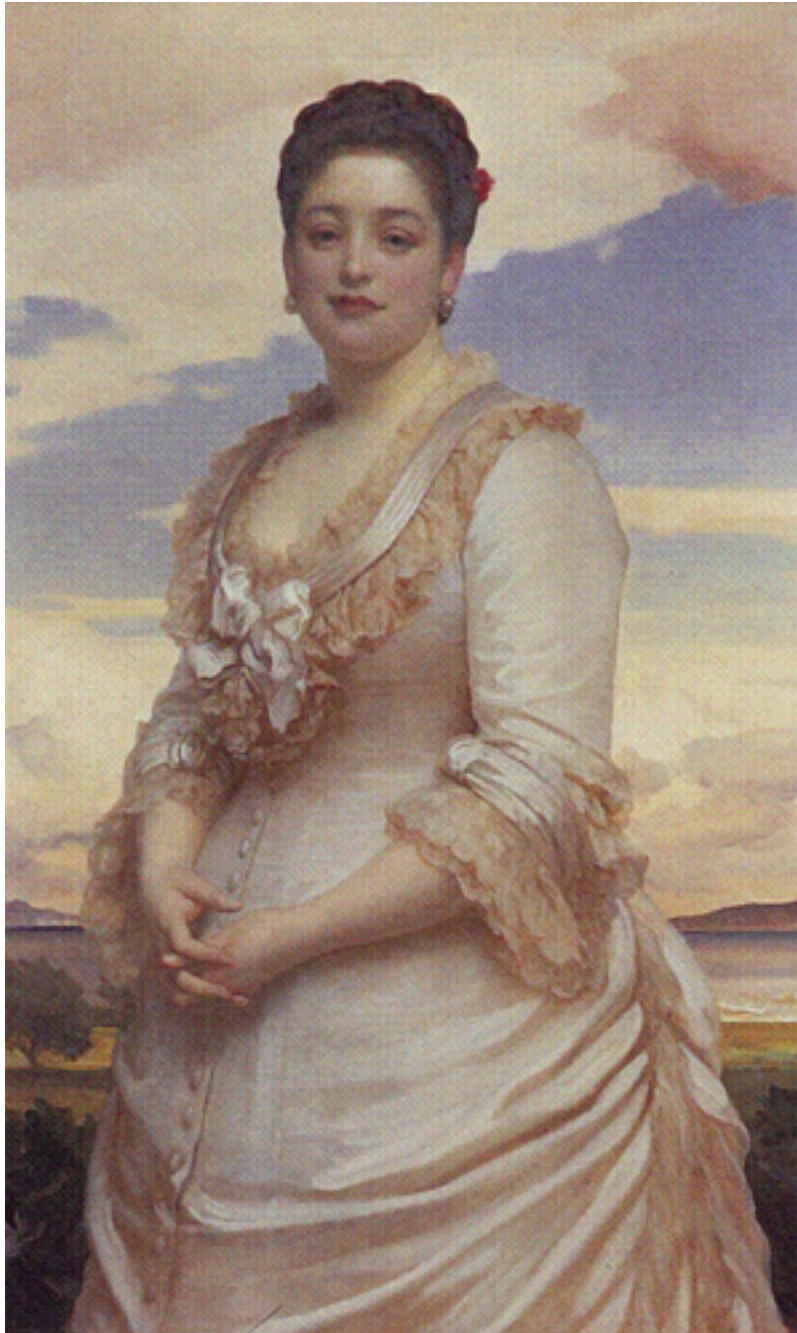


## Hannah Primrose, Kingmaker of Ungrateful Gladstone, Dies Young

Both families were horrified at the union of 'Hebrew-looking' Hannah de Rothschild and Archibald Primrose, yet the couple went on to great things.



On November 19, 1890, Hannah Primrose, Countess of Rosebery, died, at Dalmeny House, in Scotland, at the age of 39. As the only child of Meyer de Amschel Rothschild and the wife of a future prime minister of the United Kingdom, Primrose was in her day the wealthiest woman in Britain, and an astute political observer who, while she lived, played a key role in advancing her husband's career.

