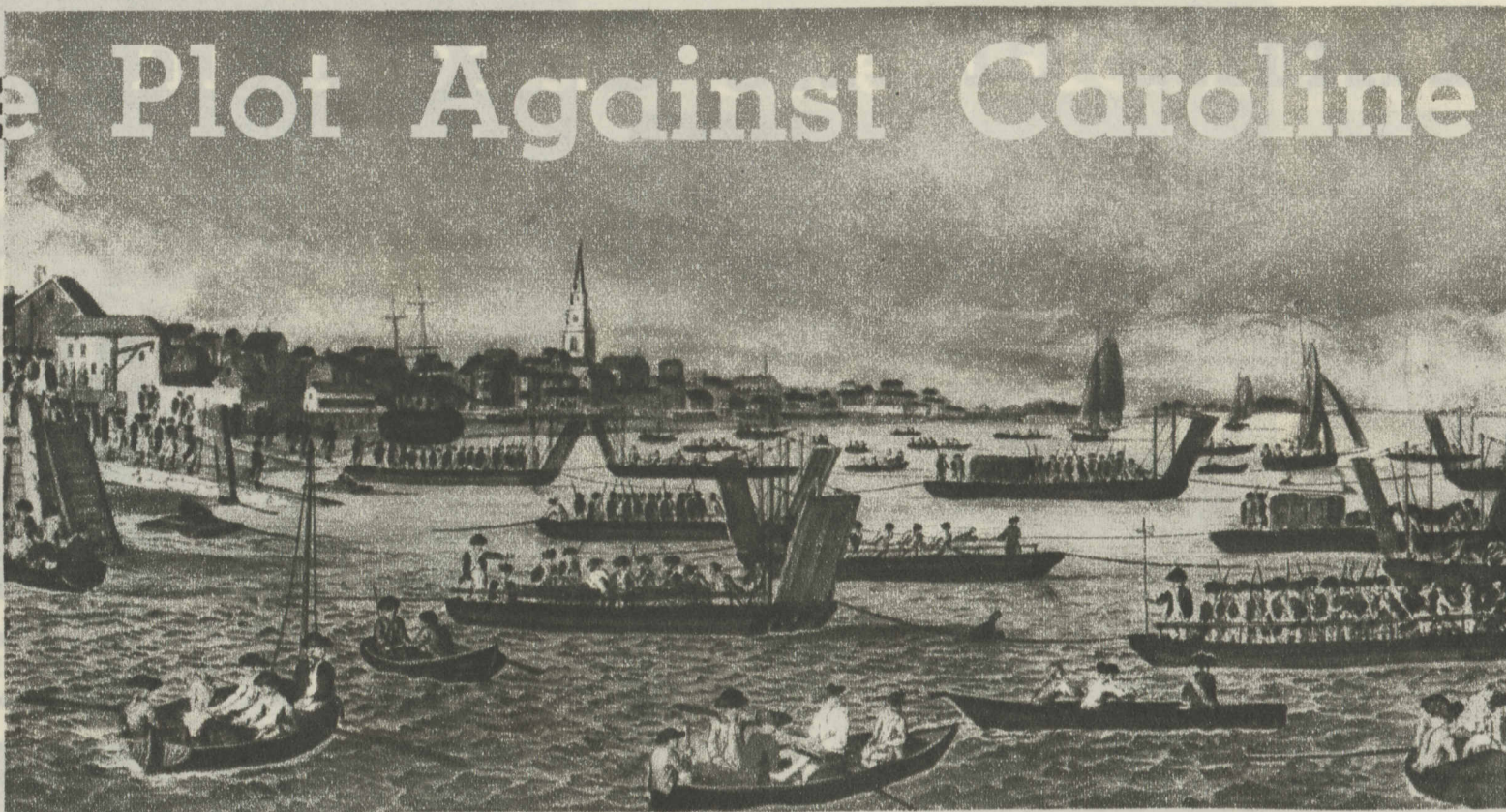
"Had to do it!" she mimicked furiously. "Aren't you king, and haven't you more power this minute than anyone else in the world? Had to do it!" She paused and suddenly her voice changed. She felt a spasm of pity for this man, sick in mind and body, with the dread of a horrible malady hanging over him. She dropped to her knees on the floor beside his couch



THE QUEEN'S MATRIMONIAL LADDER.

Queen Caroline's matrimonial ladder as drawn by the celebrated contemporary caricaturist, George Cruikshank.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM HONE, LUDGATE HILL, LONDON. Price (with the Pamphlet) One Shilling.



(Reproduced by courtesy of Arthur Ackermann & Son, Inc.)

