



## Pamela's Shawl

By DOROTHY CANFIELD

Drawings by JOHN WOLCOTT ADAMS

FOR a long time it was only a legend to me—a legend to which as a child I used to listen, with my eyes on the portrait of Cousin Pamela when she was eighteen, with lappets of delicate lace falling over the burnished brown of her bandeaux. That charming, soft-eyed, friendly young face looked so startlingly unlike what one would think Cousin Pamela must have been as a young lady that, gazing up at it as I listened, I was always struck anew by the significance of the often-told story of her wonderful India shawl. Grandmother used to ramble on about it.

“It cost, my dear, one thousand seven hundred dollars, and it cost that in 1830, when money meant more than now. So you can imagine how valuable it must be now. We all happen to know exactly how much it did cost because of the quarrel between

Pamela and her sister about it. They were twins, you know, just twenty-one years old when their uncle Cooke Clark died; but their lives had been very different. Pamela was to inherit a great deal of money from the grandmother she had been named for, and Melinda had nothing. She was married, too, to a poor man, and had two children. They married young in those days. So when it was known that Uncle Cooke had left his little fortune of thirty-four-hundred dollars to both his nieces equally, everybody thought that Pamela would let her poorer sister have the whole sum. Pamela thought she ought to do it, too, and I suppose she would if it had n't been for the India shawl. It seems she had been very much put out because somebody she knew in Albany (she had been brought up mostly with her rich grandmother in Albany) had

what everybody said was the finest India shawl in America. I guess from what they say she had had that shawl rubbed into her till it got on her nerves. Anyhow, just before she was to sign over to her sister Melinda her share in Uncle Cooke's little fortune, she heard that a ship from India had come into New York Harbor with an India shawl that was the talk of the town. It was said that the captain had stolen it from an India princess who was in love with him. But be that as it may, Pamela took the packet-boat straight down the river to see it. Sure enough, there was a wonderful shawl that would make the one in Albany look like linsey-woolsey. It cost just one thousand seven hundred dollars. Was n't that queer? Almost as if it *meant* something. Pamela tried to wheedle her grandmother into buying it for her, but Great-grandmother Van Reuter was n't the kind to be wheedled into any such extravagance even by Pamela, who was her favorite.

"Well, there was Pamela in a tight place. She 'd been foolish enough to make her brags in Albany about bringing back a shawl that would make Mrs. Van Tromp hang her head, and she could n't bear to go back without it. And there was exactly the money she needed, in the bank, her very own.

"She went back to Albany with the shawl all right. They say she wore it as she stepped off the boat, and that Mrs. Van Tromp turned pale and went home and packed hers away in a trunk and never wore it again."

This was the point in the story at which I looked hardest at the dewy-young face with the smiling, friendly eyes. Yes, as she stepped off the gang-plank with the shawl about her

shoulders, her triumphant gaze on the defeated Mrs. Van Tromp and her eyes turned away from her needy sister, that must have been the moment when she began to look like the Cousin Pamela I knew. And before that, she had looked like this picture! What a world we live in, to be sure!

The story was not quite finished, but my brown study was apt to last so long that I never heard more than the last of it.

"Melinda and her husband had been counting on that money to start a business of their own (Pamela had virtually said they could have it), and they were so disappointed they just picked up and moved out West, 'way out into Ohio somewhere. They did not write much, naturally, and Pamela felt sort of uncomfortable about writing them, I suppose. Anyhow, they lost track of each other. Pamela never saw her sister again."

Yes, that was the Cousin Pamela I knew, quite alone, with her money and her India shawl and her hard, amused eyes on the horde of us poor relatives with watering mouths and itching fingers, marking off each succeeding one of her interminable birth-days with the silent reflection that even Cousin Pamela could n't last much longer.

