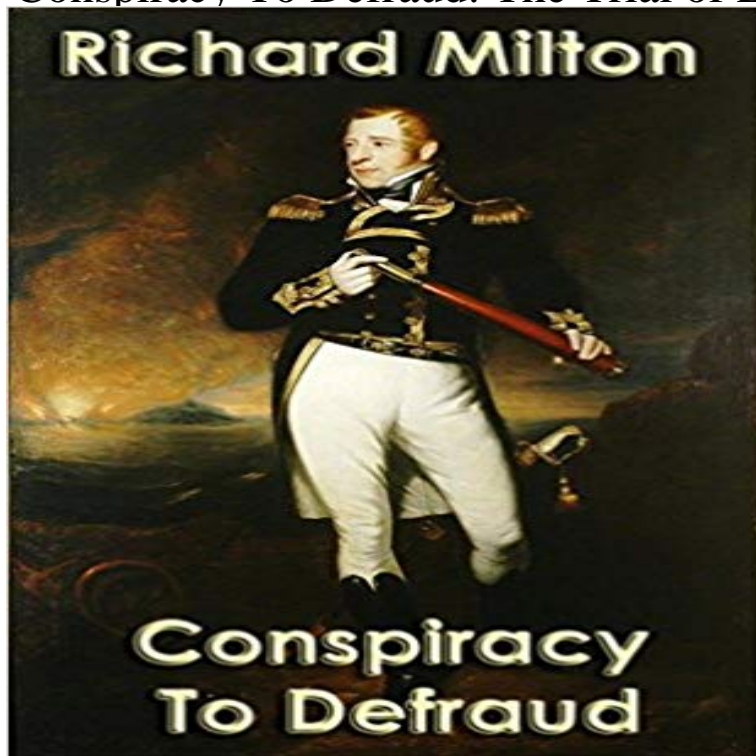


Conspiracy To Defraud: The Trial of Lord Cochrane



Wednesday June 8, 1814 was a blazing hot day. Londons Guildhall was crowded and stifling, its courtroom packed to overflowing, as the public flocked to witness the most spectacular trial of the decade: The King Against Charles Random De Berenger And Others. It was the others they had come to see. Standing in the dock, accused of the biggest fraud ever perpetrated on the London Stock Exchange, was Lord Cochrane - one of the most daring and popular naval captains of the Napoleonic war, and Member of Parliament for Westminster. The multi-million pound fraud had been committed when a fake messenger from France, Colonel De Bourg, landed at Dover and sent dispatches to the Admiralty claiming that the war in France was over and that Napoleon had been killed. Stocks soared in value with millions of pounds worth changing hands in just hours. But the dispatches were fakes and Napoleon still very much alive. The officer impersonating Colonel Du Bourg was traced to the London home of Lord Cochrane, then preparing to join the British Fleet in American waters as Flag Captain to his uncle, Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane. It was through this connection, and his dealing in stocks and shares that Lord Cochrane was indicted to stand trial. Lord Cochrane was one of the most remarkable men of an era notable for naval and military leaders of daring and originality. Among his many talents, however, was that of making enemies of the powerful, through a curious combination of obstinacy and integrity; courage and vanity. Victorian novelist A.G. Henty produced a successful boys adventure story entitled With Cochrane The Dauntless in which even Hentys fertile imagination failed to improve on Cochranes real-life exploits. Cochrane also served as the model for Captain Horatio Hornblower as well as Captain Jack

Aubrey in Master and Commander. Just one example of his exploits serves to show what a remarkable naval officer he was. Cochrane was given command of a tiny vessel, the brig Speedy - in Cochranes words, a burlesque on a vessel of war that was crowded, rather than manned, with 84 men and 6 officers. Its main armament consisted of 4-pound guns - a fact which Cochrane satirised by walking the quarterdeck with a broadside in his coat pocket. In May 1801, Cochrane led the Speedy into its most famous exploit when he captured by boarding the Spanish frigate El Gamo. The Gamo carried a complement of 319 men and was armed with 32 twelve-pound and nine-pound guns. The Speedys complement at the time of the action was 54 and its armament the absurd four-pounders. It was like a mouse attacking a tiger. Taking every man and boy on board except the ships surgeon, Dr. Guthrie, who was left at the wheel, he boarded the Gamo. Cochrane ordered one of his men to haul down the Spanish colours and the Gamos crew, imagining that their officers had surrendered, laid down their arms, and the tiny Speedy found itself master of more than 300 prisoners. Because of his naval exploits, Cochrane was awarded the Order of the Bath. Now, in 1814 as the war with France was nearing its climax, Cochrane was tried with others for conspiracy to defraud the Stock Exchange, before the intimidating figure of Lord Ellenborough, the Lord Chief Justice. To his astonishment, Cochrane was found guilty and imprisoned. But this was merely the start of the greatest battle of his life the epic fight to prove his innocence and clear his name. To read more abot Lord Cochrane click on Look Inside.

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