Military maneuvers by water in the days of George IV. A view of Gravesend in Kent, with troops passing the Thames to Tilbury fort.

had spent two nights at Carlton house that year. . . .

A little later she said: "You will hear of my taking children in baskets to Montague house, but don't let it surprise you. I shall do it as a cover to have my own brought to me in that way."

In January of 1803 I went to visit her, and she led me to a sofa where a baby was lying. "I had him only two days after I saw you," she whispered.

In 1804 I visited her again. The boy was calling her mamma, and little Princess Charlotte Augusta

I was distressed at Sir Sidney's staying at the house till two or three in the morning. . . . And my wife told me that Frances Lloyd, in the coffee room, told her that Mary Wilson, Princess Caroline's own maid, told her that one morning when she went to the princess' room she saw Sir Sidney there. It was so shocking what she saw, she fainted at the door!

Mrs. Sarah Bidgood trotted dutifully at her husband's heels and repeated his testimony almost word for word.

Members of the committee of four were growing a little impatient. They had not come to pass on the conduct of the princess excepting as it concerned directly the case of one small boy, William Austin. They were four of England's gravest and most important men—Lord Thomas Erskine, a chancellor; Lord William Grenville, first commissioner of the treasury; Lord Edward Ellenborough, chief justice, and Lord George Spencer, secretary of state. The point was to be decided whether or not little William was Caroline's own son, and they did not seem to be getting very far with their witness on this question.

About this time there began to appear a change in the testimony offered.

Mary Wilson, housemaid for ten years at Blackheath, swore that she had never fainted outside Caroline's door.

Frances Lloyd, who had been with the princess twelve years, swore that she never told Cole anything about anyone's fainting outside the princess' door.

Samuel Roberts, a footman at Blackheath, remembered when the child William Austin was taken by the princess. He said that Sir Sidney used to visit the princess, but he never had seen him alone with her and he never had stayed after eleven o'clock.

Thomas Stikeman, page to the princess from the day she had come to London, had considerable to say about the child. He had been instrumental in showing it to Caroline, he declared; had really been the one who manipulated the whole affair, and was proud of it. Part of his testimony follows:

Her royal highness had a strong desire to have a child, which I and all the house knew. A woman came to Montague one day to get her husband replaced at the dockyard, and she had a child with her. I took the child and showed it to Mrs. Sanders and later to the princess. . . . Within a few days the child was brought again by the mother and left and has been with the princess ever since. . . .

The father of the child, whose name is Austin, lives with me at Pinlico. The child was born in Brownlow street and baptized there, but I only know this from the mother.

John Sicard, house steward for seven years at Blackheath, was next to testify. He remembered perfectly the day the child was brought to Montague house to live, and spoke in straightforward fashion.

Charlotte Sanders took the stand. She stressed all the evidence which had been given by the preceding five witnesses, concluding her testimony thus:

It is not possible there could have been a child born to the princess without my knowing it.

The last witness to testify was Sophia Austin, who said: "I know the child which is with the princess of Wales. I am the mother of it. I was delivered of it four years

ago the 11th of July next at Brownlow Street hospital.

I went with my child to Montague house to try to get the princess to restore my husband to the dockyard at Deptford. . . . I presented my petition to Mr. Stikeman, who took my child from me and was gone for a long time. He gave me my child back and afterwards came to see us several times. On Nov. 6 I took the child to Montague house. The princess was out and I waited for her a long time till she returned. She saw the child and asked its age. I was told to bring the child back when I had weaned it and leave it with the princess. I did wean the child and brought it to the princess' house on the 15th of November and left it there where it has been ever since.

The "delicate and secret investigation" ended the second day, June 7. The committee of four retired to go through the "depositions," and on July 14 returned a report to his majesty.

The verdict was, "Not proven."

At the end the committee made one suggestion. It was not entirely pleased with the conduct of Caroline. It seemed as if she were having too good a time in her semi-exile at Blackheath and it hinted that if the king wished it would take up this matter of her possible indiscretions at a later date.

When George learned of this decision he promptly flew into one of his well known rages. "Am I never to be rid of that Brunswickian crutch!" he roared.

There was general rejoicing at Montague house when Caroline received the committee's report. But Queen Charlotte was now so infuriated at the turn of events that she determined that, guilty or innocent, Caroline was going to be

royal palaces and allow her to attend his majesty's court." Parliament even went so far as to offer to increase Caroline's allowance, but she refused to let them do this. It was a gracious gesture. Every one quoted how she had declared "The poor people are dreadfully taxed already. I will not add to their burdens by a single pound."

This increased Caroline's popularity tenfold. It came at a moment when the public's wrath against Prince George was aroused over extra money he was demanding. His debts were enormous.