## § 2

Aunt Carrie Letchford had a gayer set of tales about this shawl—dear old Aunt Carrie, who could laugh like chiming bells over her patched dresses and shabby bonnets. When she was a lively young lady of twenty-one or so she was sent down to Albany for a time to "be company" for Cousin Pamela. You may be sure that Cousin Pamela has never lacked

such volunteer unpaid maids and companions. Hardly one of the older Letchfords and Hitchcocks but has served in her youth an apprenticeship of bowing before Cousin Pamela's India shawl. There was even an attempt to commandeer my generation into the same service, but I was thought too plain and unattractive to suit Cousin Pamela's exacting taste, and my brilliant brother was just then beginning at college that friendship with the celebrated Dr. Brooke Hastings which was to mean much to him later, and although he was one of Cousin Pamela's favorites, he would not consider tearing himself away from his Arabic texts.

By the time Cousin Pamela was forty and a well-preserved spinster, with those dignified, commanding manners of hers very well formed, she had had twenty years of the India shawl. She had been too grand to marry any of the young fellows who gathered around her in her youth, and, besides, she had always been suspicious of their motives since she had overheard one of her admirers estimating the value of her famous shawl, and reasoning from it that her fortune must be prodigious. "It's not prodigious at all, my dear," she would always say to her listener,—nobody on earth save herself had any idea of the extent of it,—“and as I did n't care to disappoint the poor young man, I refused him when he offered himself.” She always added, if her listeners were feminine and young, “and from that time I have known how much *men* are worth.” She probably had also a fairly clear estimate of how much women are worth, after a good many years of impecunious young cousins visiting her to seek their fortunes. Aunt Carrie, however, must have been

a hard mouthful, and at the end was sent home in disgrace, laughing as she came.

“You never saw anything like it,” Aunt Carrie would say. “The season in Saratoga was just on, and of course Cousin Pamela wanted to show her best, and we took the India shawl along. It's simply enormous, you know, and weighs like anything. I'd as soon carry around a featherbed in hot weather. But we did n't dare pack it in a trunk, for fear of losing it. In the train we had to have it in our laps every minute because Cousin Pam was sure there were thieves following her. She thought everybody knew about it and how much it cost, and she'd snub anybody into the very ground who tried to be friendly and talk to her on the train.

“At the hotel it was worse. It had to go down to breakfast with us. I felt so foolish lugging that great heavy shawl around, with the perspiration standing out on my forehead, and me in a thin muslin dress! And Cousin Pam would clutch it and glare when the waiter offered to take it and hang it up out of the way.

“Well, I suppose by that time she had got the habit of dancing 'tendance on the thing, but it was something new to me, and it 'most drove me crazy, and in the end Cousin Pam sent me home in disgrace.”

Shortly after that Cousin Pam took the shawl to a safe-deposit vault, where she locked it up, and where it remained invisible for the last fifty years of her life. Yet it continued to shade with its costliness the mental chambers of our family life quite as effectively as though Cousin Pamela was still carrying it about on her arm and snatching it from the waiter.

## § 3

There came to be a sporting interest about it, if one may apply so frivolous a term to what disrupted families and parted mothers from daughters. Who would get Cousin Pamela's India shawl in the end? Her fortune, we divided and subdivided in our minds over and over, making our calculations according to her cordiality to this or to that one, her disapproval of this or that one's children; but the shawl could go to only one. To whom would it go?

I was quite grown up, was even past my first youth, when Cousin Pamela, having wrung everything from life that she wanted, made her final departure at the age of ninety. Many changes had taken place among us during her later years. I had begun

to write down some of the old stories in our family, and once in a while to succeed in selling one, a fact which offered a sop of comfort to the circle of relatives mourning over my failure to secure a husband. My brother, the pride of the family, had taken a fatal fever in Asia Minor, where he had gone with his old friend, the Oriental specialist, Dr. Hastings, to conduct some excavations near the site of Nineveh. His death left his widow, gentle, dove-eyed Eleanor, quite alone. I was alone, too, and so was Aunt Carrie, who was now growing very old; therefore we three women pooled our solitudes and gathered ourselves into a sort of family in grandmother's old house, from one wall of which looks down the charming and friendly face of Cousin Pamela when she was



“I felt so foolish lugging that great heavy shawl around”

eighteen. And now she was dead at ninety, the old lady who, as far back as the oldest of us could remember, had never had a friendly look for any one.

I remember that Eleanor and I, with Aunt Carrie sitting by to supervise, were picking currants when the mailman handed us the bunch of letters from the various relatives who had journeyed down to Albany to hear the will read.