Hannah de Rothschild was born on July 27, 1851, to Baron Meyer de Amschel Rothschild and the former Juliana Cohen. Meyer was the son of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, founder of the English branch of the Rothschild banking dynasty. Juliana was his first cousin.

On the occasion of their marriage, Nathan decided to build a country home that would serve as an “enduring monument” for the family – the palatial Mentmore Towers, in Buckinghamshire. The foundation stone of Mentmore was laid by a six-month-old Hannah, in December 1851.

When her father died, in 1874, Hannah, who had been raised in unimaginable wealth and luxury but also in relative isolation and with a minimal formal education, inherited not only Mentmore, but also her father's art collection and other properties, plus a sum of 2 million pounds.

## Oy, a Jew in the family!

On March 20, 1878, Hannah married Archibald Philip Primrose (1847-1929), the 5th Earl of



Rosebery, to whom she had been introduced several years earlier, at Newmarket Racecourse, by Lady Beaconsfield, the wife of Benjamin Disraeli.

Both Hannah and Archibald had to overcome their own and their families' prejudices before they could marry. Rosebery's mother was supposedly mortified by the thought of a Jew in the family; the Rothschilds tended to marry not just within the faith, but also within the extended family. The Jewish Chronicle even expressed, in October 1877, its "most poignant grief" at Hannah's impending marriage, quoting the Babylonian Talmud (tractate *Mo'ed Kattan*) – though without citation – in noting that "*If the flame seize on the cedars, how will fare the hyssop on the wall: if the leviathan is brought up with a hook, how will the minnows escape.*"

No Rothschilds attended the wedding, but the Prince of Wales did, as well as the prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli. And by all accounts, the couple were very happy, and extremely close.

Rosebery, who told a friend that his wife was "very simple, very unspoilt, very clever, very warm-hearted and very shy...I never knew such a beautiful character," was quite attractive and bright, and widely assumed to have a promising career in Liberal Party politics ahead of him. Yet he was emotionally remote, and lacking in great personal ambition. Hannah was plump, if not homely (Henry James, an occasional visitor at their home, characterized her as "...large, coarse, Hebrew-looking with hair of no particular colour and personally unattractive"), but she was a charming hostess and was completely dedicated to helping her husband advance in public life.

And in this, she also proved to have uncanny political instincts.

## **Masterminding Gladstone's comeback**

It was apparently Hannah Primrose who masterminded William Gladstone's return to Parliament in 1879, and to the prime ministership the following year. She soon began pushing Gladstone to name her husband to the cabinet.

After much unpleasantness, and brief service as undersecretary in the Home Office, Rosebery was eventually named Lord Privy Seal in 1885, and a short time later, when Gladstone became prime minister for a brief third term, he became foreign minister.

Though politically indebted to Rosebery and his wife, Gladstone was not especially fond of the couple, especially of the wife's ambitions for her husband. When hearing that Hannah aspired to see Rosebery as foreign minister, Gladstone was reported to have commented to a friend, "She would think herself capable of being Queen of the Realm and think the place only just good enough for her."

Hannah Primrose was a doting mother and she was very involved in philanthropic activity: She established schools in all the villages surrounding the family's various homes; was active in helping young Jewish working women in London's East End; and set up a number of other programs to advance women in society.

The Roseberys had four children. Harry (1882-1974) dabbled in politics, but was more successful as an owner of race horses and a cricket player. Margaret (1881-1967) was married to politician and writer Robert Crewe-Milnes and became one of England's first female magistrates. Sybil (1879-1955) was a writer and artist, as well as a celebrated eccentric. Neil (1882-1917) was an MP and junior cabinet officer before dying in combat against the Turks at Gezer, in Palestine, during World War I.

Hannah died of typhoid on November 19, 1890, having already been weakened by kidney disease.

After his wife's death, Archibald Primrose was grief-stricken, and apparently remained in that state until the end of his life, in 1929. He attempted to quit public life, but was persuaded to become foreign secretary again in 1892, when Gladstone became prime minister a fourth and final time, and succeeded him briefly in the position, when Gladstone retired. Rosebery served as premier between March 5, 1894, and June 22, 1895.

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