When George drove down the street on his way to parliament he was hissed and called vile names. When Caroline drove abroad the crowds around her shouted, "God bless our injured queen!"

Once when Queen Charlotte was returning home a group of working women mobbed her carriage.

Again when the Princess Charlotte Augusta, now a pretty and popular girl of 18, was driving through the park, the crowds milled about her and shrieked, "Don't desert your mother!"

Then suddenly the queen came on to a little secret! Charlotte had been enjoying an amorous adventure, unbeknown to any one. A shocking adventure, the queen whispered, and immediately announced that it was all Caroline's fault. Her influence over the girl was bad, she was ruining her. The girl was to be sent to Cranbourne lodge to be disciplined and tamed.

"She's learning nothing good from you," she told Caroline bluntly. "She isn't going to see you again for a long time. In fact she's going to stay at Cranbourne lodge until you are out of the country."

The queen didn't mean this, but Caroline couldn't be too sure. She wanted her daughter to be happy and it was plain that things would be easier for her if she went away for a while. She would take a little trip. It had been years since she had been away.

"All right," she shrugged with an impudent grin. "I'll take a trip. I'll go to a lot of places I've always wanted to see."

The queen hesitated. "It will be very expensive."

"Very expensive," Caroline agreed coolly. "I am done with pinching and saving. Do I go?"

Caroline went! The queen felt it was too good a chance to let slip. Something might happen and she would never come back! Prince George felt the same. They couldn't afford to refuse her!

Only the cautious Charlotte Sanders, Caroline's devoted lady in waiting, had her doubts.

"They do say the prince is going to trap you. He's already offered a certain naval captain—I couldn't learn his name—10,000 pounds if he can get proof in any way that you're not a good woman. He doesn't care who the man is—just any one. Ten thousand pounds is a lot of money," she added unhappily.

The princess chuckled. "He's tried that before; let him try it again. He'll get nowhere."

In next week's concluding instalment: The story of Caroline's "good time"—such a good time that when she came back Prince George imported some half a hundred witnesses from different countries in Europe where she had visited, in a last frenzied effort to get rid of her, once and for all. Also the desperate effort Caroline made to be crowned queen of England—and her startling, dramatic end.



Caroline of Brunswick, who came to be known as the injured queen of Britain.

Lady Charlotte Douglas was the first to take the stand against Caroline when the committee of four, the body before which she was to be tried, assembled at Downing street, Westminster. She told of the many sociable visits she had with Caroline in the early days of the friendship, but took pains to point out how often she had been shocked at Caroline's heedless conduct, her love of coarse jokes, and her visible lack of moral restraint.

An excerpt from her testimony: "From the first day I met her she was constantly boasting of the freedom she enjoyed. She had the most complaisant husband in the world, who had even given her a letter telling her she could do exactly as she liked. 'I've no one to control me,' she would say. 'I do as I wish, go where I wish, and my husband pays the bills. There is no place like England to have a good time.'

Lady Douglas talked for several hours before she came to the vital point at issue—the baby, William Austin, now a sturdy flaxen-haired youngster four years old. She testified that: "One day—I shall never forget it—in May or June of 1802 the princess came to my house and asked me to guess what had happened to her! I couldn't imagine, so she told me. She did not tell me who the father was."

When she left she confided to me that she was a little worried, but that if things came to worst she would give the prince the credit of being the child's father, since she

was playing with him. . . . Later in that year I was insulted and told to leave the house and never return.

Sir John Douglas came next. His testimony merely corroborated his wife's, excepting that he added a bit concerning Sir Sidney Smith, who had lived in the Douglas home at the time he met Caroline.

A William Cole was next. He had been a servant at Blackheath for a number of years and previous to that position had been a close attendant of George's for twenty-one years. He admitted as follows that he had been greatly perturbed over the "carryings-on" in Montague house:

I always had much reason to be dissatisfied over the princess' conduct. Sir Sidney came in at all times of the day or night to see her and went right up to her tower. He dined with her frequently. . . . Sir Thomas Lawrence, the painter, slept at Montague while he was doing her picture. . . . They stayed alone in the blue room all hours of the night with the doors locked.

Cole hedged when it came to the question of the child and would not commit himself definitely, saying: "I saw the princess at Blackheath about four times in 1802—I had left her employ shortly before—and five or six times in London the same year. I heard the story that she was with child but cannot say I formed an opinion she was so."

Robert Bidgood, a servant of Caroline's for six years and previous to that in the employ of George for some twenty years, followed Cole to the stand, and, like Cole, thus expressed the deep regret he had always felt for Caroline's actions:



An old sketch of Sir Sidney Smith, mentioned by George's witnesses in the case against Caroline.