They were written quite separately by a group of men and women who had nothing in common but a tenuous tie of distant blood-relationship, but one sentiment of outraged indignation animated them all. When she was thirty years old, Cousin Pamela's fortune had been put into an annuity. There was nothing left to be distributed at all!

My sister-in-law and I looked at each other in a stupefaction that was broken by Aunt Carrie's shout of laughter. "For sixty years," she cried, holding her sides—"for sixty years!"

#### § 4

But how about the India shawl? For the moment it would not have surprised me to hear that the shawl was a myth, that the safe-deposit vault was empty. I was mistaken. The shawl was there, in excellent condition. It had been specially mentioned in the will, which had been made when Cousin Pamela was thirty-five. She had then willed the shawl to her dear friend, Amelia Berwick. Who under the heavens was Amelia Berwick? None of us had ever heard the name. The excited and righteously indignant letters went on to inform us that she had been a girlhood

friend of Cousin Pamela's,—how incalculably distant seemed that girlhood!—that she had died fifty years before, that her children were dead, and that nobody knew anything of the family. The executor said that the shawl must remain in the vault until the proper formalities of inquiry were gone through with.

In short, the question of who was to get Cousin Pamela's shawl was as undecided as though she had not died.

Many and heated were the family councils that followed upon this. Some were for forcing the executor to sell the shawl and divide the proceeds, others presented the special reasons they had for claiming it themselves. The beginning of the dreadful quarrel between Aunt Margaret and her son's wife dates from this period, and it was as the outcome of a disagreement at one of these meetings that young Hugh Letchford slapped his brother-in-law's face, and the members of the families have never spoken to one another since. Even my gentle sister-in-law, though with her usual dignified good taste she said very little about it, felt bitterly that her rights were overlooked. She told me that Cousin Pamela had promised the shawl to her because my brother was her favorite.

As a matter of fact, our quarrels had at that time no effect upon the disposition of the shawl. The executor, a stiff-necked, formal old man, insisted that everything must stand in *statu quo* until "due inquiry" could be made for the heirs of Amelia Berwick. But as there was no money left to follow up those inquiries, and as none of us felt called upon to furnish funds for that purpose, it can be imagined that the inquiries were not pushed with remarkable vigor. The

matter lapsed. The shawl remained in the vault, and gradually it lost its grip on the family.

§ 5

I shall never forget the first glimpse I had of that remarkable fabric. Eleanor had been away visiting some connections of hers in Albany, and when she came back had seemed preoccupied and distraught. After supper I asked her for some of her ballads; I had missed her singing during her absence. But she shook her head, and startled me by suggesting that we lock the doors of the house. This was a precaution we had never taken in our lives, and I doubted if we could find all the keys necessary. But she urged me on until, after much struggling with rusty bolts and bent keys, we were barricaded. Then she pulled down the shades, an action which positively alarmed me. We never pull them down except to keep the sun out. In the evening we always leave them up, so that people approaching the house can see if we are alone or not, and if they care to spend the evening with the callers already arrived. Those closely drawn shades made me shiver.

"Eleanor, what in the world—" I began. She put her finger on her lip with a secretive gesture, and disappeared up-stairs, returning at once with something dark and heavy over her arm.

She unfolded it endlessly; she spread it out over a chair, a stand, and the sofa.

"It is Cousin Pamela's India shawl," she said under her breath, looking at it reverently.

I looked at it reverently, too. Not for nothing had I been brought up in

the tradition of that shawl. I do not think that either Eleanor or I thought it at all pretty,—for that matter, I never heard that Cousin Pamela ever considered whether it was beautiful or not,—but our reverence was none the less genuine. That was Cousin Pamela's India shawl! Think what it had cost! Yes, indeed, think what it had gone on costing for nearly a century!

With bated breath, we looked at its dull, blurred colors and the obscure, elaborate, and inexplicable design.

Then, my astonishment overcoming my reverence, I turned to Eleanor for an explanation. The matter was simplicity itself. One of her young cousins had married a young lawyer who was the son of Cousin Pamela's executor. The son had succeeded to his official position, but not at all to his opinions or temperament. Also he had never heard of Cousin Pamela's shawl.

"There 's a funny old relic," he told them one day at table as he related his difficulties in settling his father's affairs, "a shawl of the kind old ladies used to wear, and it 's been lying around for Lord knows how long—estate of Pamela Letchford, left to Amelia Berwick, and both dead years ago; no money to do anything with, no heirs to be found, no consequence, anyhow. Nobody on earth wears that sort of thing, anyhow. Father 'd gone on paying rent on a safe deposit for that just out of stubbornness, I take it, because he 'd begun. But I sha'n't! I shall take the—"

"And then I told him," said Eleanor, her eyes not meeting mine for the first time in all her life—"I told him about how Ned was Cousin Pamela's favorite, and how she promised the

shawl to me." She flushed as she spoke, and looked defiantly at the shawl, smoothing a corner of it with trembling fingers. "It's *right* for me to have it," she added. "Cousin Pamela told me—"

I did not ask then why, if it was "right" for her to have it, she had pulled the shades down so jealously, nor, later, why she kept it at the bottom of the oldest trunk in the attic. I did not need to. Cousin Pamela's shawl had taken a fresh lease of life and was beginning all over again.

### § 6

And now the shadow it cast was over the house I lived in. I did not see it after that one furtive peep, but it hung like a dark curtain between Eleanor and me. We always locked our doors at night now, and Eleanor had catches put on all the windows. Nor did she dare to leave the house alone. Gone were all our care-free berrying-days on upland pastures, gone were our sociable jaunts together to Rutland to do our shopping. Nothing was ever said about the reason, but I never pressed Eleanor when she said she "guessed she'd better not go this time." She even rushed home from church with an anxious face, and went up-stairs to the attic before she went to see if the kitchen fire was still burning.

There never had been any secrets in our life before, and Eleanor found it hard to change her nature enough to guard this one. Emergencies were always arising. Molly Burgess ran in one morning to ask for great-grandmother's lace tucker to wear to a fancy-dress party.

"Don't you stir, Aunt Eleanor," she said fondly, moving toward the



John Wolcott Adams

"She unfolded it endlessly"

stairs; "you look awfully tired and worn these days, and I don't want to make you an extra step. I know just where you keep those old relics—in that little old trunk under the eaves."

She was half-way up the stairs before Eleanor could catch her breath and command her to come down.

"I'll get it myself," she said, with a flustered attempt at dignity.

"Oh, no; don't you bother," said Molly, carelessly, continuing her rapid ascent. She was stopped by Eleanor's voice with a heat of scared anger in it that nobody had ever heard before.

"Mary Burgess, come right back here this instant! Is this your house or mine?" In the startled silence ensuing upon this unexpected speech, she went with trembling steps up past Molly and into the attic. Molly came back to me, wide-eyed.

"Say, what do you know about

*that?*" she asked, evidently in genuine alarm. "Is Aunt Eleanor sick or something? She has n't seemed just right lately."

"Well, she is n't as well as she has been," I admitted rather sadly.

A few days after that I sent one of my young cousins up into the attic to bring down some extra bedding that was on one of the shelves. As he flung his armful of patchwork quilts and comforters upon the bed, I saw a rich, dark, soft fabric lying among those homely bed-coverings. I sat looking at it a long time.

Presently Eleanor came into the room, grew pale, and pounced upon it, turning to me with terrified, furious eyes.

"What do you *mean*—" she began.

I cut her short with the explanation.

"How could I tell you had—"

She retreated with it, shamefaced, but resentful.

"Well, after Molly's coming in so, I thought it would be better out of that trunk. You know what Molly's mother would say."

Indeed, I shuddered at what Molly's mother would say, at what the discovery of the thing would mean to the family at large. Eleanor was no more anxious than I to bury it in the darkness of Nibelheim.

I do not know in which crevice of our lair she next hid it, but one night I woke up to see her, with a candle in one hand, transferring it from the upper shelf of our closet to the linen-closet, under the sheets. The sight of her face made me grave. She never sang her ballads those days.

### § 7

It was not long after this that Dr. Brooke Hastings came to make us one

of his infrequent visits, bringing with him, as usual, a breath from the pedantic specialist's world in which he lives, and to Dr. Hastings, as to our oldest friend, I told the story of Cousin Pamela's shawl. I made no comment on it, only looked hard at him as I narrated the course of the eighty-odd years it had been in our family. And when I had finished I said:

"You are a professional expert on India shawls, I believe."

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, as though he saw what I would be at—"yes, I am professionally an expert on India shawls."

"And you are also," I continued, "non-professionally an expert on human souls."

He shook his head.

"Ah, as to that, one can never be sure." He hesitated. "One is never more than an experimenter; one is mostly wrong."

He fell into silence, stroking his beard. I left him to his meditation.

That evening he startled Eleanor by saying:

"Your sister-in-law tells me that you have recently inherited a rare India shawl. You know my passion for Oriental fabrics. I do hope you'll give me the pleasure of a look at this."

Eleanor looked at me reproachfully; but she must have reflected that none of the rest of the family knew Dr. Hastings, and it is probable that she felt an anticipatory triumph in at last displaying her hidden treasure. We were sitting, as we had every evening since the shawl entered the house, with drawn shades, locked doors, and bolted windows. There were, therefore, no preparations to make. Eleanor went across the room to the sideboard, and began fumbling in the

drawer where we keep the table-cloths. So that was where she had put it last! She turned about with the precious thing in her arms, and, slowly unfolding it, laid its dimly opulent expanse out on the dining-room table.

There was a silence. Dr. Hastings got up, and turned the lamp a little higher. He put on his spectacles, and took a small magnifying-glass out of his pocket. He picked up a fold of the cloth and rubbed it between his forefinger and thumb. He clapped his eye to his magnifying-glass and examined one corner. Then he said:

"But, my dear lady, this is an imitation—a very poor imitation at that. During the years that your cousin's shawl lay in the safe deposit somebody must have substituted this worthless rag in its place, unless, indeed, your cousin herself was taken in. I don't suppose it ever occurred to anybody in those days to have such a thing appraised by an expert. I dare say there was n't any expert in this country at that time."

This was the point at which my nerves gave way. He was going on to talk in his leisurely pedant's way, but I could stay no longer. I was afraid to look at Eleanor; I was afraid to look at Dr. Hastings. I beat a retreat, murmuring to Eleanor some excuse about shutting up the hens.

I took a long time to shut up the hens, and out there under the stars I thought of many things. As I came back toward the house, I saw the red tip of a cigar approaching me, and made out under it the patriarchal white beard of the specialist in souls and Oriental fabrics. He halted, and surveyed me through the soft darkness.

"Well?" I said.

"Oh, very rare, very unusual, an-

cient Kashmir, a museum specimen," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "It must have been very old when it was brought to this country. Probably from some native ruler's treasure-store. The pattern shows that. And its age makes its value very great. It's quite the finest I ever saw," he added in another tone, as if upbraiding me for urging him into a mistake. "But she began to cry, and I could n't stand that, and I came away. I told you one is never more than an experimenter, and generally wrong. Why did n't you tell me she had a special attachment for the shawl?"

"Oh, I don't think it's the shawl she's crying about," I said.

Eleanor met us bravely with a tray of cookies and a glass of lemonade. There was no sign of the shawl. And that evening, as she had not done for many weeks, she sang us some of her old Scotch ballads.

I had not locked the door after me when I came in from the hen-house, and Eleanor went to bed without thinking of it.

## § 8

A few days after that Eleanor and I went to the pile of burlaps and worn-out quilts and old rugs we keep in the woodshed to cover up the plants in the garden the first cold nights of autumn. And there was Cousin Pamela's India shawl lying between a horse-blanket and a flour-sack. Eleanor saw me looking at it, and said in as casual a tone as she could manage:

"It just occurred to me that nobody would make any comments on it, because none of the family now are old enough ever to have seen it. And, anyhow, they never notice what we put out in the vegetable garden. I

thought it would be useful this way."

I made no answer, because I felt an excited tremor running over me. Eleanor went away with an armful of coverings, and I stood still, fairly swept away by a flood of new thoughts. I was amazed by the prompt fertility of my own invention, usually rather sluggish. My mind rushed from one detail to another, and found a solution for every difficulty. I could secrete the shawl very easily, I thought, and if Eleanor missed it, I could lay the blame on the chore-boy. The matter would be of little consequence in Eleanor's mind, of course. Then I could make an excuse for going down to the city, smuggle it into my trunk, and take it to Dr. Hastings, and tell him Eleanor asked me to dispose of it. With the money I could—

I found I had been gazing so fiercely at the shawl that I was a little dizzy, and I caught at the side of the door to steady myself. The night air blew in on me with an icy breath. Why did it feel so cold? I put my hands up to my cheeks and found them blazing. My head throbbed with a dull, heavy pulse like an ache. And then I knew! I knew what inheritance had risen up in me and set in motion all those swift and evil plans.

I am not ashamed to confess that as soon as I knew, I fled away with all my might, anywhere to get away from the pile of old clothes with the India shawl on top. I am not ashamed to confess that I felt a mortal terror of it.

Nothing in the world would have induced me to touch it.

As I write, I look out from my window upon sheets of silver hoar-frost, clothing all the world in shining armor, and sparkling out a death-warrant to our garden—all but a few rows of cabbages which Eleanor and I covered up last night with things from the pile of old clothes in the woodshed. It is with a deep satisfaction that I see among these Cousin Pamela's India shawl, shimmering beautifully with hoar-frost. A wandering cow had stepped on one corner and trodden it into the ground. The row of cabbages beneath it hold up their knobby heads against its intricate, figured pattern, which once a Hindu princess wore. Ah, well-avenged Hindu princess! The blind and avaricious barbarians who for so long have clutched at that thing of beauty have paid full price for their misunderstanding greed.

Back of me, at the piano, sits Eleanor, singing a lilting, care-free ballad, as brave and sparkling as the hoar-frost. I note that the key of the front door is missing. We have not used it for weeks now.

Outside the sun is slowly melting the hoar-frost from the coverings in the garden. The minute and elaborate pattern of the Kashmir shawl flaunts its exotic beauty harmlessly up in the face of this alien Northern sun.

Yes, at last Cousin Pamela's shawl is safe. It can never harm any one again.





# Our Awakening Theater

*A Survey of the Season 1920-21*

By OLIVER M. SAYLER



THE American theater is looking back from these middle months of summer on the record of a highly encouraging season with something of the feeling of a young artist who is elated over his first major work, but a bit apprehensive of the possibility of living up to its promise. Those who like to make periodic appraisals of "the state of civilization" will probably call it the most encouraging season our stage has known. Certainly there have been a provocative range of plays and acting and the appearance of new forces, which will increase in importance in seasons to come.

Even before the war the theory and practice of the awakening theaters of Europe had begun to influence the American stage. The war served to heighten this influence, for by it European producers and actors were largely dispersed, and many of them came to America, the modern counterparts of those Byzantines who, fleeing to Italy from the Ottoman torch, sowed the seeds from which the Renaissance sprang. Only a few of our artists and esoteric little groups paid any attention to them at first; the rest of us were too preoccupied with world politics and bulletins of battle. But with returning peace we discovered that they had made inroads on our complacent traditions, had converted many of our designers and producers,

and had even penetrated the barriers erected by the incredulous business men who control our theaters.

Two main aspects of this foreign influence deserve attention. For one thing, our own artists, spurred by the example of these European visitors, have gained confidence enough to break with tradition and to express themselves in their own way. Again, American prosperity has continued to lure to our shores players, playwrights, and producers from France, England, Italy, Russia, and Germany who have come to share in this prosperity and incidentally to enrich our artistic annals.

## § 2

We have not realized the full benefit of these new forces in our theater, because our dramatists have not provided plays worthy of interpretation by designers and producers who have caught the spirit of the new movement. The fact is that creative leadership in the American theater has come from those who design and produce plays instead of from those who write them. Men like Robert Edmond Jones and Arthur Hopkins, for instance, have been seeking in vain for plays through which to express their own impatient ideals. As if in answer to this summons, a young American, Eugene G. O'Neill, came forward last autumn with "The Emperor Jones," a curi-